THE HINDU

SCIENCE

Record temperatures in Great Barrier Reef seen in last decade

The Hindu Bureau

Water temperatures in and around the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, in the past decade have been the warmest in the past 400 years. The results were published recently in Nature. These periods of warming increase the risk of mass coral bleaching and mortality and are likely driven by human-induced climate change. The Great Barrier

Reef has undergone a sequence of mass bleaching events in recent years, with the events increasing in frequency since some of the first recorded episodes occurred in the 1980s. Mass coral bleaching can be spurred by warming water temperatures linked to global warming. Analysis of sea surface temperatures in the Coral Sea, which contains the Great Barrier Reef, has until now

mainly been limited to recent instrumental observations.

Researchers now reconstructed sea surface temperature data from 1618 to 1995 using coral skeleton samples from within and surrounding the Coral Sea and coupled this dataset with recorded sea surface temperature data from 1900 to 2024. They identified relatively stable temperatures prior to 1900.

From 1960-2024, however, they observed an average annual warming for January to March of 0.12 degree C per decade. The average sea surface temperatures for January and March in the mass coral bleaching years of 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022, and 2024 were considerably warmer than in any year in the reconstruction prior to 1900 and were five of the six warmest the region has experienced in

the past four centuries. Further modelling suggests that this rate of heating post-1900 can be attributed to human influence. The authors note there are remaining uncertain-

ties in reconstructed sea surface temperature data due to some of the chemical proportions in the coral that are used to model temperatures being influenced by other variables such as salinity. However, these

uncertainties could be reduced with additional sampling of coral cores from the region. The researchers note that even if global warming is kept under the Paris Agreement's goal of 1.5 degree C above pre-industrial levels, 70% to 90% of corals across the globe could be lost, and future coral reefs will likely feature a different community structure with less diversity in coral species.

SNAPSHOTS



Saliva indicates severity of respiratory infections

A study involving one hundred children with recurrent respiratory infections shows that saliva measurements better indicate the severity of the disease than blood measurements. While there was no relationship between antibodies in the blood and disease burden, broadly protective antibodies that work against various pathogens were observed in the case of saliva. Children with lower levels of these antibodies had more severe infections. These antibodies in saliva served as a good indicator of disease burden.



A deep drill core unveils new insights into Earth's mantle

A record-breaking 1,268-metre drill core into Earth's mantle, collected from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in the North Atlantic, has provided a detailed mineralogical glimpse of the oceanic mantle. The findings reveal new insights into mantle composition and earth's deep geology. Contrary to common models, melt migration was found to be oblique to mantle upwelling. The researchers observed hydrothermal fluid-rock interaction throughout the core, with oxidative weathering down to 200 metres.



Hidden dangers of irrational use of antibiotics on microbiome

Antibiotics, especially the broad-spectrum ones, can wipe out a large portion of the gut bacteria; this disruption, known as dysbiosis, can have severe and long-lasting effects. Even a single course of antibiotics can produce dysbiosis

Abdul Ghafur

ntibiotics are often hailed as miracle drugs, capable of curing once-deadly infections and saving countless lives. However, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in humans, animals, and agriculture have severe and ofoverlooked ten consequences. While the world is acutely aware that such practices drive antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a more insidious danger lies beneath the surface. The true peril is the profound disruption antibiotics cause to the microbiome a disruption that ripples out to affect every organ and function of our bodies.

Various roles

The human body is home to a vast, intricate community of microorganisms collectively known as the microbiome. This includes bacteria, fungi, and viruses. Astonishingly, our bodies host approximately 38 trillion microbial cells, outnumbering our cells, which total around 30 trillion. This means we are more microbial than humans. The gut microbiome, in particular, plays a crucial role in maintaining our health. It aids in digestion, supports the immune system, produces essential nutrients like vitamin K and certain B vitamins, and protects against pathogens. The diversity and balance of these microbial communities are vital for our well-being. While antibiotics are essential for treating bacterial infections, their irra-

tional use can wreak havoc on the microbiome. Antibiotics do not discriminate between harmful pathogens and beneficial bacteria. When we take antibiotics, especially the broadspectrum ones, they wipe out a large portion of the gut bacteria. This disruption, known as dysbiosis, can have severe and long-lasting effects. Even a single course of antibiotics can produce dysbiosis that lasts for months

or even years.

Dysbiosis can cause more severe conditions like inflammatory bowel disease and irritable bowel syndrome. A healthy microbiome is essential for a robust immune system. Dysbiosis can impair immune function, making the body more susceptible to infections and autoimmune diseases. The gut microbiome also plays a crucial role in regulating

metabolism

Overlooked consequences of antibiotics use

Beyond antimicrobial resistance, irrational use of antibiotics can cause profound disruption to the microbiome Antibiotics are a Dysbiosis

SQ. prime example of can cause the medicine-poison severe conditions paradox like inflammatory Broad-spectrum bowel disease ar antibiotics can wipe irritable bowel out a large portion syndrome, and of the gut bacteria, can impair the known as dysbiosis immune function

Since the gut-brain axis links the gut microbiome with the brain, dysbiosis can alter neurotransmitter 🗸 📇 levels and brain chemistry

Antibiotics can impact colonisation resistance, allowing harmful bacteria to take hold and proliferate thus increasing the risk of infections



Judicious use of antibiotics is essential to preserve

maintaining

acne, eczema, and psoriasis by altering systemic immune responses and skin barrier function. The gut microbiome influences metabolic processes, including energy harvesting from food and the regulation of glucose and lipid metabolism. Dysbiosis can disrupt these processes, contributing to conditions like obesity, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. Beyond the gut, the microbiome also plays

crucial roles in other parts of the body. The skin microbiome protects against harmful microorganisms and supports skin health. The respiratory tract microbiome helps defend against respiratory infections and maintains respiratory health. Antibiotic use can potentially lead to respiratory conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The genitourinary microbiome, which includes the vaginal and

pathogenic microorganisms. Beneficial bacteria consume available nutrients, limiting resources for pathogens. By occupying adhesion sites on the gut epithelium, commensal bacteria prevent pathogens from attaching and establishing themselves. Antibiotic use can reduce colonisation resistance, allowing harmful bacteria to take hold and proliferate, increasing the risk of infections. Given the profound im-

pact of antibiotics on the microbiome and the longterm health consequences of dysbiosis, it is crucial to use antibiotics judiciously. Implementing alternative practices, such as better hygiene, vaccination, and the use of bacteriophages, can reduce the reliance on antibiotics.

Antibiotics have revolutionised medicine, but their misuse poses serious threats. The concept of medicine being a poison when misused is particularly relevant here. In the right hands, these miracle molecules cure infections and save lives. However, if misused, they disrupt the

The gut microbiome interacts with various organs through complex networks known as gut-organ axes. These interactions influence the overall health and functioning of the body. The gut-brain axis links the gut microbiome with the brain, where dysbiosis can alter neurotransmitter levels and brain chemistry, affecting mood, cognition, and mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. The gut-liver axis involves the transport of bacterial metabolites and

good

toxins from the gut to the liver. Dysbiosis can increase gut permeability ('leaky gut'), allowing more toxins to reach the liver and exacerbating liver conditions such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. The gut-skin axis involves the influence of the gut microbiome on skin health, where dysbiosis can exacerbate conditions like

protects against infections and maintains urinary and reproductive health. Dysbiosis in these areas can result in conditions like bacterial vaginosis and urinary tract infections.

urinary microbiomes,

Concerning aspects

One particularly concerning aspect of antibiotic use is its impact on colonisation resistance. This is the ability of the native gut microbiome to protect against colonisation by microbiome and contribute to a host of health problems, essentially becoming poisons. Antibiotics are a prime example of the medicine-poison paradox. Preserving the balance of our microbiome is essential for maintaining our health. We must carefully consider our use of antibiotics before taking them.

(Abdul Ghafur, Consultant in Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospital, Chennai and Coordinator of Chennai Declaration on AMR)

Gene responsible for prickles in eggplants discovered

Scientists have discovered the gene responsible for prickles in eggplants, a trait that complicates farming. They identified the Prickly Eggplant gene on chromosome 6 and pinpointed SmLOG1 gene as the key factor. CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing confirmed that disabling the gene SmLOG1 eliminates prickles, paving the way for prickle-free eggplant varieties. This not only sheds light on prickle development but promises to streamline cultivation and harvesting.

New mpox clade Ib disproportionately affects children

Bani Jolly Vinod Scaria

The ongoing multinational mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) outbreaks continue to be a significant threat to public health systems across the world. The outbreak that gained global attention in 2022 has persisted, and as of mid-2024, the WHO reports that over 97,000 laboratory-confirmed cases and 203 deaths have been recorded across 116 countries, including the recent one in South Africa, which affected over 20 patients, suggesting that the global outbreak which started in 2022 is continuing unabated.

It is concerning that new massive outbreaks emerged last year in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with significant human-to-human transmission. Over 14,000 cases and 500 deaths have been documented this year. Given

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the country's ongoing struggle with internal conflict and health infrastructure challenges, this is a cause of global concern

with cases now being reported from almost 10 African nations. The WHO has recently called an emergency meeting with experts in this context, to assess the situation and evaluate whether to declare it as a public health emergency of international concern.

The emergence of mpox in the DRC is caused by a new clade of the virus, clade Ib, which emerged late last year and is characterised by severe disease and higher mortality. Broadly, the monkeypox virus has two clades. Clade I

has been present in the DRC for several years causing sporadic outbreaks, while clade II (previously the West African clade) and specifically IIb emerged during the global mpox outbreak that attracted global



Widespread: Over 14,000 mpox cases and 500 deaths have been reported this year from 10 African countries. AP

ic and potentially zoonotic

in origin. While the initial

spread was seemingly

through sexual contact, the

epidemiology of the dis-

ease rapidly shifted to af-

fect children under 15 years

who constitute over 60% of

all cases and 80% of all

deaths, with the largest

case fatality rate in children

aged less than one

year. The rapid availability

of whole genome sequenc-

ing of the virus from the

outbreak could provide im-

mense insights into the ori-

attention in 2022. The clades are also characterised by distinct disease severity, with clade I known to be associated with severe disease and mortality compared to clade II, which has a mortality rate of less than

The outbreak in the DRC is unique in many aspects. The unprecedented human-to-human transmission in a short period is in stark contrast with previous clade I infections, which were largely sporadgin and spread of the outbreak. A preprint has dated the

emergence of the outbreak using a molecular clock to September 2023, apart from suggesting mutations

in the binding site of primers used in diagnostics for clade I mpox. A recent preprint analysing 58 genome sequences of mpox suggests three potential clusters, driving the spread of infection in the DRC. Both analyses suggest a significant number of APOBEC3induced mutations, confirming a significant human-to-human transmission.

The emerging situation in the DRC specifically and in Africa, in general, would potentially result in the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security by Africa CDC with mpox spread across 16 countries in the continent. While there are many unanswered questions, includ-

ing what drives the rapid spread and unprecedented emergence of clade I, the urgent need would be to enable the rollout of vaccines.

With only two major vaccine producers for the smallpox vaccine which was repurposed for mpox, and with little emphatic support from global organisations to enable diagnosis and prevention, the world might be awaiting another global outbreak in the immediate future. Molecular surveillance could be the best effort for countries like India, apart from international cooperation and developing indigenous capacfor ity vaccine manufacturing before it becomes too late.

(Bani Jolly is a senior scientist at Karkinos Healthcare. Vinod Scaria is a senior consultant at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation and adjunct professor at IIT Kanpur)

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Question Corner Directional swimming

Are jellyfish randomly moving organisms?

Despite there being some evidence that jellyfish may actively affect their position, the role of active swimming in controlling jellyfish movement and the characteristics of jellyfish swimming behaviour, have not been fully understood. As a result, jellyfish are often considered as passively drifting or randomly moving organisms. A study using drone videos helped track multiple adjacent jellyfish. The analysis showed that the movement of jellyfish is modulated by distinctly directional swimming patterns that are oriented away from the coast and

against the direction of surface gravity waves. The behaviour of individual jellyfish translates into synchronised directional swimming of the aggregation as a whole. The researchers undertook numerical simulations, which showed that the counter-wave swimming behaviour of jellyfish results in biased correlated random-walk movement patterns that reduce the risk of stranding. This provides the jellyfish with an advantage critical to their survival.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



Why are India's 'Gaganyatris' going to the ISS?

What will they do on board the International Space Station? How will it help Gaganyaan mission?

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

n August 2, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) announced that two of the astronauts selected for its maiden human spaceflight mission, 'Gaganyaan', will train in the U.S. for a mission to the International Space Station. Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla has been assigned to fly to the ISS while Group Captain Prashanth Nair will be his backup. Both astronauts have flown to the U.S. and have begun their training.

What is this new mission?

On June 22, 2023, the U.S. and India issued a joint statement after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Joe Biden. The statement mentioned "a joint effort to the International Space Station in 2024". The two astronauts - or "Gaganyatris", as ISRO calls them – are the Indian participants in this mission.

In an August 2 statement, ISRO said: "During the mission, the Gaganyatri will undertake selected scientific research and technology demonstration experiments on board the ISS as well as engage in space outreach activities. The experiences gained during this mission will be beneficial for [Gaganyaan] and it will also strengthen human space flight cooperation between ISRO and NASA.'

Who are part of India's crew?

On February 27, Mr. Modi announced the names of the four astronaut candidates for the Gaganyaan mission.

The other two, apart from Mr. Shukla and Mr. Nair, were Group Captains Ajit Krishnan and Angad Pratap.

They have undergone training in India and Russia; according to the India-U.S. joint statement, NASA will provide Mr. Shukla and Mr. Nair "advanced training ... at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas".

According to ISRO, a "National Mission Assignment Board" selected Mr. Shukla and Mr. Nair for the joint mission. Their flight to the ISS will next need to be approved by the Multilateral Crew Operations Panel.

'The main purpose of the India-U.S. joint mission to the ISS is to expose the two Indian astronauts to the way a spaceflight mission is conducted

What are mission parameters?

According to ISRO's statement, its Human Spaceflight Centre has signed an agreement with Axiom Space, Inc.

Will Saudi's new law aid migrant workers?

Does the upcoming migrant domestic workers law address the gaps in protection benefits? What are some of the features? What is the Kafala system and how does it marginalise workers further? How many Indians work in Saudi Arabia? What are some of the problems they face?

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Vani Saraswathi

The story so far:

he Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the world's largest recipients of migrant domestic workers (MDWs). will roll out a new domestic workers law in September. The six GCC states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain) employ close to 5.5 million migrant domestic workers, and all of them exclude MDWs from labour laws, with only four having passed specific domestic worker laws.

How many migrants work in Saudi Arabia?

In Saudi, as of the first quarter of 2024, there were 39,13,925 migrant domestic workers with 27,32,344 males and 11,81,581 females, making up 25% of the total workforce. The exclusion of these workers from the labour law leaves huge gaps in protection, as monitoring mechanisms such as labour inspections, complaints mechanisms, and the Wages Protection System do not apply to the sector. These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by the systemic marginalisation of migrant workers under the Kafala system. The employer-tied visa system leaves lower-income migrant workers at the absolute mercy of their sponsors. In effect, the state has outsourced the immigration regime to individuals, the majority of whom are citizens.

The current and upcoming MDW laws do not address these protection gaps sufficiently. It is common knowledge that female MDWs face extreme abuse at the hands of their employers within households and by officials when they seek remedy. Saudi Arabia's regulations have failed to address these issues, and the broader justice mechanism that fails migrant workers in general is especially indifferent to the plight of MDWs.

Saudi still does not have a minimum wage, and mandatory referral wages apply only when



Failed safeguards: Saudi Arabia has a poor record of implementing laws that protect the rights of migrant workers. GETTY IMAGES

The state prescribed in bilateral agreements by origin countries. This means MDWs are not only paid makes it easy poorly but there are no clear calculations for to recruit and overtime, though almost all of them are overworked.

Who are migrant domestic workers?

They are employed by individuals to render services in their household. The combination of exclusion from labour laws and the stranglehold of the Kafala system results in employers having absolute control over domestic workers. Saudi has 14 categories of domestic work. Some categories are recent additions, and concerningly, go beyond household work to roles requiring specialist skills.

As per the official data, there are over 20 lakh workers who fall under the category 'servants and house cleaners' - referring to domestic workers, nearly 60% of whom are female. The second most recruited category is drivers, at 18,17,120, almost all of whom are male. Saudi is the only GCC state where male domestic workers constitute the majority in the sector, at nearly 70%.

How does the Kafala system work?

GCC citizens are wealthy and can afford 'engines of liberation' - mechanised consumer goods that were meant to reduce the domestic labour of women. This has not played out as desired in most patriarchal cultures, even if women are active in the labour economy and the dependence on women's labour at home is still high. Large joint families living together demand a host of unpaid services that women in the household were once responsible for. With growing affluence and the assumption that domestic work is menial, these tasks are now delegated to paid MDWs, but the value placed on their work – and by extension them – remains low. Many of the mechanisms and institutions set up by Saudi to govern the sector tend to have an employer bias, including its Musaned system, the domestic worker recruitment platform, through which all aspects of the recruitment and employment of MDWs are regulated.

Consequently, the intersection of the Kafala system and labour law exclusion results in a type of bonded labour. The state makes it easy to recruit and employ migrant workers, resulting in extreme exploitation with impunity. The cost of recruitment excluding wages is steep - between U.S.\$2,000 and U.S.\$5,000 per worker - and employers feel they have 'bought' the worker, instead of seeing it as payment for services.

Is the new MDW law better? Some notable features of the new law are a maximum of 10 working hours a day and entitlement to a weekly off day; prohibition of confiscation of identity documents; emphasis on workers' right to communication; workers have a right to terminate the contract without losing entitlements under certain conditions; compensation for unjust termination; one month paid leave yearly and employer must pay for the annual ticket home.

Saudi also introduced insurance on all new MDW contracts to protect workers and employers, the cost of which is built into the recruitment fees. More recently and quite significantly, the kingdom included all new MDWs in its WPS from July, and will gradually cover all existing MDWs by the end of 2025.

What are the persisting concerns?

Saudi has a poor record of implementation, especially when it comes to protecting the rights of migrant workers. Wage theft and labour exploitation are rampant, but employers are rarely held to account. When it comes to MDWs, especially women, they cannot leave the employer's household without permission and there's a risk of being reported as absconding (huroob)

Though the absconding regime has been reformed, making it more difficult to file false charges, and giving workers more time to challenge false accusations, the law still can be weaponised by abusive employers. The lack of labour inspections, limited access to communication, and language barriers make it difficult both for the state to assess the impact of reforms and for workers to report violations.

