

Underwater mapping reveals insights into melting of ice shelves

The Hindu Bureau

New research documents never-seen-before shapes formed at the base of a West Antarctic ice shelf. An autonomous underwater vehicle found these features – including tear-shaped indents – exclusively in areas with higher melting rates by underlying warm ocean water.

An ice shelf is a mass of

glacial ice, fed from land by tributary glaciers, that floats in the sea above an ice shelf cavity. Dotson Ice Shelf is part of the West Antarctic ice sheet and next to Thwaites Glacier, which is considered to have a potentially large impact on future sea level rise due to its size and location.

Brought to the Amundsen Sea through ocean circulation, warm salty water

is a significant driver of ice melt and, thus, sea level rise. This bottom-up melting, called basal melt, thins and hollows out cavities at the base of floating ice shelves, reducing or eliminating structural support for grounded ice that flows into them. Yet the physical dynamics of basal melt have been poorly understood because the process occurs in deep water un-

der ice – an environment best explored by autonomous vehicles.

Now, researchers have described basal melt patterns at the base of the Dotson Ice Shelf (DIS) located in West Antarctica's Amundsen Sea. From January to March 2022, the team sent an AUV with multibeam sonar up to 17 km into a basal melt cavity to chart its topography over

er 140 sq. km. They found some things as expected, for example the glacier melts faster where strong underwater currents erode its base. Using the submersible, they were able to measure the currents below the glacier for the first time and prove why the western part of Dotson Ice Shelf melts so fast. They also found evidence of very high melt at vertical frac-

tures that extend through the glacier.

During the expedition, the vehicle also recorded data about the salinity, temperature, and currents of the water below the ice shelf. Overall, the findings indicate that previously unquantified basal melt mechanisms are happening beneath Dotson Ice Shelf and likely other ice shelves.

SNAPSHOTS



Heart attacks, stroke incidence lower after COVID vaccination

A new study that analysed the health records of 46 million, which is nearly the whole adult population of England, has found that the incidence of heart attacks and strokes was lower after COVID-19 vaccination than before or without vaccination, during the first two years of the vaccination programme. Heart attacks and strokes were up to 10% lower in the 13 to 24 weeks after the first dose, and 27% after the second dose of AstraZeneca vaccine and up to 20% lower after the Pfizer vaccine.



Climate anomalies may play a role in driving cholera strains

A study suggests that an El Niño event may have aided the establishment and spread of a novel cholera strain during a 20th-century pandemic; climate anomalies could create opportunities for the emergence of new strains. The study revealed that anomalous patterns of cholera deaths from 1904 to 1907 occurred alongside out-of-the-ordinary seasonal temperatures and rainfall levels associated with an El Niño event. The timing correlates with the establishment of a new strain during the sixth pandemic.



Connection between obesity and heart failure uncovered

A small study has revealed the impact of obesity on muscle structure in patients having a form of heart failure called heart failure with a preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF). Originally, this form of heart disease was associated with having a high blood pressure and excess muscle growth to help counter the pressures. Muscle tissue samples from 25 patients diagnosed with HFpEF caused by diabetes and obesity had ultrastructural abnormalities compared with healthy people.

39% TB cases found during T.N. TB survey had no symptoms

All the 94 people with TB, who were initially picked up based on chest X-ray abnormalities and subjected to sputum examination, were found to be bacteriologically positive, thus confirming TB disease

R. Prasad

The first-of-its-kind TB prevalence cross-sectional survey was carried out among individuals aged older than 15 years across Tamil Nadu from February 2021 to July 2022. Based on the survey findings, the authors of the study from the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (ICMR-NIRT), Chennai have recommended that the State TB programme should prioritise the use of chest X-rays for earlier detection of cases and for cutting the transmission chain, and upscale the molecular tests to increase the yield. The results were published recently in *The International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease*.

In a cross-sectional survey, 130,932 participants consented to participate. Among them, 130,914 underwent symptom screening and 125,870 underwent both symptom screening and chest X-ray examination. Those with symptoms of TB and/or abnormal chest X-rays were tested for TB using Xpert, smear microscopy, and liquid culture. The survey identified 244 microbiologically confirmed TB cases. Among the 244 patients with TB, only 54.5% (133 people) reported having symptoms of TB, while 92.6% (224 people) had chest X-ray abnormalities.

Among the 244 TB cases detected, molecular test (CBNAAT) correctly detected 224 (91.8%) cases, while smear microscopy was able to detect only 123 (50.40%) cases. Even among the 115 symptomat-

Subclinical TB: Hiding in plain sight

A TB prevalence survey was undertaken in Tamil Nadu from February 2021 to July 2022 in nearly 131,000 people aged over 15 years

Among the 244 TB cases detected, molecular test correctly detected 91.8% cases; smear microscopy detected only 50.4% cases

39% (94 people) of the TB cases detected had no TB symptoms, and would have been missed if chest X-ray was not used

All the 94 people with TB who were picked up based on chest X-ray abnormalities were bacteriologically positive

Even as per the National TB Prevalence Survey Report (2019-2021), 42.6% of the TB cases had no symptoms but were bacteriologically positive

Even if people do not have TB symptoms, bacillary loads can be high leading to transmission

In high-incidence settings, subclinical tuberculosis could contribute considerably to the TB burden and transmission

Respiratory droplets can be expelled during singing, talking, and tidal breathing, and not just coughing



ic TB cases, 89% (102) were diagnosed by CBNAAT compared with 58 (50%) who were diagnosed based on smear microscopy. The Tamil Nadu TB programme, which over-relies on smear microscopy, must scale up molecular tests, the authors write.

The most important finding from the survey is that 39% (94 people) of the TB cases detected had no TB symptoms, otherwise called subclinical TB, which would have been missed if a chest X-ray had not been used. All 94 people with TB, who were initially picked up based on chest X-ray abnormalities and subjected to sputum examination, were found to be bacteriologically positive, thus confirming TB disease. This highlights the importance of using chest X-ray for screening even in people who do not exhibit any symptoms. Currently, the TB programme in Tamil Nadu offers chest X-

rays only for those with symptoms. Based on the survey findings, the State should prioritise the use of chest X-rays for earlier case detection and increase the yield.

Even active case finding of high-risk/vulnerable groups across India screens people for presumptive TB symptoms/signs, leaving out a huge chunk of people with subclinical TB. As per the India TB Report 2022, 22.1 crore individuals in India were screened for presumptive TB as part of active case-finding. Of this, only 48,329 (2.5%) were diagnosed, resulting in a low yield of just 22 per 100,000 population. Considering that TB incidence in 2022 was 199 per 100,000, active case finding, which is a targeted approach to find more cases in vulnerable populations, should have produced a higher yield. The use of chest X-ray as a prelimin-

ary screening tool along with molecular diagnostics will surely help in better detection of cases.

That 39% of TB cases detected had no symptoms is not surprising. As per the National TB Prevalence Survey report (2019-2021), 42.6% of the TB cases, which were bacteriologically positive but did not exhibit any TB symptoms, would have been missed if chest X-ray was not included as an additional screening tool.

Besides, picking up more people with TB when chest X-ray is used, early detection of subclinical TB cases will greatly help in cutting the transmission chain. According to a March 2024 paper in the journal *Lancet Infectious Diseases*, a meta-analysis of surveys from a few high TB-burden countries found 27.7% of people with TB had no TB symptoms. The paper says that the majority of people with

pulmonary TB in the community do not cough.

"A quarter of those not reporting any cough have positive sputum smears, suggesting infectiousness. In high-incidence settings, subclinical tuberculosis could contribute considerably to the tuberculosis burden and transmission," the paper says. In India and other high-burden countries, subclinical TB may be hiding a higher prevalence of the disease.

Even when people do not exhibit symptoms, they can still have the high bacillary loads typically associated with transmission, according to a 2021 paper in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*. It also says that though cough is associated with higher infectiousness, cough is not necessary for transmission. "Subclinical TB can potentially drive a substantial fraction of transmission on a population level because of its high prevalence and long duration," it says. Although cough expels large quantities of droplets leading to increased transmission risk, respiratory droplets can also be expelled without cough such as during singing, talking, and tidal breathing, the paper says.

Across the globe, TB incidence has been dropping more slowly compared with TB deaths suggesting that all TB measures have been less effective in stopping transmission. According to the 2021 paper, one explanation for the slower reduction of TB incidence might be that people with "subclinical TB may be the source of a large fraction of ongoing TB transmission".

Fighting mosquito menace with repellents, vaccines



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. Balasubramanian

Since 2007, WHO has called April 15 as the World Malaria Day to highlight the need for continued investment and sustained political commitment for malaria prevention and control. The book *Mosquito: The Place of Pests in a Healthy World* states that there are over 3,500 species of mosquitoes in every continent except Antarctica. India has over 12% of the world's mosquito population. B.K. Tyagi et al in the *Journal of Mosquito Research*, 2015, point out that India has 63 species of this pest, with *Anopheles* as the leading one. In 1902, Sir Ronald Ross received the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for having

shown how malaria was transmitted by the bite of *Anopheles* mosquitoes infecting a human patient in Hyderabad suffering from malaria.

The National Centre for Vector-borne Diseases, of the Indian Health Ministry, points out that mosquito bites lead to malaria, dengue, filaria, Japanese encephalitis, and chikungunya, and suggests ways to control and win over these diseases with drugs and vaccines.

Across India, mosquitoes are most prevalent in highly water-borne areas such as Odisha, West Bengal, and the Northeastern states. However, even Pune, Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata have shown a large increase in mosquito populations due to heavy rains and inefficient water handling.

Mosquitoes breed in stagnant waters such as agricultural farms, plant



In 2021, WHO recommended two malaria vaccines – Mosquirix and R21/Matrix. AP

pots, gutters, bird baths, tires of bicycles, autos and other vehicles, and trash containers. Periodic cleaning of these will help in reducing mosquito growth. The Healthy Talbot website offers several simple ways to get rid of mosquitoes.

While some of these are usable in cities and towns, people in rural areas (where rice/wheat breeding occurs and has a lot of

stagnant water) can use camphor and the leaves of 'tulsi' plants, both of which are used in their homes for prayers. The plant citronella offers an oil that is an effective mosquito-repellent, out of which the mosquito repellent *Odomos* is produced, which is available in the market for affordable prices, both as a cream to apply on the skin and as bandage-like sticky patches, which can be distribut-

ed across the country.

The widely used insect-repellent DEET was developed to protect soldiers during the Second World War. A simple change in the chemical structure of DEET improved the efficiency of this molecule. This indigenous product from Balsara Home Products was studied a decade ago by Mittal et al (*Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 2011) and is sold as non-sticky advanced *Odomos*. More such molecules are needed, and we look forward to organic chemists and biochemists to synthesise new molecules that can do even better.

Vaccines against malaria

In 2021, WHO recommended the malaria vaccine called 'Mosquirix', produced by Glaxo-Smith-Kline and PATH, in four doses for infants, and allowed it for large-scale use

in some parts of Africa.

It is yet to be used elsewhere in the world. Two biotech firms in India have initiated programmes for the manufacture and supply of malaria vaccines. Bharat Biotech, which has already been working on some malaria-related vaccines, has tied up with GSK-PATH for technology transfer for long-term supply of 'Mosquirix', and hopes to manufacture and supply it to people in India by 2026. In 2021, the WHO also recommended the R21/Matrix vaccine. Serum Institute (in collaboration with Oxford University) has produced the R21/Matrix vaccine; in mid-July this year the vaccine was rolled out in Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa, the first country to begin administering R21/Matrix-M. It is our hope that they will inoculate Indians soon, hopefully by World Malaria Day 2026.



Question Corner

Flying high

How do high-altitude birds take to the air when thin air offers little lift?

In high altitudes, despite the air being of low density, which makes the bird wings produce less lift and more difficult to remain aloft, high-altitude birds have been seen at high altitudes of over 6,000 metres. One possibility of how birds at high altitudes take to the air may be simply flying faster to compensate for the lower air density. In a study published in the *Journal of Experimental Biology*, researchers studied if turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) residing

at different elevations fly at different speeds depending on their altitude. The researchers found that turkey vultures fly faster at higher altitudes to compensate for the lack of lift caused by flying in thin air. The high-altitude vultures were flapping no more than the birds nearer to sea level to counteract the effects of low air density. The high-altitude birds were flying faster because there was less drag in thin air to slow them down, thus compensating for generating less lift in lower air density.

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

What is the new Alzheimer's blood test?

How will it help treat the disease better? Is it more affordable? Will India be able to introduce it soon?

Ramva Kannan

The story so far:

Researchers have developed a new blood test to detect Alzheimer's disease that helps diagnose the disease even at the early stage of mild cognitive impairment. Scientists at Lund University in Sweden have shown that PrecivityAD2, a new blood test, is about 90% accurate in identifying AD in people experiencing cognitive symptoms. The paper 'Blood Biomarkers to Detect Alzheimer Disease in Primary Care and Secondary Care' by Sebastian Palmqvist et al was published in the July 28 edition of peer reviewed journal JAMA.

Why are practitioners excited about the test?

According to statistics, one in five women and one in 10 men develop dementia due to AD (Alzheimer's disease). Individuals with cognitive symptoms are first seen in primary care, with a minority being referred to secondary care, authors of the article pointed out. Further they added that symptomatic AD is misdiagnosed in 25% to 35% of patients treated at even specialised clinics and likely even more patients treated in primary care.

For long, a blood test has been the Holy Grail for diagnosis of AD, since even current, modern methods of diagnosis involve very expensive and complex amyloid or Tau Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans. The other alternative

'Blood tests are revolutionising Alzheimer's detection, diagnosis and ultimately treatment. These tests will soon replace more invasive and costly PET scans as the standard of care'

is to draw cerebrospinal fluid via a painful procedure, lumbar puncture. "The big goal is a serum study," explains neuropsychiatrist E.S. Krishnamoorthy of Buddha Clinic who has a special

interest in dementia, whose most prevalent type is Alzheimer's disease. This blood test comes as close to the target as possible, and in that sense will make the diagnosis of AD very simple. Blood tests will not only reduce the costs of diagnosis, but also simplify the diagnostic procedure – involving as it does, just drawing of blood. There have been a few commercial attempts that went live before this test, but the current study has provided some definitive results.

In a statement to Medscape Medical News, Howard Fillit, co-founder and chief science officer of the Alzheimer's Drug Discovery Foundation, says: "Blood tests are revolutionising Alzheimer's detection, diagnosis and ultimately treatment." He believes that these tests will "soon replace more invasive and costly PET scans as the standard of care and serve as the first line of defence in diagnosing the disease." Dr. Fillit adds: "After many years of research, the field is in a place where we have novel biomarkers and diagnostics to support a diagnosis, the way cholesterol is used to help detect heart disease."

What does the test do?

According to Medical News Today, the test works by measuring a combination of two ratios within a blood sample: plasma phosphorylated-tau217 (also called p-tau217) to not-phosphorylated-tau21 and two types of amyloid-beta: AB42 and AB40. Let it suffice for us to understand that both tau and amyloid-beta proteins are currently considered pathological hallmarks of AD.

A total of 1,213 patients were already under evaluation for cognitive decline in primary or secondary care centres between February 2020 and January 2024 in Sweden. Of the participants, 23% had subjective cognitive decline, 33% had dementia, and 44% had mild cognitive impairment. About 50% of participants showed Alzheimer disease pathology through primary and secondary care testing. In comparison to the blood test that had an accuracy of 91%, dementia specialists identified clinical Alzheimer disease with a diagnostic accuracy of 73%, the researchers say in their paper. In primary care, physicians had a diagnostic accuracy of 61%, they add. They argue that this would be an accurate blood test for AD and that it could streamline the diagnostic workup and treatment of AD. The significance is that there are several drugs that work in the early stages of the disease, and an early, cost-effective, simple diagnosis will go a long way for patients, experts say.

How does this impact the future?

Future studies should evaluate how the use of blood tests for these biomarkers influences clinical care, researchers have said in their paper. No doubt the costs will come down, naturally impacting positively on affordability. Availability is the other issue. Dr. Krishnamoorthy says that in India, the diagnostic tools still remain an MRI and a regular PET scan. Amyloid or Tau PET scans are not commercially available yet. He adds that availability of the blood test will happen, but one needs to wait and watch if the test will be accessible to all or if only a few will be able to afford the test, even at reduced rates.

Why did courts revisit bar on sub-quotas?

Will the weaker among Dalits get representation from further sub-classification? Why did the Supreme Court overrule a five-judge decision of 2004? What are the views on creamy layer exclusion? Do the judges' opinions on this constitute a direction to the government?

K. Venkataramanan

The story so far:

A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that States have the power to sub-divide Scheduled Castes (SC) into groups so that it can give sub-quotas within the quota for Dalits. In the process, the Bench overruled a 2004 judgment by a five-member Constitution Bench that said such sub-classification was impermissible as Parliament alone was empowered to modify the list of SCs notified by the President under Article 341 of the Constitution.

What was the 2004 judgment?

The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservation) Ordinance, 1999, and the Act that replaced it created four groups – A, B, C and D – of Scheduled Castes and earmarked varying percentages of reservation for each group. The rationale was that there were differences in the level of advancement among communities under the SC list and that such sub-classification will ensure representation for the weaker castes. The Andhra Pradesh High Court rejected the challenge against the Act.

However, in the Supreme Court, a Constitution Bench of five judges held the sub-classification was unconstitutional. The November 2004 judgment in *E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh* noted that under Article 341 of the Constitution, the President notifies the list of Scheduled Castes. Once the list is notified, it shall not be modified through another

The court permitted sub-classification of Scheduled Castes, but said States should have a rational basis for doing it

notification, and the only way to include or exclude a community in that list was by an act of Parliament. The Bench then ruled that once enumerated under Article 341, SCs constitute a single homogeneous class, and that State legislatures were not competent to tinker with the list by further classifying them into groups.

How did it come up before a larger Bench?

The Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006, provided for 25% reservation for SCs and 12% for backward classes in direct recruitment to services. Half the jobs under the SC quota, the law said, would be given as first preference to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs, if candidates were available. When this was challenged, the Punjab and Haryana High Court cited the judgment in *E.V. Chinnaiah* to hold that the relevant section on preference to two communities among SCs was unconstitutional. Similarly, in 2006, the High Court also struck down the Haryana government's notification dividing SC communities into two blocks and earmarking 50% of the SC quota to each block.

In 2009, the Tamil Nadu Assembly enacted a law to provide a sub-quota in services and educational institutions for Arunthathiyars, a group of sub-castes considered the weakest among the Scheduled Castes in the State. This was challenged directly in the Supreme Court. In 2020, a Constitution Bench doubted the correctness of the *Chinnaiah* judgment, noting that the nine-judge Bench in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) had permitted sub-classification of backward classes. However, in *Chinnaiah*, the Bench had declined to use that as a precedent for sub-division of SC communities as *Indra Sawhney* was only concerned with OBC reservation. Hence, a larger Bench was constituted to revisit the earlier verdict.

What is the reasoning behind it?

Six of the seven judges have now ruled that the 2004 judgment was wrong. In his judgment on behalf of himself and Justice Manoj Mishra, Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has held that SC communities are not a homogeneous class as ruled in the earlier judgment. He disagreed with the view that the act of notifying a list of SCs creates a deemed fiction that all of them have a similar status. It is true that they get a common constitutional identity as Scheduled Castes based on their experience of untouchability and discrimination, but this does not mean that there is no heterogeneity among them.



New categories: Political leaders pour milk on the statue of B.R. Ambedkar as they celebrate the SC judgment, in Hyderabad on August 2. RAMAKRISHNA. G

How can Wayanad reduce landslide risks?

What are the natural and man-made factors that triggered large-scale death and destruction in Kerala? What is the plan to protect the Western Ghats? Why have recommendations by the Gadgil committee not been implemented? Were warnings issued ignored by the State?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

Massive landslides hit the district of Wayanad in northern Kerala in the early hours of July 30, with continuous torrential rainfall triggering large-scale death and destruction in Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and Meppadi, and entire villages being washed away. The death toll stands at 215, though the number of missing people indicate that the real toll will be higher.

What are the possible causes?

Most experts are clear that there are a number of causative factors behind any landslide, both natural and anthropogenic. Almost half of Kerala's land area – 19,301 sq km or 49.7% of the total landmass – is prone to landslides, according to an assessment by the Geological Survey of India (GSI). The heavy rainfall in the region and the slope of the Western Ghats mean that Wayanad is uniquely vulnerable to landslides, and 31.54% of the district is highly susceptible, according to research at IIT-Delhi.