What is the status of Indian MDWs?

At 26.5 lakh, Indians constitute the single largest migrant population in the kingdom. Though Saudi does not furnish nationality-wise disaggregated data, by several estimations, the domestic work sector comprises a large percentage of Indians working as drivers, and also in other categories.

Recruitment of Indian MDWs must be through the eMigrate system. India's minimum referral wage for the sector is SAR1,500 (₹33,400). Special provisions for female MDWs - minimum age must be 30 - include a financial bank guarantee of U.S.\$2,500 in favour of the Embassy in Riyadh. The contract must be attested at one of the missions in Saudi.

However, according to many workers in distress, consular support is limited at best to repatriation and there is no effort to help with access to justice or ensure workers receive all their entitlements before deportation. Given the size of the kingdom and the diaspora, the Embassy in Riyadh and the consulate office in Jeddah are not equipped enough to deal with these needs.

(Vani Saraswathi is the director of projects and editor-at-large of Migrant-Rights.Org, a GCC-based research and advocacy organisation)

How will Sheikh Hasina's exit impact India?

and to give them flight experience'

"for its upcoming Axiom-4 mission to the ISS". The mission, colloquially

called Ax-4, is the fourth crewed mission to the ISS organised by Axiom Space, a private company based in Houston. In an August 7 interview, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said India's share of the cost would be in the hundreds of crores of rupees.

Axiom plans to operate the world's first commercial space station and currently offers human spaceflight services. Mr. Shukla or Mr. Nair will fly to the ISS with three others: mission commander Peggy Whitson (U.S.) and mission specialists Sławosz Uznański (Poland) and Tibor Kapu (Hungary). SpaceX will provide the launch vehicle and its Crew Dragon capsule will house the crew. NASA has said the mission will last 14 days. According to the ISS's programme manager, Ax-4 will fly no sooner than November. In the August 7 media interaction, Mr. Somanath had said it is expected sometime "next year middle to end".

What is the schedule onboard the ISS?

Mr. Somanath recently said that the main purpose of the joint mission is to expose the two 'Gaganyatris' to the way a spaceflight mission is organised and conducted and to give them flight experience.

If he flies to the ISS, Mr. Shukla has also been designated the mission pilot – a responsibility Mr. Somanath said will put him through the paces of conducting a mission.

The two 'Gaganyatris' will also be conducting "five different experiments" onboard the ISS, according to Mr. Somanath, who added that "some of them... originated in India" while "some are international experiments" in which India will be "joint partner".

What is Gaganyaan's status?

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ISRO has thus far completed the pad abort and the high-altitude abort tests, and has tested the crew escape system, among others.

In October 2023, Mr. Somanath told *The Hindu* the LVM-3 launch vehicle for the mission has virtually completed the process of being rated to carry humans. He added the crew module was being developed. He said engineers were working on the capsule's Environmental Control and Life Support System and the overall Integrated Vehicle Health Management System: "Every day, there is some test happening."

The next Gaganyaan milestones are a series of uncrewed suborbital and orbital test flights. The last of these is currently expected to happen in mid-2025, although the date could slip further.

What was the state of ties between Delhi and Dhaka during Prime Minister Hasina's reign? What were the main areas of cooperation between the two countries? How were things different in Begum Khaleda Zia's term? Has India reached out to the new dispensation?

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Suhasini Haidar

The story so far:

week after protests in Bangladesh boiled over, forcing former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee to India, there's little clarity about her future. While the Narendra Modi government has given her shelter, it has also moved to engage the regime that replaced the Awami League government, even as it counts the cost of Bangladesh's political changes on India's relations with the country.

Is Ms. Hasina's ouster a setback for India?

Ms. Hasina's removal from power in Bangladesh is no doubt a dramatic setback for India, as both countries have transformed ties on every front in the past decade and a half. The worry is that all the progress made on the economic front, border security, defence, and strategic ties, trade and connectivity, and linking people-to-people could be undone.

What kind of transformation did her reign bring to relations between the two neighbours?

From her return to office (2009), Ms. Hasina made her intentions to forge strong ties with Delhi clear. She began a nationwide crackdown to shut down terror camps, a campaign against



Challenges ahead: PM Narendra Modi and former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina during a meeting, in New Delhi, on June 22, 2024. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

religious radicalisation, and extradited over 20 Several issues "most wanted" men accused of terrorism and crime to India. In sharp contrast to her predecessor Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government, Ms. government's Hasina also worked on ending border tensions caused by illegal immigration into India, particularly the 2001 incident where brutal BDR-BSF clashes left 15 dead. Several border in Bangladesh patrolling agreements and the signing of the historic 2015 land boundary agreement followed.

In India, the Manmohan Singh government followed by the Modi government gave Bangladesh trade concessions and low-interest Lines of Credit to help Ms. Hasina take a country, once called the "basket case" of the global economy, to a developing country, that outstripped its neighbours on human development indices. India and Bangladesh worked on enhancing trade through connectivity, border 'haats', and rail, road and river links. This year Ms. Hasina and Mr. Modi even essayed new defence cooperation. Though Ms. Hasina's government grew more and more authoritarian in the past decade, banning and arresting Opposition leaders, legislating tighter controls on the media, and filing hundreds of cases against any civil society group that criticised her, New Delhi remained steadfast in supporting her. In turn, Ms. Hasina stood with India on every issue, from boycotting SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) over terrorism from Pakistan, to the Citizenship Amendment Act that set off protests in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has become a lynchpin to India's regional connectivity plans to Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, and an important buyer of Indian energy off the subcontinental grid. The worry is that many of the agreements signed, including the most recent power agreement with the Adani group, will now be reviewed.

Can New Delhi forge similar ties with the new government?

New Delhi has shown that it continues to engage the interim government and any future elected government in Dhaka. The Indian High

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Commissioner in Dhaka, Pranay Verma, attended the swearing-in ceremony of the new interim government led by Muhammad Yunus.

However, several issues complicate the Modi government's ties with the new regime in Bangladesh. Firstly, Ms. Hasina's presence in India is viewed with suspicion in Dhaka. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's statement in Parliament that she has come to India just "for the moment" indicates that New Delhi would like to see her travel elsewhere until some of the anti-Hasina sentiments in Bangladesh die down. Things will get trickier if the new government there demands her extradition.

Secondly, elections in Bangladesh could throw up the BNP as winners, and India's experience with Ms. Zia's last stint in power (2001-2006) was bitter. During that time, Bangladesh became a haven for violent anti-India separatist groups, and China and Pakistan made inroads. It remains to be seen if two decades on, another BNP government will be different. Thirdly, Mr. Modi's appeal for the safety of Hindus and other minorities, as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs setting up a five-member committee to "maintain communication channels with their counterpart authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety of Indian citizens and people belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh," are being seen as partisan in Dhaka. Hundreds have been killed in violence in the past few weeks; Mr. Modi's appeal and setting up of the committee will further complicate Delhi-Dhaka ties.

Will Bangladesh's ties with other countries change?

The immediate impact of the changes in Dhaka will be felt in ties with the U.S., which was consistently inimical to the Hasina government, and has even been accused of instigating her downfall. Last year, the U.S. State Department passed a special visa policy to "promote democracy" in Bangladesh, seeking to sanction officials who attempted to subvert elections. This was targeted at Ms. Hasina and the Awami League, and thus ties with the new dispensation will likely improve. Bangladesh's ties with Pakistan had also been tense during Ms. Hasina's tenure, and that could change. Ms. Hasina had close ties with China, joining the Belt and Road Initiative and meeting President Xi Jinping. Beijing will likely forge equally strong ties with the new government in Dhaka.

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PROFILES

The mainstream Democrat

Tim Walz

If Kamala Harris is seen as a tough former prosecutor who speaks out strongly on core Democratic issues such as reproductive rights, her running mate has a reputation for flipping Republican districts in favour of Democrats by reaching out to independent and undecided voters

Narayan Lakshman

im Walz, Governor of Minnesota, may not in his wildest dreams have imagined that one day he would be picked as a running mate alongside a U.S. presidential candidate, yet that was indeed how the plot twist on the Democratic side played out at this tail end of the 2024 election season

Mr. Walz, a man whose demeanour has been described as "folksy" and who has said on the record that Republican challenger and former President Donald Trump's policy priorities were "weird", may in fact turn out to be the perfect foil to Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee for the race to the White House in November. Not only do the two Democratic leaders' profiles offer a balance of gender and racial parity for their campaign, but their track records suggest that their popular appeal among the electorate may be as broad as the party could hope.

Ms. Harris is seen as a tough former prosecutor who speaks out strongly on core Democratic issues such as reproductive rights, and Mr. Walz has a reputation for flipping Republican districts in favour of Democrats by reaching out to independent and undecided voters.

In a sense, Ms. Harris' pick was a close call, and many had assumed that the frontrunner in that race was Josh Shapiro, Governor of Pennsylvania, a critical swing State whose votes the Democrats will certainly need if they're to win the presidency. In this context, her selecting Mr. Walz says more about his personality and antecedents than it does about the calculus of regional politics for the election.

So, what does Mr. Walz bring to the table?

Small-town childhood

Born to a middle-class family - his father was a school teacher - in West Point, Nebraska, a small town, and graduating from high school from an even smaller town called Butte, Mr.

Walz has said his values were shaped by such a rural upbringing: "A town that small had services like that and had a public school with a government teacher that inspired me to be sitting where I'm at today."

He went on to graduate with a degree in social science education from Chadron State College in Nebraska and an MSc in educational leadership from Minnesota State University in 2001. Following the footsteps of his father, an Army veteran who served in the Korean War, Mr. Walz served in the Army National Guard after high school. He ended up serving in the Army for a total of 24 years, during which time he rose to the rank of command sergeant major and then retired from the 1-125th Field Artillery Battalion in 2005.

After completing his university education, he spent a year teaching in China as part of one of the first cohorts of American educators authorised by the U.S. government to teach in Chinese high schools - clearly an experience that had a lasting influence on him, as he is said to still speak Mandarin.

Democratic representation

It would have been expected that with this diverse and rich experience under his belt Mr. Walz would plunge deeper into the education sector and the teaching profession, yet that was not to be. The story goes that during the 2004 presidential election, Mr. Walz was teaching and took his class to a George W. Bush campaign event to give his students a sense of what democratic politics looked like. When the Secret Service at the event saw that some of his students were sporting clothing indicating that they were supporters of Bush's Democratic opponent, John Kerry, they ejected the students from the rally, an act that angered Mr. Walz and propelled him towards joining politics as a local campaign manager for Mr. Kerry.

From that point on, there was no turning back for him. In 2006, Mr. Walz stood for Congress in Minnesota's first district, "a heavily rural area covering the south of Minnesota where only one other Democrat had won in



the preceding century". Despite poor odds, Mr. Walz ended up winning with 53% of the vote. With a firm grip on this tough district, Mr. Walz was re-elected every two years there until 2018, when he retired to run for Governor of Minnesota. His consistent record of popularity with his constituents was reflected in the gubernatorial capacity as well, and his State voted for him not only in 2018 but also in 2022, making him the present incumbent.

Mr. Walz's active career in the

House of Representatives clearly underscores his credentials as a reliable progressive within the firmament of Democratic Party leaders. Not only did his former career choices of school teacher and army vet consistently win him respect among his peers and constituents over the years, but his voting record shows that he ranks among the Democratic Party mainstream – for example multiple votes over the years in favour of raising the minimum wage, supporting stem cell research, giving Medicare greater

leeway to negotiate for affordable medicines, lowering tuition costs for university students and in backing reproductive rights.

He is not, however, entirely unfamiliar to controversies, personal and political, including, in the former category, an arrest, charge and related conviction in 1995, when he was still a teacher, for driving under the influence. He has since become a

teetotaller. On the political front, as soon as his pick for Ms. Harris' running mate was announced, Mr. Walz was targeted by the Republican campaign with comments such as "No one is more pro-China than Marxist Walz."

Yet, the truth is that Mr. Walz, while no doubt cherishing his time teaching in China and even setting up a business with his wife that organised annual summer educational trips to that country, is fairly hard-nosed on his view about violations of human rights in the region.

He is known, for example, to have met with both the Dalai Lama and high-profile Hong Kong democracy activist, Joshua Wong prior, to the latter's arrest, when Mr. Walz was a Congressman. Reports note that during his time in Congress, Mr. Walz spent more than a decade serving on the Executive Commission on China, described as "a body focused on scrutinising the Chinese government's human rights abuses".

Safe pick

While it is expected that the Harris-Walz duo will deliver, in what remains of this election season, a policy agenda and campaign effort that truly reflects the full power and value set of the Democratic Party as it stands today – and that matters for complex issues such as immigration reform and job creation – it remains to be seen whether either of them commands a sufficiently broad recognition among voters that could rival the reputation of Mr. Trump. The voters' choice will, however, set the tenor for the brand of politics that Americans want to see for the next four years - continuing polarisation across issues, or genuine attempts to build unity across the partisan divide.

THE GIST

Born to a middle-class family in West Point, Nebraska, a small town, and graduating from high school from an even smaller town called Butte, Tim Walz has said his values were shaped by such a rural upbringing

In 2006, Mr. Walz stood for Congress in Minnesota's first district, "a heavily rural area covering the south of Minnesota where only one other Democrat had won in the preceding century".

•

His consistent record of popularity with his constituents was reflected in the gubernatorial capacity as well as Minnesota voted for him not only in 2018 but also in 2022, making him the present incumbent

Wrestler emeritus

The banker who became ruler

Vinesh Phogat

The Asian Games gold medallist, who had beaten career-threatening injuries and stood up against alleged sexual harassment by former WFI chief, remains a symbol of resilience

<u>Y.B. Sarangi</u>

hen we met an 18-year-old Vinesh Phogat in her rookie year at the National championships in Nandini Nagar, Gonda, Uttar Pradesh, her cherubic smile belied her steely resolve. Hailing from Balali village in Charkhi Dadri, Haryana, she had already built a reputation as a promising wrestler and showed it on the mat by claiming a National title.

By that time, the Phogat surname had become famous following Geeta's 2010 Commonwealth Games gold medal and both Geeta and her sister Babita's World championships bronze medals two years later. The general impression was that Vinesh was one of the Phogat sisters. Only a few knew that the youngster was a cousin of the famous Phogats and wanted to make a name for herself.

Vinesh, who turns 30 in August, has succeeded in achieving what she wanted. Her sound game, rocklike determination, smart thinking and a fearless approach ensured her rise. Within a few months, she took a bronze in the 51kg at the Asian championships to prove her mettle.

Since then, Vinesh has not looked back. She went on to become the first Indian woman wrestler to claim gold medals in both

YK



Vinesh, returning from

a knee surgery, always

wanted to compete in the

53kg category and was

keen to challenge Antim

Panghal, who had secured

a quota place in the same

weight. Since the Union

Sports Ministry had de-re-

cognised the WFI and the

sport was being run by an

ad-hoc body, there was

confusion as to whether

there would be a trial bet-

ween the quota place win-

ner and a challenger prior

to the Olympics (such a de-

cision was a prerogative of

the federation). Because of

this, Vinesh, a two-time

Worlds medallist in 53kg,

chose to compete in the

50kg selection trials, bag-

Nevertheless, her deci-

sion to drop down to 50kg

was always a gamble as it

potentially weakened her

due to the significant

weight loss of nearly seven

kg from her normal body

Ultimately, her gamble

ging a quota place.

weight.

the Commonwealth Games nal. It was a never-before occurrence for an Indian and Asian Games and two bronze medals in the wrestler in the Olympics. World championships.

However, success at the Olympics has eluded her. In her Olympics debut in Rio 2016, she dislocated her knee in a 48kg quarterfinal bout and had to be stretchered off from the mat. Her injury looked so bad that her return to competitive wrestling seemed doubtful but she made a miraculous recovery.

A flop show in the Tokyo Olympics, where she competed in the 53kg category, followed by her suspension by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for 'indiscipline,' which was later revoked, spoiled her second appearance at the Games.

The dramatic loss of her medal after reaching the 50kg final in the Paris Olympics was shocking. She was disqualified (as per the United World Wrestling rules) after being overweight by only 100gm on the second day of the competition prior to her fiand Olympic champion Yui Susaki on her way to the title clash before seeing the script change unexpectedly the next morning. An emotionally broken

backfired. She sensational-

ly stunned Japan's World

Vinesh decided to hang up her boots soon after her disqualification.

Vinesh's life has not been one-dimensional. She has been a fighter off the mat too. Apart from successfully beating some career-threatening injuries, Vinesh, known for calling a spade a spade, showed her feisty nature as she famously stood up against alleged sexual harassment by former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. She was backed by other pre-eminent athletes, including Olympic medallists Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia. Fighting for a cause she believed in, Vinesh literally took on the police on the streets of New Delhi. The spectacular scenes beamed on various television and digital channels and photos splashed in newspapers across the country triggered the debate over women sportspersons' safety.

All through Vinesh's battle for 'justice,' her wrestler husband Somvir Rathee provided unwavering support. Because of all her fights on and off the mat, Vinesh has emerged as a symbol of woman power and resilience.

Muhammad Yunus

The Nobel Laureate, who faced arrest when Sheikh Hasina was in power, is now tasked with stabilising Bangladesh and restoring democracy

Suchitra Karthikeyan

f action is needed in Bangladesh, for my country and for the courage of my people, then I will take it," Muhammad Yunus, the microfinance pioneer and Nobel prize winner, said on August 6, a day after Sheikh Hasina resigned as Prime Minister and left Bangladesh. Coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, which spearheaded the anti-government protests in Bangladesh, had urged Mr. Yunus to head an interim administration. After the military gave its nod, Mr.

Yunus, 84, was sworn in as the head of the interim government on August 8. "In Dr. Yunus, we trust," wrote Asif Mahmud, a key leader of the student movement, in a Facebook post, echoing the wides-

pread acceptability Mr. Yunus has in Bangladesh's fractious polity. Born on June 28, 1940,

in Chittagong, East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Muhammad Yunus, the third of nine children, completed his primary and college education in Bangladesh and PhD in the U.S.

Then, he began teaching economics at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, U.S., in 1969.

As his homeland was struggling for liberation from Pakistan, Mr. Yunus

ILLUSTRATIONS: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



lobbied the U.S. Congress to stop military aid to Pakistan. He also helped raise support for the Liberation movement by running a Bangladesh Information Center in Washington DC, a Citizen's Committee in Nashville, Tennessee, and published the Bangladesh Newsletter.

With the birth of Bangladesh, he returned home, joining the Economics Department of University of Chittagong in 1972. As the newly-liberated country suffered a famine in 1974, he forayed into rural economics, studying economic aspects of poverty. In his visits to farming households in Chittagong's Jobra region, he realised the necessity and effectiveness of small loans to women bamboo furniture makers, freeing them from the claws of loan sharks. Initiating the first 'small loan', Mr. Yunus lent \$27 to 42 families in Jobra to manufacture their items for sale.

This idea gave birth to microfinance in 1976, where Mr. Yunus offered

•••

himself as the guarantor and secured a credit line from Janata Bank to lend small loans to Jobra residents. In 1983, Grameen Bank was established, specialising on small loans. Over 100 nations, including India, have replicated this model. As of 2024, Grameen Bank has 2,568

branches across 81,678 villages with 10.61 million borrowers. Mr. Yunus's pioneering

work in microfinance won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Political entry

port.

In February 2007, when both Ms. Hasina and BNP leader Khaleda Zia were in jail, Mr. Yunus announced the formation of the Nagorik Shakti party and promised to contest polls. However, he dropped

the plans within months due to lack of public sup-On taking power in 2009, Ms. Hasina's government began scrutinising Mr. Yunus and Grameen Bank. In 2011, he was re-

moved as managing director of the bank, as he had passed the retirement age of 60. While he challenged his ouster, he lost the court battle, accusing Ms. Hasina of targetting him.

The micro-financing model itself came under the scanner after Mr. Yunus admitted that some organisations may have abused the system for profit. The lack of collateral in such loans have attracted high interest rates by some banks, leading to borrowers falling into more debt.

In 2019, an arrest warrant was issued against Mr. Yunus for three alleged breaches under the Labour Act. In May 2023, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission accused Mr. Yunus and several others of misusing funds from the workers' welfare fund. After a lengthy trial, Mr. Yunus and his colleagues were convicted in January this year, days after Ms. Hasina began her fourth consecutive term as Prime minister.

Within six months, chaos and violence broke out in Bangladesh, which would trigger dramatic developments.

Now Ms. Hasina, whose government sought to incarcerate him, is out of power and out of the country, while Mr. Yunus is heading an interim government, tasked with overseeing an orderly political transition.

A ND-NDE



{ THE BIG PICTURE }

16

The many voices of the Quit India Movement

Apart from the geopolitics, the high politics and internal dynamics of the Congress of that time, many other stories emerged from the movement launched on August 8, 1942

he Quit India Movement, launched on August 8, 1942, stands out in the metanarratives of the Indian Freedom Struggle. It was the last of the major anti-colonial agitations launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The extent of spontaneous public mobilisation. the severity of the government crackdown, and the high level of violence that accompanied the agitation, all make it distinctive in the history of nationalist politics in India.

The larger geopolitics in which the agita-tion was embedded is important. Its launch is inseparable from the decisive setback European imperialism encountered at the hands of the Japanese military, with the collapse of the French in Indochina, the Dutch in what is now Indonesia, and the British in Malaya and Burma. To many, this heralded a major political change in India. Certainly, both panic and a sense of doom that Britain's back was to the wall explain the ferocity of the colonial government's repressive measures after August 1942.

For the nationalist leadership, a long hibernation followed. Mahatma Gandhi was jailed in the Aga Khan's palace on the outskirts of Poona and freed only in May 1944. The Indian National Congress leaders and

activists also faced extended jail terms across the country. Its principal leaders — the dozen-strong Congress Working Committee (CWC) — were jailed in the Ahmednagar Fort, a medieval structure housing a military garrison (which it still does). Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, AK Azad, JB Kripalani and others would spend, in all, some 32 months here with only each other for

company. This was a like-minded group in its broad thinking, in that they had been in the Congress for many years, and the circumstances of their confinement made for strengthening this sense of camaraderie. It was a stressful time in personal terms. Mahadev Desai, Mahatma Gandhi's much-loved secretary, died on August 15, 1942, within a week of their arrival at the

Aga Khan's palace. Kasturba Gandhi would also die there. Maulana Azad's wife died in April 1943; he learned of it only sometime later. Many detainees were in bad health, and nursing each other, supporting each other to overcome loneliness and depression, and, finally, just being together in a closed space for so long, cut off from all outside contact, further enhanced their sense of fraternity.

Yet, inevitably, they would get on each other's nerves. Personal differences were further exacerbated, and pre-existing factions on political issues were further consolidated. How far should they have gone to defy the colonial State? Some felt that going all out on an agitational mode in the midst of a war creeping ever closer to India was a wrong judgement call and a costly mistake. This moderate voice was in the minority in the Congress High Command. There may have been other takers, but in the inner dynamics of the Congress in 1940-42, there was also a general inclination to go along with whatever the Mahatma decided.

Maulana Azad and Asaf Ali were amongst this moderate group — insufficiently power-ful to influence events and always vulnerable to the charge that they were only the Muslim shopfront for the Congress. Their concern

also was that by isolating itself in an oppositional mode, the Congress was allowing the Muslim League to demonstrate its value as a loyal British ally and thereby establish itself as politically strong. Underwriting this was the larger question of how the Congress should Raghavan approach the Muslim League, and whether a different kind of federal thinking could accommodate the Muslim League's aspirations.

TCA

Ahmednagar Fort, a Nizam Shahi struc-ture, was, therefore, the venue of many acrimonious, but ultimately inconclusive, discussions between 1942 and 1945. A record survives in the form of the prisoners' diaries, recollections and memoirs. Reading them decades later, it is possible to see it as an ensemble of how conflicted and different ideas of India could exist even within a largely like-minded group.

Apart from the geopolitics, the high poli-tics, and the internal dynamics within the Congress, there are other voices and stories that emerged from August 1942. To Asaf Ali, incarceration for such a long time during a critical period was the result of wrong tactics. He was essentially a constitutionalist and an incrementalist and had been so from



The Quit India Movement, launched on August 8, 1942, stands out in the metanarratives of the Indian Freedom Struggle **HT ARCHIVE**

the early 1920s. To him, the way forward on the Hindu-Muslim issue was negotiating with Jinnah and the Muslim League, since choosing from a menu of bad options was preferable to being left later with no choices or being overwhelmed by events. That he was married to a Hindu — Aruna Asaf Ali marked him out as being a Muslim Congressman with a difference.

In Ahmednagar Fort, apart from all the political issues and disputes, what weighed on him the most was the welfare of his wife. Aruna Asaf Ali nee Ganguly had defied cus-tom and family in September 1928 by marrying at 19, a Muslim lawyer 20 years her senior. Since then, she followed the well-trodden path of being a supportive wife. She had been iailed multiple times while not showing any sign that she would move beyond the Congress toolkit of peaceful non-cooperation.

In August 1942, all this changed. Aruna went underground even as her husband and other CWC members were being arrested. Thereafter, for almost three years, she remained a wanted figure by the police and was charged as being responsible for various acts of violence against the State. Appeals to her by her husband and other Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, to surrender were to no avail. In brief, she had

changed. If, to Asaf Ali, the Quit India Agitation was an extreme posture that should have been avoided, to Aruna, it was the opposite. August 1942 was that pure moment, she wrote, when "the Indian came nearest to perfection". Hers was a radically different vision of how the nation should be constituted. To Aruna, this was the time when a hitherto unacknowledged mass of people had seized

the initiative into their own hands. "a day on which our passion for freedom burnt at its whitest". There was little prospect of these conflicting views being reconciled, and amongst the many things that irreversibly changed from August 1942 onward, was Asaf Ali's marriage.

From late 1945 onwards, a new trajectory emerged in the national movement that ended finally with freedom, and Partition, in 1947. If both these end-states had a long prehistory and gestation, it was, to a very great extent, in the crucial period since August 1942 that the new architecture for South Asia was, in fact, forged.

TCA Raghavan's latest book is Circles of Freedom: Friendship, Love and Loyalty in the Indian National Struggle (Juggernaut, 2024). The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS } Karan Thapar

Heed those WhatsApp warnings on fraudsters

t's the sort of thing WhatsApp messages warn you against. Guard against door-to-door salesmen, resist enticing offers from fly-by-night companies, and never share your credit card pin code with people claiming to be from your bank. I get such messages all the time. I'm sure you do too. Last week, the predicament they seek to prevent happened to

time. The three men 'inspected' the pipes and declared one of them had outlived its warranty and needed to be replaced. If mine's become old. Kiran said, all the other flats in this building will have the same problem. We got our gas connections at the same time.

Undaunted, the man who claimed he was the senior engineer said he'd check with the next door flat. Minutes returned to say theirs was okay. It had been updated. Kiran, he said, needed to take similar action. As the three men began replacing the pipe, Kiran, irritated that IGL had not told her the connection needed updating or that their engineers would visit, began texting all the IGL numbers she has to ask why. She must have texted 10 or 15 - several, no doubt, out of use - and one which she thought belongs to a former CEO.

These men have not been sent by IGL. They're imposters. More importantly, don't let them change any pipes. Some of the IGL numbers sent Kiran WhatsApp messages warning that frauds were mas-querading as IGL staff. Get rid of these men was the clear message. They're cheats

But by then the pipe had been removed and a replacement fitted in its place. Oddly, the men didn't ask for payment. Instead, they seemed in a hurry to leave. Perhaps unnerved by Kiran's communication with IGL, they told her she'd be charged for their work in her next gas bill. And then they left, accidentally leaving behind a greasy folder.

Meanwhile, IGL told her they were immediately sending their engineers to her home. In fact, the number she thought belonged to a former CEO made a particular effort to ensure IGL's own engineers the real McCov-- would arri as soon a possible and double-check the new pipe the imposters had fixed.

WHATSAPP MESSAGES OFTEN WARN US TO **GUARD AGAINST DOOR-TO-DOOR SALESMEN AND** TO NEVER SHARE OUR **CREDIT CARD PIN CODE** WITH PEOPLE CLAIMING TO BE FROM THE BANK

gas had been switched on, it would have leaked. The police took copies of the identity cards Kiran had photographed and the folder the imposters left behind. They said they would trace the men through the phone numbers.

Thus, within 90 minutes, the situation was rectified and the damage reversed. Kiran was left with a riveting if disturbing tale to tell, but it could have been far s verv lucky it was

{ ENGENDER } Lalita Panicker

A blockchain boon for women's health

he Centre has made creditable efforts towards universal health coverage through Ayushman Bha-rat, Digital Health Mission, and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), among other initiatives. It has started various women-oriented schemes to dispense welfare benefits, too, However, awareness and access remain a challenge for millions, especially women in the

women workers and their families. Mirai Chatterjee, director of SEWA Social Security, said, "This collaboration will aid the work of the SSKs by encouraging thousands of women workers to participate more actively in their health care journey. We are hopeful for improved health outcomes and ultimately a sense of ownership and confidence that will help them achieve economic empowerment a Purnimaben, a woman farmer from Lakhya village, Sabarkantha district in north Guiarat, said, "SSK brought health information to our aangan. Who else will come to our remote village in the Aravallis?" When Lakshmiben, SEWA *aagewan* (volunteer) started the centre, said Purnimaben, the village's women learned of the health schemes and those specifically started for them. "We are all Bhil Adivasis and had no idea of all this. We got our PMJAY cards and a young girl in our village got her disability allowance. Her parents had no idea this was possible." Now, many more women come to the Kendra asking for support. SSKs are also enabling women to access various other State benefits, which they could not earlier due to lack of awareness or documents or both. Maniben Vasava from Jhanand village in Ahmedabad, said, "I was widowed 15 years ago. I had no idea that I was eligible for widow's pension till the SSK was set up in my village. SEWA aagewan Gitaben explained the pension scheme and what documents were required to obtain this support. But I did not have my husband's death certificate. I did not know how to go about getting it. Now, for the last three years I have been getting my pension." The project will give women control and access to their own documentation and enable them to demand the benefits that are owed to them. This, in turn, will give them control over their lives. Who can argue with that?

Her front-bell rang on Saturday afternoon and she found three men claiming to be engineers from Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) at the door. They said they had come to check her gas connection. Fortunately, Kiran's response was to ask for their identity cards but, I presume, they produced fake ones. She also had the wit to photograph the cards and obtain their phone numbers. That surprised the men, but it didn't shake their confidence. Kiran took them to the kitchen, but

ensured her own staff was present all the

It didn't take long for replies to come.

By now the penny had fully dropped. Kiran telephoned the Vasant Vihar Station House Officer who immediately sent the police around. Kiran said his response was prompt, efficient and polite. So, shortly after the three imposters had done their 'work' and departed, IGL engineers and the police were at Kiran's place.

IGL told Kiran not only was the replacement pipe fake, but its lower half had not been properly fastened. So, if the

I would say three things saved her. The fact she photographed the identity cards and had taken their phone numbers, then insisted on enquiring with IGL why she hadn't been informed in advance and, most importantly, kept her own staff in

the kitchen while the imposters were working' on the 'faulty' pipe. But suppose

she hadn't done any of this?

Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

ANI

Behind the unmaking & making of Brand Rahul

Suhel

Seth

should be about unmaking and making of a "brand" at all. But that is because this person is special. He inherited a formidable legacy, fired the imagination of those around him, and then, presumably, let entitlement creep in. From allegedly staring at his

beloved dog during critical meetings to being famously inaccessible, it was all about a person who believed he was born to lead. Just like many brands that come from sterling stables believe. What he didn't realise was that India had changed, and the Indians had changed. Leader worship was slowly changing to leader disdain, and, to make matters worse, the

perception about Rahul Gandhi was that he was not interested and was doing all of this more at his mother's bidding than for any real reason of public service. Add to that both petulance and impishness - real, imagined, or perceived — and you had a brand that was easy to revile. From Rahul Gandhi, he went quickly to become Pappu, which, in the North of India, seems to suggest a blend of idiocy and worthlessness. This also served the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) narrative. They needed to destroy the Gandhi legacy if they wanted to destroy the Congress because the Gandhis and the Congress are intertwined. The Gandhis are the glue the Congress needs.

The Rahul Gandhi brand then was amorphous and directionless. It stood for many things and nothing. From tearing up an ordinance to hugging Narendra Modi in Parliament, it was as if Gandhi was catering to his Khan Market cohorts and seek-

any may wonder why this essay ing their approval, which he needn't have done. Gandhi also misunderstood the concept of loyalty, and this was where he made the first mistake.

Brands serve well to make allies of even hesitant customers, but here was Gandhi who was downright rude and disdainful of those leaving the Congress. Great brands

> always keep the door ajar for those who leave to return. And brands are about benefits. You don't buy a tube of Colgate toothpaste, but instead white and healthy teeth: It's just that, in your mind, Colgate is best suited to deliver that benefit.

So, the question that begged an answer from 2014 to 2022, was,

what did Rahul Gandhi stand for? Was he the angry young man? Was he a keeper of people's aspirations? Was he the voice of the marginalised? Was he just an opportunist biding his time? This is where I believe his advisors went wrong. They played into the hands of the BJP, which went as far back as Jawaharlal Nehru to not only vilify but actually destroy a great legacy. In doing that, the BJP came across as divisive and not objective - something that most Indians detest.

It was in 2022 that Rahul Gandhi did what only he could have done. Being both youthful and impatient, he embarked on his Bharat Jodo Yatra. I wrote in October 2022, saying that from a marketing perspective, this brand was going through a makeover but needed to be consistent and focused on one key benefit. He morphed from one *yatra* to the other — from unity to justice — thereby stoking the imagination of many and also recognising that the aver-



Today, as a brand, Rahul Gandhi wants to be the voice of the silenced, and for an **Opposition leader, doing that is easy**

age Hindu was not temple-proud but heritage-driven. The Hindu of this country would not sacrifice that secular streak something that he kept repeating

The fact that he did not score a decisive victory in the 2024 elections is not as relevant as the BJP would like it to be. Gandhi's seeming arrogance was replaced by the BJP's arrogance of 'Abki Baar 400 Paar' a variation of 'India Shining' but with the same disastrous consequences.

And Rahul Gandhi began doing everything right even from an optics perspective. The counterpoint to a well-groomed Modi was this unshaven, T-shirt-wearing man of the people. Indians love the underdog even if that dog is pedigreed.

Today, as a brand, Rahul Gandhi wants to be the voice of the silenced, and for an Opposition leader, doing that is easy. You have to distract and destruct much like challenger brands do. They have no market share or category creation to worry

about, and even unwittingly, they can re-position their competition. So, in a strange way, the poster boy of legacy and entitlement has become the voice of the poor and the marginalised, and a man who rose from the bottom of the barrel. Narendra Modi, is today seen as the entitled and the voice of those who are rich and influential. And for this re-positioning, you must give credit to Rahul Gandhi. To that end, he has crossed the first brand hurdle. *Pappu* has been replaced by the people's

Gandhi, but it is still a work in progress. The journey towards being a person who can be counted on and is seen as an effective foil to unarguably one of India's most astute politicians, Modi, has begun. What remains to be seen is whether Brand Gandhi will endure.

> Suhel Seth is managing partner, Counselage India. The views expressed are personal

informal economy. Obtaining and securing documentation at a single, easily accessible place is a significant hurdle.

A pilot project to remedy this is underway in partnership between AlgoBharat, the Algorand Foundation's India arm, and Lok Swasthya SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)'s health team. SEWA Shakti Kendras (SSKs) will serve as hubs for women to get blockchainenabled Digital Health Passports (DHP) secure and immutable records of their verified credentials — in order to access health benefits and social security programmes. SSKs can scale more rapidly and fine-tune services based on each household's unique needs. Anil Kakani, vice president and country head of Algorand Foundation said, "We want to democratise data through an inclusionary platform so women don't have to run from one office to the other to get documentation to claim their benefits.'

Each SSK provides vital information on health and related services, collects and validates documents manually, and then transfers and consolidates individual-level data in spreadsheets on nearly 34,000 households (200.000 individuals) it currently reaches. The DHP will reduce errors while maintaining information in a secure manner, compliant with Indian laws. Blockchain use will ensure users retain control over their own identities, protecting their data from unauthorised access. Lok Swasthya SEWA will also gain a macro-view of the population it serves, allowing it to more effectively target its services to informal

The views expressed are personal

HJ

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

On criticising and celebrating

This is with reference to "Wins, losses and longing in the Olympics season" by Abhishek Asthana (Aug 4). The day we accord athletes the same respect, regardless of whether they have won a medal, just as we do for cricketers, irrespective of trophies won, will be the day we earn the right to celebrate or critique their performances.