However, human factors have exacerbated the danger of a natural calamity; increasing construction and changes in crop patterns are among the possible culprits. The Wayanad region has become a tourist hotspot over the last few years, with homestays and monsoon tourism being the latest trends. Ecologist

The heavy rainfall in the region and the slope of the Western Ghats mean that Wayanad is vulnerable to landslides

Madhav Gadgil has pointed to the construction of resorts and artificial lakes, as well as recently abandoned quarries, as among the developmental activities which should not have occurred in the sensitive zone. Land use changes which have occurred over a longer period of time, starting with the British-era tea plantations that surround the disaster site, are also potential factors, and have continued in the post-Independence era. A study on plantation-induced forest degradation in Wayanad, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in 2022, found that there has been a 62% reduction in forest cover between 1950 and 2018, coupled with a 1,800% increase in the area under plantation. Such monocropping leads to a loosening of the topsoil that was once held in place by the roots of a forest.

Climate change has also played a role, albeit an indirect one, leading to changes in rainfall patterns in the State. The warming of the Arabian Sea is allowing the formation of deep cloud systems, leading to extremely heavy rainfall over a shorter period, according to S. Abhilash, a senior scientist at the Cochin University of Science and Technology. In recent years, such heavy rainfall events have been increasing, even as the number of rainy days in the monsoon season has been decreasing. Despite the record 527 mm of rainfall that was recorded in Mundakkai over the 48 hours before the landslide, Wayanad has seen only normal rainfall averages during this monsoon, while Kerala as a whole has seen deficits, according to India Meteorological Department data. "What was once a cool, humid environment with year-round drizzles and monsoon rains, is turning into one marked by drier, hotter summers and intense downpours during the monsoons. This change has increased the risk of landslides. Dry soils absorb less water and heavy rainfalls cause run-offs that can lead to landslides, such as the ones we've seen this week," said Mariam Zachariah, a researcher at the Grantham Institute for Climate Change.

How can the Western Ghats be protected?

Mr. Gadgil led the high-profile Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, which submitted its report in 2011, recommending that the entire region of the Western Ghats, spanning 1,29,000

He cited historical and empirical evidence to show that there were inter se differences among SC communities. There were even instances of some sections of SCs being discriminated against by other SC communities. Therefore, sub-classification was permissible, but it should be based on an "intelligible differentia" (a clear characteristic that will mark one group as different from another) and should have a rational nexus to the purpose of doing it. Further, such sub-classification is subject to judicial review, and the State should be able to justify it using empirical data.

The CJJ also held that sub-classification will not in any way amount to tinkering with the Presidential list and that it will not violate Article 341, which confers the power to notify Scheduled Castes exclusively on the President. The function of Article 341 was to identify who came under the category of Scheduled Castes, but States are free to identify those with different degrees of backwardness and make special provisions or extend reservation benefits to them. The new ruling is expected to encourage States to earmark sub-quotas for the most marginalised sections of Dalits who have not enjoyed the fruits of reservation so far.

In her dissent, Justice Bela Trivedi stands by the *Chinnaiah* doctrine that it is impermissible to sub-classify a homogeneous class and that it would amount to tinkering with the President's list under Article 341.

What about creamy layer exclusion?

The creamy layer concept is now applicable only to OBCs and so far has not been extended to Dalit communities. Justice B. R. Gavai, in a separate opinion in which he concurs with the Chief Justice, has written in detail about the need for identifying the more advanced among the Scheduled Castes and excluding them from the benefits of affirmative action.

Noting that equality would mean that unequals cannot be treated as equals, Justice Gavai has wondered whether the children of IAS or IPS officers could be treated the same way as children in remote villages even though they may belong to the same community.

Underscoring the differences in access and resources to those in urban and rural areas, and those attending elite institutions and those in schools with limited facilities, he has said putting them in the same bracket would obliterate the equality principle. However, he also notes that the parameters for excluding the creamy layer for the SCs cannot be the same as those used to identify the well-off among the OBCs. Three other judges have agreed with his view. However, the opinions do not constitute a direction to the government to implement the creamy layer concept, as the issue did not directly arise in this case.



Utter ruin: A man examines the site of his house, which was destroyed by the landslide in Chooralmala on July 31. THULASI KAKKAT

PROFILES

The party of the state

Awami League

Bangladesh's ruling party, which built itself up through mass protests and played a central role in the liberation of the country from Pakistan and in ending military dictatorship later, is facing a massive challenge as angry students are organising themselves against its rule

Kallol Bhattacharjee

When India proceeded to hold its first general election in 1951-52, Pakistan witnessed a different set of landmark developments. On January 27, 1952, Pakistan Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin declared that, as envisaged by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan.

This rocked the campuses of East Pakistan. In the subsequent crackdown, Salam, Barkat, Rafique, Jabbar, Shafiur, Abdul Awal and Ohiullah became the 'language martyrs'. The leader of the movement was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was at that time in prison. On July 9, 1953, Mujib was elected as the general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.

The language movement, under the Awami Muslim League, tried to draw pro-Pakistan Shaheed Suhrawardy, A.K. Fazlul Huq and leftist Maulana Bhashani into a coalition. A Jukta Front, or United Front, was formed on November 14, 1953. In the first legislative assembly election of East Pakistan, held on March 10, 1954, the United Front won 223 seats out of 237. It was the first major electoral victory of the Awami Muslim League, which won 143 seats.

The future ruling party of free Bangladesh, which has been in news over the past few weeks because of a government crackdown on students protesting against a system of job quota in public employment, was not born as a mainstream Indian nationalist or pro-Pakistan political party as the leading political formations before 1947 were mostly.

The Awami League came at a time when the major leaders of Bengal politics had either joined the pro-Pakistan wave or were left on the margins. The Awami League started from the university campuses of Dhaka and Calcutta as the students

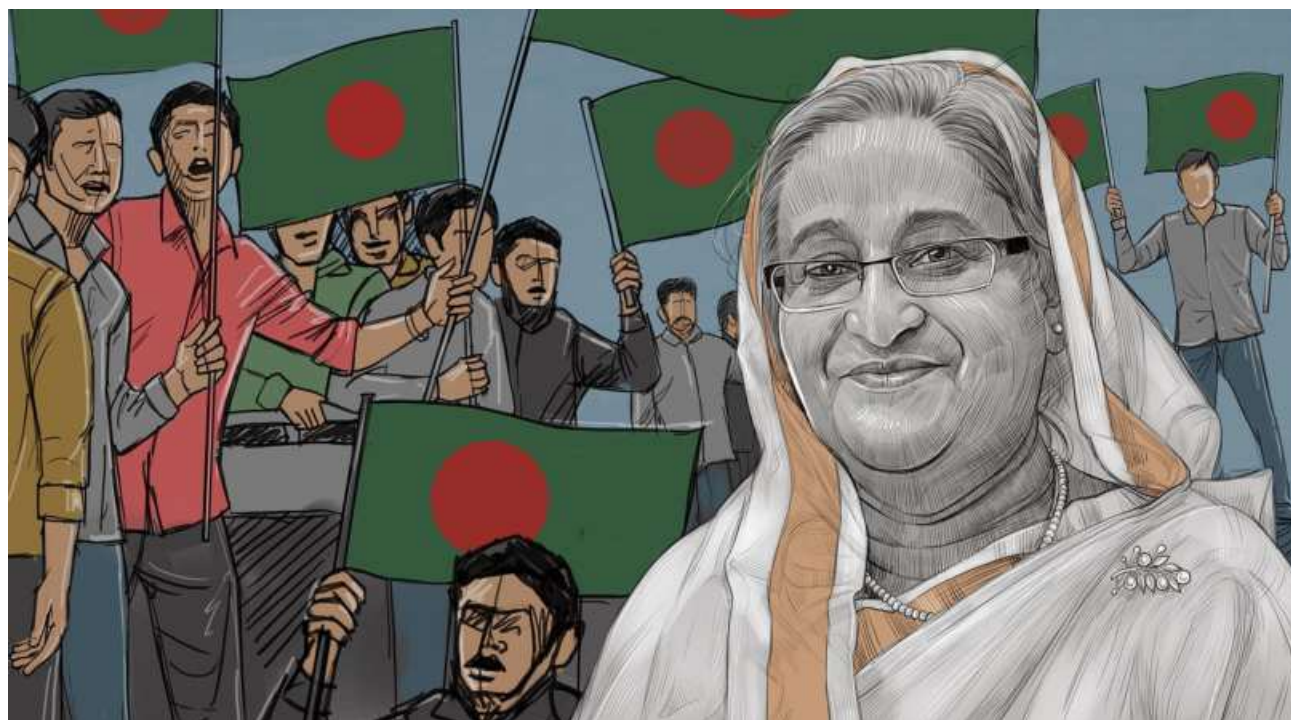


ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

realised early on that the idea of Pakistan was going to fail sooner or later, says Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, a leader from the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Mr. Tuku, who started his political journey as a supporter of the leftist student movement under Maulana Bhashani, says the Awami League started as a protest movement and it remained so for many years before coming close to power in the 1970 national election in Pakistan.

Secular platform

From the beginning, the Awami League had been staunchly secular in contrast to the culturally tilted identity of the Muslim League. To emphasise its political break from the Muslim League, the Awami Muslim League dropped the 'Muslim' from its name during a special council meeting on October 21, 1955.

From 1955 to 1969, the AL remained a party driven by student activists and educated professionals of East

Pakistan. On January 5, 1969, the Central Students' Action Council was formed for campaigning for the autonomy of East Pakistan. Next year, in the backdrop of the devastating cyclone Bhola, Pakistan held another election in which the AL secured 167 of the 169 National Assembly seats in East Pakistan and won 288 out of the 300 seats in the Provincial Assembly.

The country witnessed as a stalemate as there was no consensus on government formation between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party, the majority party in West Pakistan, and Sheikh Mujib. The AL leader was later arrested, and there was a massive crackdown on his supporters, triggering a crisis and flight of refugees from East Pakistan, which eventually led to the India-Pakistan war of December 1971.

The defeat of the Pakistani military in the war and emergence of an independent Bangladesh brought the next phase of the AL. Mujib was

released on January 8, 1972 and returned to Dhaka.

It was the first time that the AL tasted power. It consolidated its gains by legislative and administrative moves, and sought to strike a balance between the Islamic tradition and modernity. In 1973, the first major election of Bangladesh, the AL joined hands with the Communist Party and the National Awami Party (NAP), and won 293 seats out of 300.

Political discontent

The AL had become the establishment in the new country but it found the challenges of unemployment, food scarcity and lack of political cohesion as overwhelming. On January 25, 1973, the AL took a fateful turn when Mujib formed the single party system in Dhaka named Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League. Bangladesh witnessed some improvement in the economic situation in the following years, but political discontent exploded soon. On August 15, 1975,

Mujib and 15 members of his family were killed by a rogue military unit.

The rise and rule of the AL was stopped temporarily as the country was ruled by General Ziaur Rahman and his Bangladesh Nationalist Party till he was assassinated on May 30, 1981, setting the country up for nearly a decade of military rule of Gen. Hossein Mohammed Ershad.

The AL was out of power during the subsequent nearly two decades but the idea of liberation that it represented remained strong. Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, who had returned to Bangladesh in the early 1980s after six years of life in exile in Europe and India, launched a public movement, in coordination with Khaleda Zia, the widow of Ziaur Rahman, and deposed the Ershad regime in 1990. Just like the 1970's cyclone, the year 1991 also saw a devastating cyclone. Ms. Zia came to power in March 1991 and in April, the cyclone exposed her government's ineptitude in handling disasters.

Ms. Hasina, who launched an anti-government movement after the cyclone hit the country, came to power for the first time in 1996, riding the anti-government sentiment.

The AL's support base was revived because of the extraordinary energy that Ms. Hasina displayed in the early 1990s, first in deposing Gen. Ershad and then in voting out Ms. Zia. Over the past five terms, out of which four terms were consecutive, Ms. Hasina has maintained a tight grip on the state, and strengthened a generation of young student leaders whom she brought to the party.

The latest protest is perhaps indicative of a new break in the history and the huge challenge the Awami League is facing. The protests, in which more than 200 people were killed, were apparently not triggered by the forces of tradition and orthodoxy that the AL had fought throughout its journey. The new adversary appears to be a progressive force – the students who have got wind beneath their wings.

THE GIST

From the beginning, the Awami League had been staunchly secular in contrast to the culturally tilted identity of the Muslim League

On January 5, 1969, the Central Students' Action Council was formed for campaigning for the autonomy of East Pakistan. Next year, Pakistan held another election in which the AL secured 167 of the 169 National Assembly seats in East Pakistan

On August 15, 1975, Mujib and 15 members of his family were killed by a rogue military unit, and martial law was imposed, which ultimately led to the emergence of Gen. Ziaur Rahman as the president

The Awami League would return to power in 1996, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina

Shooting star

Manu Bhaker

In Paris, the 22-year-old became the first Indian ever to win twin medals in a single edition of the Games and the first female Indian shooter to win an Olympic medal

Uthra Ganesan

Egos are fragile and practically impossible to protect. They are also, far too often, too big to handle and end up causing damage, mostly to their owners. The high-pressure, result-oriented, high-risk, high-reward world of professional sports makes sports-persons susceptible to these pitfalls without seemingly being aware of it.

Nothing exemplifies this better than a complicated coach-athlete combination. And the bigger they are, the more complicated their equation gets. Which is perhaps why the most famous fallouts in the sporting world are often between players and coaches where both have strong personalities.

But when Manu Bhaker created history at the Paris Olympics, reaching the final of all three events she participated in, watched by a certain Jaspal Rana from the stands, it was not just a 22-year old winning two medals for herself and the country; it was also proof of how tough times never last but tough people do. Manu won the bronze in the women's 10m air pistol and in the mixed 10m air pistol with Sarabjot Singh, and in the 25m pistol, she finished fourth in the final.

Paris saw Manu register several firsts for Indian shooting – first Indian ever to win twin medals in a single edition of the games; first female Indian shooter



to win an Olympic medal, a day after she became the first female shooter to reach an Olympic final in an individual event since Suma Shirur in 2004; first Indian woman to qualify for the 10m air pistol final; first Indian shooter to make three finals at a single Olympics.

To think that, at 22, she is one of the most experienced members of the 21-member Indian shooting squad, is remarkable. More impressive is the way she turned things around, on and off the range, since the disaster at the previous Tokyo Games that was preceded by a fallout with her coach Rana. After that, for two years she tried different coaches and training methods in a desperate attempt to find the missing spark.

When Rana insisted on her dropping out of the 25m sports pistol, a then 19-year old Manu accused him of ignoring her and believed he was doing so to favour another shooter and decided to split. She asked the national federation to intervene just before the Olympics in 2021, he was called a negative in-

fluence on the entire pistol squad and Ronak Pandit entrusted with her training less than two months before Tokyo. Her disastrous campaign, which also included an equipment malfunction, was also blamed on Rana, who became an outcast within the Indian shooting fraternity.

The reunion

And then, one fine day in 2023, Manu called him, realising what she needed was not a coach but a mentor, with the duo agreeing both sides were at fault and to not talk about Tokyo ever. Rana believes she has matured as an athlete but the world most people in the fraternity use now is 'thehrav' or stillness.

Shooting was never Manu's first love. Belonging to Jhajjar in Haryana, Manu excelled at tennis, skating and boxing in school before deciding to try her hand at shooting at 14, soon after Rio Olympics. Then, at the 2017 National Championships, she stunned former world No. 1 Heena Sidhu en route to winning nine gold medals, followed by golds at the 2018 Commonwealth

Games and the ISSF World Cup at 16. But it was at the 2018 Asian Games, where Manu impressed in the qualifying rounds but faltered in the finals, that things started going downhill.

Meanwhile, Rana's famous tough training regimen ruffled feathers. Part of the national coaching set-up and in-charge of the junior shooters, Rana oversaw the rise of the likes of Anish Bhanwala and Sourabh Chaudhary besides Manu, a generation of brilliantly talented youngsters, but they all walked out eventually, unable to stick to his tough demands.

She was still a peppy teen in Tokyo but by then she was famous. There were reports of her walking out of the training camp at Bhopal with her brother after a disagreement with Rana. At the beginning of 2023, the shooter walked around in a T-shirt emblazoned with a snarky message that reportedly came from her mother at the Karni Singh shooting ranges in Delhi. It left no one in doubt about how bad things had turned between the coach and his star pupil.

Finally at the Chateauroux shooting range in France, a former military camp, peace and glory reigned. The silent bonding between Manu and Rana, sitting in the stands with his notebook, meant that there was a closure to their Tokyo fallout. Paris helped them turn a new leaf, a glorious one at that.

Pawn in the game

Evan Gershkovich

The American reporter, who was detained in Russia while working on a story on Russian tanks, was released as part of a major East-West prisoner swap

Adithya Narayan

Evan Gershkovich was on a reporting assignment in Yekaterinburg, some 1,400 km off Moscow, when Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) picked him up from a local bistro on March 29, 2023. The press accreditation by the Russian Foreign Ministry notwithstanding, the FSB slapped espionage charges against the 32-year-old *Wall Street Journal* reporter and detained him at the notorious Lefortovo prison, where political prisoners of the Soviet era were once held.

Mr. Gershkovich was handed out a 16-year sentence in July 2024, to be served at a penal colony. Much like the dawn that reveals itself after the darkest hour, the journalist's prospects brightened as he, along with 15 others, was released by Russia on Thursday in exchange for eight prisoners sourced from five countries.

While Mr. Gershkovich's 491 days spent behind bars in Russia are marred by monotony, for the nation outside his prison premises, it was a period marked by massive churning. Prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny died in an Arctic prison; Vladimir Putin won an unprecedented fifth term as President; Russian forces began to make battlefield gains in Ukraine; and the administration clamped down on any form of dissent against the regime, and Yevgeny Prigozhin, a former Putin



ILLUSTRATIONS: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

ally who led a rebellion against the Kremlin, was killed in a plane crash.

Some say the prisoner swap, perceived as a diplomatic triumph for the Biden administration ahead of the coming polls, also serves to legitimise Putin's actions – of detaining foreigners and using them as diplomatic leverage. A *WSJ* report states that the seeds of the idea were originally sown by the U.S., whose forces in 2008 and 2010 arrested Russian nationals from Thailand and Liberia, to snuff out transnational threats after the September 11 attacks. Russia's call for their release went unheeded during both Barack Obama and Donald Trump's tenures.

Hostage diplomacy

With Joe Biden's ascent to the office, the administration began to adopt a softer approach to 'hostage diplomacy'. His government oversaw the swap of woman basketball player Brittney Griner, held in Russia on drug charges, for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout. So did they release assets worth billions of dollars belonging to the sanc-

tion-hit Iran in exchange for Americans. Venezuela, too, benefited from a similar deal, but not without stoking fears that it would incentivise hostage-taking by authoritarian leaders.

For Mr. Putin, Thursday's arrangement was the fruition of his years-long effort to retrieve Vadim Krasikov, who was imprisoned in Germany after gunning down a Chechen rebel at a Berlin park in broad daylight in 2019. The U.S. saw it as an opportunity to bring back Paul Whelan, a former Marine imprisoned in Russia since 2018 and for whose return clamour was growing at home.

Along with Mr. Whelan and Mr. Gershkovich, those freed included Alsu Kurmasheva, the editor of Radio Free Europe, and Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Vladimir Kara-Murza, convicted for criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Navalny's name was also pushed by the West, especially Germany, where Krasikov was jailed. His death in February sparked fears that the plan to secure Mr. Gershkovich would come undone, but his mother El-

l's lobbying made sure that did not happen. Mr. Gershkovich, the American-born son of Soviet-Jewish parents, worked as a cook before becoming a journalist. At the time of his arrest, Russian officials accused Mr. Gershkovich of collecting information about a defence contractor for the CIA, but, according to *WSJ*, he was working on a story on Russian tanks. His time in jail was spent in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day in a 9-foot X 12-foot cell.

Plight of prisoners
However, the bleakness of that setting had no bearing on the man who emerged on the tarmac of the Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. After being greeted by President Biden, Vice-President Kamala Harris and his family, Mr. Gershkovich, in his first remarks, talked about his fellow detainees in prison.

"I spent a month in prison in Yekaterinburg, where everyone I sat with was a political prisoner. Nobody knows them publicly, they have various political beliefs. I would like to see if we could do something about them as well. I'd like to talk to people about that in the next weeks," he said.