Naweed

A balance of passion and conduct in Parl

This is with reference to "The dangers of breaching parliamentary propriety" by Gopalkrishna Gandhi (Aug 4). Sometimes things get heated in Parliament, but that's because people care about important issues. We should focus on the problems, not how they're talked about.

Irshad Ahmed

Efforts should start from home

This is with reference to "Urban waste management needs a cohesive strategy" by Bhavreen Kandhari (Aug 4). It may be worth adding that citizens should take up positive and climate-friendly actions, such as opting for cloth bags while purchasing items.

SB Saraswat

R. N. I. No. DELENG/2002/07317

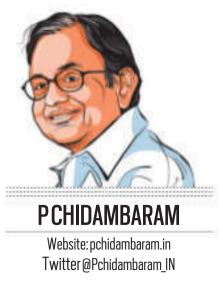
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13 OPINION

Across THE AISLE



Begum Sheikh Hasina was first elected in 1996. She was re-elected in 2008, 2014, 2019 and 2024. The Opposition parties boycotted the last election. The 2024 election's 'freeness and fairness' have been seriously doubted by well-informed persons and governments. India decided that being politically correct was the better part of principles

ON JULY 4, 1776 thirteen states of America declared their independence. More than 200 years have elapsed since the French Revolution (1789-1799). Australia was the first colony to become free from the British Empire in 1901. India won its independence in 1947. The U.S., France and Australia are still independent and democratic. Not all countries that became free from the colonial power (Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, etc.) are still 'free' in the sense that their citizens enjoy human freedoms and are able to elect a government of their choice in a free and fair election. According to one estimate, only 20 per cent of the world's population live under freedom. Happily, Indians are among them.

DEMOCRACY NOT A GIVEN

Democracy is not a given. Pakistan became free on August 14, 1947 but came under military dictatorships several times. Our neighbour, Bangladesh, then a province of Pakistan, was under the heel of a military dictatorship that ruled Pakistan; a guerilla movement gained strength and became a struggle for freedom; India intervened; and Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971. But between 1975 and 1991, there were several military rulers. The two main political parties, Awami League and Bangladesh National Party

Democracy deficit

(BNP), joined hands to depose the military ruler and a civilian government took office in 1991.

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Progress No Immunity

Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh had recorded notable economic progress. Its per capita income is higher than India's as well as that of other South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal. On the Human Development Index, Bangladesh's rank is next only to Sri Lanka's; and it ranks higher than India, Nepal and Pakistan. Bangladesh has reduced its IMR to 21-22 while India's is 27-28; only Sri Lanka's IMR is lower at 7-8 (source: The Hindu). Side by side, the Freedom House has castigated Bangladesh's poor record on elections, on the state of the media, on the independence of the judiciary, and on the personal freedoms of citizens. Rulers think that economic progress will prevail over the decline of democracy or rising dissatisfaction over unemployment, inequality and discrimination, but that is seldom true. In Bangladesh, the dam burst on the flood of opposition to what, in the perception of the students, was a biased and nepotic reservation policy in government jobs.

Meanwhile, the momentum of economic growth slowed down, prices increased and jobs were scarce. Sheikh Hasina's government was in denial — the common fault of autocrats. The trigger was the reservation policy but the protesters soon included other perennial grievances such as corruption, police brutality and judicial passivity. It is a familiar story.

CLOSE THE DEFICIT

Street demonstrations do not invariably succeed. Such protests have indeed toppled governments, for example, Sri Lanka's. On the contrary, the Arab Spring, that seemed to have succeeded when Hosni Mubarak was forced to quit, ultimately failed when another military ruler assumed power ousting an elected President. Mass protests take place when most of the people completely lose hope that a government can be changed through a fair election. When that route is shut in election after election, the flood of opposition will swell and the dam will burst. However, there is a downside to street protests. All can join such protests, and that may include radical or terrorist groups as, it is believed, has happened in Bangladesh. Foreign nationals may be vulnerable. Minorities are especially vulnerable and their homes, businesses and places of worship may be vandalized.

Bangladesh's situation is not unique. People of many countries face the same plight. It is the democracy deficit that forces the people's anger to pour into the streets. The answer is to fill the defict. The United States and Britain have nearly perfected the art of closing the deficit. Faced with mounting dissatisfaction, Prime Ministers such as Thatcher, Johnson and May stepped down in the U.K. and allowed the party to elect a new leader. U.S. Presidents such as Lyndon Johnson and Joe Biden declined to seek re-nomination as a candidate. Accountability is enforced and resignations are secured. Term limits are very useful. A truly free media is a vent. A Supreme Court that will fearlessly exercise its authority and act as the sentinel on the qui vive is a great solace. Truly free and fair elections, on schedule and guaranteed and delivered by an independent Election Commission, is a balm to the poor, neglected and oppressed. In my view, a Parliament that meets every month and allows verbal battles every day between the ruling Party and the Opposition without undue interference from the Chair is the ultimate answer to the democracy deficit.

Bangladesh paid a heavy price for the democracy deficit. I grieve for those who died.



Lessons from Bangladesh

IT IS a shame that our mishaps in the Olympics knocked the events in Bangladesh into second place. There are lessons that we can learn from what happened there. You would have read many learned pieces about why Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee, so let me assure you at the outset this is not going to be another one of them. What interests me about what happened to Sheikh Hasina is the conviction that she brought this upon herself by showing complete contempt for the fundamental rules of democracy. When a leader that powerful is forced overnight to flee for her life, it is usually because she has disrespected basic democratic rights.

Let us not pretend that we did not know that she had become unpopular. The last election that she fought and appeared to win was openly unfair. It was no surprise that all it needed was a trigger for mobs, led by students, to take to the streets in protest. Her response was to call them terrorists and traitors, and order her security forces to shoot to kill. Now, let me come to the first lesson that we can learn from this.

In India, described often by our Prime Minister as the 'mother of democracy' when Muslims took to the streets to protest what they believed was a discriminatory clause in the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA), they also were called traitors. Perhaps there were some among the protestors who were jihadi troublemakers. But remember that they carried the Indian Constitution in their hands to remind the Modi government to respect it. The response from the Home Minister was to order voters in the Delhi election to 'press the button so hard that they can hear it in Shaheen Bagh'. At another rally, a senior minister incited violence against Muslims with a slogan that said traitors should be shot. In Bangladesh, student protesters were called terrorists. Similarities like this must be acknowledged and in India, they are less forgivable because our democratic roots are deeper. Narendra Modi is extraordinarily skilled at portraying himself as India's greatest 'nationalist'. He wraps himself in the flag at every public meeting and tells the people that real patriotism has blossomed only since he became prime minister. Taking the cue from him, BJP spokespersons often confuse dissidence with treason. The term 'urban Naxals' is routinely used to malign dissidents. I have no sympathy for Naxalites or leftists of any shade, shape or size, but believe that in a democracy they have a right to express their views if they do not openly spread hatred and violence. When middle-aged professors and priests are arrested and jailed as 'urban Naxals', it defiles democracy. What should worry us more is that a small group of Hindutva 'nationalists' now decide who is anti-national and who is a patriot. It is they who hand out certificates of patriotism. In a region where autocracy and military dictatorships thrive, it is India's greatest achievement to have survived for 75 years as a democracy. This would not have happened if dissent had been crushed in the name of 'nationalism'. At this point, it is important to remember that the suppression of dissent did not begin with Modi. It began when the revered founders of our Constitution brought a first amendment that took away important freedoms like the right to property and the limited right to free speech. It may have been done with the noble intention of bringing about land reforms to uplift the degraded lives of the peasantry, but it was not a good thing to do. As time went by, it was used to ban books and films the government did not like. We should remember that it was Rajiv Gandhi who first drew attention to Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses by banning it in India. The Ayatollah may not have noticed this book if we had not banned it. So, it is wrong to suggest that democracy has only been weakened in the past decade. What is true is that the process of crushing dissidence has gathered speed. And crushing it is seen as nationalistic which is more worrying still. This would not be happening if India were truly democratic. So international democracy watchdogs have taken to calling India an elected autocracy and they have a point. Another lesson that India can learn from what just happened in Bangladesh is that no amount of economic transformation compensates for political autocracy. In the end, people resent leaders who cancel democratic freedoms. In India, we are lucky that despite some hysterical allegations by opposition leaders, elections continue to be free and fair. Modi would have ensured a full majority for himself if the recent Lok Sabha election had been rigged. It might be possible that jailing two opposition chief ministers worked against him. If they are guilty of corruption they must be tried and punished, but trying them first is necessary And keeping politicians, journalists and student leaders in jail without trial has damaged Modi's image much more than he seems to have realised yet. There are things that Sheikh Hasina could do in Bangladesh and get away with for a while. What we can learn from her mistakes is that they cannot and must not be made in India. As the only democratic country surrounded by tyrants of one kind or other, India must remain a shining model of democracy.



Pradesh, has large shoes to fill. The littleknown legislator was picked last year to replace Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the longest



100 years ago, when a train

TOTAL SEGREGATION

THE ARCHITECTURE and rules of the new Parliament segregate not just journalists from MPs, whom they are expected to report on, but also Rajya Sabha MPs from Lok Sabha MPs and former MPs from sitting MPs. The absence of Central Hall, hitherto the common meeting place, has been much written about. What is unusual is that Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha members have separate cafeterias. When a former TMC MP recently secured a one-day pass for the new building, he was informed it did not permit him to enter the MPs' lounge to meet his friends. The TMC was allotted a party office in the new building but its access was through a bewildering maze of corridors. So the TMC decided to retain its previous office in the old building. Photographers and TV journalists, other than official and agency media, once permitted to stand near the Makar Dwar entrance, have now been restricted to a glass caboose-like cabin over 20 metres from the building, making it nearly impossible to have any contact with MPs entering Parliament.

Shadow PM?

The Congress is riding high on Rahul Gandhi's impressive new image. Ever since his strenuous yatras displaying vim and vigour, Gandhi has attracted many more supporters, particularly youth. There was a time when senior functionaries in Gandhi's team had no permission to disturb him between 10 pm and 11 am, even when they wanted to consult him about issuing an urgent press statement. But recently, his staff was pleasantly taken aback when Gandhi tweeted at 1.52 am that he feared an ED raid. Ever since he finally accepted the position of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Congress presumes that Gandhi is the PM-in-waiting who will take charge in the eventuality of an INDIA majority. But not all allies are convinced of Gandhi's suitability. Mamata Banerjee has made her scepticism known, but, surprisingly, SP's Akhilesh Yadav also indicated that the choice was still open. When asked recently by a TV anchor about possible names for a shadow cabinet.

serving CM in the state who is credited with dramatically uplifting MP's economy. Understandably, Yadav is keen to shed his anonymous image and his PR team is in overdrive to promote him on social media and liberally offer local journalists interviews, although normally an interview with the CM is considered a special privilege granted only to a few. Yadav's PhD topic as a student at an Ujjain university was media coverage of Chouhan's achievements. Interestingly, when Chouhan first returned to Bhopal after being sworn in as agriculture minister in Delhi, his followers arranged a grand reception, preceded by a train journey from Delhi to Bhopal, where he was cheered at stations along the route. However, the local unit of the BJP put a spanner in the works by declaring that the felicitation ceremony in Bhopal should not be just for Chouhan, whose national profile has increased considerably of late, but for all MP ministers serving in Delhi. On the day of the reception, the function was cancelled on the pretext that the wife of a former minister, who was unconnected with the reception, had passed away.

AJIT TURNS PINK

Poll strategist Naresh Arora of DesignBoxed, whose previous clients have included Congressmen D K Shivakumar and Ashok Gehlot, was hired last month by NCP's Ajit Pawar for the Maharashtra Assembly elections, which are just months away. Arora has advised Ajit of the need for a makeover. In the united NCP, Ajit was perceived as the key organiser who liaised with the cadre and elected representatives, while his uncle Sharad Pawar was the public face. Since Ajit will now be seeking votes in his own name, his strategist has suggested that he project a softer, brighter and less abrasive image. For starters, the Ajitled NCP should have a distinctive colour in contrast to the Shiv Sena's orange, the BJP's saffron, and the NCP (Sharad) and Congress's white with a tricolor.

DesignBoxed recommended pink and lately Ajit is seen wearing only pink jackets and his posters have a pink or mauve background with specks of yellow. Ajit has increased his presence on social media and a video on him attracted over 8 million views. He has also started yatras through his strongholds in Maharashtra. His party is keen to project a more women-friendly persona and, as in

robbery shook the Empire

On August 9, 1925, a railway station nearly 20 km from Lucknow witnessed one of the most daring events of the Indian freedom movement. That day, 10 men boarded the Saharanpur-Lucknow passenger train at Kakori station and, minutes into the journey, pulled the chain. The train stopped nearly 2 km from Kakori, at a village called Bajnagar. The revolutionaries acted as they had planned, and looted money meant for the British treasury that were being transported by rail.

The audacious act, famously known as the Kakori train robbery conspiracy case, shook the British government and accelerated the freedom movement. This year marks the 100th year of the incident — on August 9, UP CM Yogi Adityanath launched the centenary celebrations.

The Kakori case was the first major action executed by the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), a revolutionary outfit set up in 1924 by, among others, Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan and Sachindra Nath Bakshi. Bismil, the mastermind, was joined in its execution by Ashfaqullah, Bakshi, Rajendra Lahiri, Chandrashekhar Azad, Keshab Chakravarthy, Manmathnath Gupta, Murari Sharma, Mukundi Lal and Banwari Lal. While the revolutionaries only intended to rattle the British, the accidental death of a passenger hurt their cause.

Of the accused who stood trial at the Special Sessions Court of Justice Archibald Hamilton, 19 persons were convicted. Bismil, Roshan, Rajendra and Ashfaqullah were sentenced to death, while the others got varying jail terms, including five of them getting deported to the infamous Kala Pani (Cellular Jail in Port Blair).

Bismil was arrested in October 1925, supposedly after two members of the HRA betrayed him. While being taken to the gallows, Bismil is said to have famously sung *Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai; Dekhna hai zor kitna baju-e katil mein hai*, the ghazal that went on to become an immortal war cry for freedom fighters.

Ashfaqullah escaped to Nepal and then Daltonganj (Jharkhand). He was arrested a year later. Chandrashekhar was the only major revolutionary associated with the HRA who evaded arrest (he shot himself dead when surrounded by police in a park in Allahabad on February 27, 1931). The park is now named Chandrashekhar Azad Park. *The Indian Express* visited Kakori station and Shaheed Smarak, a memorial dedicated to the revolutionaries. The road



The old station building is now the Kakori Shaheed Rail Museum. Shyamlal Yadav

between the station and Bajnagar, two key signposts in the freedom movement, is in poor shape. The old railway office at Kakori still exists and has been developed into a museum. A notice board near the building details the incident and mentions that a total of Rs 4,679, one aana and 6 pai was looted. While the sum stolen was paltry, the act was an audacious snook at the British Raj, whose response to Kakori was to set an example for future revolutionaries and restore British authority in the minds of the people.

The Kakori case had its ramifications on the country in the days after Independence. The first and third CMs of UP — Govind Ballabh Pant and Chandra Bhanu Gupta — were defence advocates in the case, while Jagat Narain Mulla, a Congress member who was appointed minister in 1921 in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, represented the prosecution side. Mulla, who quit the Congress and joined the Liberal Party, died in 1938.

His son Anand Narain Mulla, also part of his legal team in the case, was in August 1954 elevated as judge of the Allahabad High Court. He went on to have a political career — he was elected to the Lok Sabha as an Independent candidate in 1967 from Lucknow and was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1972 as a Congress nominee. The Opposition was quick to attack the Congress for its proximity to A N Mulla, reminding the ruling party that he had worked to defend the British state in the Kakori trial.

On April 8, 1973, then PM Indira Gandhi released A N Mulla's book of poetry, *Siyahi Ki Boond*. A particular couplet in the book — "*Khoon-e-shaheed se bhi hai keemat mein kuchh siva; Fankar ke kalam ki siyahi ki ek boond* (A drop of ink from the pen of poet is more worthy than the blood of martyr)" — would go on to rock the UP Assembly on April 18, 1973. An adjournment motion was moved by Rajendra Pratap Singh (Congress-OMLA from Sataon, Rae Bareli), who alleged that Mulla had been awarded for acting against freedom fighters. CM Kamalapati Tripathi, however, defended Mulla, "He was an advocate, he practised law. He was general secretary of the Congress and was in the Liberal Party as well. He should not be termed a traitor because of his legal practice."

Speaking in the House, Bakshi, one of the convicts in the train robbery case who was elected MLA of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh from Varanasi South in 1969, narrated an incident related to the Kakori trial. "One day the special judge was at lunch and Ashfaqullah and I were present in the court. J N Mulla (senior defence lawyer in the case) came there and I was talking to him. Ashfaqullah sahib didn't recognise him (Mulla). I introduced them and requested Ashfaqullah to sing a couplet. Ashfaq responded with: 'Chalo yaron ek Rig Theatre dikhayen tumko naya liberal, jo chand simo-jar ke tukdon par, naya tamasha dikha raha hai (Friends, let us visit Rig Theatre; I will show you a new Liberal who will regale you for a small amount of money)." The trial was held at Rig Theatre in Lucknow.

Bakshi said the couplet was a reference to the high legal fee that Mulla charged during the trial — Rs 500 a day and Rs 100 a day for his son — and that the senior Mulla, angered by the taunt, left the court.

The Opposition kept demanding a ban on A N Mulla's book, with some of them walking out in protest. Amid slogans of Inquilab Zindabad, the adjournment motion was not accepted. Finally, CM Tripathi

Akhilesh said, "What about proposals for a shadow Prime Minister?"

OUT OF HIS SHADOW

Mohan Yadav, the new CM of Madhya

Karnataka, Maharashtra has started a scheme, "Majhi Laadki Bahin", which provides Rs 1,500 as well as three LPG cylinder refills for women. Despite combating serious anti-incumbency, his MLAs haven't deserted Ajit yet. brought some peace when he promised to look into the issue. However, two months later, his government was dismissed by the Congress's own Central government due to a mutiny in the Provincial Armed Constabulary.



TRADITIONALLY, CABINET decisions in the Delhi government were taken post long meetings and many discussions between the council of ministers. In the last two and a half years, AAP has streamlined operations by doing away with unnecessary back and forth by circulating cabinet notes instead. In 2024 so far, 15 decisions were taken through the circulation of these notes and just six at actual, physical meetings of the ministers. "It expedites policy implementation. Policies that are crystal clear and certain to be implemented don't require physical meetings," AAP said in a statement.