His resilience is best echoed through his message for the Russian President in his clemency letter. Mr. Gershkovich asked Mr. Putin if he would be willing to sit down for an interview after his release.



REFLECTIONS

INCIDENTALLY

Gopalkrishna Gandhi



The dangers of breaching parliamentary propriety

Spending public-financed hours in name-calling and finger-pointing carries a big risk: It may well make the people of India indifferent to Parliament

I am not politically neutral. Far from it. I have my unequivocal political preference, and it is for the principles that define democracy, secularism, and respect constitutional morality. And, by extension, I am intuitively opposed to everything that threatens these three principles. But, in recent weeks, I have, I must admit, been appalled by the precious — and hugely expensive — time of India's Parliament being taken up by the receiving and returning of invectives across all party lines.

When a member of Parliament (MP) or a minister rises to speak, it is as if for a duel, a combat, not a discussion. Vocal cords do not tire, nor do eardrums seek respite from the resultant explosion of sound. And the nation is treated to a relentless exchange which media then records and reports as:

'X slams Y'
'Y challenges Z'
'X says he has been insulted by Y'
'Y says X insulted him first'
'Apologise, demands B of C'
'Apologise? For what? For speaking the truth?', retorts C'
'You have no shame, says B'

'You have no guts, says C.'
'Yours is an autocratic mindset, says P'
'No one could be more autocratic than Indira Gandhi, says Q'

The words 'I am sorry', or 'I apologise' do not belong in the vocabulary of parliamentary proceedings today. The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and the state legislatures, like our Supreme Court and high courts, are assumed to be governed by what in English may be called etiquette and in old-style Hindi and Hindustani, *maryada* or *tehzeeb*. An MP or a minister may hold strong views, believe in hard principles expressed in unqualified terms, and yet be wholly governed by *maryada* and *tehzeeb*. Employing non-malicious sarcasm, and non-personalised criticism, an MP or minister can speak trenchantly, in fact, witheringly.

Has that simple faculty slackened, or worse, has it actually been lost? What is most disturbing is the increasing personalisation in speeches. It is not possible and is certainly not required that personal references be never made, but the increasing trend of finger-pointing an individual and attacking him or her relentlessly in what seems to come from personal animosity, going into the religion, caste, parentage, educational qualifications and such intensely intimate attributes of the person, is, to put it mildly, painful to watch.

The fireworks at work in the Houses of Parliament and state legislatures are such now that when a new MP like Sudha Murthy speaks on 'pure issues' without wasting a syllable on a personal comment, her speech

shines for the plain contrast offered by its non-toxic simplicity.

Can a situation be right when children watching live telecasts of parliamentary debates ask their parents, "Why is this uncle shouting?" Or, "Why is that aunty screaming?" Is it wholesome and good? Surely those questions are not what MPs and MLAs are elected for, or ministers appointed to their distinguished positions.

I say this in sadness and with total respect for legislators and ministers in their individual capacities and for the Houses in their collective personalities. And, I should add, in complete political objectivity.

When MPs like Acharya Kripalani, Ram Manohar Lohia, CN Annadurai, Gayatri Devi, Renu Chakravarty, Hirendranath Mukherjee, Era Sezhiyan, Madhu Limaye, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke in Parliament from the Opposition benches, they used no words that could leave a wound, a scar. When luminaries on the Treasury benches like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Jagjivan Ram, Morarji Desai, Indira Gandhi, Asoka Mehta, Violet Alva, C Subramaniam spoke, they could be hard-hitting, often pulverising the Opposition, but never at the cost of the dignity of the House or in disregard of its traditions.

MPs targeted ministers, for sure, and ministers did likewise with Opposition stalwarts, but there was *maryada* (to use a word associated indelibly with Vajpayee) in the way they went about it, quite like when, for instance, Feroze Gandhi, a Congress MP, went with the sharp focus of a projectile for finance



Parliament's time is being increasingly taken up by the receiving and returning of invectives across all party lines

BLOOMBERG

minister TT Krishnamachari in the Mundhra case. And when ministers like VK Krishna Menon 'gave it back' to Opposition MPs of the fibre of Acharya Kripalani, they did so with maximum political but zero personal punch.

It is not that earlier Houses did not have their 'problem' MPs. They did, but their examples, like exceptions, only proved the rule, which was that legislative opportunities are meant for enacting laws, keeping a weather eye on national affairs and, seeing that the country's interests are never at variance from that of its states, the latter are protected against adversities and adversaries.

The politicisation and personalisation of calamities, like what has befallen Wayanad this week, is to be lamented. When calamity struck the Himalayan town of Joshimath on the night of January 2, 2023, as torrents of water gushed out of its lower slope, did the Opposition seek to make political capital out of it? If it did, that would have been wrong.

There are urgent and important issues facing the country, such as the impact of the climate crisis on livelihood and the security of life, the ogre of zoonoses like Nipah and

Chandipura hissing over us about which K Srinath Reddy wrote in these pages on August 1, an almost certain water drought looming over us, the danger of an imminent Himalayan-scale earthquake in the Himalayas of which seismologists have been warning us, and connected with this the existential issue of how the development and progress models of the last several decades need modifying in the light of experience. And urgent thought needs to be bestowed on the perils of cyber crime allied to the new phenomenon of Artificial Intelligence. Not many days ago, a Microsoft outage led to operations in several airports in India collapsing. That traumatic occurrence has been forgotten by our short-term memory storage. The phenomenon was chilling. Can such occurrences paralyse aircraft in the air, or trains on tracks on the ground? Or banking operations, leading to a national standstill? Can such an outage bring all digital-based work to a halt — either by the work of international crime or by accident?

Then, there are policy issues such as the limbo that our national Census, carried out last in 2011, is in. Another major issue is that

two years from now, India's electoral democracy will be at an existential crossroads when a delimitation of the constituencies to elect members of the Lok Sabha, following the population figures returned by the next decennial census, is to take place. The population-stabilising states of India that is Bharat, which include all the southern states, must continue to enrich our legislative and parliamentary processes as they have been doing over the decades. No democratic penalties should have to be paid by them for their high sense of demographic responsibility.

When such issues face us menacingly, spending public-financed hours in name-calling and finger-pointing carries a big risk: It may well make the people of India indifferent to Parliament. And that would be more than a thousand pities. It would be a billion-and-more disaster. Our Parliament is the altar of our democratic federal Republic, not an *akhaara*.

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

SUNDAY SENTIMENTS

Karan Thapar



The Gymkhana Club's ungentlemanly move

If you're a member of a club, you'll know it's special. Introduced by the Raj, they're associations where people of equal standing can meet and relax, without fear that what they say or do will be made public. By definition, clubs are private and intimate. That's probably why members become fond of them and are, often, inordinately loyal to them.

It follows that members of a club are deemed to be 'gentlemen'. That's true of the ladies as well! An unwritten but well known code of conduct prevails. At its core is the assumption that members will always behave honourably. They can be relied upon to do the decent thing.

Traditionally, members of a club sign for the services they avail of and pay when they are billed. Whether it's drinks at the bar, food in the dining hall or charges for the sports facilities, there's never any doubt that once partaken of or used they

will be promptly and fully paid for. After all, gentlemen honour their debts.

Alas, it seems the Delhi Gymkhana Club, by far the most prestigious and sought after in the Capital, no longer believes that to be the case. In a move that is both bizarre and insulting to its membership, it has decided that members must deposit money in advance. As the management puts it, members must maintain "a positive credit balance" to be able to drink at the bar or dine in the club. The fact you pay an annual subscription is no longer enough.

For a start, this undermines the central purpose of a club as a place you can visit whenever you want. Now, if you haven't maintained a deposit, you can't eat and drink. The best you can hope to do is scrounge off someone else!

But it's worse. Clubs are a place where the convivial atmosphere encourages you

to buy others drinks or dine in their company. You may have come on your own, but you often end up as part of a happy group. But if the advance you've deposited is not sufficient, you can't offer drinks or pick up the tab for a friend's dinner.

Even commercial restaurants treat their guests with greater regard and consideration. They pay once they've finished eating and are ready to leave. They don't need to deposit money in advance. And unless you look particularly disreputable and untrustworthy, no restaurant would ask, as you enter, if you have the money to pay for what you propose to eat! Yet, in effect, this is what the Gym — as its members fondly call it — proposes hereafter to do.

The Club's excuse for this discourteous treatment of its membership is that some people do not pay their bills. Sadly, that's true. Even the prominently displayed list of defaulters is not enough to shame them. But this is a wee minority — if not a fraction — of the membership. Out of the list of people with signing rights, which probably is well over 10,000, habitual and incorrigible defaulters are unlikely to be more than 100. I'm deliberately not including those who are only late in paying, often for legitimate and acceptable reasons. Now, should everyone else — the honourable and preponderant majority — be distrusted and penalised because the Club can't find a better and more effective way of responding to them?

IN A MOVE THAT IS BIZARRE AND INSULTING TO ITS MEMBERS, THE CLUB HAS DECIDED MEMBERS MUST DEPOSIT MONEY FOR DINING, ETC IN ADVANCE. THEY MUST HAVE A 'POSITIVE CREDIT BALANCE' TO DINE AT THE CLUB OR USE THE SERVICES OF THE BAR

It seems the Club's answer is yes. That, itself, is cause to be concerned about the management. It doesn't understand what a club is and should always seek to be.

However, there's another solution which has been inexplicably overlooked. If the management is really worried that a growing number are refusing to honour their bills, it could have asked members to pay for their drinks and food as soon as they've finished and before they leave. Like guests in a restaurant. In fact, this is what several London clubs do. It would be both more trusting and more polite. Now, why on earth did the management not think of that?

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

Urban waste management needs a cohesive strategy

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) yet again drew attention to Delhi's waste management crisis, highlighting the daily accumulation of 3,800 tonnes of untreated solid waste. The Court stressed that this violates citizens' fundamental right to a pollution-free environment, underscoring broader waste management challenges in urban India.

Delhi, like most cities, struggles with waste management. Despite significant discussions and efforts, over 45% of the city's municipal solid waste continues to be dumped in landfills, leading to environmental degradation and health hazards for residents. The situation is further exacerbated by the existence of legacy waste, accumulated over decades, which poses a monumental challenge for remediation efforts.

Instead of enforcing waste segregation at the source to redirect waste towards recovery, reuse, and recycling, promoting a sustainable approach, and integrating waste-pickers and waste-dealers into the formal waste management system through collaboration between state governments, self-help groups (SHGs), and other relevant players, 2,000 tonnes per day of mixed waste is being incinerated at the waste-to-energy (WTE) plant in Delhi's Sukhdev Vihar area. This plant faces scrutiny due to its environmental impact and alleged violations of rules, now under SC's review. Concerns include its location in a densely populated residential zone, disregard for the Delhi Master Plan, 2021, and the absence of a nearby landfill. The plant emits PM2.5 and dioxins, prompting nearby residents to demand its relocation.

Political promises have failed to translate into tangible solutions. While waste management falls under State jurisdiction, the absence of a consolidated approach at the national level exacerbates the problem. The fragmentation of responsibilities across multiple ministries further complicates efforts to tackle the crisis comprehensively.

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Urban), managed by the ministry of housing and urban affairs (MoHUA), aims to create cleaner cities but faces significant challenges due to the fragmented nature of waste

management oversight. While MoHUA handles urban sanitation and cleanliness, the guidelines on plastic waste, construction and demolition (C&D) waste, and electronic waste (e-waste), among others, are set by the ministry of environment, forests and climate change. This division of responsibilities results in a lack of cohesive strategy and hampers the efficiency of coordinating waste management practices.

To effectively tackle these challenges, a holistic and integrated approach is crucial. This requires consolidating efforts across

various ministries to create a unified framework for waste management. Collaboration with industry stakeholders and local communities is essential to develop innovative solutions and implement best practices. Fostering partnerships for advanced technological solutions is another key aspect. Technologies and standard operating procedures that facilitate efficient

waste segregation, recycling, and disposal need to be scaled up and supported by robust policy frameworks. Additionally, state governments should be empowered with the necessary resources and training to manage waste effectively on the ground.

The issue of e-waste, in particular, highlights the urgency of a coordinated approach. Mountains of e-waste, often not covered under the Swachh Bharat Mission, pose significant environmental and health risks. Addressing this requires strategies and regulatory measures currently lacking due to the fragmented governance system.

India's waste crisis demands concerted effort from all levels of government, private sector players, and civil society. By integrating efforts across ministries, fostering collaborations, and embracing technological advancements, India can move towards a sustainable and circular waste economy.

Can our fractured governance systems effectively address the multifaceted waste management issues we face today? The answer lies in our ability to unify efforts, create a cohesive strategy, and enforce regulations that prioritise both environmental sustainability and public health.

Bhavreen Kandhari is an advocate for environmental rights. The views expressed are personal



Bhavreen Kandhari

Wins, losses and longing in the Olympics season

"Pehla set haar gaya, ab kya jeetega" (He lost the first set, he won't win now); 28 years ago, my father, sitting in front of our Weston black-and-white TV, gave up hope. A tennis player from Kolkata, playing with a broken wrist at the Stone Mountain Center, was struggling. He had lost the first set. Watching a high-emotion sporting encounter with a strict dad was akin to walking the tightrope for a 90s kid. The outcome of the match dictated the subsequent harmony in the house. Giving up hope was the national hobby then. We had given it up a few months earlier, at Eden Gardens, when a teary-eyed Vinod Kambli walked back to the pavilion — and just a few weeks before the tennis match,



Abhishek Asthana

lion. An individual medal. My father had never seen an individual Olympic medal in his lifetime. It took 44 years for the nation to see an Olympic medal gleaming around the neck of a sportsman who wasn't holding a hockey stick. The nation was delirious. Our bronze age had begun. Paes's win taught us how it felt to win an Olympic medal. An entire generation busy with inter-colony sports such as cricket, unaware of the joy of winning at a global event with more than ten nations participating, suddenly wanted more. They had tasted blood.

The drought of the medals was such that even today when a player reaches an Olympic final, out of sheer post-traumatic stress syndrome, the headlines whisper a defeatist "PV Sindhu has assured a silver" headline, instead of deeming it a battle for the gold. That said, the times are changing. Our national pride has outrun our per capita numbers. Now, presidents of richer nations take selfies with our leader. We are called to their exclusive clubs. India's Gross Domestic Product is growing fast. Even beggars have QR codes. The only inconvenience is our denominator. Black-pillars tell you how some countries with the population of Dadar station at rush-hour have more gold medals than us. A single-digit tally isn't good enough. Not befitting a Quad member. Deepika Kumari, an archery world champion, is openly criticised for not winning a medal. In a nation of mythological archers such as Arjuna and Eklavya, how could we not win at archery, the internet jokes.



Leander Paes's win taught us how it felt to win an Olympic medal GARY M. PRIOR/GETTY IMAGES

For many decades, such stuff was blasphemous. Now, such jokes are fine. Winning hearts is not enough. Now, these athletes aren't objects of our sympathy or a guilt trip of a cricket-obsessed nation. No longer do stories of a resource-starved athlete sleeping in railway wagons during sporting trials and swimming in a crocodile-infested river just to reach school move us. That time is over. Now, we want medals. "Our medal tally should look like a six-digit OTP and not an ATM pin," internet users post. But with higher expectations come greater disappointments. As we grow old, we guard our emotions in a savings account rather than investing it around. We can't afford mental downtime with all the commitments and responsibilities. Hence, a mundane sports defeat might not rattle much for a middle-aged person.

After all, the kids who saw the unraveling of the 120-chase in Barbados or the Kolkata 1996 semis or Sachin Tendulkar in that Chennai test — who barely ate their dinner on those days — are adults

now with dependents. More immune to such non-material damages. I still remember when MS Dhoni hit that winning six in the 2011 World Cup, I ran out to the 16th Main of BTM layout in Bengaluru, hugging absolute strangers and waving the flag. Did I do the same when India won the T20 WC this year? Not really. Maybe when I've kids old enough, I'll partake. For now, there's a brief lull. Such philosophical musings are usually reserved for cricket.

The day an Olympic defeat has a similar shelf life of public despair, the day when we can actually criticise an erring athlete freely — that's the day we show we actually care. Nothing shows we care more than actually being genuinely disappointed. And that's the day when we should bid for hosting the Olympics. Maybe, that year our medals tally will look like an OTP.

Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur, and tweets as @gabbarsingh. The views expressed are personal

SUNDAY LETTERS

A fight between two Americas

This is with reference to "How Kamala Harris has reshaped the US election" by Prashant Jha (July 28). Even with her Indian connections, Harris is unlikely to reshape India-US relations. On Nov 5, the likely Kamala vs Trump fight will be between two different visions of America.

Sanjay Chopra

A sunny day in London

This is with reference to "Glimpses of British summertime cheer" by Karan Thapar (July 28). This was an enjoyable peek into a fun outing on a bright, sunny day in London.

Anuradha Bisaria

A rare quality in a politician

This is with reference to Pavan K Varma's "Away from the spotlight, a remarkable President" (July 28). R Venkatarman believed in serving the nation quietly, shunning publicity. This was his sterling quality, which is rarely found among politicians.

Samiul Quadri

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

Across THE AISLE



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The FM spoke but did she listen?

ON JULY 23, 2024, Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, the Hon'ble Finance Minister (FM), presented the Budget for 2024-25. A discussion on the Budget commenced in both Houses of Parliament the next day. The FM "replied" to the discussion in the Lok Sabha on July 30 and in the Rajya Sabha on July 31.

The FM's case rested on three broad premises:

1. The government is spending more money under each head of expenditure.

The expenditure, according to the FM, is a measure of good governance. Consequently, all sections of the people are benefited by 'development' and 'welfare'. The FM buttressed her argument by numbers: what was spent in 2013-14, the last year of the UPA government; what was spent in 2019-20 and 2023-24, the first and last years of the NDA II government; and what will be spent in 2024-25. The numbers showed, naturally, an increase from year to year — in absolute terms. For example, the FM said "Just Rs 0.30 lakh crore was allocated to agriculture and allied sector in 2013-14 whereas it is now Rs 1.52 lakh crore. It is even Rs 8,000 crore more than the last year of 2023-24. So, over the last years, we have made an increase in it and not brought about a reduction on it." The catch is, the numbers were in *current prices*, not in constant prices. Besides, the claim of enhanced expenditure will be

relevant only if it is expressed as a *proportion of total expenditure* or as a *proportion of GDP*.

Further, there were several heads under which the allocated funds were *not* spent in 2023-24, and *not* explained why:

HEAD	BE	RE
	(in Rupees crore)	
Agriculture & Allied	1,44,214	1,40,533
Education	1,16,417	1,08,878
Health	88,956	79,221
Social Welfare	55,080	46,741
Scientific Departments	32,225	26,651

2. The problem of unemployment does not exist.

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■ U.P. Police Constable Recruitment Examination: for 60,244 positions, over 48 lakh candidates (including around 16 lakh women) wrote the examination.

■ Staff Selection Commission, U.P.: for around 7,500 posts there were 24,74,030 applications.

If unemployment had declined so steeply, why was the ratio of applicants/candidates to jobs so grossly disproportionate? In the two instances above, the ratio was **1:80** and **1:329**. Why were engineers, management graduates, lawyers and post-graduates applying for the job of a constable or clerk? In order to find out the truth about unemployment, I suggest that the prime minister and other ministers walk the streets of towns and cities of India. On a lighter note, the finance minister may begin her walk at Madurai (where she was born), go to Villupuram (where she went to school) and end at Tiruchirappalli (where she went to college).

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The FM said, "The UPA government was run by the Harvard and Oxford educated leaders for the economy. They did not know when and how to withdraw the stimulus leading to a high double-digit inflation between 2009 and 2013." (Wisely, she did not take any name because it may have embarrassed her government.) The FM was technically correct but, I am afraid, not relevant. The people do not live in the UPA era; they live in the

time of Modi 2.1. They live in a time when prices of tomato, onion and potato have risen year on year by 30 per cent, 46 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively (source: CRISIL). They live in a time when WPI inflation is 3.4 per cent; CPI inflation is 5.1 per cent; and food inflation is 9.4 per cent. They live in a time when wages of all categories of workers had stagnated during the last six years. When the people voted in April-May 2024, they did not vote against the inflation during the UPA government but voted against the inflation during the term of the Modi government. The FM proposed no idea to mitigate the burden of inflation: no reduction in administered prices, no reduction in taxes or cesses, no increase in minimum wages, and no measures to stimulate the supply side. She quoted the 15 words of the Chief Economic Adviser on inflation — "India's inflation continues to be low, stable and moving towards the four per cent target" — and dismissed the subject. She did not answer a pertinent question: if inflation management was so admirable, why was the RBI keeping the bank rate at 6.5 per cent for the last 13 months and with no prospect of any reduction in 2024?