Pre-Covid, some version of the daily morning meeting was the norm in offices around the world. If even the ponderous



Indian bureaucracy thinks workplace culture needs to embrace hybrid functioning, machine-like productivity that limits human interactions is clearly the future.

A quick Google search reveals that one of the world's first "offices" as we know them was the East India Company in London, created in the early 1700s for employees to gather and discuss their goals and aims. Before that, the EIC was run out of the home of its Governor and don't we know it, this transformational change worked out rather too well. Within a century, the EIC controlled a vast empire, their initial 35 employees having grown to well over a hundred, who congregated daily for work.

Since then, the office has been the mainstay of adult life — a place to collaborate, socialise, form friendships, even, maybe, stumble on love. Coworkers spend more time side by side than with family, often developing profound bonds and relationships that contribute to overall wellbeing. So, by relegating the meeting inconsequential or allowing the option of work-from-home, one can't help but wonder if we're underrating the value of social connections forged over coffees and shared professional aspirations.

We're on earth to move around and meet people, not sit in front of a laptop in our pyjamas. There is beauty in everyday human engagement. Digital interactions cut costs and improve business efficiency but can feel greatly dehumanising. Recently, at a Singapore restaurant, I had to place the food order on an app. Gone are the days of Maitre' D's and waiters explaining flavours and cunningly pushing the most expensive dish on the menu. Singapore, always cutting-edge, has done away with immigration officers too. You can scan a passport and exit the airport without speaking to a soul. While nobody would miss the glum-faced customs officials at the Delhi airport whose expressions are unfailingly surly, increasing disconnection at every level will create its own set of problems, like loneliness and isolation.

Repeated studies on octogenarians, who, typically, are more alone than others, suggest that in the absence of family and friends, daily interactions with the other people in our lives, like the grocer or the neighbours, goes a long way in fostering a sense of community.

Could Bangladeshi students have kicked out their Prime Minister by communicating on Zoom? So far voiceless, their pent up hopes have acquired a fierce momentum — the deeply moving images out of Dhaka resonant of the old adage, united we stand, divided we fall. At the gym, I notice everyone's got their headphones on, following workout routines on the many fitness apps available. Trainers, provided for free by the gym, are standing by twiddling their thumbs. Somewhere, optimisation culture has lead to the mistaken notion that the best use of our time is to keep our heads down and get on with it. Actually, it's the opposite. Life contains an infinite number of possibilities but exploring them requires conversations, occasionally allowing in strangers or just being curious about the lives of others.

Spike Jonze's weirdly memorable 2013 feature, *Her*, about a guy who develops a romantic attachment with his personal Alexa, perfectly captures the paradox of alienation. We live in urban sprawls, surrounded by people. Yet, it's never been harder to reveal oneself honestly, to build something real.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

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People in Ahmedabad stand in support of wrestler Vinesh Phogat after her disqualification from the Paris Olympics

Third-place shouldn't be the limit of ambition



WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING — but wanting to win is. And winning, even in the context of the Olympic Games, implies the gold medal.

Three competitors get on the podium — four in certain sports which undoubtedly adds to the Olympics' worldwide appeal as more people get a sense of achievement, but as far as professional sport goes, there can only be one winner. India had gone into the Paris Olympics with high hopes – of their number of medals reaching double digits. But as the dust settles, they have barely got close to their tally of seven from Tokyo, and still without a gold in the kitty.Don't let the cheerleaders on the official broadcasters lull you into false pride. They have a job to influence the narrative in a positive fashion, but the fact remains that even though India may be sending much bigger contingents these days, in many more disciplines than was previously the case, and more athletes make it to the later stages of draws, when push comes to shove and the world's eyes are upon them, most fail to take the step up.It all comes down to mentality, as there may not be much to choose between the Indians and their top-level counterparts from around the world.Winning a medal at the Olympics is a huge achievement, which one can tell their grandchildren about, and the joy that on the faces when someone manages that is seen to be believed. It is a vindication and celebration of everything that an athlete, their coaches, families and the whole support structure have done over a long period of time.But getting any medal at the Olympics cannot be the height of ambition for anyone who aspires to be the best in the world. The likes of Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps and Carl Lewis never seemed ecstatic after coming second. That's not what they worked all their life for.It's for a reason that the country-wise medal tally is compiled on the basis of gold medals won. The best sportspersons in the world demand a lot from themselves, and are not happy at being second—or third-best—which silver and bronze medallists essentially are. Their ambition pushes them harder to get the best out of themselves. There are no guarantees in top-level sport, but the chances of success improve considerably if one strives to be the best in the business, rather than just trying to be there or thereabout. If one misses slightly while aiming at the moon, they may hit a tree, but if one is aiming at the tree to start with, a slight miscalculation may result in shooting someone in the foot.

even if she lost that fight, she would be in contention for a bronze medal through the repechage route. But Vinesh wanted to be the best, and for that she needed to beat the best. And the Indian found a way to do something that was considered improbable, if not downright impossible, in wrestling. After the Indian men's hockey team clinched the bronze after a hard-fought win over Spain, the first thing skipper Harmanpreet Singh uttered was an apology. The inspirational captain, a drag-flicker par excellence, said the team had come to Paris with an eye on the gold medal, and third-place was a cause for relief, not unbridled joy. It was a nice send-off for incomparable goalkeeper PR Sreejesh but compared to the jumping around and running amok one saw in Tokyo, after India made the Olympic podium after a gap of 41 years, the celebration in the French capital were much more restrained. India know that there's hardly any gap in skill and fitness between them and the likes of Germany and the Netherlands and hence, there's no point in putting a ceiling on their ambition. The only Indian Olympic gold medallist in athletics, Neeraj Chopra has made a habit of breaking barriers and defying convention. In an event previously dominated by Europeans, Chopra showed what was possible, culminating in a South Asia 1-2 in Paris, led by Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem. Not that the Indian was totally pleased with a silver medal, despite suffering from a groin injury and lacking rhythm all evening on the fast lavender track.



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Vinesh's exceptional

Competing with oneself

As Chopra said, medals are significant, but what he is really after is the perfect throw-which really implies the pursuit of perfection. While that quest is endless, it pushes a sportsperson to be the best version of themselves, and strive to improve themselves, bit by bit, every day. It's no surprise that he has not finished outside the podium at any competition he has been part of for the last several years. Brought up in a system which treats a third-place finish as a big success, Chopra refused to set a limit to his goals and how far his spear would soar. At the Olympics, the path to the podium is not equally long.

At Paris, a few boxing categories required just two wins to ensure a medal. It's tempting in a way for any high-quality pugilist, and it may be seen as an easier medal than one in another weight class. But a top-level competitor can't afford to take the easy way out, if they want to realise their full potential. The most populous country in the world is far from being a sporting powerhouse. It still revels in making its presence felt on the biggest stage. That explains the often vociferous celebration for bronze medals, and the hard-luck stories put forth for those finishing fourth. Shooting was touted as a big success story this time, with three

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ON JULY 4, 1776 thirteen states of America declared their independence. More than 200 years have elapsed since the French Revolution (1789-1799). Australia was the first colony to become free from the British Empire in 1901. India won its independence in 1947. The US, France *and* Australia are still independent and democratic. Not all countries that became free from the colonial power (Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, etc.) are still 'free' in the sense that their citizens enjoy human freedoms and are able to elect a government of their choice in a free and fair election. According to one estimate, only 20% of the world's population live under freedom. Happily, Indias are among them.

Democracy not a given

Democracy is not a given. Pakistan became free on August 14, 1947 but came under military dictatorships several times. Our neighbour, Bangladesh, then a province of Pakistan, was under the heel of a military dictatorship that ruled Pakistan; a guerilla movement gained strength and became a struggle for freedom; India intervened; and Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971.

But between 1975 and 1991, there were several military rulers. The two main political parties, Awami League and Bangladesh National Party (BNP), joined hands to depose the military ruler and a civilian government took office in 1991.

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People block the streets to protest against violence in Dhaka

Democracy deficit

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Progress no immunity

Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh had recorded notable economic progress. Its *per capita* income is higher than India's as well as that of other South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal. On the Human Development Index, Bangladesh's rank is next only to Sri Lanka's; and it ranks higher than India, Nepal and Pakistan. Bangladesh has reduced its IMR to 21-22 while India's is 27-28; only Sri Lanka's IMR is lower at 7-8 (*source: The Hindu*). Side by side, the Freedom House has castigated Bangladesh's poor record on elections, on the state of the media, on the independence of the judiciary, and on the personal freedoms of citizens.

Rulers *think* that economic progress will prevail over the decline of democracy or rising dissatisfaction over unemployment, inequality and discrimination, but that is seldom true. In Bangladesh, the dam burst on the flood of opposition to what, in the perception of the students, was a biased and nepotic reservation policy in government jobs.

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Bangladesh's situation is not unique. People of many countries face the same plight. It is the democracy deficit that forces the people's anger to pour into the streets. The answer is to

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uplifting MP's economy.

fill the deficit. The United States and Britain have nearly perfected the art of closing the deficit.

Faced with mounting dissatisfaction, Prime Ministers such as Thatcher, Johnson and May stepped down in the UK and allowed the party to elect a new leader. US Presidents such as Lyndon Johnson and Joe Biden declined to seek re-nomination as a candidate. Accountability is enforced and resignations are secured. Term limits are very useful. A truly free media is a vent. A Supreme Court that will fearlessly exercise its authority and act as the sentinel on the *qui vive* is a great solace.

Truly free and fair elections, on schedule and guaranteed and delivered by an independent Election Commission, is a balm to the poor, neglected and oppressed.

In my view, a Parliament that meets every month and allows verbal battles every day between the ruling Party and the Opposition without undue interference from the Chair is the ultimate answer to the democracy deficit.

Bangladesh paid a heavy price for the democracy deficit. I grieve for those who died.



Website: pchidambaram.in Twitter: @Pchidambaram_IN

have included Congressmen D K Shivakumar and Ashok Gehlot, was hired last month by NCP's Ajit Pawar for the Maharashtra Assembly elections, which are just months away.

Arora has advised Ajit of the need for a makeover. In the united NCP, Ajit was perceived as the key organiser who liaised with the cadre and elected representatives, while his uncle Sharad Pawar was the public face. Since Ajit will now be seeking votes in his own name, his strategist has suggested that he project a softer, brighter and less abrasive image. For starters, the Ajit-led NCP should have a distinctive colour in contrast to the Shiv Sena's orange, the BJP's saffron, and the NCP (Sharad) and Congress's white with a tricolour. DesignBoxed recommended pink and lately Ajit is seen wearing only pink jackets and his posters have a pink or mauve background with specks of yellow. Ajit has increased his presence on social media and a video on him attracted over 8 million views. He has also started yatras through his strongholds in Maharashtra. His party is keen to project a more womenfriendly persona and, as in Karnataka, Maharashtra has started a scheme, "Majhi Laadki Bahin", which provides ₹1,500 as well as three LPG cylinder refills for women. Despite combating serious antiincumbency, his MLAs haven't deserted Ajit yet.

performance

At the Paris Olympics, regardless of the colour of medal they earned, or even going medal-less, three Indian contenders caught the eye for their singular determination to be the best that they could be. She may have been disqualified before her gold medal bout, but the fire and determination she displayed on the mat make Vinesh Phogat an immensely inspirational figure. She was pitted against the previously-undefeated Yui Susaki in her first bout, and must have known that there was a good chance that podium finishes after two medal-less Olympics. But the hard fact remains that India finished 14th on that table as well.

Badminton legend Prakash Padukone faced some heat for pointing at Indians' perceived inability to step up under Olympic pressure despite the facilities, funds and coaching and logistical support provided. He wants the athletes to take a good hard look at themselves and analyse whether they want it badly enough. But if anything, it's up to the whole sporting system to see whether it has put a limit to its ambition and becomes satisfied too soon.





Total segregation

INSIDE TRACK

The architecture and rules of the new Parliament segregate not just journalists from MPs, whom they are expected to report on, but also Rajya Sabha MPs from Lok Sabha MPs and former MPs from sitting MPs. The absence of Central Hall, hitherto the common meeting place, has been much written about. What is unusual is that Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha members have separate cafeterias. When a former TMC MP recently secured a one-day pass for the new building, he was informed it did not permit him to enter the MPs'lounge to meet his friends. The TMC was allotted a party office in the new building but its access was through a bewildering maze of corridors. So the TMC decided to retain its previous office in the old building. Photographers and TV journalists, other than official and agency media, once permitted to stand near the Makar Dwar entrance, have now been restricted to a glass caboose-like cabin over 20 metres from the building,

Gandhi's impressive new image. Ever since his strenuous yatras displaying vim and vigour, Gandhi has attracted many more supporters, particularly youth. There was a time when senior functionaries in Gandhi's team had no permission to disturb him between 10 pm and 11 am, even when they wanted to consult him about issuing an urgent press statement. But recently, his staff was pleasantly taken aback when Gandhi tweeted at 1.52 am that he feared an ED raid. Ever since he finally accepted the position of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Congress presumes that Gandhi is the PM-in-waiting who will take charge in the eventuality of an INDIA majority. But not all allies are convinced of Gandhi's suitability. Mamata Banerjee has made her scepticism known, but, surprisingly, SP's Akhilesh Yadav also indicated that the choice was still open. When asked recently by a TV anchor about possible names for a shadow cabinet, Akhilesh said,"What about proposals for a shadow Prime Minister?"

Out of his shadow

Mohan Yadav, the new CM of Madhya Pradesh, has large shoes to fill.

Understandably, Yadav is keen to shed his anonymous image and his PR team is in overdrive to promote him on social media and liberally offer local journalists interviews, although normally an interview with the CM is considered a special privilege granted only to a few. Yadav's PhD topic as a student at an Ujjain university was media coverage of Chouhan's achievements. Interestingly, when Chouhan first returned to Bhopal after being sworn in as agriculture minister in Delhi, his followers arranged a grand reception, preceded by a train journey from Delhi to Bhopal, where he was cheered at stations along the route. However, the local unit of the BJP put a spanner in the works by declaring that the felicitation ceremony in Bhopal should not be just for Chouhan, whose national profile has increased considerably of late, but for all MP ministers serving in Delhi. On the day of the reception, the function was cancelled on the pretext that the wife of a former minister, who was unconnected with the reception, had passed away.

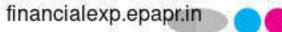
Ajit turns pink

Poll strategist Naresh Arora of DesignBoxed, whose previous clients

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SUNDAY

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Acting is the least mysterious of all crafts. Whenever we want something from somebody or when we want to pretend, we're acting. Most people do it all day long

Marlon Brando

newindianexpress • com

DHAKA TO DURHAM: MISERY FUELS ANGST, **MORPHS INTO HATE**

HYDERABAD

T wasn't too long back that Bangladesh was portrayed as a grand success story. At the 50th anniversary of nationhood, pundits celebrated the rise of millions out of poverty in a nation challenged by history, geography and circumstance. Its per capita income hovered above that of India, fuelling antsy commentary. This week, Bangladesh surfaced in headlines for all the wrong reasons—corruption, quota politics, inflation, unemployment and inequality. The learning curve in democracy shows the limitations of an authoritarian occupation of narrative. Curbing dissent and neutering the opposition is effectively lighting a fuse for implosion. Everything that could go wrong went wrong in a democracy gone astray. In a little over 45 days, the headlines from Dhaka—of agitation, over 400 deaths and regime change, and images of protestors walking away with Sheikh Hasina's Dior bags-have upended the brand equity of Bangladesh.

Cut to Durham in the UK, over 7,900 km across time zones west of Dhaka. Durham witnessed cars used to devastate businesses. Twenty other UK cities also saw violent protests and hate crimes,



06

triggering the biggest law and order crisis since 2011. Unlike Bangladesh, the UK, tagged an advanced economy, has a robust font of competitive politics. Barely six weeks after the Labour Party led by Keir Starmer won a historic majority, the nation is facing the spectre of a civil war.

THE THIRD EYE SHANKKAR AIYAR Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaai A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit *Revolution*, and *Accidental India* (shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com)

A curious aspect of the chaos is the

face-off between Elon Musk, who tweeted that a civil war was inevitable, and the UK prime minister warning those directly or remotely involved "you're culpable". Fuelling the incendiary anger are social media posts by ex-convicts and populists.

The protests are brewing on a fertile ground of the belief of being neglected. Those seeking power are persuasive in presenting AN opinion, as THE opinion and research shows, in war or social strife, algorithms amplify polarisation and disinformation.

Anger is parading out on the streets. Tragically, those power-



POWER & POLITICS PRABHU CHAWLA prabhuchawla@newindianexpress.com Follow him on X @PrabhuChawla

HE mystery of Kangana Ranaut is that she is no mystery. To mutilate a Churchillian wisecrack, she is an enigma wrapped in a Sabyasachi sari, mysteriously accepted as a political novice-turned-moral po-

lice with her hugely popular social media handles. There are other women actors in politics, but the 38-year-old heroine of *Manikarnika* is a breed apart. She is not a damsel in distress, but a hardsell nonetheless. The style and substance her acerbic diatribes against those who oppose her ideology and her idol signals the arrival of a belligerent saffron warrior. Her persona subconsciously identifies with Jhansi *ki rani*, the warrior queen who went down fighting.

However, this Bollywood *rani* has no intention to go down, but only to fight. She aligned with the BJP six years ago, attracted by the uncompromising persona of her idol, Narendra Modi, who gave her a ticket to contest from Mandi in her home state this year. The cinematic queen defeating the son of the incumbent is a metaphor of her life: a successful outsider in both cinema and her party who is widely panned by the cog-

some theatre owners even cancelled the screenings because not a single ticket was sold. Now that she has switched roles, Kangana's ticket to glory is her idol Modi. "I've been the struggler of the century. Fortunately, everyone loves the underdog," she told an interviewer. What makes Kangana different from other film stars in parliament who reserve dramatic dialogues only for the silver screen? She launched blockbusters centred on strong but not silent women who triumph over patriarchy. Now she plays the perfect supporting

actress for Modi's anti-elitist stance. The bard wrote: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances." Well, Kangana does

know how to make an entrance. Her anti-Rahul Gandhi meltdowns are not only politically incorrect but are in bad taste. No star cast matters to her, but caste is the star. She retweeted a highly objectionable RG meme with the comment, "Jaati-jivi jise bina jaati pooche jaati ganana karani hai (One who wishes to hold a caste census

one's caste)."