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Fifth COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH
Twitter @tavleen_singh

Developed India is a distant dream

IT IS time for the Prime Minister to stop talking about 'Viksit Bharat'. It has, of late, started sounding like he is making a joke of bad taste. Last week, he invited some of our biggest industrialists for a meeting in Vigyan Bhawan and told them that he wanted them to play a role in helping India become a developed country, 'Viksit Bharat'. He asked for their support for his new scheme to solve our unemployment problem. He urged them to use their CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds to hire and train 'interns' for a year. His government will give those who join this scheme a small monthly tip as an incentive.

As I listened to Narendra Modi, I wondered if in some private moment later he might notice the irony of what he is asking of those who run our most successful companies. These are people who have done their duty to India by building world-class companies despite the sad truth that it has not become any easier to do business since Modi became prime minister than it was before. Socialist habits are rooted so deeply in the mindset of our high officials that they find it impossible to give businessmen the freedom they need to continue building bigger and better.

Socialism is more than an ideology in our dear Bharat Mata. It is a means of extorting vast sums of money from those who spend years of blood, sweat and tears building world-class institutions. So shameless are our officials (elected and unelected) that they do not allow fine private hospitals and colleges to be built without taking their cut. It is not Indian industrialists who have failed India. It is those who are responsible for governing this country who have not done their jobs. They care more for making money than for 'Viksit Bharat'.

There have been many examples of failed governance in recent days. I want to draw your attention only to the most heartbreaking ones. Wayanad and the devastation we have seen there comes first to mind. It is being written off as a natural disaster but is that really all it was? When unplanned construction was happening in precarious terrain was the government of Kerala asleep? The Home Minister said, after hundreds had died, that his office had alerted the state government in advance and that it did nothing. This sounds like just politics.

Soon after the Wayanad disaster came news of floods in Uttarakhand. Those images you would have seen of towns and temples drowning in muddy rivers are an annual sight in the rainy season. These floods happen because unrestrained construction has been allowed in hills so fragile that they can no longer survive. Every year, whole towns collapse and yet as soon as the rains go away, we go back to doing nothing at all to find lasting solutions. Why? Short answer: bad governance.

In Delhi, who is responsible for stormwater drains becoming so clogged this year that vast sections of the city drowned in filthy water? The Chief Minister is in jail, so the responsibility falls upon the central government since the Lieutenant Governor functions directly under the Home Minister. If the capital of India cannot build a drainage system that works, why should we expect more lower down the line?

Indian small towns look as if they have grown organically out of garbage dumps. There is not the smallest sign of municipal governance or urban planning. The situation in villages is worse. Before writing this piece, it happens that I drove through a long stretch of rural India in one of our 'Viksit' states. The roads were so bad that driving on them was dangerous. Narrow, flooded village streets had turned into open drains.

Another recent example of bad governance comes to mind. The tragic, needless death of three students who were studying in the basement of a coaching centre in Delhi. Once they were dead, we found that there should not have been a library in that basement. Once they were dead, we found that they are forced to live in tiny, filthy, airless cells and that their food is cooked in disgusting rooftop kitchens. I discovered these distressing details in an excellent story on NDTV's Hindi channel, and it shamed me that these students were paying exorbitant rents to live in such awful conditions. The irony is that they are studying to become civil servants. They would not need to live in such conditions if the Delhi government had built clean, affordable student hostels.

One more reason why the words 'Viksit Bharat' sound like a joke came from the Finance Minister. In her Budget speech, she said that we should be proud that our gracious Prime Minister is providing more than 80 crore Indians with free foodgrain every month. No Madame, we should be ashamed that this is necessary. It comes as definite proof that we are a very long way from becoming a developed country.

It is a good dream to dream, but it will not become reality until those who govern this country recognize that it is because of the failure to do their job that India continues to resemble a country that has barely emerged from desperate poverty. The accumulated failures of bad governance cannot be blamed on Narendra Modi but he can be blamed for not doing enough to bring the promised 'parivartan'.

The writer is a Delhi-based journalist

In Kenya, rebels with a cause but no affiliations

Dalitality

SURAJ YENGDE

Twitter @Surajyengde



KENYA, AN east African nation, is undergoing a series of protests against the William Ruto government. It all started with the government imposing a cess on income generated through social media. This increased income tax was within a plan for salaried middle class that increased household spending and reduced the capacity to save. Gen Z, a major user of social media, did not take too well to the proposed plan to tax their revenue. They took to the streets to demand accountability from the government, especially since many are unemployed despite having graduated from tertiary and higher education institutions. If anything, Kenya's Gen Z is proving that it is up for a rebellion despite the shiny life held in the claws of neoliberal capitalism.

Like many post-colonial nation states, Kenya saw strife between pre-colonial cleavages and the new Constitutional state. Both do not fully adhere to traditional ways of power exchange and contest the hegemony of power-broking social groups.

The story of Kenya's independence, especially the Mau Mau episode, is not a widely accepted phenomenon among a section of its people, who consider it a land issue that had no effect on regions outside the Central and Rift Valley areas. The post-colonial promise set a path of wealth creation opportunities for subsequent generations but that path and its true nature was forever hidden since the unification of the nation demanded priority.

Kenya has 43 tribes and barring recent entrants who are not ethnically African, the others have a strong form of identity. Usually, power is centred around the five dominant tribes who have formed into unique castes of their own — the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo, Luhya, and Kamba people. There is nostalgia among post-colonial elites to direct attention to the colonial state as the reason for their current malaise. While partly true, it also invites us to hold to account the power that still lies with capital-owning groups running the world through banks located in former colonies.

A closer examination of post-colonial societies reveals that old divisions and power struggles are a cliché in democratic governance. Though tribal identity is not

manifested through caste markers, it is marked in the way one Kenyan registers the other — a name or a dialect decodes one's tribal affiliations.

I was informed by Kathleen Anangwe, a sociologist at the University of Nairobi, that power struggle is often presented through ethnicities and diversities that accrue. When I encouraged her to think about the hierarchical distribution of power and simultaneous marginalisation of intra- and inter-tribal formations, she paused to think about a possible account of such a society.

A leading Kenyan law professor of Indian descent hosted a meeting for me to meet people from various social strata. Visibly proud of Gen Z's protests, a lawyer in her 50s claimed they had done in a month what it took the nation 30 years to express. Since Gen-Z protesters have no political or tribal affiliations, Kenyans like this lawyer support them financially in their spirited drive to demand accountability.

Another participant came from an open forum with lawyers requested by Gen-Z protesters to guide them on constitutional provisions that would protect them against violations during their groundswell. Everyone at the dinner table was receiving updates on social media regarding a protest at Nairobi International Airport the next day.

Barring Ruto loyalists, the protest is widely embraced by many. What started as a grievance against the government, turned into a forum to scrutinise its inactions against growing corruption and lavish spending by officials. The ruling elite have formed political factions to advance their exploits. They, including Jomo Kenyatta, the first President, have always accumulated looted resources by taking turns to monopolise Kenya's crucial resources. The template was followed by successive governments, till it was Ruto's turn. In the wake of the latest protests, he dissolved his Cabinet, only to get most of them back into the fold under the guise of having conducted a reform to check corruption and embrace austerity.

Kenya has seemingly inspired its neighbouring nations in the region. With an aggressively pro-capitalist economy, it was an eyesore for neighbours like Tanzania, where Julius Nyerere (anti-colonial activist who later became the Prime Minister) took the socialist path. That approach seems to be working gradually in Tanzania's favour, because it seems more stable, less volatile, and is emerging as another important economic player in the region.

Suraj Yengde, author of 'Caste Matters', curates Dalitality, and has returned to Harvard University

history HEADLINE SANDIPG



A NUTRITION drink endorsement on the back of a magazine would become an unlikely provocation for gender tests in the Olympics. The advertisement, which appeared in 1934, featured Czechoslovakian track star Zdenek Koubek. While Koubek claimed the photograph was used without her permission, the officials revoked her amateur status, thus crashing her dreams of competing at the 1936 Berlin Games.

Koubek retired in 1934, but a year later, newspaper *Czech World* broke a story that she was planning a gender reassessment surgery. Koubek had participated in the Women's World Games in 1932, becoming the fastest woman on the planet, and now wanted to be a man. "My soul was always more for being a man," Koubek said in a press conference.

European society, at large, warmly greeted the decision, and her celebrity status swelled, except in Nazi Germany. Wilhelm Knoll, the head of the International Federation of Sports Medicine and a Nazi sympathiser, whose advice the IOC often sought, wrote a letter to the international federations, suggesting gender tests, the first of this sort in the Games. "I request that all female participants in the Olympic Games should have their gender checked beforehand by a specially commissioned doctor. By competing in women's sports, they unfairly make use of superior physique, as a man, against frail women," he wrote in the letter.

In the subsequent meeting of the athletics federation, members provided anecdotal evidence of instances where "women competitors were believed to be men". It passed a rule that if a protest was lodged, medical experts would perform "a physical inspection". Thus, the first vague law to bar trans and intersex women from competitive sport was founded.

In the aftermath of the latest row over Algerian boxer Imane Khelif, the gender of a competitor in a female competition has become a talking point. It's interesting to go back in time to find out how such issues were sought to be settled to ensure no one had an unfair advantage.

What often used to be a whiff of doubt, whispered among athletes, became a full-blown storm at the 1936 Games. The first of such tests was conducted on American sprinter Helen Stephens based on the complaint of Polish athlete and runner-up in that race, Stanislaw Walasiewicz. Stephens passed the gender test. But ironically, when Walasiewicz, who later mi-

The unsettling question of gender & the Games



(From left) Czechoslovakian track star Zdenek Koubek, German high jumper Dora Ratjen and Algerian boxer Imane Khelif. Wikipedia, Reuters

grated to the USA and changed her name to Stella Walsh, was shot dead in Ohio 40 years later, the autopsy revealed that she had "ambiguous sexual features".

The most intriguing and fascinating of all cases, one that staunch advocates of gender screening often fish out, is the story of Heinrich/Dora Ratjen, part of the critically acclaimed movie *Berlin 36*. The world record holder in high jump then was Gretel Bergmann, a German Jew. The Nazis wanted to keep her away and so, replaced her with the 17-year-old Dora, whom they plucked from the village of Erichshof near Bremen.

Some claim the Germans intentionally put a boy in a girl's dress, forcing the first instance of gender fraud, though a more sympathetic view is that she didn't exactly know her gender and that her assigned gender, by the midwife, was that she was a girl.

"My parents brought me up as a girl," Ratjen told the police in 1938. "I therefore wore girls' clothes all my childhood. But from the age of 10 or 11, I started to realise I wasn't female, but male. However, I never asked my parents why I had to wear women's clothes even though I thought I was male," she would add.

Ratjen would join a local athletics club and practise in the evening, after working at a tobacco rolling factory during the day. She kept breaking records and was soon picked in the national team.

Some made fun of her husky, masculine voice, but more as banter than genuine doubt about her gender. Bergmann herself would tell German newspaper *Der Spiegel*: "I never had any suspicions. In

the communal shower, we wondered why she never showed herself naked. It was grotesque that someone could still be that shy at the age of 17. We just thought, 'She's strange. She's odd'... But no one knew or noticed anything about her different sexuality."

The Olympics was a disappointment and Ratjen ended up in the fourth place. But two years later, she bagged gold at the European Athletics Championships with a world record jump of 1.67m, and a year later, won gold at the World Championship too. But when travelling from Austria to Cologne, after setting another world record, a police officer in the train grew suspicious of a "man dressed as a woman", which they related to espionage, and arrested her.

Ratjen showed her IDs that declared her a woman, but was dragged to the police station, where she supposedly confessed that she was a "man". Some allege the police officer was tipped by fellow high jumper Dorothy Tyler-Odam, whose record she had broken.

Ratjen's records were revoked and she slipped into oblivion. She was rumoured to be working as a waiter in Berlin, having changed her name to Heinz, and died in 2009 in her hometown. Whether she, like Koubek, performed a surgery is unknown. Some researchers though allege that the claims about her gender were twisted by the makers of *Berlin 36*.

But her story set off suspicion, which still grips major athletic events of the world, despite advanced science and testing methods, and remains as grey as it was in the days of Koubek and Ratjen.

She SAID

SANCHARI BHATTACHARYA



DAYS AFTER Kamala Harris emerged as the presumptive Democratic nominee for the US President's post, pitting her against Republican candidate Donald Trump, some unfortunate comments made by his running mate J D Vance made headlines. Speaking in a 2021 interview, Vance had said the US was being run by "a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made, and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable too".

Harris is the Vice-President of the most powerful country in the world, a former senator from California and the for-

In defence of cats and 'cat women'

mer attorney-general of the same state. She is also the daughter of migrants, a woman of colour, someone who got married for the first time at the age of 50 and has no biological children.

Many have taken Vance's comment and run with it. In their opinion, Harris is "miserable" despite the fact that she has a tremendously successful career, is happily married and has two step-children, who have often spoken of how fond they are of "Momala".

Vance's comments are not surprising in the least, as Republicans have made no secret of their antipathy towards female agency. They are suspicious of women who are childless by choice, who seek meaning in life differently than others and who are bewildered at being the object of

pity for making a choice that is, ultimately, only theirs to make.

This is not the first time the Republicans have come after women's choices. After successfully gutting abortion rights in 2022, they openly spoke of their plans to ban multiple forms of contraception, as well as IVF. They presumably don't want women to have sexual or reproductive rights.

There isn't enough ink in the world to write about the unrealistic standards a woman in public life is held to and the depths to which her actions are scrutinised, compared to male politicians. But beyond the undeniable misogyny and sexism, there is another issue with Vance's comments. They are not only offensive to independent women everywhere, they are also offensive to cat parents and cats.

Just like such diatribe is always directed towards "childless women with cats", not "childless men with cats", why are only cats and cat parents subjected to such stereotyping? What about childless women who have pet dogs or hamsters or a horse?

Is it because dogs are more affectionate and loyal, so there is some inherent credit in having one as a pet? I am simply wondering how cats attract such a bad reputation, to be forever associated with a group of women who are no doubt living their best lives, but are still treated as 'incomplete projects' by most of society. Is it because all cats secretly hate their owners, respond to affection with contempt and act like they are plotting to murder you? Is it because cats are considered cold and uncaring, the same traits so-

ciety gleefully attributes to their 'miserable' female owners?

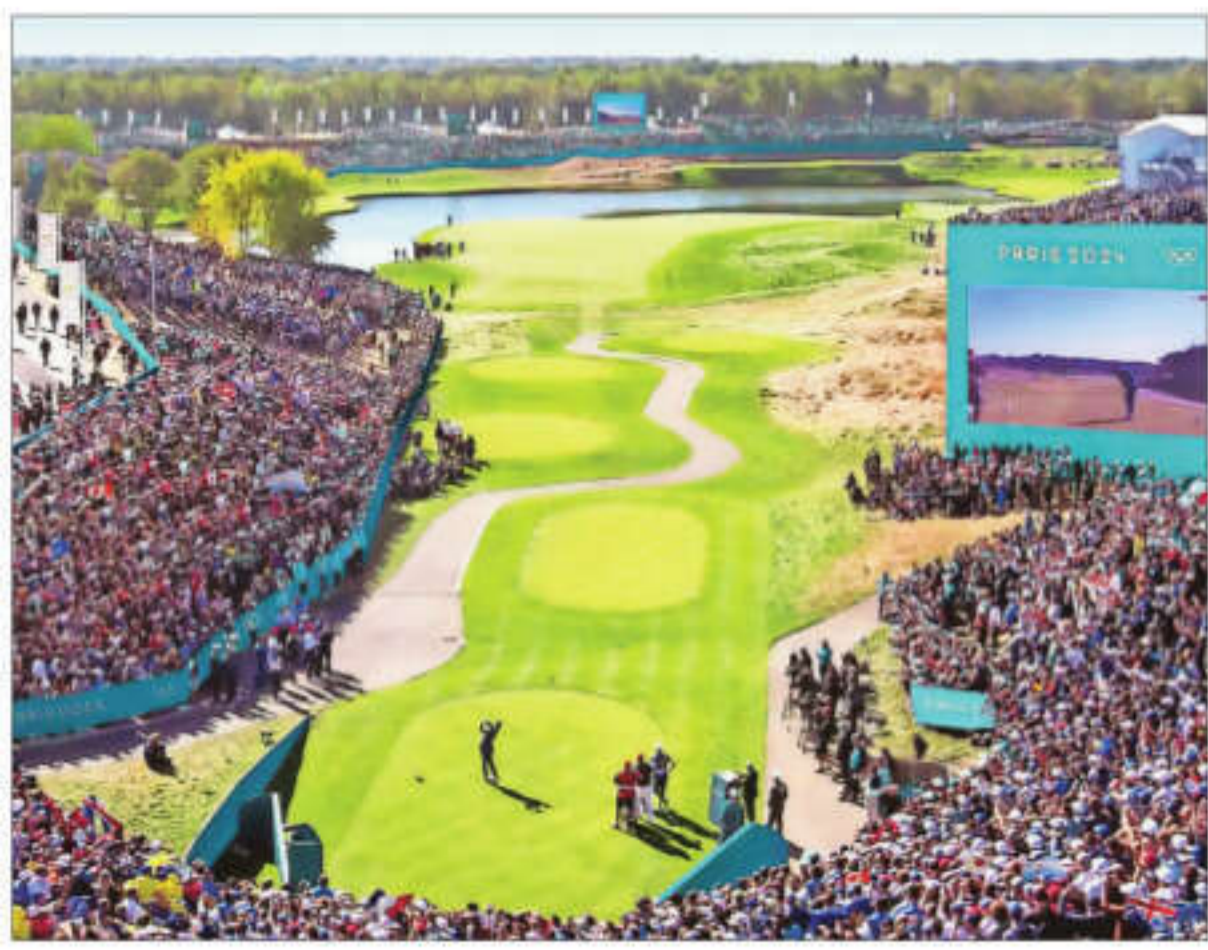
Women, just like most men, live lives that are a tapestry of complex choices, personal convictions and unwinnable circumstances. There is no linear equation to living life, where just because having children equals massive joy, childlessness equals pure despondency. Women who don't fit in socially sanctioned roles don't really spend all their time being miserable.

Women whose life choices you don't approve of also live rich, fulfilling and complicated lives. Constantly attacking them for those choices and projecting your misery on them doesn't dent their happiness, but it does reveal a gaping hole in your otherwise well-manicured existence.

The writer is a Delhi-based journalist

Opinion

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024



The Albatros course at Le Golf National is an 18-hole golf course in France, southwest of central Paris

An American in Paris

Will an Olympic Gold be added to the American sweep of all majors in 2024?

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah

In *Xanadu*, did Kubla Khan. A stately pleasure-dome decree... And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills... Enfolding sunny spots of greenery...

GRANDEUR, INSPIRATION, VISION, as well as poetic frustration all loom large in Samuel Coleridge's magnum opus about Kubla Khan's legendary summer palace complex. Almost as iconic a modern arena, with an enviable record of dramatic events, and the scene for human triumph and heartbreak is Le Golf National — the venue for the ongoing golf event at the 2024 Games. Four decades ago it was a vast expanse of cornfields, but the Albatros layout at the National — a course built in 1991 — has quickly acquired a reputation as being a superlative test of golf. The closing act — the last four holes crisscrossed with rills and lakes dubbed, 'The Gauntlet,' for their setup designed to create last-gasp drama — are not to be trifled with.

But with calm weather and reasonable pin positions the first two days saw the course offer easy pickings for the field. Expect that to change today as the final round of the 2024 Olympics Golf unfolds. It's quite likely that these final holes, especially the spectacular 466-yard par-4 18th is where the medal winners will be decided.

Already, the 18th hole has recorded its share of triples and quadruples over the first two rounds.