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

A vegetarian by choice, she wants to make mincemeat of her opponents. Since Modi-bashing is the invigorated INDI Alliance's favourite sport, Kangana is playing the BJP's unofficial ideological matador by taking on RG: "Apni jaat ka kuch ata pata nahi, nanu Muslim, dadi Parsi, mummy Christian aur khud aisa lagta hai jaise pasta ko kadi patte ka tadka lagakar kichadi banane ki koshish ki ho, aur inko sabki jaat pata *karni hai* (You know nothing of your own caste, your grandfather is Muslim, grandmother Parsi, mummy Christian, and it feels like someone tempered pasta with curry leaves to make rice and lentils, but he wants to know everyone's

caste)." And on another occasion: "Rahul Gandhi has no dignity, vesterday he was saying that we are Shivji's *baraat* and this is a *chakravyuh*. I feel he should be tested if he is doing drugs. The way he reaches parliament and the way he speaks irrationally. Either he is drunk or under the influence of drugs whenever he reaches parliament. Nobody can make this kind of statement in their right mind." The last one was rich considering her rehab past.

Her contempt for Bollywood's Tier I defines her anti-establishment profile. She has called Karan Johar the "flagbearer of nepotism" and a part of the "movie mafia". She has trolled her own industry for not backing her for slapping a woman cop. She called Urmila Matond-

> kar "a soft-porn star", Sonam Kapoor a "mafia bimbo", and Swara Bhaskar and Richa Chadha "B-grade actresses". Kangana has cracked the code of today's political ethos: spew invective and get attention. Over 20 years ago she had claimed: "My biggest asset is that I know how to learn and I believe it will help me in the long run." And she ran for parliament. Hers is an Indian cannon-

ball run through cinema and politics. After a series of humiliations by pow-

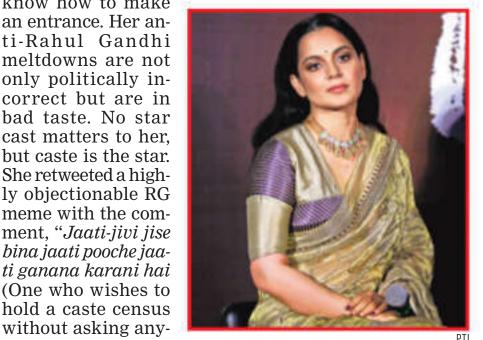
erful film personalities, Kangana Amardeep Ranaut decided to be an A-grade actor in B-town. It should've been easy. She had more National Film Awards for best actress than tricks the snooty Bolly-dynasts' turned at parties she wouldn't be invited to. Mocked for her backwoods English accent and eviscerated on social media for her politics and gaffes, Kangana played the parvenu to the hilt—after all, she is an acclaimed actor. She chooses her own roles and her own script.

political lifetime. Politics is a great bulldozer. The high-profile tyro neta is on a spree of levelling Modi's enemies. She trashed Mamata Banerjee for appealing to Bengalis to maintain peace after the Bangladesh unrest and back Modi's decision: "Mamata *didi ko bhi* prime minister *ji ki yaad aayi*, finally *unhone apni* life mein pehli baar Bengal ko Bharat ka hissa mana, Centre ko support kiya. Wah! (Mamata didi too remembered the prime minister; she considered Bengal a part of Bharat for the first time, supported the Centre. Bravo!)"

To call India's only openly nationalist filmstar a brainless bimbo would be reading the wrong script. Her histrionics reveal someone with a keen eye for polarising debates by projecting narratives as Modi vs the World, and herself as BJP's Joan of Arc. By calling Netaji India's first PM, she was playing to the establishment gallery which has been booing the Nehru-Gandhi team.

She gives a Hindu spin to everything from diplomacy to politics. After Sheikh Hasina landed in India, Kangana boasted: "Bharat is the original motherland of all Islamic republics around us. We are honoured and flattered that honourable prime minister of Bangladesh feels safe in Bharat, but all those who live in India and keep asking why Hindu Rashtra. Why Ram Rajya? Well, it is evident why! No one is safe in Muslim countries, not even Muslims themselves. Unfortunate whatever is happening in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Britain. We are lucky to be living in Ram Rajya. Jai Shri Ram."

Evidently, Kangana doesn't want to waste her new avatar like her other filmi colleagues in parliament do. Hema Malini, Shabana Azmi and Jayalalithaa were conspicuous by their presence, and not for opinions on everything from potato to politics. She has defined her identity and the destination. However, she should be wary of becoming a hot potato in politics if rhetoric over substance is her plan of action. In politics as in films, Kangana is writing her own dialogues for a lethal oratorical arsenal to target her foes. But what's cooking in her political kitchen is anyone's guess.



KANGANA: NEW WEAPONISED SAFFRON WARRIOR

less to change their circumstance are being pitted by political entities to wage war on equally powerless people. The first step to resolution is acceptance of mistakes. Studies show that Brexit, which was sold as the cure for lost opportunities, made it worse following the loss of trade, investment and growth. Yet tragically, nobody wants to call out Brexit.

Beyond national politics, there is a global context fuelling protests. On the face of it, the UK and Bangladesh are two very different cultures, economies and democracies. In the 1970s, Arthur Okun, a professor at Yale and an adviser to Lyndon Johnson, came up with the concept of the 'Misery Index', which is arrived at by adding the annual unemployment rate and the annual inflation rate. The rise of misery is the common factor fuelling agitation and chaos.

Misery has a new moniker in modern economies—the cost of living crisis. Aggravation has catalysed political mobilisation— Carnegie Endowment's Global Protest Tracker reveals that since 2017, economic issues have triggered protests in 258 countries. In Bangladesh, misery morphed into anger at the persistence of entitlements for some at the cost of many. In the UK, misery has morphed into violent hate at those perceived to be robbing the "locals" of opportunities. Erosion of opportunity worsens inequality as the income gap is widened. Inequality is a complex issue and a force multiplier of angst. The phenomenon has spawned literature and indices inspired by literature such as the Great Gatsby Curve conceptualised by Alan Krueger, which illustrates the connection between concentration of wealth and barriers to opportunity and hurdles to upward mobility.

It is well established that the longer one performs below potential, the lower one drags long-term potential. Indeed, mentors of athletes and CXOs deploy the concept of a 'compound effect' elaborated by Darren Hardy and others to agitate protégées into achieving their potential. Long-term potential already impacted by uneven globalisation is challenged by global disruptions in business models, which threaten the resilience of nations and the prosperity of individuals.

The disruptive potential of generative AI is already in play the IMF estimates that states over 40 percent of global employment is exposed to the impact of artificial intelligence. Digitalisation has shrunk human interface, especially in banking and retail. The next frontier is visible through the prism of the Ozempic economy-earlier this month, Weight Watchers of the weight loss programmes fame shed staff, Wendy's cut sales guidance as diner traffic declined, and retailers are rejigging procurement.

The global economy is migrating from a demand-constrained world to a supply-constrained one as companies, consumers and countries shift from the fossil fuel economy to a net zero regime. There is disruption in the media world too-the decline of linear television is visible in the write-offs of billions by mega corps such as Warner and Paramount, and the fall in Disney's earnings from the "happiest place on earth".

Context is critical for comprehension and policy design. The triad of disruptions—climate, technology and demography fuel uncertainty. The rise in protectionism and reshoring of investments will aggravate faultlines and misery. Resilience calls for a rejig of policies from enabling skills to raising resources for income support. The question is how ready the countries are to mitigate pain, Globally, it would seem the political class is campaigning in one constituency and contesting in another.

noscenti. She may not be a motor-mouth, but she is a much louder mouthpiece of the BJP than many of her party's firstterm Lok Sabha members.

Kangana may not be accepted by the Bollywood royalty or the BJP's organisational hierarchy. But she definitely cannot be ignored. She has done 44 films, six of them superhits. Her last film *Tejas* was rejected by the audience:

The only role she is currently playing is to win enough saffron Oscars to last a

A HOMECOMING FOR INDIAN INDIES



NAMRATA JOSHI Consulting Editor Follow her on X @Namrata_Joshi

HEN Bauddhayan Mukherji went to Kolkata from Mumbai in early July to supervise the release of his Bengali production, Manikbabur Megh (The Cloud and the Man), he told his colleagues at Little Lamb Films

to expect him back in seven days. It's been six weeks and he has still not returned, happily overwhelmed by the steady, incremental success of his small, independent venture that few were willing to wager on.

It was released during the monsoons, not considered an opportune time for business. "But for a film about the bond between a man and a cloud, we wanted the audience to come out of the theatres and look up at the sky," says Mukherji. The gamble appears to have paid off.

The debut directorial of Abhinandan Banerjee, Manikbabur Megh is a rumination in black and white on seclusion and companionship, life and death, that boasts of neither big stars nor popular songs. Despite that, it completed an unprecedented 25-day run last Sunday

with a 780-strong audience in attendance at Kolkata's Nandan theatre. This weekend, it opened in Pune and spread its wings to Chicago and Fremont in the US. The public love has come more than 2.5 years after its world premiere at Tallinn and subsequent screenings at 38 international film festivals.

It's a rare success story for a profound, meditative movie that bucks the dominant trend of Indian independent cinema not being able to find a passage back home despite garnering critical acclaim and awards abroad.

Indies have for the longest been deprived of a workable distribution and exhibition system that has always been risk-averse and heavily skewed towards mainstream commercial films. Even the OTT platforms are going back on their promise of diversified, independent content, and are demanding theatrical release of films before considering them for acquisition.

It's then necessary for indies to work out alternatives. And Manibabur Megh is not the only one. This independence day, a small gem from Meghalaya, Dominic Sangma's Garo film *Rapture*, on the issues of xenophobia and intolerance, is aiming for an unfettered run in theatres. It comes home a year after its world premiere in Locarno in August 2023 and a successful commercial release in France in May 2024.

Community-based ticketed screenings of the film are being personally organised in the Garo Hills in Meghalaya by Sangma and his producer, Eva Gunme Marak, hiring local auditoriums and projectors. There will be three daily shows in the initial phase spread over 10 days. Sangma is hoping to subsequently take it to Shillong and Guwahati.

Yet another young, talented filmmaker, Sumanth Bhat, also decided to take an unusual route to reach out to audiences for *Ekam*, a new anthology series in Kannada, Tulu and Malayalam languages that is deeply rooted in Karavali in coastal Karnataka and celebrates its culture. It went through 2.5 years of a trying process of reaching out to the streamers. "They didn't even watch it.



We bemoan independent films not finding an audience beyond foreign film festivals. Some new ventures show that the way out of this quagmire might be persistence. And in filmmakers spending more time and energy wooing niche viewers

Kannada content is the last in the peck ing order on OTTs," says Bhat. So, the team decided to release the series on July 13 on its own exclusive online platform. "The idea is to build a democratic online distribution system beyond the existing modes," says Bhat. The ₹149 price provides unlimited access to all the seven shorts with bonuses. The idea is to "let no barriers remain between the creators and the audience".

Similarly, the fiercely feminist independent filmmaker Leena Manimekalai has also created her own video on demand channel where one can rent a curated set of her films.

Will these indie release models be replicable? Each indie film is unique and needs to have its own strategy in place. There must be an understanding of the core audience, finding the right niche and interested communities in viable pockets to then promote it.

Mukherji feels it's essential to tie up with a distributor or exhibitor, like he partnered with Inox, and have a limited, staggered release. Endorsements and support from influential voices and word of mouth promotion through social media are the key. There is also a need for boutique properties like Siri Fort auditorium in Delhi to serve the cause of alternative cinema.

The audience must also walk the talk. There might be a lot of curiosity around indies, but people aren't going to the theatres to watch them—at times because of inconvenient venues and showtimes, at others for too much else vying for their limited attention span. With established names like Rakshit Shetty and Raj B Shetty on board, the trailer of *Ekam* drew a lot of attention, but that didn't translate into a big viewership. Bhat feels the audience is not willing to pay anything more than ₹99 when it comes to the pay-per-view model.

So it appears that indie filmmakers will have to spend a lot of their time and energy wooing viewers. "It's no longer about filmmaking alone," says Sangma. It's about being cinema warriors and evangelists for building a whole new viewing culture.



Banking votes



We have to stand the way Abu Sayed stood... In Bangladesh, regardless of nationality or religion, everyone's child is Abu Sayed. Whether it is a Hindu family, a Muslim family, or a Buddhist family. So please ensure that there is no disturbance anywhere.

Muhammad Yunus, chief adviser to the interim Bangladesh government, on a student activist shot dead by the police on July 16

Wrestling won and I lost. My dreams are shattered. I don't have any more strength. Goodbye wrestling 2001-2024. I will always be indebted to you all. I am sorry.

Vinesh Phogat, first Indian women wrestler to win an Olympic semifinal, after being disqualified for the final for being marginally overweight

It's really kind of nuts. I am trying to think about the last time Senator Manchin and I, respectfully, were on the same side of an issue.

Alexandra Ocasio Cortez, US Congresswoman, on Kamala Harris's choice of running mate



Politicising misstep

Ref: Thorough probe must on how Vinesh was disqualified (Aug 10). The editorial has rightly argued for a thorough probe on the disqualification of Vinesh. It appears there was negligence on the support staff's part. The incidence has now turned political with the opposition staging a walk-out from the Rajya Sabha, which was uncalled for. The prime minister has tried to console Vinesh and called her a "champion of champions". The Haryana government is treating her like a medallist. The matter should end there. But knowing our politicians, it is going to be a major issue for the forthcoming Haryana assembly elections. Hemanth Bhide, Mangaluru

Sports diplomacy

The bonhomie between Neeraj Chopra and Arshad Nadeem after a tough battle in Paris was heartening to watch. Sports have the capacity to transcend borders and reconcile hostilities. It is time for India to make use of sports diplomacy to lower friction and enhance relationships in the neighbourhood in such a tumultuous time. This will embolden India's commitment to the Neighbourhood First policy and cater to national interest.

M Rishidev, Dindigul

Supply-side economics

Ref: Why not to focus on trickle-down economics (Aug 10). I read K M Chandrasekhar's write-up with keen interest. The last two paragraphs are a warning signal for a further erosion of support base for this adamant, "I know all" BJP-led government. Maybe god is working according to a grand design to restore our heterogeneous social fabric. This budget reflects that this central government is for the rich, by the rich and of the rich.

Subramanian Anantharaman. Chennai

Towards Valhalla

The 'Valhalla' to be attained in 2047 needs to take into account many course corrections based on expected and unexpected national and global situational sequences. Like that, trickle-down economics is not an overnight phenomenon, but a gradual process built into economic activities. Extended credit guarantee to smaller enterprises and higher Mudra loan limits will help the effect to a great deal. However, the columnist's grouse about inadequate allocations for R&D, education and health is genuine and worth taking cognisance of.

Venkat Desikan, Chennai

Creamy layer

I am not surprised with the Modi government's decision to avoid recognising a creamy layer for SCs and STs. It was not Ambedkar's idea to protect the creamy layer, which is why he added a clause in the Constitution that the classification should be reviewed from time to time. The creamy layer must be added at the earliest, as there are general quota students who are more deserving than creamy layer ones. The recent elections were a boon for representation, but a bane for development. Sujit Ravva, email

The Supreme Court's call to carve out a creamy layer was a ray of hope for the downtrodden among SCs and STs. The government's decision has thrown cold water on their hopes. The decision is more political than societal, as the government knows enthusing the privileged is more important than uplifting the non-creamy layers who are less sure of casting votes. They will have to wait for a statesman to come to the helm to enjoy their shares. Ramesan P, Keralapuram

Audit benefits

Ref: Kerala HC emphasises need for ecological auditing (Aug 10). Incorporating ecological audits into organisational processes is the need of the hour. Such audits not only help companies to steer clear of penalties and legal consequences, but also allow them to build favourable public images. Risk management is another key benefit. It is important to make ecological audit reports a prerequisite for all detailed project reports for ecologically vulnerable areas. N R Jagannath, Bengaluru

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The Sunday Tribune SPECTRUM

REFLECTIONS

A truly electrifying dancer

SREEVALSAN THIYYADI

HE gathering at Lahore was restive as the dance show began much behind schedule. This left young Yamini Krishnamurthy tasked with nursing the viewers' grievance primarily. She took up the challenge along with a risk: opening to a long piece. "If they liked it, they would stay around," the artiste would later recall the gamble. Not only did the residents of the heritage city cheer her, many among the enthralled even sang with her towards the end of the programme.

Yamini was already established when this episode unveiled in Pakistan's Punjab province. Yet, practical tips during tricky junctures would invariably come from her father. "Suppose you startwith a small item and many in the audience leave immediately. You are defeated easily," suggested M Krishnamurthy, who often travelled with Yamini, knowing her calibre. He foresaw the victory in the Paris of the East.

In any case, Yamini had won over her family as a little girl. At five and just into school, she told her parents that academic studies bored her. "I want to dance, nothing else," she kept announcing —louder as days passed by in the Cauvery delta where she grew up as a child. The elders were all art-inclined, but they sensed no career in anyone taking up Bharatanatyam full-time in the 1940s.

The Telugu kid living in Tamil land had her reason. A couple of minutes' walk from her house in Chidambaram would take Yamini to the imposing Nataraja temple. Its exquisite architecture featured statues that enticed her much—especially Shiva in his cosmic dancing posture. Spending all day for months together in its precincts, Yamini decided that dance alone would define her life.

The determination led Prof Krishnamurthy to eventually take the child to Kalakshetra. In between, for seven years, Yamini lived in hilly Madanapalle in ancestral Andhra Pradesh. Kalakshetrawas only a couple of furlongs away from their residence in Madras. It took one glance at the bright-eyed child for theosophist



Yamini Krishnamurthy (1940-2024) re-sculpted classical dance in ways that became tradition

Rugminidevi Arundale to conclude that the aspirant was a promise. Indeed, the 12-year-old student went on to rise as an icon — and for not just Bharatanatyam. She redefined the status of Kuchipudi and made meaningful inroads into Odissi as well. As the late scholar SN Chandrashekhar used to note, Yamini infused freshness while presenting the three classical forms, seldom mixing up the movements.

By the time Yamini was in her twenties, India of the 1960s had begun to acknowledge the stature of its vintage arts that had undergone grand reinventions. An array of maestros played a role in this renaissance in dance and music. Yamini's role in the subsequent takeoff was central, notes fellow Delhite and Bharatanatyam exponent Geeta Chandran. "For three decades till the early 1990s, she was an overarching figure," she adds, also recalling the complementary intellectual contributions

by the dancer's father. "Yaminiji was effectively the country's global ambassador for dance." At age 15, Yamini saw Tanjore Balasaraswati perform. Stunned, she strived to emulate the icon. Two years later, in 1957, Yamini's Bharatanatyam debut at Madras marked the start of her fine assimilation of two major schools: Pandanallur and Kanchipuram. The lyrical movements of the first came through Kittappa Pillai, while Ellappa Pillai's unhurriedness emboldened her rhythmic patterns. Dandayudhapani Pillai's choreographies inspired her. Devadasi Mylapore Gowriammai honed Yamini's abhinaya skills. She also learned Carnatic: vocals from the unconventional MD Ramanathan and the veena from the purist Kalpakam Swaminathan.