Le Golf National is the only golf club in the world to host both — the Ryder Cup, and the Olympics. And the man hoping to make it a unique double is defending champion Xander Schauffele, who is hoping to become not just the first man in the Open era to win two Olympic medals (gold or otherwise) and the only one to have won an Olympic medal as well as the Open Championship and the PGA Championship in the same year. Schauffele was tied for the lead at 11-under par with Tommy Fleetwood and Hideki Matsuyama going into the penultimate round. The man most capable of denying the World number two, is, well, the top-ranked golfer in the world — Scottie Scheffler — who's won no less than six times in 2024. Tommy Fleetwood, who made short work of this layout at the 2018 Ryder Cup is the punter's favourite to take a medal home. Rory McIlroy, who very nearly won a medal in 2020 is in the hunt as well. The Ulsterman, somewhat chastised by his last-minute loss at the US Open seems to have got past the setback, and has been playing like he's got nothing to lose. Another man with nothing to lose, and with experience of shining on this stage is an

Agolfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

ODD & EVEN

ROHNIT PHORE



ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



In order to find out the truth about unemployment, I suggest that the Prime Minister and other ministers walk the streets of towns and cities of India. On a lighter note, the finance minister may begin her walk at Madurai (where she was born), go to Villupuram (where she went to school) and end at Tiruchirappalli (where she went to college)

ON JULY 23, 2024, Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, the Hon'ble Finance Minister (FM), presented the Budget for 2024-25. A discussion on the Budget commenced in both Houses of Parliament the next day. The FM "replied" to the discussion in the Lok Sabha on July 30 and in the Rajya Sabha on July 31.

The FM's case rested on three broad premises:

1. **The government is spending more money under each head of expenditure.**

The expenditure, according to the FM, is a measure of good governance. Consequently, all sections of the people are benefited by 'development' and 'welfare'. The FM buttressed her argument by numbers: what was spent in 2013-14, the last year of the UPA government; what was spent in 2019-20 and 2023-24, the first and last years of the NDA II government; and what will be spent in 2024-25. The numbers showed, naturally, an increase from year to year — in absolute terms. For example, the FM said "Just ₹0.30 lakh crore was allocated to agriculture and allied sector in 2013-14 whereas it is now ₹1.52 lakh crore. It is even ₹8,000 crore more than the last year of 2023-24. So, over the last years, we have made an increase in it and not brought about a reduction on it." The catch is, the numbers were in *current prices*, not in constant prices. Besides, the claim of enhanced expenditure will be relevant only if it is expressed as a *proportion of total expenditure* or as a *proportion of GDP*.

Further, there were several heads under which the allocated funds were *not* spent in 2023-24, and *not* explained why: (see table)

2. **The problem of unemployment does not exist.**

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Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman

The FM spoke but did she listen?

HEAD	BE	RE
Agriculture & Allied	1,44,214	1,40,533
Education	1,16,417	1,08,878
Health	88,956	79,221
Social Welfare	55,080	46,741
Scientific Departments	32,225	26,651

(in ₹ crore)

dent and capable). She trotted out the familiar numbers: the Periodic Labour Force Survey claimed that unemployment had declined to 3.2%. The SBI research report found that 1.25 million jobs had been created between 2014 and 2023. Both were government reports. They were contradicted by the CMIE data which estimated the current unemployment rate as 9.2%. The ILO report revealed that of the unemployed in India, 83% were youth. The FM did not answer the question why for a few hundred or a few thousand jobs there were thousands or millions of candidates? For instance

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steeply, why was the ratio of applicants/candidates to jobs so grossly disproportionate? In the two instances above, the ratio was 1:80 and 1:329. Why were engineers, management graduates, lawyers and post-graduates applying for the job of a constable or clerk? In order to find out the truth about unemployment, I suggest that the prime minister and other ministers walk the streets of towns and cities of India. On a lighter note, the finance minister may begin her walk at Madurai (where she was born), go to Villupuram (where she went to school) and end at Tiruchirappalli (where she went to college).

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FIFTH COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH

Developed India is a distant dream

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become any easier to do business since Modi became prime minister than it was before. Socialist habits are rooted so deeply in the mindset of our high officials that they find it impossible to give businessmen the freedom they need to continue building bigger and better.

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Indian small towns look as if they have grown organically out of garbage dumps. There is not the smallest sign of municipal governance or urban planning. The situation in villages is worse. Before writing this piece, it happens that I drove through a long stretch of rural India in one of our 'Viksit' states. The roads were so bad that driving on them was dangerous. Narrow, flooded village streets had turned into open drains.

Another recent example of bad governance comes to mind. The tragic, needless death of three students who were studying in the basement of a coaching centre in Delhi.

Once they were dead, we found that there should not have been a library in that basement. Once they were dead, we found that they are forced to live in tiny, filthy, airless cells and that their food is cooked in disgusting rooftop kitchens. I discovered these distressing details in an excellent story on NDTV's Hindi channel, and it shamed me that these students were paying exorbitant rents to live in such awful conditions. The irony is that they are studying to become civil servants. They would not need to live in such conditions if the Delhi government had built clean, affordable student hostels.

One more reason why the words 'Viksit Bharat' sound like a joke came from the Finance Minister. In her Budget speech, she said that we should be proud that our gracious Prime Minister is providing more than 80 crore Indians with free food-grain every month. No Madame, we should be ashamed that this is necessary. It comes as definite proof that we are a very long way from becoming a developed country.

It is a good dream to dream, but it will not become reality until those who govern this country recognise that it is because of the failure to do their job that India continues to resemble a country that has barely emerged from desperate poverty. The accumulated failures of bad governance cannot be blamed on Narendra Modi but he can be blamed for not doing enough to bring the promised 'parivartan'.



RECESSION FEARS TRIGGER RED ALERT ACROSS MARKETS

HEY haven't given the day a moniker yet. Friday saw every major global index, barring three, flashing red. Stocks, commodities and bond yields slid into negative territory. Thanks to fears of a demand de-growth despite worries of a wider war in West Asia, Brent and WTI crude prices edged closer to year-to-date lows. Gold, the safe haven for anxious money, dipped and Bitcoin slid nearly 10 percent from Monday's high of \$70,000.

It would seem there is a new consensus around the Chaucerian expression "all good things must come to an end". The slide in sentiments set off by the fall in the US markets on Thursday worsened and went global on Friday as the Nikkei 225 crashed over 2,000 points, apparently the worst fall since the Black Monday of 1987. Other Asian indices followed—the KOSPI, Shanghai and Shenzhen included. So did the FTSE and European indices. In the US, the VIX or the fear gauge touched 29 before settling at 23.3. The Magnificent 7 tech stocks lost nearly \$300 billion as investors shifted from 'tell me your AI strategy' to 'show me the earnings' on calls. Tech totem NASDAQ landed in correction territory and investor wealth of \$2.9 trillion was wiped out.

In India, the Nifty 50 tap-danced to the tune of the global piper. Sure, India has been among the better performing markets with a credible track record of returns, thanks to the robust flow of domestic savings. That said, there are limits to the popular thesis of inoculation from viral global cues. FII holdings are valued at ₹17.5 lakh crore. Capital tends to seek safe havens and the flight to safety will influence stocks and investment flows. To paraphrase Alan Greenspan, anything can be a proximate cause for correction. But there are clear limits to the thesis of inoculation from global cues due to the cushion offered by domestic flows.

A confluence of known unknowns is stoking fears of a recession. The textbook defines recession as two quarters of negative growth. Tracing its progression is complicated. The glacial arrival of gloom is eloquently illustrated in a conversation between two characters in Earnest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. "How did you go bankrupt?" Bill asked. "Two ways," Mike said "Gradually, and then suddenly." The exchange succinctly defines the evolution of recession.

The US is the epicentre of fears. On the face of it, the US GDP grew 2.8 percent in the April-June period. Indeed, on Wednesday the US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell asserted "economic activity continued to expand at a solid pace". Powell stated that a September rate cut was possible but not a given, and added, "We will be data-dependent but not data-point-dependent." The smart semantics scarcely helped. Conversations among CXOs, economists and analysts migrated from a soft landing to a recession.

The consensus of fear is not entirely misplaced. New data revealed unemployment in the US had touched 4.3 percent and triggered the Sahm rule. The rule divined by economist Claudia Sahm essentially states that acceleration in unemployment—of 0.5 percent or more, using a three-month moving average relative to the previous low—signals the start of a recession. Context matters. For some, the stock sell-off is an August holiday phenomenon. It is also argued that higher unemployment is due to an expansion of the workforce. It is also true, credit card data shows, there is distress in the two-speed economy—and that there are cost limits to intervention as the US government adds a trillion dollars in deficit every 100 days. There will be splitting of hairs on the defining data, but the fears are for real.

Hard landing or not, what happens in the US does not stay in the US. Effectively, the global economic cycle yo-yos between QE and QT (quantitative easing of money and quantitative tightening). There is no dearth of studies illustrating the effect of a downturn in the US on the global economy. A 2010 study by IMF on the impact of the global financial crisis on emerging markets observed that EMs with strong external linkages experienced sharper falls in output. How does it all matter to India? The US is the world's largest economy. The impact of the global financial crisis on India—on GDP, currency, exports and credit—are all well chronicled by former RBI Governor D Subbarao. The US is among the top three destinations for exports and the largest source of remittances. Trade and investment flows will be affected in an increasingly protectionist world.

India faces the spectre of what the World Bank terms as the middle-income trap and a slide in global growth worsens the circumstance. Charting an all-weather glide path of growth rests on domestic action. Whether the US enters a recession or not, there is no disputing the need for structural reforms in India—in agriculture, which employs 45 percent of the workforce and yields a sixth of national income, and in the factors of productivity—to enable more jobs and higher incomes.

The good news is that India in 2024 is better off than in 2009. Its banks are healthier and foreign exchange reserves are higher at \$667 billion. It is the fastest growing large economy and has a presence in the emerging geopolitics. India's rise is dependent on consistent situational awareness and policy response. The global crisis could well be an opportunity.

CASTE RESERVATION FABRIC NEEDS NEW PATTERN



POWER & POLITICS

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"Begin at the beginning, the king said, very gravely, and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

FOR millenniums, caste has been cast in stone in the Indian psyche. Ironically, the legacy of discrimination was carried forward when India became a democracy, muddying the pristine playground of liberation. The social pyramid was turned on its head and generous generations scrambled up the ladder of power as a genetic journey to pelf. It also allowed uninterrupted caste-led *parivarvaad* to thrive without facing challenges.

The legacy of the bloodlines of India's rich and powerful in politics and bureaucracy sustains the system. However, a Supreme Court ruling last week could derail the gray train. The current *katsenjammer* on caste—in parliament, elections and institutions—agitated a seven-member Constitution bench of the top court. Four of them led by Justice B R Gavai felt that caste-based reservations are meritocratic, nor bureaucratic or plutocratic.

Gavai, who could be the chief justice next year, wrote: "The State must evolve a policy for identifying the creamy layer even from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes so as to exclude them from the benefit of affirmative action. In my view, only this and this alone can achieve the real equality as enshrined under the Constitution... The question that will have to be posed is whether equal treatment to unequals in the

category of Scheduled Castes would advance the constitutional objective of equality or would thwart it. Can a child of an IAS, IPS or Civil Service officers be equated with a child of a disadvantaged member belonging to the Scheduled Castes studying in a gram panchayat or zilla parishad school in a village?"

If the Bhagavad Gita is the soul of India, caste is its curse. What began millenniums ago as professional identification was perverted through the ages to create a *parti pris* paradigm to win elections. Caste-based reservations began almost 125 years ago. Considering the plight of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the Constitution-smiths added affirmative clauses for proportionate representation of underprivileged castes in the executive and the legislature—a temporary provision for just a decade.

Indian politics revels in status quo and subverts change into stasis. No party has altered the clause or dropped it. So it's discussion over. Instead, they've reserved the *weltschmerz*-laden caste system for election manifestos. Reservations were meant to raise the social and economic status of India's first post-independence generation's underclasses. Instead, it has filtered down as a third-generation prerogative. Reservation was meant as an equaliser. Now it is a combo of oligopoly and monopoly of the social elite. By their sheer control over their part of the establishment, Dalit and backward monarchs constructed a fortress-like exclusive armature that denied right of entry to those who were at the bottom of the pyramid.

While the establishment has sedulously secured the advantages for itself, the constitutional principle of checks and balance has come into play. Making a powerful case for creaming the creamy layer, Justice Gavai felt, "It is also

commonly known that disparities and social discrimination, which is highly prevalent in the rural areas, start diminishing when one travels to the urban and metropolitan areas. I have no hesitation to hold that putting a child studying in St Paul's High School and St Stephen's College and a child studying in a small village in the backward and remote area of the country in the same bracket would obliterate the equality principle enshrined in the Constitution."

Gavai wasn't alone in his views. Justice Pankaj Mithal added, "Reservation, if any, has to be limited only for the first generation or one generation, and if any generation in the family has taken advantage of the reservation and have achieved higher status, the benefit of reservation would not be logically available to the second generation."

If the judicial stand is accepted by the states and the Centre, a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe family will lose reservation status if any member has availed it in the past. The Supreme Court has diluted the quota enjoyed by subjectively- and selectively-listed castes by making it inclusive: bringing in more deserving sub-castes that were left out. The creamy layer was already eligible for OBC reservation. It excludes people whose family income exceeds ₹8 lakh a month. The unfairness lies in agricultural income not being included in the total income. Hence, the landed backward-class peasantry enjoys reservation's benefits.

Politicians are unlikely to heed the judicial advice. Since the categorising of reservations falls under the legislature, it is highly improbable that the political and bureaucratic nexus will yield to fair play. Rural India is still an area of darkness—a Naipaulian nightmare of unpunished humiliation, bondage, rape and murder. In the past three

decades, politics, civil services and business have become hereditary institutions. Successive successors continue to replace powerful progenitors. Caste-based reservations are grossly misused by caste leaders, too.

Though no official data exists about the number of SC and ST youth entering the IAS, IPS, IFS or IRS, a sample of current legislators in the states and the Centre reveals every fourth member got his or her seat from their parents. Over the past two decades, the kin of at least 20 percent of services officers were from the same Cosy Cub Club. Recently, a few youngsters from poor backgrounds made the cut, but the overwhelming majority of the marginalised classes don't have access to good education or skill development that will empower them to compete with upper-caste spawn.

V P Singh, prime minister during 1989-90, wanted to restrict senior government jobs to one person per family, irrespective of their caste. He felt that the recruitment mechanism heavily favoured the affluent. The joke doing the rounds in the power circles then was about the unsaid convention of children of senior officers appearing before a panel of UPSC interviewers made up of 'uncles and auntsies'.

At one stage, around 20 IAS officers were closely related to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's principal secretary. His view was that the dynastic monopoly of the services shouldn't thrive on rigid rules. He offered to drop the Mandal Commission if all political parties unanimously agreed to the 'One Family, One Post' principle. His social justice formula was jinxed by conspiratorial silence, because parties banded together to protect their clan, class and caste calculus. Singh retaliated by igniting the inferno of caste that engulfed the entire nation.

With over 3,000 castes and sub-castes included in the Scheduled category, a caste cartel arose led by family fiefdoms. Swami Vivekananda said in Oakland in 1900: "This caste system had grown by the practice of the son always following the business of the father." About a century and a quarter later, powerful parents continue to pass the caste and class torch to their progeny. There is no end of the beginning in sight.



SOURAV ROY

5 TEMPLES THAT ARE ODES TO NATURE



OPINION

NANDITHA KRISHNA
Historian, environmentalist
and writer based in Chennai

ENVIRONMENTAL problems are challenging the entire planet today. Most countries in the northern hemisphere faced their hottest summers this year. The recent landslides in Wayanad are yet another tragedy caused by unchecked deforestation and construction. Human impact on ecology is destroying nature, presaging a frightening future. India is urbanising in the most unplanned way, destroying the basic resources required for existence. Air pollution, water shortages, desertification and extreme weather conditions have made every season a time to dread.

Indian traditions nurtured nature as a finite resource. The primordial or cosmic matter of nature is made up of five elements—*prithvi* (earth), *vayu* (air), *apa* (water), *agni* (fire or energy) and *akasha* (space)—better known as the *pancha maha-bhuta*. Their proper balance is essential for the well-being of humankind and maintaining their harmo-

ny is a *dharma* or duty. Air and water are essential for our existence. Fire gives energy and space is the nothingness beyond our control and knowledge. Unfortunately, the contemporary world has forgotten the importance of all this.

In medieval South India, as new dynasties were springing up, trade and urbanisation were growing. To ensure that people did not forget the importance of their surroundings, the rulers and the ruled protected natural resources by giving them sanctity. Enormous temples were built to the five elements of nature. Each was a massive work of art and a reminder of the immutable *prakriti* to which we owe our harmonious existence.

At Kanchipuram, Shiva is worshipped as Ekambareswarar and is represented by a *prithvi* or earth lingam made of mud and sand. To preserve it, oil rather than water and milk are poured for the ritual baths. There are Pallava and Chola inscriptions. The loftiest *gopuram* is the 11-storey southern tower, one of the tallest in India. The temple houses many halls, the most famous being the 1,000-pillared one built in the Vijayanagara period. It is famous for single mango tree, beneath which, it is believed, Parvati performed penance beside the Vegavati river. It is an imposing structure in one's first view on entering Kanchipuram.

In the underground water stream of Jambukeshwara temple in Thiruvanaikkaval wallows the *apa* or water lingam. Even if the water is pumped out, it returns immediately. This lingam was once situated in a forest of jambu or Mal-

abar plum trees. The stream from which grew a plum tree engulfed the lingam—hence the name. It is believed that Parvati made the lingam from the water of river Kaveri. The massive outer wall covering the fifth precinct stretches over a kilometre and a half, is two feet thick and over 25 feet high. The fourth precinct contains a hall with 1,000 pillars.

At Tiruvannamalai, Shiva is worshipped as Arunachaleshwara or Annamalaiyar, and is represented by the *agni* lingam. The 9th-century Shaiva saint

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Manikkavachakar composed the Tiruvempavaai here. The temple complex is one of the largest in India. It houses four gopurams. During the festival of Karthikai deepam, a huge beacon is lit on the hill that can be seen from far, symbolising the lingam of fire reaching the sky. Before each full moon, devotees circumnavigate the Arunachala hill, performing *girivalam*. Srikalahasti is the site of the *vayu* lin-

gam, celebrating the element of air. This is where Kanappa Nayanar was prepared to offer his eyes to cover the blood flowing from the lingam. The inner temple was constructed around 5th century CE by the Pallavas, and the outer temple in the 11th century by Rajendra Chola and later by Vijayanagara kings. Inside the *sanctum sanctorum*, there is a lamp that remains permanently lit despite the lack of air. The lingam remains clean and untouched, as pure as air. According to legend, Shiva was worshipped by an elephant who sprayed water to keep the premises clean; a spider spun a web to protect the lord from dust; and a snake gave the lingam a precious gem.

Chidambaram, which houses the temple of Nataraja, displays the 108 karanas from Bharata's *Natyashastra*. The present temple was built in the 10th century when the town was the capital of the Chola dynasty. After its consecration by the Cholas, Shiva is believed to have appeared as Nataraja and performed the Ananda tandava or dance of delight in the golden hall or *pon ambalam*. The temple contains the most subtle of all the elements, *akasha*. It appears as a blank space with a *rahasya* at the back.

All the five temples are imposing structures with exquisite carvings and 1,000-pillared halls, courtyards, shrines, water tanks and gopurams. The kings of ancient and medieval India ensured that the people were constantly reminded of what they owed to nature. It would help if we remembered their message.

QUOTE CORNER

At this juncture, Manipur has the lowest per capita income and the highest rate of inflation... You already have a conflict... How do you expect the state to survive? We have helped in building this nation. We deserve an equal budget. Nirmala Sitharaman ji talked about tourism for the country, but left out the Northeast.

Alfred Kan-Ngam Arthur, Congress MP for Outer Manipur, in the Lok Sabha

Trump did crap the bed today. The only question is if he's going to roll around in it or change the sheets.

Scott Jennings, advisor to Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, reacting to Donald Trump's interview with members of the National Association of Black Journalists

I believe that all our enemies should stay [abroad], and all those who are not our enemies should return. That's my point of view.

Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin spokesman, after the biggest prisoner swap since the Cold War

MAILBAG WRITE TO

Pen pride

Bibek Debroy's article on the story of Sulekha ink was an interesting read. One brand of Indian pens made history with its impeccable performance and for being an inspiration to writers and teachers. Manufactured in small units in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh's Rajahmundry, the Guider brand nurtured by K V Ratnam needs a special mention.

Ramalingeswara Rao, email

Layered reality

Ref: *Levelling the field for poorest of poor* (Aug 3). The Supreme Court ruling allowing states to sub-categorise the Scheduled Castes for reservation is a positive step. It would reduce the anomaly among the sub-groups who suffer from varying degrees of backwardness but are bracketed as one. But the proposal to identify a creamy layer among the SCs, similar to the OBCs, should not be carried out in haste.

Dharmarajan A K, Thalassery

Not creamy

The Supreme Court's verdict on Scheduled Castes' sub-quota is a good decision. However, the creamy layer concept does not do good. Reservations are not solely for financial equality, there is the matter of social equality too. There is caste discrimination going on even among Indians in the US. Is there social equality? Do the so-called rich scheduled castes enjoy equal social status on par with others?

R Maitreyee, email

Tree cover

Ref: *Debate on landslide rages as Wayanad mourns* (Aug 2). Although it's a bitter pill to swallow for Kerala, V S Vijayan's pro-Gadgil recommendation remains a reality. A space-constrained Kerala can never afford to implement them. But one thing can be done: grow more big trees on private properties in landslide-prone areas. The crops grown near forests and on hillsides fail to prevent landslides. Agriculture should be apportioned with an adequate volume of larger trees, if necessary through a law.

Joseph V Thottan, Kottayam

Ghat ecology

The Central Electricity Authority on Friday approved the detailed project report for the Sharavathi pumped storage project in Karnataka's Shivamogga. However, this has left environmentalists unhappy. They pointed out this would affect the lion-tailed macaque reserve and the fragile Western Ghats' ecology. Every pro here will have a con.

M S Rao, Bengaluru

Leaky parliament

It's a tragedy that the new parliament building, built with almost Rs 1,000 crore and inaugurated by the prime minister in May 2023, has sprung leaks within such a short span. The government downplayed the issue and explained it as displacement of an adhesive used to fix the glass domes over the parliament lobby. But the chink is not in an ordinary building. A raft of experienced engineers and builders were put to work for a month of Sundays to fix it. A comprehensive investigation must be made and the truth brought to the public.

Rajamani Chelladurai, Palayamkottai

Donald's diatribe

Former US President Donald Trump has lost his balance of mind. Particularly after Kamala Harris replaced Joe Biden as the Democratic nominee and early predictions gave Harris an edge. The former president has started calling Harris all sorts of names in the most indecent manner. His attack on Harris for being of Indian origin has offended Indians, particularly those naturalised in America. The silence from the Indian government gives one the inkling that they consider Trump's friendship more valuable than the self-respect of Indians.

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

Budget blues

Ref: *Opposition states accuse Union government of unfair allocation* (Aug 3). The writer vividly expressed the importance of fund distribution. It seems not acceptable that those who pay higher taxes be allotted more. Allocations must be based on priority. A study of budget must not only question the equilibrium, but also the welfare of the people.

Kaliappan Palaniswami, Salem

Where's goodness, integrity



TOUCHSTONES
IRA PANDE

A RECURRENT nightmare I have is that I am drowning and can't breathe. I open my eyes with a start and discover it was the result of having covered my nose with a quilt or coverlet, and breathe easy once again. I try to imagine the horror of those who were literally buried alive as a devastating landslide in Wayanad slithered down at I am, when most people were sleeping soundly. Even worse must have been the end of those who did not die immediately but were buried under a mound of rubble and could not escape. There can be no worse death, so let us keep the politics out of it and just pray that we all learn lessons from this tragedy that was both man-made and a natural disaster, triggered by unprecedented rain.

For years, renowned ecologists have been warning governments against rampant illegal mining, blasting fragile mountains to build roads, changing forestland into human habitations, but who listens? Each party has had a role to play and blaming one or the other is not going to bring back those poor villagers and innocent lives that now lie buried. The same story took place in our national capital: the death of three students in an illegally-run basement library raises many questions, but the person who finds himself in jail is the driver of an SUV that was passing by. Really? Several coaching centres running out of residential properties, by violating every known rule in the book, now have nowhere to hide as public anger mounts and students have taken to the streets. Meanwhile, an obnoxious civil servant who lied her way into the IAS clears the exam

by gaming the system. Thankfully, she has been dismissed but the question remains: how many others have used foul means to slither in by paying money to willing helpers and by misusing the caste reservation clauses?

Every morning, the national papers are fronted by full-page colour ads of these teaching centres that proudly display a list of successful candidates. Along with their mugshots, there is a list of prominent retired bureaucrats who are advisers or are invited to share their 'knowledge' with hopeful learners. How much they are paid is anyone's guess, but in every likelihood, they are there just as window-dressing to lure innocent students. The huge financial success of the Kota industry that started this trend now has copycat 'institutes' in every town. All this is well known but has anything been done thus far to regulate these 'teaching shops'? You all know the answer to this no-brainer. Issues of paper leaks of the NEET exam as well as the dodgy reputation of this system are raised in Parliament and there are long editorial articles, but the next disaster brushes all this muck under the carpet, while the owners and promoters of this system go laughing to the bank.

The fact is that the dedicated and honest Indian is harder and harder to find

In the last 30-odd years, we have succeeded in poisoning every institution and selection process to the extent that nobody respects either the academic world, or the *sarkari* babus. It is unfair to paint everyone with the same brush but the fact is that the dedicated and honest Indian is harder and harder to find. Public trust has been eroded so deeply that it will take generations for us to believe that

goodness and integrity are not completely lost.

Let us turn now to a more entertaining topic. And this is the chutneyfication of language. I belong to the generation that still reads many newspapers and enjoys the new language, popularly known as Hinglish, slowly gaining acceptance. Our Hindi newspapers particularly are encouraged to use English words freely while reporting events and news. Now, if only we had followed this trend properly (as was done in Urdu, for example), we would not have our tongues twisted into Sanskritised translations that were promoted when Hindi became the preferred language. AIR and Doordarshan should have taken lessons from the Bombay film industry and those splendid lyricists and script writers who subtly introduced words that made it easier to convey emotions and concepts that gave us an emotional lingua franca. If Hindi is understood at all south of the Vindhyas, a large part of the credit must be given to these brilliant poets and filmmakers who reached out to the Indian inside each one of us.

Then came the Shobha De era and her natter that made English a *chatpata masala* of gossip about our stars and films. Today, I'm delighted when my *sabziwala* and cook use English words to describe what is best described by using English. However, remember that Hinglish has just the first two words to describe this 'sangam' of Hindi and English. Words borrowed from English far outnumber those that are taken from other Indian languages. Even Salman Rushdie, who introduced a new 'Bumbaiya' vocabulary into English, now writes in pristine English. There is food for thought there.

Yet, as I end this column, let me ask all of you who still read books, to go and buy a copy of 'Knife', his gut-wrenching account of the murderous attack that left him almost dead. This is a new Rushdie, a man who has confronted death first-hand and whose clever wordplay is a thing of the past. As a rumination on life, death and encounters that make one confront oneself honestly, it is unsurpassed. *Wah, Salman, wah, is all I can say. Tussi great ho.*

A geologist and a mountaineer



The writer receiving the advanced course batch from Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, 1968. PHOTO COURTESY: HARPERCOLLINS

SUDIPTA SENGUPTA

SIXTY years ago, when I started my journey to become a geologist, I could never have imagined that it was going to be a voyage full of adventure. When I chose the subject for my graduation, I had little idea that it would be a predominantly male-dominated vocation. I discovered later that very few girls studied geology as it involves rigorous fieldwork. When I look back, I feel grateful. This profession has given me so much joy and fulfilment. I had the opportunity to explore remote areas all over the world, and meet fascinating people. The memoir 'Breaking Rocks and Barriers' (published by HarperCollins) is about my journey through life as a geologist and a mountaineer.

After my MSc, when I started my doctoral studies, I worked in remote parts of the Singhbhum area in Bihar (now Jharkhand) alone and had several remarkable experiences. Sometimes I hired a young tribal boy to accompany me during the fieldwork. I faced a rogue elephant once and, on several occasions, encountered poisonous snakes. In the late Sixties, the roads were primitive or nonexistent; I had to walk mile after mile to locate rock exposures, sometimes through jungles and dried paddy fields. At the end of the day, I had to trudge long distances through rough terrain with a rucksack full of rocks. But a rock exposure with beautiful structures made me forget all the hard work.

I would spend hours working on that exposure to understand the story behind it. It gave me immense pleasure to go through the intricate path of finding suitable solutions for complex problems. To me, it was not only work; it was my way of life.

Along with my studies, I took up mountaineering as a hobby. From my childhood on, I was attracted to this adventurous sport and my parents supported me as long as it did not affect my studies. In 1953, I saw Tenzing and Hillary after their epic climb of Mt Everest in Kathmandu, where my father was posted. Later, during my Basic and Advanced training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, Tenzing was one of my instructors. I was also a member of the first all-women expedition to Ronti in 1967.

In 1970, six women mountaineers from Calcutta decided to climb a virgin peak, Lalana (20,130 ft) in Lahaul Himalaya, which had never been attempted. The leader was Sujaya Guha and I was her deputy. Sujaya was 32, I was 24 and the other members were between 22 and 28 years old. We were warned that it would be a challenging summit, but did not realise how difficult it would be. After our base

camp, as we proceeded higher, we realised that numerous crevasses crisscrossed the approach glacier.

Sujaya, Kamala and I reached the summit on August 21, 1970. We were overjoyed and on our return to the base camp, celebrated our success with the other members of the team. But the joy was short-lived. On August 26, Sujaya, Kamala and another member, Shefali, were involved in an accident while crossing a mountain river near the camp. We lost Sujaya and Kamala. Tri-

'Breaking Rocks and Barriers' is a memoir about daunting challenges and rare experiences

umph had turned into a tragedy.

In 1973, after a few years working with the Geological Survey of India, I had the opportunity to do my post-doctoral studies in Europe. I carried out fieldwork at the geological sites of Devon, Cornwall, Wales and Scottish Highlands and in Rio Tinto area in Spain. It was an uncommon sight to see an Indian girl moving around with a rucksack and a hammer in her hand! I also carried out my post-doctoral studies in Uppsala University of Sweden, where I joined the International Geodynamics Project and carried out research on the Scandinavian Caledonides for two years. In connection with this project, I carried out fieldwork in the Norwegian mountains alone for two field seasons of two months each.

There were several exciting experiences during this time. I was fortunate to carry out fieldwork in the Alps, the Pyrenees in Spain and the Appalachians and Rockies in North America. Each and every trip was exhilarating.

The opportunity to join the Third Indian Antarctic Expedition in 1983 was like a dream come true! Carrying out fieldwork in the Antarctic climate is not an easy task. We stayed in tents. The temperature can be as low as minus 15-20 degrees Celsius and the constant wind makes matters far worse. Just writing in a notebook or taking readings is difficult. Except for a few good weather days, most of the time there would be cold wind blasting against your face — the only exposed part of the body.

Being a woman, I did have to endure the hardship and disadvantages, both practical and social, of conducting fieldwork in adverse conditions. However, I have had so many rare experiences which a scientist in a laboratory would never have.

To Arjun & others, medal or no, you shine

DEEPTI BABUTA

Arjun tum nahi haare, kismat haari hai. Abki baar aisi tyari karenge, ki kismat bhi kahe, 'Le Arjun, tu jeeta. Main tere aage ghutne tekti hoon.'

(Arjun, you haven't lost, but fate has. Next time, we'll prepare so well that even your fate will have to bow before you and say, 'Arjun, you have won'.)

My son Arjun lost out on winning an Olympic medal by a whisker in Paris, coming fourth in the 10m air rifle final, but there's always a next time. To him and to all the young players, I want to say, enter the field like a fighter, remain calm like the ocean, give your 100 per cent and never lose patience.

Don't lose before you lose, don't celebrate before you win. Every player wants to win, but not all win. But no one actually loses. Only the numbers move from up to down. What if Arjun came fourth, next time he'll get a better rank. Accepting defeat with a smile is real sportsmanship.

Times such as these can be very challenging for parents as well. But, in such moments, they forget about themselves and are only worried about their loved ones, who need emotional support. However, since the children are far away, parents can only pray to God to give their child the strength to accept the loss.

Communication is underrated. There's nothing better than it. Arjun and I talk at



REUTERS

length on every topic. Judging his mood, I start a conversation with him but eventually try to take the conversation to the space where he feels relaxed.

Arjun loves Shiv Kumar Batalvi. That day will be a new lease of life for me if he wants to write poetry. He is a book lover, a very sensitive and sensible person.

Dekho, humein ek doosre ko jaise hain ussi roop mein sweekaar karna chahiye. Jo jeet kar aata hai woh bachha hamara hai, toh haare wala bhi hamara hi hai. Jeet ka jashn manao, na manao, haar mein har haal mein apne bachche ke saath rehna zaroori hota hai. Main Arjun ke saath hoon, hamesha — achhe mein bhi or bure waqt mein bhi.

(We should accept each other the way we are. If the one who's won is our child, the one who lost is ours too. You may or may

not celebrate your child's victory, but it is important to be his or her support when they are down and out. I am always with Arjun, in his good as well as bad times.)

It is natural for every athlete to dream of becoming a star. And each of them is a star in his or her own right. Just like in the sky there are a multitude of stars — some sparkling bright, while others are dim. But every athlete aims to shine bright and be a pole star like Neeraj Chopra.

I'm a big fan of Pash. To quote him, 'Sab ton khatarnak hunda hai saadde supnayan da mar jana (The most dangerous thing is the death of our dreams).' This is just the start of Arjun's Olympic dream and a fourth place can't end his journey.

— The award-winning Punjabi writer is mother of Olympian shooter Arjun Babuta

Three evocative episodes of snow leopard sightings



LT GEN BALJIT SINGH (RETD)

"As we reach for the stars, we neglect the flowers at our feet. But the great age of the mammals in the Himalayas need not be over unless we permit it to be... but when the last snow leopard has stalked among the crags and the last markhor has stood on a promontory, his ruff waving in the breeze, a spark of life will have gone, turning the mountains into stones of silence." — George B Schaller



Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*). Painted by Kay Nixon. The Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, Volume 37, 1935.

I HAD once come across a tantalisingly brief account of the sighting of a snow leopard in the wilds of India which occurred in 1906 near village Nilang, in the Jadh Ganga valley (Uttarakhand). Major HC Tytler in the company of his wife had set out from the duty station at Barrackpore to acquire an ibex trophy-head

from the upland of Tibet. At the base of a sheer cliff with a crystal-clear stream, their guides halted abruptly and signalled to the *sahibs* to come over. Lo and behold, the Tytler couple was astonished at their good luck of viewing a fine specimen of a snow leopard at 11,300 ft above sea level, literally

under their noses as it were.

After thoroughly examining its pelt and body, they concluded that the leopard had drowned barely an hour earlier. They supervised the removal of its skin. In the process, they discovered the probable cause of its death: a big stone detaching from the upper

reaches of the cliff had hit the skull and spine of the leopard with lethal force as it lay crouched to drink water. Back at Barrackpore, the skin was dispatched for trophy-mounting to Rowland Ward, world famous taxidermists of London. Maybe, it was on display when Major General Sir Harry Tytler arrived at the family mansion, post superannuation from the army in 1928.

Provisionally, at that very time, Kay Nixon, a lass of 34, was much sought after in the art circles of London. She was a bright graduate in art illustrations who had won acclaim by embellishing a few Enid Blyton stories, as also an edition of 'Alice in Wonderland'. With that baggage of accomplishments, she arrived in Bombay in 1928 on some assignments, one among others for illustrating the definitive compilation 'Wild Animals of the Indian Empire'. It led to the oil painting which in my experience is the most exquisite and enigmatic art piece of a pair of snow leopards! Was that painting from a factual sighting of the elusive cat by Kay or imaginary, is shrouded in mystery. Kay stayed on till 1954 and married an army braveheart, Col Victor Blundell, MC.

But it will be another four decades post Kay's painting that the world at large would get to see the first recorded black and white photograph of the snow leopard from the lofty heights in Chitral. George B Schaller, a young affable American field biologist with an accreditation to the New York Zoological Society and the National Geographic Society, had been stomping for mapping the field biology of mammal species, across the west to east stupendous arc formed by the Pamirs, Hindu Kush and Himalayas.

But in years of searching, Schaller got his first look at a snow leopard in Chitral in 1970 — "a hundred and fifty feet away, peering at me from the spur, her body so well moulded into the contours... smoky-grey coat sprinkled with black rosettes... pale eyes conveyed an image of immense solitude... sensing that I meant no harm, she sat up... she had a kill, a domestic goat, and at the entrance to a rock cleft nearby were her two cubs".

And his friend, Peter Mathiessen, author of 'The Snow Leopard', recounts that "after an entire month of baiting, with live goats, he (Schaller) made the first films ever taken of this creature in the wild".



A poster at a protest rally outside a UPSC exam coaching centre asks a pertinent question after three civil services aspirants died when the basement of the centre was flooded following heavy rainfall in New Delhi. PTI

CAN'T BE BUSINESS AS USUAL

Rein in recalcitrant coaching centres, hold officials accountable for failure to enforce laws, and in particular for the consequent mishaps

PUSHPA GIRIMAJI

THE tragic drowning of three UPSC aspirants in an illegally-run basement library of a coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar in New Delhi is yet another grim reminder of the callous negligence to safety exhibited by coaching centres as well as civic authorities around the country, putting at risk the lives of young students. It is also indicative of the systemic apathy and corruption that erodes the enforcement of laws in the country.

Ironically, it was only after the death of the three youngsters on July 27 owing to flooding of the basement, following heavy rains, that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) woke up to the fact that 'Rau's IAS Study Circle' was permitted to use the basement only for car parking and storage. Running a library or classes there was illegal, and the building had also encroached on the storm water drain, affecting draining of rainwater, and desilting and cleaning of drains. That the MCD had turned a blind eye to such violations by coaching centres on a large scale was also obvious from the fact that following the tragedy, the MCD sealed over 60 coaching centres and libraries running from basements in violation of building bylaws.

In fact, the MCD had been forewarned about the illegal use of the basement for running classes and a library by a UPSC

aspirant who had sent a complaint in June, followed by two reminders in July. Prompt action by the local government could well have prevented the deaths of three youngsters. Besides, the Delhi High Court had directed the MCD and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) repeatedly last year, and again this year, to close all coaching centres not conforming to statutory requirements under the Delhi Master Plan 2021 and the Delhi Fire Services Act and Rules. "There can be no compromise on the issue of safety of students," the High Court had said. Neither the coaching centre nor the MCD complied.

The brazenness with which the coaching institutes violate the law is also evident from the fact that 'Rau's IAS Study Circle' had got a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the Delhi Fire Service (DFS) on the basis that the basement was used only for storage. The DFS, which issued a fire NOC accordingly on July 9, has now started the process of cancelling the certificate. Similarly, even after the MCD had shut down coaching centres on the orders of the High Court, inspection by a team of lawyers on the request of the High Court in April this year found that some of the coaching centres were still running, under a new management or under a new name!

But then, this is the situation in most parts of the country. Following the death of three students in Delhi, several states/cities ordered inspection of coaching centres and sure enough, found flagrant violation of building bylaws and fire safety laws. Inspection of coaching institutes in Sector 34 of Chandigarh by the UT Estate Office on July 30 found many institutes using basements as classrooms, reading rooms, counselling rooms and reception offices, in gross violation of Chandigarh building laws. In Indore, the administration sealed 13 coaching institutes or study centres for running classes and libraries with no fire safety equipment, and just one narrow entry and exit. The Bhopal administration inspected nine centres and sealed six of them. In Kota, the administration ordered closure of 13 libraries operating in the basement. In Gurugram, a media report quoting fire officials said 300 coaching centres were running without the fire NOC. However, one can be sure that as the horrific incident in Delhi fades from memory, the checks will also come to a halt and it will be business as usual, for both coaching centres as well as the enforcement agencies.



Students protest in Old Rajinder Nagar over the death of three civil services aspirants. ANI

CONSUMERS CAN SEEK REDRESS

■ The question of whether education comes under the purview of consumer courts is still before the Supreme Court, but fortunately, the apex consumer court has drawn a distinction between educational institutions and coaching centres. It has held that "coaching centres cannot be equated to regular schools or colleges, which are regulated by a regulatory authority and also confer a degree or diploma on a student who has passed in the examination conducted as per rules and norms in the statute and also by universities concerned". (*Filjee Ltd vs Pramod Pareek*, RP No. 462 of 2013)

■ So, under the Consumer Protection Act, consumers can seek redress, including compensation, from those who run coaching classes for unfair trade practices, deficient and negligent services and also for the consequences of such practices or violation of prescribed laws.

FAST-TRACK PROSECUTION

■ Criminal prosecution of offenders in tragedies such as the one in the basement of 'Rau's IAS Study Circle' should be fast-tracked so that punishment is meted out quickly. In addition to the owners of coaching centres, those in the administration who failed to enforce the law should also be hauled up — that's the only way to activate these agencies.

■ In the Surat coaching class case of May 2019, where 22 teenagers were killed, 13 persons, including the owners of the coaching class, and officers of the Surat Municipal Corporation were arrested and are out on bail. The parents are still waiting for justice and from all accounts, it is going to be a long wait.

It was the same attitude that killed 22 teenagers and injured an equal number in a devastating fire at a coaching centre in Surat on May 14, 2019. The coaching classes were being conducted in a makeshift structure constructed on the terrace of the

multi-storey Takshashila Arcade, with absolutely no fire safety provisions. With no escape route, most died from the smoke, while others died while jumping from the third and fourth floors in a bid to escape the fire. Many were also injured in the process. This once again spurred many cities to conduct inspections of coaching centres for fire safety, but obviously such regulatory oversight was only temporary because soon after, there were reports of fires in coaching centres from many cities, including Chandigarh and Ludhiana.

In Delhi, students of a coaching centre in Mukherjee Nagar had a harrowing experience in June last year when the electric meters installed along the staircase on the ground floor caught fire. The smoke escaped through the staircase into the second and third floors, where coaching classes were on. Sixty-one students were injured while trying to escape clinging on to water pipes as well as electric cables dangling outside the second and third floors, after breaking the glass window. Two coaching centres were operating in the building, with no thought given to the safety of students.

The extent of infringement of safety laws in the coaching industry can be gauged from the status reports submitted last year to the Delhi High Court, which had taken up the issue suo motu as well as in response to several petitions filed after the Mukherjee Nagar incident. As per the Delhi Police, out of the 583 coaching institutes running in the national capital, only 67 had an NOC from the Delhi Fire Service. The DFS told the court that its survey of 461 coaching centres showed that the requisite fire preventive and safety measures were not in place.

In fact, following the Mukherjee Nagar fire, several cities ordered checks on coaching centres for fire safety, but the effectiveness of those regulatory actions were as usual short-lived. On May 31 this year, for example, 25 students of a coaching institute in Sector 16 of Panchkula had a narrow escape following a fire caused by a short circuit in an electrical panel on the stairs, that blocked the students' exit and

denied access to fire fighters to reach the second floor. The fire personnel had to break open a glass window and use ladders to evacuate the students. The institute did not have a fire NOC.

The Delhi tragedy should act as a wake-up call and force all states to regulate the coaching centres at least now in a transparent and corruption-free environment. For too long, these tutorials, which collect hefty fees ranging from ₹1.75 lakh to ₹3 lakh per year, have cocked a snook at law enforcement agencies, at the cost of students' life and safety. Today, only about half a dozen states have laws to regulate them and even these are not being enforced properly.

Now that the Centre has issued (in January this year) comprehensive guidelines for registering and regulating the industry, all states and UTs must adopt them. The guidelines, aimed at ensuring proper standards vis-à-vis infrastructure, curriculum and qualification of teachers, also deal with false and exaggerated advertisements and promotions by coaching centres, fees and refunds. These mandate proper counselling of students through trained and qualified counsellors and psychologists to ensure the mental well-being of students.

In the absence of proper regulation and registration, it's anybody's guess as to how many coaching centres operate in the country. However, their numbers are certainly going up sharply, thanks to the burgeoning number of aspirants looking for coaching to succeed in competitive examinations, and the widening gap between demand and availability. According to Infinium Global Research, a market research firm based in Pune, the Indian coaching class market is expected to go up from the 2021 valuation of ₹58,088 crore to ₹1,33,995 crore by 2028. This calls for urgent measures to rein in recalcitrant coaching centres and also hold the administration, including top officials, accountable for their failure to enforce laws, and in particular for the consequent mishaps.

—The writer is a consumer affairs expert



EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO SAFETY

Youngsters planning to join a coaching class should remember that they are consumers of the service being provided by the coaching class, and as a consumer paying for that service, they have a right to safety and the coaching centre has an obligation to comply with all relevant laws and make that declaration on the application form. Remember, your demand will force them to comply. Patronise only those coaching centres that assure you of your safety. Nothing is more precious than life!

"This journey of education and breaking stigma around HIV is something that will have a legacy everlasting"
— Gareth Thomas



OVERCOMING HIV STIGMA YOUTH BREAKING BARRIERS

In the face of deep-seated stigma and discrimination, young people living with HIV in Goa, are finding hope and resilience through the Human Touch Foundation. **SHOBHA SHUKLA** explores their personal journeys and examines the collective efforts that are transforming their lives and challenging societal norms

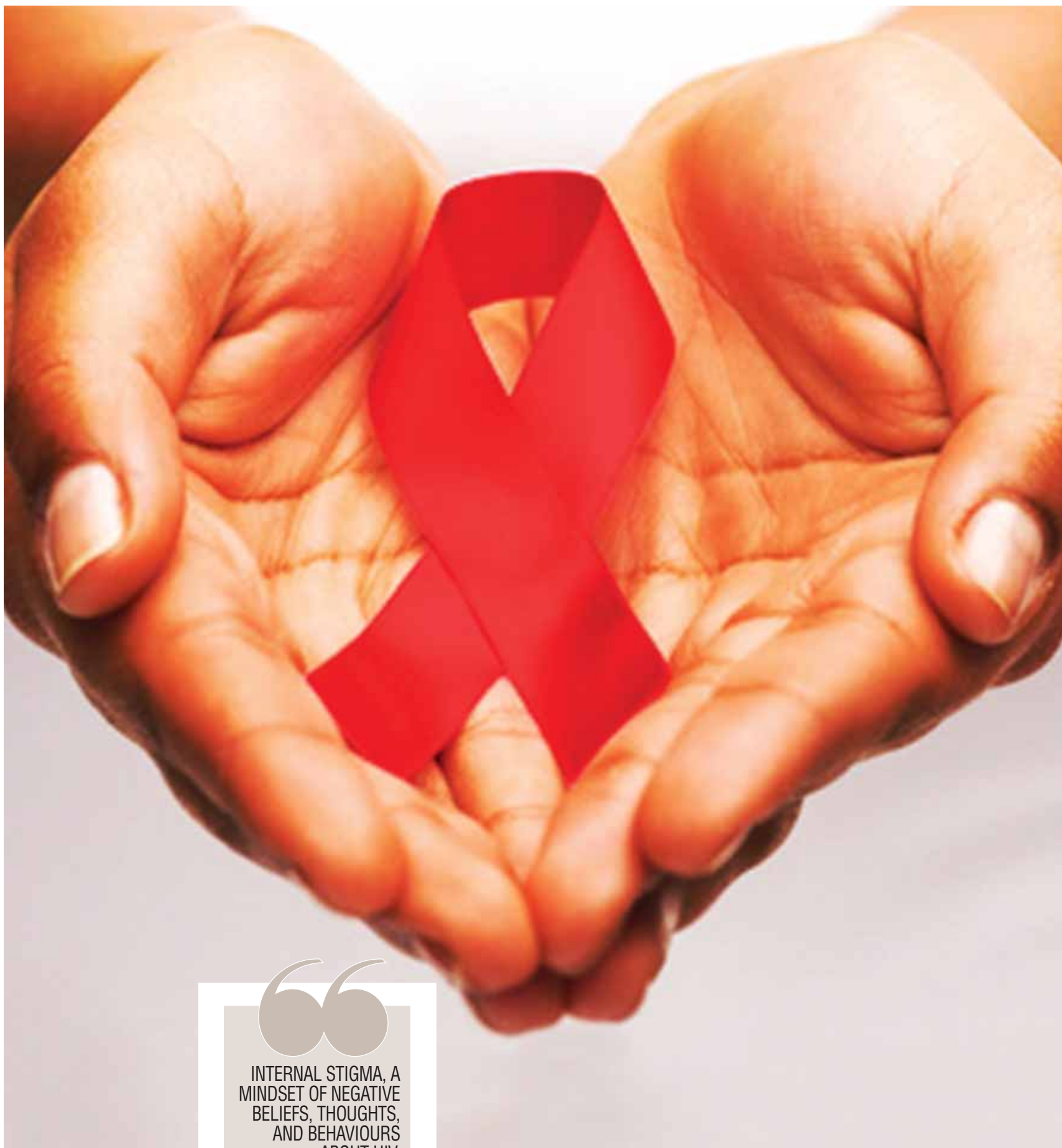


SHOBHA SHUKLA

Living with HIV often comes with a heavy burden of internal and external stigma. For many young people, this fear of discrimination can be paralyzing, affecting their ability to live normal lives. HIV-related misconceptions remain a significant barrier for those living with the virus, impacting their mental health, relationships, and opportunities in life. However, through the dedicated support of the Human Touch Foundation, these youths are not only overcoming their fears but also becoming advocates for change in their communities.

THE WEIGHT OF STIGMA

A young person living with HIV shared, "As a young person living with HIV, I had self-stigmatised myself due to the fear of discrimination... fear of discrimination if I dare disclose my HIV positive status to others... this fear had stopped me from living life like a normal person." This sentiment, echoed by many, underscores the profound impact of internal stigma. Internal stigma, a mindset of negative beliefs, thoughts, and behaviours about HIV, manifests as shame, guilt, feelings of contamination, reduced self-efficacy, self-loathing, low self-esteem, and self-rejection. "Internal stigma happens when we internalise external stigma and judgements and believe that they are true. Internal stigma also happens in the absence of external stigma and discrimination," explained Nadine Ferris France, CEO of Beyond Stigma. A youth shared his trauma, "I and my youth peers have confronted HIV-related stigma and discrimination in schools, workplaces, and societal levels. Sometimes, it is the teachers who were not cooperating or discriminating against them. The fear of disclosure – which means sharing our HIV positive status with family members, friends or others in society – the fear of being discriminated, is faced by many... the fear if we would be thrown out of the house or will our friends unfriend us..." The Human Touch Foundation, based in Goa, India, is dedicated to supporting young people living with HIV. The organization provides a comprehensive range of services including mental health counselling, nutritional support, educational and vocational training, and medical assistance. By fostering a supportive community and empowering youth-led initiatives, the foundation addresses stigma and discrimination at multiple levels. Their efforts ensure that those living with HIV can lead healthier, more fulfilling lives while advocating for broader societal change. A young girl living with HIV



shared how the Human Touch Foundation helped her overcome her fears of stigma and discrimination: "From my childhood I have been touched by Human Touch Foundation which helped me overcome my fears of stigma and discrimination related to disclosure – and helped me in various ways." She added, "As I am living with HIV, I faced a lot of stigma and discrimination from my own family as well as from society. People in the society told the family to not let me come out otherwise I will spread the virus to their children. I even faced it in my relationship with one guy. I knew him for one year and had shared everything with him but still he blamed me that I got infected because I have been sleeping with others." Despite these challenges, she found a supportive community within the Human Touch Foundation, which provides a range of services including nutritional counselling, mental



INTERNAL STIGMA, A MINDSET OF NEGATIVE BELIEFS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIOURS ABOUT HIV, MANIFESTS AS SHAME, GUILT, FEELINGS OF CONTAMINATION, REDUCED SELF-EFFICACY, SELF-LOATHING, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND SELF-REJECTION. "INTERNAL STIGMA HAPPENS WHEN WE INTERNALISE EXTERNAL STIGMA AND JUDGEMENTS AND BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE TRUE. INTERNAL STIGMA ALSO HAPPENS IN THE ABSENCE OF EXTERNAL STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION," EXPLAINED NADINE FERRIS FRANCE, CEO OF BEYOND STIGMA

health support, and job opportunities.

PERSONAL TRIUMPHS AND COLLECTIVE SUPPORT

Another young person recounted their journey: "I got to know my HIV status at the age of 13. I was with my relatives because I had lost my parents. That is when I first felt being stigmatised and discriminated against by my own family. For example, I was told not to use the common family nail cutter because if any blood comes out while cutting my nails then it can put others at risk. Or sometimes there were separate utensils for eating food. It used to hurt me." Finding support through the Human Touch Foundation, this individual connected with peers facing similar challenges and received guidance from Peter Borges, the foundation's CEO. "Peter Sir helped me a lot from the very beginning. He helped me with my documents too. We used to

have residential camps back then too, with adolescents living with HIV. I learnt a lot from these camps. Doctors were involved in these camps where we learnt a lot about HIV and how can we overcome problems we face."

THE POWER OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The Human Touch Foundation emphasizes the importance of youth-led initiatives in the HIV response. "Youth are the best equipped to lead the response to HIV," said a young intern at the foundation. Sandhya Chavan, Lead for Adolescent Health and Wellbeing, highlighted the comprehensive support provided: "We at Human Touch Foundation provide a range of youth-led services, such as mental health counselling, psychosocial support, help them avail a range of social protection schemes, nutritional packages, medical help, or treatment adherence support, among others." Masooma Sheikh, a

counselling psychologist at the foundation, stressed the need for proper mental health services in HIV care centres and a holistic approach to support young people living with HIV.

A BEACON OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE

As the Human Touch Foundation celebrates its 15th anniversary, its impact is evident in the lives it has touched. Peter Borges reflected on the journey: "Human Touch always had something different to offer when it came to support system or ecosystem which surrounded HIV care and support. For example, young people themselves speaking at different conferences including AIDS 2024 is so important. Lately, the realisation has grown over us about the importance of resilience: we must focus more on building the resilience of the young people. Issues like relationships or livelihoods cannot be missed while young counsellors themselves provide

mental health services." The foundation continues to address various needs, including relationships, sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse, TB and HIV co-infection, and child sexual abuse. Their commitment to non-institutional care and resilience-building for families and communities remains steadfast. The Human Touch Foundation has also been instrumental in initiating viral load monitoring in Goa and ensuring the uninterrupted supply of antiretroviral therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic. They offer free vocational training for young people with HIV, helping them build skills and secure employment. Dr. Kashyap Bandodkar, a volunteer with the foundation, emphasized the importance of humane and holistic care: "Usually patients appear as a 'number or statistic' in a report. But experiences (like Human Touch) tell us the life story behind those numbers or statistics. This help us – doctors – provide better care because I believe that humane and holistic care is so key." The Human Touch Foundation's journey and the stories of those it supports underscore the importance of tackling HIV-related stigma and discrimination through empathy, education, and comprehensive support. Their work serves as a beacon of hope and a model for other organizations worldwide. Despite significant advancements in the treatment of HIV, societal stigma continues to pose a major challenge for those living with the virus. The personal stories shared by young people in Goa highlight the persistent fear of discrimination that can prevent individuals from living their lives to the fullest. Internal stigma, which manifests as self-loathing and low self-esteem, often results from the external judgments and prejudices of society. Organizations like the Human Touch Foundation are making remarkable strides in addressing these issues. By providing comprehensive support services, fostering youth-led initiatives, and promoting resilience, the foundation is helping to dismantle the barriers that stigma creates. Their work emphasizes the importance of empathy, understanding, and community in overcoming the challenges faced by people living with HIV. However, the fight against stigma requires collective effort. It is crucial that society as a whole becomes more informed and compassionate towards those affected by HIV. We must reject discriminatory attitudes and instead offer support and acceptance. By doing so, we can create an environment where individuals living with HIV can thrive without fear of prejudice. Only through such a unified approach can we hope to eradicate the stigma associated with HIV and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy, fulfilling life. (Shobha Shukla is Managing Editor and Executive Director of Citizen News Service (CNS) and a health and development justice advocate. She is Coordinator of Asia Pacific Regional Media Alliance for Health and Development (APCAT Media) and Global AMR Media Alliance; views are personal)

LIVING IT UP IN JAIPUR

Jaipur, a bustling hub of commerce and culture in North India, is famed for its grand palaces, majestic forts, and exquisite crafts. Known globally for its intricate artwork and stunning jewellery, the Pink City exudes charm with its vibrant colours and rich artistic heritage. Alongside its historical grandeur, contemporary spaces reflecting local elegance have emerged as the city continues to evolve and thrive

BY AKANKSHA DEAN



JAIPUR, is a delightful place to visit with its colourful palaces, historic forts, lively markets showcasing local crafts, and diverse food options. It's a city that offers something for everyone. The pink city is also home to luxurious hotels and unique restaurants. Stroll along streets lined with palaces, temples, and the occasional cow. Indulge in royal culinary delights, explore exquisite jewellery shops, and discover a weekend of tranquillity amidst the bustling vibrancy.

TRADITION MEETS CONTEMPORARY

Nestled near Amber fort off Delhi-Jaipur highway, The Leela Palace Jaipur sits with the backdrop of Aravalli hills amidst 8 acres of gardens. This hotel aims to impress guests with luxury while maintaining a cosy atmosphere. Royal opulence can be felt in the wood panels, windows, and artwork, yet there's a touch of modernity. The design reflects local artistry, from ancient Thikri mirror engraving to Shekhawati canvases on the walls. Traditional meets contemporary in a blend of comfort and grandeur at this splendid hotel. Stepping into the Leela Palace Jaipur feels like entering a world of extravagance and refinement

deeply rooted in history. This stunning hotel offers a range of accommodation options, including rooms, suites, and villas - all meticulously designed to provide a lavish experience. The Royal Plunge Pool villa is a highlight of my stay, radiating a sense of lightness and luxury. The spacious layout, complete with cosy armchairs, indulgent day beds, and a private pool, makes me feel like royalty. The attention to detail was exquisite, from the walk-in wardrobe to the marble-trimmed bathroom with a tub, not to mention the plush robes and organic toiletries provided. And for those seeking the epitome of luxury, the Maharaja suite exceeds all expectations with its grand living spaces, luxurious bathrooms, and stunning Palace views. One of the standout aspects of my experience at Leela Palace Jaipur is the warm and welcoming presence of Sharad Puri, the General Manager. His humble approach and dedication to ensuring guests feel at home set the tone for the genuinely gracious service throughout the hotel. The meticulous butler service, provided by a dedicated team of footmen in true Leela Palace style, adds an extra touch of luxury to my stay. In terms of relaxation amenities, the expansive spa and well-equipped

gym are truly remarkable. One can also enjoy exploring the local area with running maps provided by the hotel, along with the option to use bikes for leisurely rides or even embark on a customized cycling safari itinerary. Situated close to the capital, the hotel offers a perfect base to explore Jaipur in all its splendour, with historical sites, vibrant bazaars filled with textiles and handicrafts, and renowned silver and gemstone markets just a stone's throw away. My stay is a seamless blend of opulence, comfort, and exceptional service, making it a truly unforgettable experience.

INDIA'S ONLY CANDLE LIT RESTAURANT AND MORE

From its impressive design and stylish interiors to the refined culinary offerings and carefully curated immersive experiences, Leela Palace Jaipur epitomizes authentic Indian luxury. As my eyes wander through the architectural marvels of the Sheesh Mahal, I find myself at Mohan Mahal, the Indian specialty restaurant glowing softly with candlelight. The ambience is crafted with 350,000 pieces of Thikri mirror, meticulously assembled by artisans over three years, creating an aura of refined elegance. Being India's only candle-



lit restaurant, it is truly a delight for the senses. The royal cuisine from Rajasthan and Awadh served at Mohan Mahal is a blend of simplicity and artistry, with standout dishes like the Seekh kebab dressed with barley. Breakfast is equally splendid, presented on beautiful tableware and featuring a selection of à la carte favourites. In the afternoons, I enjoy a delightful tea service at the Jharokha bar, where expertly crafted cocktails are served till late. I am particularly impressed by the Martini concocted by the talented mixologist, who



shares stories of mixing drinks for royalty. For a more intimate dining experience, Hawa Mahal offers a private rooftop setting where both the views and flavours are rich with captivating charm. Truly The hotel creates memorable moments that capture the essence of Indian indulgence, blending traditional rituals with modern hospitality seamlessly. ALL VEGETARIAN Burrowed discreetly within the vibrant Johri Bazaar, known for its jeweller's market, the intimate Johri Restaurant seamlessly blends into

the bustling surroundings. Tucked away on a tranquil lane just off the main colonnaded street, which played a pivotal role in securing the city's spot on the UNESCO World Heritage list, this hidden gem welcomes all guests. Attached to a charming five-suite boutique hotel, The Johri, the restaurant offers a unique dining experience that harmoniously intertwines with the heritage and allure of the historic marketplace. Savouring Jaipur's iconic zero-sized peas here is a revelation. Despite its fame that stretches as far as Dubai and Japan,

these peas had somehow escaped my taste buds back in Delhi. The petite yet incredibly sweet and flavourful green peas are beautifully served alongside corn and spinach on a generous plate. Chef Somu Kumar has expertly crafted a menu that celebrates local and regional flavours with organic, seasonal, and vegetarian ingredients. Signature dishes like paan patta chaat and Dal Johri add a timeless charm to this culinary experience. Indulge in expertly crafted dishes that stay true to their origins, whether presented in a classic style or with a modern twist. The Jackfruit Nihari and truffle cheese kulcha stuffed with mushroom and local cheeses offer a burst of flavours in every bite. Accompanied by Missi roti and palak kofta in cashew gravy, the menu caters to diverse palates. Dietary preferences are accommodated, with gluten-free and Jain-friendly options like sangri ki shammii kebab and mirchi ka halwa.

Akanksha Dean is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.



Indulge in Pure Joy

Step into a world of craft brews and culinary delights at BeeYoung Brewgarden, the latest hotspot in South Delhi's vibrant social scene

Delhi's social scene has a new star. The BeeYoung Brewgarden, nestled in the bustling heart of South Delhi at The Panchshila Rendezvous. This lively venue is set to redefine your nights out, offering an unparalleled blend of craft beer, exquisite cuisine and endless entertainment. Whether you're a local or a visitor looking for a memorable night out, BeeYoung Brewgarden promises to deliver an experience that is both dynamic and delightful. As you step inside, you're transported to a European getaway, with chic barn-style ambience and lush, vibrant décor. The carnival-like atmosphere is inviting, with alfresco seating and stylish indoor spaces perfect for both intimate gatherings and spirited weekend celebrations. It's a setting where every detail contributes to a sense of revelry and relaxation. At the heart of BeeYoung Brewgarden is its commitment to craft brewing excellence. The menu takes you on a culinary journey, artfully pairing finely crafted brews with gourmet dishes designed to delight the senses. Each dish reflects an immersive culinary art approach, where flavour and presentation come together to create unforgettable dining experiences. With a global array of flavours, local and seasonal specialties cater to South Delhi's cosmopolitan crowd. The emphasis on quality ingredients and creative recipes ensures that every visit offers something new and exciting for

even the most discerning palates. Entertainment at the Brewgarden is as diverse as its menu. Enjoy a blend of games and nostalgia with options like Bocce Ball, Cornhole and vintage arcade machines, providing endless hours of competitive fun. The venue hosts live sports screenings, vibrant music performances and sets by an in-house DJ, ensuring a dynamic atmosphere that keeps you engaged throughout the evening. Whether you're in the mood for a lively party or a serene escape, BeeYoung Brewgarden caters to all your social needs. The soul of BeeYoung Brewgarden is its namesake beer, India's first crafted strong beer, known for its smooth, citrusy notes and crisp finish. BeeYoung Beer embodies the youthful spirit of India, with every sip reflecting the Kimaya Himalayan Beverages' dedication to quality and innovation. For those looking to immerse themselves in a world of craft brewing, vibrant social scenes and exquisite dining, BeeYoung Brewgarden is the place to be. It's where the art of microbrewing meets community and celebration, promising unforgettable experiences with every visit. Address: The Panchshila Rendezvous, Panchshila Park, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, 110017 Timings: 11 AM - 12 AM Instagram: @beeyoungbrewgarden Price For Two: INR 2500/- (Approx) For Reservations: +91 9354431386

Modern Twist on Classic Gastropubs

Embark on a culinary journey with Monkey Bar's latest gastropub sensation, blending contemporary design and inventive dishes for an unparalleled experience

In a city that's no stranger to culinary innovation, the revamped Monkey Bar emerges as a beacon of excitement and fresh perspective. Nestled within the iconic pyramid glass building in Vasant Kunj, this beloved gastropub has returned with a vibrant new look and a promise to elevate the dining experience. Monkey Bar, which first captured attention in 2012, was instrumental in popularising the gastropub concept in India. Now, it's back with a renewed vision, blending its signature charm with contemporary flair. The space has been transformed into an 'Urban Tropical Dreamscape,' reflecting a design ethos that is both inviting and dynamic. The lush greenery and bright, cheerful hues of yellow and sage green infuse the venue with a sense of energy and warmth that's perfect for any time of day. The menu at Monkey Bar is where the true magic happens. It's a celebration of flavours, seamlessly melding the familiar with the innovative. From classic favourites like their renowned burgers to new, exciting dishes such as Methi-spiced Prawns and Jackfruit Tacos, the culinary offerings are designed to surprise and delight. Each dish is crafted with a blend of regional Indian spices and global influences, providing a taste experience that is both unique and accessible. One of the standout features of the revamped Monkey Bar is its new coffee programme. The introduction of three distinct categories, 'The Usual Suspects', 'You Do Your Brews', and 'The Unusual Suspects' offers something for every coffee lover. Whether you're in the mood for a classic Espresso or something more adventurous like the Nitro



Cold Brew, there's a brew to suit every palate. This thoughtful addition enhances the café's appeal, making it a versatile destination for everything from morning pick-me-ups to evening relaxation. The bar menu, crafted by Lead Mixologist Harish Chhimwal, continues Monkey Bar's tradition of inventive cocktails. By incorporating local ingredients and innovative techniques, the drinks menu offers a refreshing take on both classic and contemporary cocktails. The new creations, such as the Manga Mule and Rasam ki Kasam, provide a unique twist on traditional flavours, demonstrating a commitment to both creativity and quality. The revamped Monkey Bar is more than just a place to eat and drink; it's a space designed for enjoyment and connection. With its lively atmosphere, interactive elements like a pool table and Instagram-worthy spots such as the quirky banana sofa, the venue encourages guests to relax,

socialise and make lasting memories. This thoughtful redesign makes it clear that Monkey Bar is committed to providing a comprehensive, engaging experience for its patrons. The new Monkey Bar offers a delightful fusion of tradition and innovation. Its updated menu, inventive drink options and vibrant atmosphere ensure it remains a top choice for those seeking a memorable dining experience. For anyone looking to explore new flavours, enjoy expertly crafted drinks or simply unwind in a dynamic setting, Monkey Bar's latest incarnation promises to be an exceptional destination. Wallet Factor: Meal for two with alcohol: INR 1800 plus taxes | Meal for two without alcohol: INR 3000 plus taxes Open 7 days a Week: Sunday to Saturday - 1pm. to 1am. Address: Monkey Bar, Local shopping complex, 11 Vasant Kunj, Next to mini cooper-110070 Instagram: monkeybarind Facebook: monkeybarind

Redefining Coffee Culture

Discover a fresh take on coffee with First Coffee, blending innovation and indulgence to cater to the modern coffee lover's palate

Step into a revolution in coffee culture with First Coffee, where each cup is more than just a beverage - it's a celebration of bold flavours and innovative experiences. This fresh, dynamic brand is transforming the coffee scene with a blend of artisanal quality and modern flair, setting a new standard for coffee lovers everywhere. Founded by Sohrab Sitaram, a distinguished name in Delhi's food and beverage world; Shiv Dhawan, a serial entrepreneur with a passion for innovation and Chandini D Purnesh, the visionary behind the Harley Estate, First Coffee brings together expertise and enthusiasm to craft the ultimate coffee experience. Their beans, sourced from the renowned Harley Estate in Chikmagalur, promise an exceptional taste journey, reflecting the lush landscapes and rich heritage of the estate. First Coffee's appeal extends beyond its premium blends. The cafés offer a stylish, minimalist setting that caters to both quick stops and relaxed hangouts. The design ethos emphasises clean lines and a vibrant atmosphere, creating a space that feels both contemporary and inviting. The menu showcases First Coffee's dedication to flavour and creativity. Dive into the 'Untamed Espresso' for a bold start or savour the 'Cold Blooded Brew,' a daring concoction that combines cascara syrup with a robust coffee base. For a whimsical twist, try the 'Jelly Jolt Affogato,' where coffee meets ice cream and jelly in a delightful fusion. Classic offerings like 'The OG Cold Coffee' are given a modern twist, ensuring there's something for every palate. Tea enthusiasts can also rejoice with the unique blends available. The 'Teaminator,' a refreshing mix of hibiscus and watermelon syrup and 'Cascara Thunder' offer bold new takes on traditional favourites. The Boba Nova collection is particularly exciting, featuring the 'Mango Boba Bomb' and 'Lychee Loca Bomb' for those who love a playful and fruity twist. First Coffee stands out as a game-



changer in the coffee industry. The brand's focus on combining artisanal quality with innovative offerings makes it a notable player in the market. The variety of options, from bold espressos to playful boba teas, caters to a wide range of tastes and preferences. Moreover, First Coffee's commitment to sustainability adds a layer of ethical responsibility that enhances its appeal. This brand isn't just offering a cup of coffee; it's creating a vibrant, inclusive coffee culture that resonates with modern consumers. It's exciting to see a brand that balances exceptional quality with social consciousness, setting a high bar for others in the industry. In a world where coffee culture is evolving, First Coffee stands out as a beacon of quality and creativity. With its commitment to exceptional brews and a vibrant coffee experience, it's more than just a place for your daily caffeine fix, it's a destination for those who appreciate the art of coffee. Embrace the revolution and make First Coffee a part of your daily routine. Your taste buds and your coffee cravings will thank you. Instagram: @yourfirstcoffee Price For Two: INR 450/- (only beverages) Locations: DLF Cyber Park, Gurugram; Pacific Mall in Pitampura; Pacific Outlet Mall in Jasola.



BK SINGH

A RECIPE FOR DISASTER IGNORED WARNINGS AND THE PERILS OF UNSUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Despite advice in 2020 to relocate 4000 families from landslide-prone areas, Kerala proceeded with a mega hydro-electric project nearby. Incessant rains led to devastating landslides, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable development and better disaster management

The flooding and landslides in Kerala since 1991 had reportedly claimed several human lives, till the state witnessed the worst disaster of its kind at Mundakkai, Wayanad in the wee hours of 30th July. In 2020 State Disaster Management Authority advised relocation of 4000 families from landslide-prone areas that included Mundakkai. State did not heed the warning and on the contrary, has proposed a mega hydro-electric project involving an underground tunnel barely two km from the site of the current horror.

Incessant rains of 572 mm in 48 hours have led to two major landslides, one at 2.00 am at Mundakkal followed by another at 4.00 am at Chooralmala towns trapping hundreds of families. The debris further covered Vellarmala GVH school. The landslide also washed away the bridge connecting Chooralmala town with Mundakkai & Attarmala. So far 126 people have been found killed, 196 injured and more than a hundred missing or marooned in swathes of slush, mud and misery triggered by continuous and heavy rainfalls for two days. Dead bodies have also been found at Pothukal village that were carried by flowing water for 20 km in the Chaliyar River. High Tension lines and transformers of the Mekkadi electrical section have also been damaged and resuming power in the area has been a challenge. Landslides washing away the bridge have posed further challenges for relief and rescue operations, though all state and central agencies are putting up their might to remove debris, find survivors, treat the injured and move the people to safer locations and camps. Rescuers are crossing the river in spate with the help of the ropeways but mist, bad weather and unstable terrain are making it more difficult. Army has rushed to set up Bailey Bridge to the site, which has been moved on the road from Chennai.



This deluge affected adjoining areas of Karnataka and left the Kapila River in the Mysuru district in spate, after 80,0000 cusecs of water were let out of the Kabini dam, severely affecting the traffic between Karnataka and Kerala. Kodagu roads were also flooded and many persons stuck were rescued. Landslides also occurred repeatedly on the Shiradi Ghats section of NH 75 connecting Bengaluru and Mangalore holding the traffic for several hours and eventually re-routing them via Kodagu and Sampaji Ghats. A few weeks earlier a landslide had occurred near Ankola, Uttar Kannada district along the newly widened National Highway burying moving vehicles underneath that claimed a dozen human lives, and many others went missing. Next to the Himalayas, the

Western Ghats have the most fragile ecosystem and despite the disasters striking frequently, we have not mended our ways and continued to engage in unsustainable activities in the name of development. The entire Ghats section from Gujarat to Kerala once had luxuriant tree/forest cover that provided the source and the catchment of several east-flowing and west-flowing rivers – a key lifeline for everyone in peninsular India. With the changes in land use patterns, the integrity of the catchment of the rivers is compromised, resulting in many of the streams and rivers becoming seasonal. People who have enjoyed the perennial flow of water in the streams in the past have now been suffering for their basic needs for drinking, agriculture and plantations.

Western Ghats comprise undulating terrain and diverting lands comprising tree growth for cultivation of tea, coconut, banana, coffee, spices etc is never sustainable. Kerala has lost its natural forests at a very fast pace and individuals, public and private agencies have grown plantations for quick cash. Some areas are also encroached. Proponents of such projects argue that destroying forests and growing bananas, tea, cashew coconut etc provide employment and help in GDP growth. This perception is highly misplaced. Such projects are not evaluated on a long-term basis. There are hardly any methods to work out an economic valuation of forests destroyed in the process. When a heavy downpour occurs for days, it causes landslides, landslips, destroys houses, roads bridges etc. To rebuild the

infrastructure we need to further spend money. The infrastructure destroyed in 2018 and 2019 in the Kerala flood disaster was rebuilt by spending more than 50,000 crores rupees. If the true environmental cost is considered, none of the plantation projects of growing tea etc would be viable. Labourers of tea gardens as well as banana and coconut gardens must be re-skilled and their services can be utilized for manufacturing etc. 2018 floods in Kodagu Karnataka, a district adjoining Wayanad, also played havoc with the life of the people. I have discussed the reasons for flooding and landslides in this region, in my book, "Changing Land Uses – Shrinking Streams and Carbon Sinks". Like Wayanad, Kodagu is again a hilly district covering an area of nearly 4200 sq km. However only 1750 sq km was reserved as forests and

Protected Areas, leaving another 1000 sq km occupied by habitation and agriculture; the remaining 1450 sq km had still quite a luxuriant tree cover until the 1980s. These were wooded areas under the control of the Revenue Department of the state, and the tree felling in such areas was regulated by the Karnataka (Preservation) of Trees Act, where forest officers were empowered to grant/ deny permission for the removal of trees. There is evidence on record to suggest that some officers had connived with the timber merchants and granted permission to remove tens of thousands of trees every year. This has resulted in compromising the ecological security of the region leading to frequent disasters of the type we are experiencing. The only solution that comes to everyone's mind is to stop

destroying the natural forests and making any changes in land use. There is a proposal to tag the Western Ghats as Eco sensitive area, but both governments of Kerala and Karnataka have yet not come on board. Unless they mend their ways the disasters would keep on striking more frequently and would be more destructive. Finally, let the column also deal with the reasons why there are heavy downpours for days in this warming world. The world at present including India is faced with heat waves, wildfires and heavy downpours leading to flooding. The uncontrollable wildfires in Canada, California and other parts of Western world are the consequences of global warming. Leh in India, which is located 3 km above the mean Sea level has the airfield at the highest altitude in the country and has been registering 32 degree Celsius temperature for some days in the last week of July. Due to such unusual temperatures, the air at this altitude gets rarefied and engines cannot develop the thrust required for takeoff. For the first time, all flights to and from Leh have remained suspended for these days.

High downpours are functions of higher rate of evaporation from Sea surfaces. As the Sea surfaces warm, evaporation increases leading to excessive moisture-laden clouds in the atmosphere. Once the conditions are favourable, it leads to heavy downpours. It can have very dangerous consequences in urban centres, as we have recently seen the drowning of three students in the basement of Rau coaching centre, Rajendranagar Delhi. The Civic Agencies must re-model the stormwater drains to take the load of 100 mm of rain per hour. These drains were originally designed for 25 mm of rain per hour. Building bylaws should also change; Basements should have only huge sumps and Parking space for vehicles and nothing else.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Karnataka; views are personal)

Unveiling the misogyny in fairytales: A feminist critique

In the enchanting world of fairytales, age-old stories have woven themselves into the fabric of our culture, shaping our perceptions and understanding of the world around us. Yet, beneath the guise of magic and fantasy lies a troubling reality: the portrayal of women through archaic tropes that perpetuate harmful stereotypes writes **SULAGNA MOHANTY**

In the enchanting world of fairytales, age-old stories have woven themselves into the fabric of our culture shaping our perceptions and understanding of the world around us. Yet, hidden beneath the guise of magic and fantasy lies a troubling reality; the portrayal of women through archaic tropes that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. If seen from a feminist lens, tropes like the witch, the evil stepmother and the damsel in distress reflect and reinforce harmful stereotypes about women and limit and distort our understanding of women's experiences.



SULAGNA MOHANTY

It is essential to challenge and dismantle these harmful stereotypes to create a more inclusive and empowering society for women. By portraying women in positions of authority as capable, compassionate and supportive, we can inspire future generations of women to aspire to leadership roles and contribute positively to society

withcraft and executed in brutal witch hunts. These women were often healers, midwives or other powerful figures in their communities targeted for their knowledge and independence. The fear of witches and the persecution of women accused of witchcraft spread to colonial countries like India where women were often accused of witchcraft and subjected to violence and even death. Even today, women in some parts of India are killed in the name of witch hunts accentuating the lasting impact of this harmful stereotype. This concept of the witch reflects society's discomfort with powerful women and is a reminder of the importance of challenging stereotypes and celebrating women's autonomy and strength.

Further, the portrayal of the evil stepmother in fairytales not only vilifies women in positions of authority but also perpetuates a harmful narrative of competition and division among women. By pitting a woman against another woman, society creates a "divide and rule" policy where women are encouraged to fight among themselves rather than unite for their common rights and goals. This stereotype undermines the credibility of women in leadership roles by painting them as inherently



dangerous and untrustworthy. It diminishes the achievements of women by suggesting that their success comes at the expense of others developing a culture of suspicion and mistrust among women. Moreover, the depiction of the evil stepmother discourages young girls from aspiring to leadership roles as it reinforces the idea that women in power are to be feared and avoided. Instead of inspiring girls to pursue their ambitions and dreams, this stereotype instills fear and self-doubt, limiting their

potential and opportunities for growth. It is essential to challenge and dismantle these harmful stereotypes to create a more inclusive and empowering society for women. By portraying women in positions of authority as capable, compassionate and supportive, we can inspire future generations of women to aspire to leadership roles and contribute positively to society. The damsel in distress trope exemplified by characters like Cinderella, Rapunzel and Sleeping Beauty portrays women as

helpless victims in need of rescue by a male saviour. This narrative diminishes women's agency by suggesting that they are incapable of taking care of themselves and solving their problems. It also underpins the idea that a woman's ultimate goal in life is to find a man to rescue and protect her. In Cinderella, the titular character is rescued from her life of servitude by Prince Charming who saves her from her oppressive stepfamily and offers her a life of luxury and love. Similarly, Rapunzel is locked

away in a tower by a wicked witch until she is rescued by a prince who climbs up her hair. Sleeping Beauty is cursed to sleep for a hundred years until she is awakened by true love's kiss. These stories send a harmful message to audiences particularly young girls by implying that women are incomplete without a man to rescue them. They fail to acknowledge women's strength and ability to overcome challenges on their own. By perpetuating this trope, these stories emphasize outdated gender

roles and limit the potential of women to be seen as capable and independent individuals.

Hence, it is time to challenge these harmful tropes and create new narratives that empower young girls and women and celebrate their diversity and strength. Instead of portraying women as either wicked witches, evil stepmothers or helpless damsels, fairytales must depict women as complex, multifaceted individuals with agency and autonomy. By telling stories that reflect the diverse experiences and identities of women, we can create a more inclusive and empowering narrative for future generations. One must realise that the witch, evil stepmother and damsel in distress tropes in old fairy tales are not harmless storytelling devices; they are powerful tools that shape our perceptions of women and their place in society. By examining these tropes through a feminist lens, we can begin to challenge and dismantle the stereotypes they perpetuate paving the way for a more inclusive and empowering narrative for women everywhere. It is time to tell new stories to our kids; stories that empower and inspire women to embrace their true selves and rewrite their destinies.