Past her teens, Yamini's liking for Kuchipudi grew further. She decided to learn it, ignoring voices that dubbed the Andhra dance folksy. Vedantam Laxminarayana Sastry, Chinta Krishnamurthy and Venugopala Sarma guided her eminently. Around that time, she decided to learn Odissi, too, primarily under Puri-bom Pankaj Charan Das, who had taught the celebrated Kelucharan Mohapatra — also Yamini's guru later.

By 35, Yamini had herself become an established teacher, with 400 students. A decade and a half later, in 1990, she founded a dance institute in the national capital, which was already her home. "Till then, I was a busy performer within the country and abroad," she'd wind back. "Setting up a school implied less time for composing. Yet, I could groom a whole lot of disciples."

A Padma Vibhushan awardee, Yamini moulded her own style through eclecticism, but never insisted her pupils must follow her — even the self-invented leaps that made her distinct on the stage. "Deep knowledge about Hindu mythology, though, is essential for excellence."

Yamini's prime-time performances for rustic audiences across the Hindi belt earned her the name 'bijli'. "She was truly electrifying," notes art historian Ashish Mohan Khokar. To many, her dance was representative of the Nataraja image that stayed inside her from the toddler days.

Unchanging climate in the literary world



BINDU MENON

"UST aweek before the unimaginable human tragedy in Kerala's picturesque Wayanad region, I happened to view an animated film that was being shared on social media. It was a rendering of

Malayalam writer Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai's short story, 'Vellappokkathil' ('In the Flood'). It's the poignant tale of a dog that is left stranded in a hut while his master and family escape in a rescue boat during a severe flood. The story captures the agony of the dog who endures the ravages of weather, pangs of hunger and the insensitivity of passing humans even as he guards his master's hut. The backdrop to this tale of loyalty and resilience was the Great Flood of 1924, which had submerged much of Kerala and devastated India's first monorail system in the tea gardens of Munnar. Exactly a hundred years later, a similar tragedy recurred in Wayanad. Landslides triggered by torrential rain and a swollen river that changed course erased three villages off the map.

Extreme weather patterns continue to wreak havoc, from flash floods and landslides in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to unprecedented rain in Delhi, Maharashtra and Assam. All this, after we witnessed one of the worst summers of all time. At the recent Paris Olympics, too, climate change was a talking point as the heatwave got to the athletes, prompting gymnast great Simone Biles to exclaim that it felt "like 9,000 degrees". Climate change is a talking point when 200 mm of rain turns Dubai into a river, when fruit orchards shrink in the Himalayan region, or when photos of a rapidly melting Swiss glacier take the Internet by storm. In otherwords, the perils of climate change are no longer a distant possibility but an everyday reality. But have we come to grips with it, or much less, do we fully grasp its import? Many Indian writers have penned cautionary tales about environmental loss, ecological imbalance and human greed. Mahasweta Devi addressed this in her Bengali novella 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha' (1995), where the prehistoric flying reptile warns, "We are extinct by the inevitable natural geological evolution. You too are endangered Forests extinct, animal life obliterated outside of zoos and forest sanctuaries. What will you finally grow in the soil, having murdered nature in the application of manimposed technology?" In similar vein, Arun Joshi's 1990 novel, 'The City and The River', is a fable that is a critique on autocracy as well as on environmentalism and the destructive consequences of development. More recently, Janice Pariat's 'Everything the Light Touches' is an exploration of the



As Amitav Ghosh has lamented, not enough cognisance is being taken of the reality of climate change

human understanding of nature and ways in which the bond can be forged. But perhaps the one writer who has consistently engaged with climate

change and been vocal about it is Amitav Ghosh. In 'The Hungry Tide' (2004) and 'Gun Island' (2019), where the Sundarbans is both the backdrop and life-force of the narrative, he captures the fragility of the mangrove ecosystem as well as its fury when threatened by man-made interventions. 'The Living Mountain' is another allegorical wake-up call to climate reality. A few years ago, Ghosh had lamented that the literary world had not taken enough cognisance of this reality. In his book 'The Great Derangement', Ghosh wrote that the very mention of climate change was enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction. "It is as though in the literary imagination, climate change were somehow akin to extraterrestrials or interplanetary travel... if the urgency of a subject were indeed a criterion of its seriousness, then, considering what climate change actually portends for the future of the Earth, it should surely follow that this would be the principal preoccupation of writers the world over - and this, I think, is very far from being the case." While one may not agree that science fiction deals only with interstellar explorations or apocalyptic scenarios, Ghosh may have a point about how mainstream fiction can no longer afford to sidestep the realities of climate change. "The real story," concedes acclaimed science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson, "is the one facing us in the next 30 years." In fact, Robinson's muchtalked-about book, 'The Ministry for The Future', opens with a deadly heatwave that kills millions in India. If it sounds ominous, one can only hope that fiction doesn't meet reality.

Another August etched in memory



RAAJA BHASIN

UGUST 1947 redefined the Indian subcontinent. This may have been a time to celebrate Independence, but at least in the North, the shadow of Partition was overwhelming. My parents and those of their generation that I met or knew never referred to this as a moment of 'Independence' and a time of joy. There is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that the ones who remained unaffected by Partition celebrated the break from imperial Britain, while some, whose lives were shattered, even bemoaned the schism. Few, if any, looked past the obvious to learn that much of the forces and convoluted processes that led to Partition were the direct result of colonial policy.

In the immediate aftermath of this cataclysm, there were two broad categories of perspectives — those who wholeheartedly condemned the British and their exploitative measures and, surprisingly, another group that quietly whispered, 'We were better off as colonial subjects.' Both groups had reason to feel what they did. But both, no matter what take they had on the matter, had been thrown off the deep end and now, Independence or not, Partition or not, survival was all that mattered. This was a moment when humanity as a collective had failed — and miserably at that. If anything, individuals with humanity lit small lamps of hope and kindness in the mass of darkness.

Some years later, in another August, war broke out with Pakistan. In 1965, General Ayub Khan launched one of our neighbour's periodic misadventures and attacked India. I was a bare toddler when this war came. We were far away from any scenes of battle. Yet, given that my parents were of the generation that had gone through Partition, its trauma remained embedded in their minds. They, not unexpectedly, were fearful of loss and separation from their loved ones. For me, this came in the shape of a small silver bracelet that remained with me for several years. Then it went wandering and has not returned. It may be in some odd box somewhere, but the odds are that this piece of functional ornament, worn just once, has slipped away and gone to the great 'whereverwhatever' of missing objects.

This bracelet had my name on the obverse and the address at the back. In essence, it said, 'If found, please return bracelet and wearer to owner.' This bracelet was my parents' way of writing down my home and origin, should I get separated from them.

Once the air-raid siren sounded, we would troop down to a room in a neighbour's house that the Civil Defence had designated as the safest place to be. Almost everybody carried flasks of tea or coffee and something to eat. Our windows had been pasted over with brown paper crosses — "Shattering glass can be lethal". In a canvas satchel, my father had a first-aid kit, with the essentials of the 1960s gauze bandages, cotton wool, mercurochrome and tincture. In that half-darkened space, there must have been around 20 adults and children. In this world that has become increasingly hateful, and with people who had survived hate, what I recall in that room is an extraordinary sense of calm. Most, if not all, religions were represented.

As older memories become sharper and sounds heard long ago are not echoes but ring clear, apart from the occasional cough or sneeze, or of a flask being opened and closed, the only sounds were of rosaries clicking and a merging hum of the 'Gayatri Mantra' and the Japji Sahib'.

A cuckoo in the nest, and the peculiar quest



RIMA DHILLON

Cuckoo sings the song of spring Yet it leaves its young for others to bring



Asian Koel



ommon Hawk-cuckor



Common Cucke

another migrates from East Africa to India to breed during this season. The Jacobin Cuckoo chooses the unsuspecting Jungle Babbler (seven sisters) to foster its chick. Even once the chick leaves the nest, it continues to demand food. The foster parent is at its wit's end trying to feed this fledgling that is so much larger than its hosts!

The Common Hawk-cuckoo is so named because of its uncanny physical resemblance to a sparrow hawk (Shikra); however, the beak is a dead giveaway! It makes its presence felt, and how, with its crazy incessant calling all day and through the night. It is popularly nicknamed the Brainfever Bird. Its "cu-cu-koo" call steadily rises in a feverish pitch to a high crescendo before easing back down and abruptly ceasing. But before one can recover from the sound, it starts off again ... and again ... and again ... setting one's teeth on edge. It is especially nerve-wracking at night when you want to just pray it will decide to fly off the tree outside your window!

ONSOON conjures upimages of lush greenery, renewed energy and vibrancy in the air after the intense heat of summer. Along with the rumble of clouds and the patter of raindrops on the ground giving off an earthy scent, a new sound begins to reverberate in the surroundings: the call of the cuckoos. The melodious songs of the Koel, the two-syllable "cuck-coo" of the Indian Cuckoo, the soft melody of the Jacobin Cuckoo, and the harsh calls of the Common Hawk-cuckoo (Brainfever Bird) fill the air. From being venerated in Hindu mythology to being berated in the West as a synonym for craziness, deceit, cunning, and many things in between, the cuckoo species has the human race enthralled with their antics. They have inspired poems, sonnets and love songs for ages, been immortalised

in films ('One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest'),

by the Germans in their cuckoo clock, and considered to herald the onset of spring, bringing hope and good fortune.

Cuckoos are famous — or infamous for their brood parasitism, laying eggs in the nests of other birds. Of the 140 species of cuckoos in the world, 56 are brood parasites, of which 16 are found in India. They have been called lazy birds as they do not build nests at all. They have cleverly picked different species of birds to host their eggs and foster their chicks. Different species of cuckoos pick the nest of a host whose eggs are either most similar to their own or use egg mimicry (they can copy and make their egg look like the host bird's egg) so they may go undetected until it is too late!

The cuckoo egg hatches earlier than the host bird's eggs. The chick is born with the instinct to look after itself. As soon as it feels the presence of another egg, it puts all its energy into pushing it out of the nest. This attribute has earned the cuckoo the tag of being a bully.

The Asian Koel, a resident cuckoo in our part of the country, hoodwinks the House Crow into fostering its family. Very often, the crows are seen chasing the Koel into the blue yonder! This is a well-thought-out strategy between the Koel couple. The male causes a diversion by leading the crow away from the nest. The loud alarm calls (faked?) of the male being chased by the crows are probably a signal to its partner that the coast is clear for the deed to be done. The female Koel seizes the opportunity to quickly drop its egg in the nest, leaving the hosts without a clue.

The crow, known for its intelligence, is no

match for the cunningness of the Koel. By the time the deception comes to light, it is too late, and the foster parents resign themselves to bringing up this interloper, which they do with the same care and love as they would their own!

The Jacobin Cuckoo is one of the prettier cuckoos. Its black and white appearance and spiky crest give it a distinctly debonair look. Called '*Chatak*' in Hindi, it has a soft, bubbly call. Its appearance in North Indi, coinciding with the onset of the rainy season, has earned it the moniker of 'monsoon bird'. In folklore, it is believed to appear in India from East Africa, riding on the winds of the southwest monsoon.

Research has since proved through citizen science records and bird ringing that a segment of the population of Jacobin Cuckoos resides in South India, while At the end of September, the curtains will come down on this episode in the avian world. The cuckoos will have done their duty in perpetuating their species — by hook or by crook. We bid them adieu, secure in the knowledge that they will be back once again, riding the monsoon winds.

 The writer is president of the Chandigarh Bird Club

Common mann cuche





DELHI-DEHRADUN EXPRESSWAY DEVELOPMENT ALONG WITH DAMAGE?

The Delhi-Dehradun Expressway project, nearing completion, is expected to be an example for the world with the longest wildlife corridor in Asia. It will cut the travel time between the two cities to 2.5 hours but apprehensions remain about its impact, writes **PARITOSH KIMOTHI**

ttarakhand has for long been a popular destination for pilgrims and tourists. While Haridwar is a major pilgrimage centre in the plains, the provisional State capital Dehradun hosts a number of prominent national-level institutions including the Survey of India and Indian Military Academy along with famous educational institutions, apart from being the gateway to the popular hill station of Mussoorie and other tourism activities especially in the mountainous regions of Garhwalin the State. Apart from long weekends and special occasions, the summer months frequently witness a large number of people arriving here especially from Delhi-NCR. Similarly, snowfall in the nearby hills also attracts a number of tourists from neigbouring regions. At present, people travel between Delhi and Dehradun/Haridwar by road, train or by air. The time taken to travel between Doon and the national Capital by road ranges from five to seven hours depending on the time when one travels and the location one is going to. Similarly, it takes about five to six hours by train and though the flight takes 40 minutes to one hour, one may spend more than an additional hour to get to the destination from the airport. This scenario is expected to be

changed drastically in the near future with the completion of the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway project of the National Highways Authority of India. The completion of this 212-kilometre six-lane access controlled expresswaywith a project cost of Rs 14,000 crore, which is in its final stage of construction, will drastically cut down the travel time between Delhi and Dehradun/ Haridwar to 2.5 hours. This expressway is also expected to be an example for the world as it also features a 13.8 kilometre elevated road, making it Asia's longest wildlife corridor. The authorities involved in the project state that the

THE DEHRADUN-**BASED WILDLIFE** INSTITUTE OF INDIA (WII) SET UP 80 CAMERÁ TRAPS ON THIS STRETCH AND STUDIED WILDLIFE MOVEMENT HERE FOR THREE MONTHS. THE MOVEMENT OF ABOUT 40 TO 50 **DIFFERENT WILDLIFE** SPECIES RANGING FROM DEER AND WILD BOAR TO LEOPARDS AND **ELEPHANTS WAS** ASCERTAINED HERE IN THIS DURATION. AS PART OF THE **EXPRESSWAY** PROJECT, THE **AUTHORITIES WILL** ALSO WORK ON AN **ECO-RESTORATION** PLAN.



stretch where the elevated road has been built has Rajaji National Park on the one side and the Shivalik Wildlife Reserve on the other. An average of 35,000 vehicles pass daily through this stretch.

Widening the existing stretch of the highway between Ganeshpur in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh and Asharodi in Dehradun would have been cheaper but might have ended causing more environmental damage and exacerbating humanwildlife conflict. Widening the existing highway would have entailed the cutting of about 1.5 lakh trees while about 11,000 trees had to be cut for building the elevated road.

The Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) set up 80 camera traps on this stretch and studied wildlife movement here for three months. The movement of about 40 to 50 different wildlife species ranging from deer and wild boar to leopards and elephants was ascertained here in this duration. As part of the expressway project, the authorities will also work on an ecorestoration plan. Further, budget

has been allocated for the WII to place cameras on the 550 pillars to study wildlife movement on this corridor for a period of five years. Similarly, the Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun will undertake a three-year Sal tree regeneration project in this area to enhance the environment. According to officials involved in the project, the elevated stretch is expected to mitigate human-wildlife conflict and also prove beneficial for the wildlife and environment. At present, the longest such wildlife corridor in India is about eight kilometres long and is located inPench, connecting Madhya Pradesh with Maharashtra. While this project promises to bring about drastic changes not just in Dehradun and Haridwar but also in Delhi, there are many who have apprehensions about the impacts of this major development. Dehradunbased anthropologist and heritage expert LokeshOhri says that the project will certainly have benefits but questioned whether Dehradun and Mussoorie are prepared for what is to come. "The opening of

this expressway will practically turn Dehradun into a part of the NCR like Ghaziabad or Faridabad. The flood of visitors has already converted Rishikesh into a trap for the locals who struggle to move around the city through traffic congestion resulting from the rush of tourists, who in turn also face the problem. The pressure on the forest wealth of this region and real estate will also increase after the expressway becomes functional. Though such projects do benefit all, the focus should also have been on ensuring that the locals benefit more. Apart from this, the authorities here do not seem to have taken any measures to prevent the negative impacts the project will have on Dehradun and Mussoorie," he said.

Human rights lawyer Reenu Paul who had also challenged the Ganeshpur-Asharodi stretch of the project in the Uttarakhand High Court for conservation of the Shivalik ecosystem, opined that damage to the Shivalik range will cause considerable damage to the environment and climate of the Doon Valley. She points out, "The Shivaliks play a vital role in insulating the Doon Valley against high winds, heat, dust and pollutants from the plains on the south western side of the valley. In the Gazetteers of Dehradun published in 1910, HG Walton had remarked that the climate of Dehradun differs from the plains owing to its elevation, while the wooded range of the Shivalik partly suppress and partly moisten the scorching winds that blow during the hot weather in the plains. Apart from this, the project doesn't appear to be sustainable as the hillocks of the Shivalik are highly eroding. The tributaries of the Ganga river including Mohan Rao, Sukh Rao, Saloni and Chilla Rao have also been disturbed and obstructed, disturbing the hydrology of the area. The wildlife corridor has also been fragmented," she opined. The authorities are confident that the opening of the Delhi-Dehradun expressway will not only enhance public convenience by drastically cutting down the travel time, but also boost economic activities further in the region. Infrastructural development is a major focus of the Union government and is a vital requirement for achieving the desired level of economic progress and public welfare. On the other hand, many in Dehradun remain sceptical about the impacts this project will have. The once green and serene Doon Valley has witnessed a considerable drop in greenery and rise in congestion and pollution in recent years. The city's existing infrastructure struggles to meet the requirements of the locals and visitors as factors like congestion and inadequate parking space have impacted the very character of Doon and life here. Expected to be completed in the next couple of months, the opening of the expressway for traffic is sure to bring about drastic changes. However, only time will tell the real

cost of this major development.



OWN ONLY WHAT YOU CAN ALWAYS CARRY WITH YOU: KNOW LANGUAGES, KNOW COUNTRIES, KNOW PEOPLE. LET YOUR MEMORY BE YOUR TRAVEL BAG - ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN



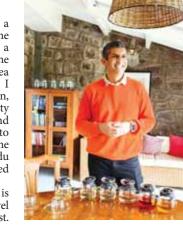
CHARMINC **PROMISES A TRANQUIL RETREAT!**

Inhaling the scents of fresh blooms, sipping freshly brewed tea, I witnessed sunrise magic from the folds of Nilgiris, sitting in the garden of the charming villa, The Xanadu in Coonoor. Here I sealed every moment as the celebration of Nature

BY SHARMILA CHAND

ucked at the edge of a cliff, the villa is my home for three days with a magnificent view of the rolling Nilgiri hills, tea plantations and the plains below. I tell my friend, Aparna Bharathan, the humble owner of this pretty home, that I have 'checked in and breathing out'. She bursts into laughter as that exactly is the tagline she has chosen for her Xanadu chain of premium, fully serviced vacation rental villas.

For me, a trip to Coonoor is essentially to relish slow travel without ticking off 'must do' list. Hence, a game of Jenga or Monopoly in the plush living room while watching the pitter patter of while watching the pitter patter of raindrops, is luxury. There is a whiff of pleasant aroma in the room, I can't resist and peep into the kitchen where Ganga Ram is busy making rasam and lemon rice. He is little more generous in using curry leaves in tadka, and that makes me atient to have the meal. By no Ganga has spoilt me thoroughly with several glasses of cutting chai and delicious food.



plains shimmering below. This is luxury for me. The weather throughout the day plays its own hide and seek, the clouds enveloping the hills in a stroke of misty white and next moment letting the hills magically appear in the famous 'Nilgiri' blue haze.

NII GIRIS ENDOWED WITH IINIOI

and lowland Savannas to lush Shola grassland, enchanting flora encompasses the region. Various endangered species including Nilgiri Langur thrive here. What I love is the heady fragrance of cypress, eucalyptus and pine. The soft purple haze of my favourite jacaranda trees keeps my eyes longing for more. I can't get over seeing magnificent trees of Pont Setia, the same festive plant with bold red leaves we have in small pots during Christmas time. And then the lush mosanda in white and pink, another favourite of mine that seems to be calling me back soon!

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY - THE TODAS

It is said that Toda community settled here around 3500 years ago, thus the oldest inhabitants of the region. Known for their pastoral way of life and vegetarian lifestyle, the Todas have a distinct identity. Every aspect of their life, including their artistic skills, are inspired by nature. The traditions they follow

village and saw women busy at their art work. Their embroidery represents an ancient art form and has been granted a GI patent by The Government.

A CUP THAT CHEERS!

Visiting Nilgiris and not taking a trip to a tea plantation, is unfair. Though you see the sweeping vistas of carpets of tea all around, blooming on the slopes as far as eye can see, but experiencing a walk through the plantation and completing it with tea tasting, is a beautiful outstanding experience. And who can do this better than Sandeep Subramani, a fourth generation tea planter and founder of Tranquilitea which runs a chain of experiential boutique holidays in the Nilgiris and conducts a highly acclaimed gourmet tea tasting experience in their estate in Coonoor called the 'Cups That

Cheer'. Sandeep takes one and half hour glorious session on tea which is full of stories, facts and secrets. One secret he tells with great pride and smile - "The Nilgiris has the world's highest tea estates. At around 8000 feet there is simply no other place on earth that grows tea as a plantation crop as high as in the Nilgiris. Darjeeling, the region that makes the other famous Indian tea has its highest tea estates at just over

6000 feet. Let me explain why tea doesn't grow at such heights anywhere else. The weather is generally too cold for tea to grow at these elevations. However, the geographical location of the Nilgiris provides the perfect temperature band through the winter months, for tea to grow even at these heights. Talking about temperature, tea thrives between 13° C and 30° C and we are always within that range. Though night-time temperatures in winter can drop below 13° C, day temperatures are always within the optimum range. This results in a tea that is intensely flavourful and typically floral in nature," he concludes.

INTERESTING ATTRACTIONS TO VISIT

Though I am contented to luxuriate in the comfort of home Xanadu, but for those discerning travelers who might like to have a sightseeing plan, here are few top things to do in Coonoor

Dolphin's Nose Point — Located

views of the valley at this vantage point with jagged rock that drops down several hundred feet to bury itself in the luxuriant jungle below. The place got its name after Captain Lamb who attempted to open a path to this place.

Droog Fort — The historical Droog Fort at an altitude of about 6000 feet above the lush plains, is said to be used by Tipu Sultan as said to be used by Tipu Sultan as an outpost. To reach this place, one has to go up to Nonsuch Estate and trek down for about 4 kms. According to locals' tales, the fort is linked with the legend of a local demon, Bakasura. Due to this, it is also called Bakasura Malai by the natives.

Sim's Park — Spend sometime in the park which was developed around the natural contours of the land by JD Sims and Major Murray in the year of 1874. Spread over 30 acres of land, the p as a pleasure resort for the residents and visitors, and later developed into garden. It has wonderful landscaped gardens & walkways lined up with beautiful hills. flowers spread across, also a lake inside the park that offers boating facility as well.

KETTI VALLEY

Embark on the toy train to enjoy this beautiful valley. It is also famous for bird watching and trekking. You can also visit the famous Shiva Lingam temple here.

GOURMET CHEESE

Coonoor is now also famous for selling gourmet cheese. You can take a tour of cheese farms or simply visit a popular old store Nilgiris Store' or 'Baker's Junction' just 100 m from Bedford circle.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Coonoor is pretty good. From pretty embroidered shawls, apparels, Toda jewellery and handicrafts items to natural oils, fruit jams, homemade chocolates and of course, the huge variety of tea, shopping here is really Spend at least a week, soak in fresh crisp mountain air and come back rejuvenated till you return to the spectacular queen of



MAGICAL NIGHT

when the sky is full of pretty stars in Ghats, lends Nilgiris vibrant flora coherence with the lights of the and fauna. From Evergreen forests

BIODIVERSITY

The Nilgiri mountains stretch over the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, connecting Western Ghats with the Eastern Ghats. I wait for the spectacular night view Located at the convergence of both

significant in their lifestyle. I was told by locals that during an infant's naming ceremony, the grandfather uncovers the child's face out in the open air for the first time, showing various elements of nature - the rising sun, the birds, the cows, buffaloes etc. I visited one Toda

amidst the rolling hills, the tip of the peak of the enormous rock resembles the nose of a dolphin hence the name Dolphin's Nose. Gigantic ravines are on both sides of the place offering a view of inspiring Catherine Falls. Lamb's Rock - enjoy fascinating

Sharmila Chand is an author and journalist who writes on Travel, Food, Culture and Lifestyle.



PARADISE EXPLORING A journey through the pristine beauty of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Nestled in the azure waters of the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a tropical haven that offers a perfect blend of natural beauty, vibrant marine life, and rich cultural heritage, writes SANTANU GANGULY

Every Indian should visit the Andaman Islands at least once in their lifetime Only government officials from departments such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Forest to complete their journey. The Andaman Islands offer an incredible blend of natural beauty, historical significance, wildlife, and adventure sports. The Andaman Islands are wellconnected by regular flights from Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata, and one can also reach them by ship from Kolkata, Chennai, and Visakhapatnam. However, traveling by flight is recommended to witness breathtaking aerial views that resemble slices of heaven. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands comprise a total of 836 islands, of which only 31 are inhabited. Visitors are not allowed on all the islands, and the non-tribal even Andamanese people cannot visit the restricted islands.

Department, and Police are permitted to access these islands for official purposes. As a general tourist, the only chance to see some of these islands is from the sky before landing or after takeoff at Veer Savarkar Airport in Port Blair, the capital of the union territory. While the Andaman Islands are open to tourists year-round, the best time to visit is from October to May. Monsoon tourism runs from June to October

There are numerous hotels and guest houses available for online booking, and package tours are also offered to suit various budgets. The local businesses are known for their honesty, adhering to strict and regulations rules throughout the islands. For



example, if the local authority sets the price of coconut water at forty rupees, the rate will be consistent everywhere. In Port Blair, the major attractions include the Cellular Jail, Chatham Saw Mill, Forest Museum, Samudrika Naval Museum, Marine

Anthropological Museum, Fisheries Aquarium, Science Center, and Corbyn's Cove. The historic Cellular Jail will not only enrich your knowledge of history but also evoke a deep emotional connection as you learn about the struggles of lesser-known

freedom fighters and the they inhumane torture endured under British rule. To reach Shaheed Dweep (formerly known as Neil Island) and Swaraj Dweep (formerly known as Havelock Island) from Port Blair, you must travel by small ships,



Elephant

while

Dweep are not to be missed. Scuba diving at Shaheed Dweep offers an unforgettable experience.

Other popular attractions include Hudi Tikri, Red, Bird and Bat islands, Amkunj Beach near Rangat; Dhaninallah Mangroves and Karmatang Beach near Mayabunder; limestone caves and mud volcanoes near Diglipur; Craggy Island; Ross & Smith Islands, and various national parks and protected sanctuaries.

The indigenous tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are divided into two groups: following a process similar to the Onge, Sentinelese, Jarawa, airport check-in. Plan to stay at least one night on each of these and Andamanese of Negroid islands to explore them fully. descent living in the Andaman Islands, and the Shompen and Nicobarese of Mongoloid Must-visit beaches on Shaheed Dweep include Bharatpur, descent living in the Nicobar Lakshmanpur, and Sitapur, Islands. It is strictly prohibited and Radhanagar beaches on Swaraj by law to enter tribal reserves,

meet, or photograph these tribes. Respect their peaceful haven and adhere to the law.

During my visits to the Andaman Islands, I was fortunate enough to encounter the Jarwa people. However, last year, I had an incredible experience while traveling by local public bus from Diglipur to Port Blair. As we entered the Jarwa forest after crossing a river, four Jarwa boys waved at our bus driver for a lift. The bus stopped, and they quickly got on board. One of them sat beside me, admiring my bracelet made of beads, which they seem to have a fascination for. Though I wanted to give it to him, I had to refuse due to the law prohibiting the exchange of items with the tribes. Their innocent laughter, however, was priceless

Photos: Santanu Ganguly



Art & culture III New Delhi, August 11, 2024

As a dedicated disciple of Padma Bhushan Drs. Raja Radha Reddy and Kaushalya Reddy, Adiva Agarwal have beautifully embodied the spirit of Kuchipudi. Her recent performance was a heartfelt expression of her growth and the profound influence of her esteemed gurus, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

n the vibrant world of classical dance, few traditions are as richly expressive and historically significant as Kuchipudi. Originating from the Andhra Pradesh region of India, this classical dance form is renowned for its intricate footwork, elaborate gestures and profound storytelling. It embodies a fusion of dance, drama and music, bringing ancient narratives to life with remarkable grace.

Adiva Agarwal's recent Kuchipudi performance, marking her Rangapravesham, was a stunning demonstration of this art form's enduring allure. From the moment she stepped onto the stage, it was clear that her recital was more than just a display of technical skill; it was a heartfelt journey into the essence of Kuchipudi. Under the guidance of her esteemed guru, Padma Bhushan Drs. Raja Radha Reddy and Kaushalya Reddy, Adiva has honed her craft with dedication and precision, resulting in a performance that both honoured tradition and showcased her personal artistry.

The evening commenced with 'Ganapati Vandana," customary invocation to Lord Ganesha, setting a tone reverence and anticipation. This opening act seamlessly transitioned into "Dashavatara," where Adiva's portrayal of Lord Vishnu's ten avatars was nothing short of mesmerising. Each avatar was brought to life with a delicate balance of intricate footwork and expressive storytelling,



its narratives. The highlight of the performance was the "Tillana," a vibrant piece characterised by its rhythmic complexity and energetic movements. Adiva's ability to navigate the intricate patterns and maintain dynamic engagement with the audience was a showcase of her exceptional skill and stage presence. Her performance was a beautiful embodiment of Kuchipudi's essence, blending technical brilliance with artistic flair. Adding emotional depth to the

evening was "Chhaap Tilak Sab Cheeni," a devotional poem by

Khusro. Amir Adiva's interpretation of this piece was imbued with spiritual reverence, showcasing her ability to convey profound emotions through dance. The grand finale, "Tarangam," was a breathtaking display of Adiva's virtuosity. Dancing on the rim of a brass plate while executing intricate footwork with flawless synchronisation, demonstrated a remarkable level of skill and commitment. This climactic piece

DANCE OF DREAMS

EXPLORING THE BEAUTY OF

KUCHIPUDI

This climactic piece beautifully capped off an evening of exceptional performances. **Photos:** Pankaj Kuma

Adiva Agarwal's Rangapravesham was not only a celebration of her talent but also a tribute to the rich legacy of Kuchipudi. Her performance was a vivid illustration of the art form's timeless beauty and complexity, made even more special by the guidance of her esteemed gurus. As Adiva continues to evolve in her dance journey, her recent recital stands as a reflection of her dedication and the enduring charm of classical

dance.

Discovering Absence Through Visual Expression

Antra Srivastava's latest exhibition challenges us to delve into the unseen,

A CANVAS OF WONDERS

Experience the magic of watercolor through a captivating exhibition that celebrates the beauty of nature, architecture and human expression, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

At the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, a captivating solo exhibition showcases the evocative power



revealing the hidden depths of absence in our lives, says TEAM AGENDA



The allure of absence is a peculiar paradox; it quietly demands attention, shaping our perceptions and provoking our thoughts. Artist Antra Srivastava's exhibition, *The Inescapable Presence of Absence*, invites viewers on a profound journey of reflection. This solo exhibition captivates audiences with its surreal yet deeply philosophical exploration of what lies beyond the visible.

Srivastava, Antra Dehradun-based artist, her experiences as an avid traveler deeply influence her work, resulting in paintings that capture the vibrancy and diversity of the world. Through her art, she blends surrealism with poetic expression, drawing inspiration from the vitality of nature and the profound energy that flows through her creative process. She describes herself as both a participant and a witness in this artistic journey, immersing herself in the boundless realm of creative this artistic

energy. The theme of The *Inescapable Presence of Absence* delves into the paradox where absence becomes a palpable presence. This theme challenges viewers to rethink their perceptions, urging them to reflect on the significant impact of what is not present. It invites an exploration of the unseen and the unheard, asking profound







perspective allows her to

seamlessly blend multiple

layers of colours, creating harmony and rhythm,

blurring the lines between

abstraction and realism and

In the Kabir series, Srivastava resonates with Kabir's ability

to express complex ideas with

simplicity. She emphasises

that life's intricacies are self-

created and that true

knowledge emerges from inner silence rather than

evoking a surreal effect.

questions about the nature of existence. Srivastava's artistic journey is profoundly influenced by ancient Indian scriptures and the wisdom of sages, providing a foundation for her introspective quest. Her collection is a philosophical interpretation of the 18 chapters of the Gita, reflections on Sant Kabir's dohe and saakhees and a portrayal of six elements: air, water, earth, fire, space and consciousness. This unique

external teachings. This series, inspired by Kabir's and saakhees, dohe underscores the experiential aspect of wisdom, offering a fresh perspective on life's fundamental truths. Srivastava's art invites a profound connection with the self, urging us to explore the deeper implications of absence alongside presence. Her work is a reflection of our existence, challenging us to look beyond what is visible and consider the unseen forces that shape our lives The exhibition's title itself, The Inescapable Presence of Absence suggests a haunting elegance. It forces us to contemplate the spaces in between, the silence between words and the pauses in conversation that often carry more weight than the spoken. In these gaps, Srivastava finds beauty and complexity, offering her audience a mirror to their inner worlds. This exhibition stands as an attestation to art's power to transcend the ordinary,

transcend the ordinary, provoke thought and inspire change. Her exploration of absence is not merely an artistic endeavor; it is a call to acknowledge and embrace the unseen, the unheard and the unfelt aspects of our existence. Through her work, Srivastava offers a profound reminder that art is not just a reflection of the world but a gateway to understanding the intricacies of our inner selves. By the time visitors exit, of watercolor art. The exhibition "This Beautiful World," featuring the watercolor works of Dr. Sushma Mahajan and curated by Dr. Alka Pande, offers a captivating glimpse into the world through the eyes of a talented and passionate artist. The collection of 35 watercolor paintings is a vivid celebration of beauty, nature and the intricate details of everyday life.

The exhibition successfully highlights Mahajan's extraordinary skill with watercolors, showcasing her ability to create vibrant and realistic images that evoke emotion and wonder. Her unique perspective as both an artist and a medical professional adds depth to her work, and it is evident that she views the world with a keen sense of appreciation for its many facets.

One of the standout pieces is Spotted Charm, a painting of a leopard that captures the animal's grace and mystery with stunning accuracy. The richness of the colors and the attention to detail make this piece particularly memorable. Similarly, Magic of Night Glow is a beautiful depiction of vintage cars on cobblestone streets, bathed in soft, atmospheric light. This piece resonates with a sense of nostalgia and transports viewers to a timeless scene that

feels both familiar and enchanting. *The Sun Chariot* is a fascinating work that pays homage to the Nalinga temple art. Artist meticulous rendering of the astronomical sundial, with its eight spokes representing the "prahars" of the day, is both educational and visually captivating. The painting serves as a reminder of the rich cultural heritage and architectural marvels that continue to inspire artists today. Her ability to capture both natural and architectural

beauty with precision invites



viewers to appreciate the power of art and the beauty that surrounds us.

In Anchored in Serenity the artist depicts a tranquil boat scene that encourages reflection and peace. The painting's serene composition invites viewers to pause and consider the importance of

finding calm amid the chaos of modern life. The Bridge similarly highlights the significance of connections and relationships, celebrating the beauty of bridges as symbols of unity and continuity. The Power of Music, celebrates music as a universal language of the spirit, while Sunflowers, presents a spiritual perspective on these bright blooms. These





aesthetics brings an added layer of understanding, making the exhibition not only visually engaging but also intellectually stimulating. *This Beautiful World* is an exhibition that beautifully captures the essence of the

artworks reflect the artist's thoughtful approach and emotional depth, conveyed through vibrant colors and delicate detail.

as The curation of the exhibition d by Dr. Alka Pande further of enhances the experience, a providing context and insight into the themes and rs, techniques that define we Mahajan's work. Pande's se expertise in Indian arts and layer of understanding, making the exhibition not only visually engaging but also intellectually stimulating. *This Beautiful World* is an exhibition that beautifully captures the essence of the world around us. Mahajan's paintings are a tribute to her talent and dedication and the exhibition as a whole serves as a reminder of the power of art to inspire, uplift and connect us to the world. The blend of

to inspire, uplift and connect us to the world. The blend of nature, culture and emotion in her work offers a refreshing perspective and an opportunity to appreciate the extraordinary beauty that exists in the ordinary moments of life.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar