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Recalcitrant jumbo

Anchoring inflation will be the base for long-term growth

The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has for an eighth consecutive meeting chosen to leave the benchmark repo rate unchanged at 6.50% on concern that 'elevated food inflation could derail' its efforts to ensure durable price stability. Governor Shaktikanta Das, who had just two months ago spoken of the 'elephant' of inflation having begun its journey back to the forest after going on a walkabout, flagged the risk that stubborn food price gains pose to the overall disinflation path as justification for the MPC's stand. Food inflation as measured by the Consumer Food Price Index accelerated to a provisional 8.7% in April, from March's 8.52%, and recent indicators such as Crisil's food plate costs suggest that price gains spurred by a surge in tomato, onion and potato prices may have quickened even further in May. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) forecast on June 8, that headline retail inflation likely increased by 31 basis points last month to 5.14%, driven almost entirely by a 40 basis points acceleration in food price gains to 9.1%. The MPC, which voted by a 4-2 majority to "remain focussed on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target" of 4%, flagged the challenges it faces in achieving this goal as increasing adverse climate events trigger supply shocks that make it very hard to foresee the food price trajectory. The CMIE cited last month's heatwaves as the cause for the rise in the costs of fruits and vegetables.

The MPC is also only too aware that besides the threat from escalating food costs, which remain vulnerable to the precariously low water storage levels at the country's reservoirs as well as the ongoing exceptionally hot summer temperatures, rising prices of industrial metals could undermine the deflationary trend in core inflation. Add to the mix the uncertain outlook for crude oil prices given the tensions in West Asia and the output cuts being implemented by the OPEC+ producer nations, and it is a recipe for heightened uncertainty on the inflation path. The RBI's latest round of surveys underline precisely why price stability is the central concern for policymakers. While households' surveyed in May expect inflation to quicken for all major product groups, both over the three months and one year ahead periods, consumer confidence too moderated from the March round of the survey with an increased majority of almost 80% of respondents expecting price gains to accelerate in one year's time. Governor Das is absolutely justified in maintaining an unwavering focus on anchoring inflation expectations, given that it is, as he put it, "the required foundation for sustained" long-term growth.

A NEET mess

More efforts to prevent egregious violations are needed

In the little over a decade that NEET has been implemented in India, it has gathered as much notoriety as a static stone accumulates moss. In the latest round, the National Testing Agency, which conducts NEET, has been forced to appoint a four-member committee to go into the charges and allegations made about the conduct of the eligibility and entrance test for medicine for 2024. About 1,500 students from six centres complained that they were not given the full time for completing the exam, because of various reasons: distribution of the wrong question paper, torn OMR sheets, technical glitches, and delay in distribution of the OMR sheets. The court allowed granting grace marks to those who were affected. After publication of results, it was noted that some students scored 718/719 out of 720, impossible with the existing evaluation pattern. It was also charged that an unusually high number of students scored full marks. The NTA later clarified that the odd marks were a result of granting grace marks as mandated by the court, and that in general it was an easy paper, so many students had scored full marks. But that was not all; there were reports of the NEET UG question paper being leaked before the exam. Inaccuracies were reportedly found in the NTA NEET UG official answer keys, and there were charges of inconsistent evaluation of the UG papers. Political parties have called for a thorough, competent third-party probe into the charges, and groups of students have also demanded a retest. Every year, there are charges of poorly managed exam centres, and absurd high-handedness over what the candidates are allowed to wear. Cheating scams where candidates have sent in proxies to write the exam in their stead, have been exposed.

Arguably one of the biggest entrance examinations conducted annually, with nearly 23 lakh students taking the test, it is no surprise that NEET has had a chequered past. Experts argue that with an exam of this scale, it is impossible to be completely error-free. But, year after year, news of egregious violations during the exams hits headlines. The NTA must, with the assistance of States, ensure that technical glitches and cheating scams, including premature release of question papers, and using proxies, do not recur. If this can be done by exercising greater rigour, and with a longer, more meticulous preparation routine, then no efforts should be spared to do so. Additionally, it should pay attention to demands that all NEET admissions come under single window counselling only; and a re-evaluation of the zero-percentile benchmark for PG admissions, besides strict regulation of fees in private medical colleges.

The Bareilly case and a flawed criminal justice system



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A few weeks ago, the case of a woman who had filed a rape case, was sentenced to imprisonment, and fined by a court in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, dominated the headlines. The narrative, echoed by select media users, painted a picture of a woman who had brazenly fabricated rape accusations. This, of course, perpetuated the damaging stereotype that false claims by women are the norm. But, a deeper dive into the trial proceedings reveals a range of systemic shortcomings in our law enforcement machinery and social complexities that demand urgent attention (ST 15/2020 before Additional Sessions Judge (Fast Track Court), Bareilly).

Lackadaisical investigation

In 2019, Pooja's (name changed) mother filed a missing person's complaint stating that her 15-year-old daughter was missing and that she suspected Ramesh (name changed) of having kidnapped her. But Pooja appeared a few days later saying that she had been taken to Delhi by Ramesh and raped by both him and several other men, with the knowledge of his mother and sister. She claimed that she ran away from Delhi to her home. No proof of her age was available, but an external medical examination showed her to be 18, and not 15 years old as she claimed to be. A more thorough examination was crucial for the prosecution's case for any evidence of sexual assault, but she refused to undergo this. Another fact is that she is a married woman.

Her statement to a magistrate was recorded, and Ramesh arrested. In her first statement to the court during the trial, she said that she had been kidnapped and raped. In her cross-examination four months later, she said that she had been made to give a false complaint against Ramesh by her mother as there was personal animosity between the mother and Ramesh.

She also said that a police officer had coerced her to lie. Based on glaring loopholes in the prosecution's case, such as the contradictions in her statements on her abduction and recovery, the lack of medical evidence due to the negligence of the investigating officer and her refusal to undergo a medical examination, Ramesh was acquitted in 2024. A perjury case was registered against Pooja, for which she was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment and a fine (SC No. 215/2024 before Additional District Judge Bareilly) imposed.

This case is a telling example of the lackadaisical approach to police investigation and where the prosecution did not even attempt to patch together a case. At the time of filing the charge sheet, other than Pooja's statement and her family members supporting the fact that she was missing, there was absolutely no evidence against Ramesh. Of course, the statement of a prosecutrix in a sexual assault is crucial, but this was a case where there were claims of her being taken to another place and where multiple accomplices were allegedly involved. But those angles were not probed. There is no circumstantial evidence placing Ramesh along with Pooja at any point. There is no medical evidence to corroborate the claim of rape. There is a claim of the mother calling Ramesh when Pooja went missing but there is no evidence placed on record to prove this. The alleged crime scene – a room in Delhi – remained unlocated and unexamined, and the clothes worn by Pooja were not even collected for forensic analysis. Even the rented property where Ramesh was living in was not examined. The site map produced as evidence was a map showing the front door to Pooja's house since her mother said she had been abducted from their house. A vegetable market, from where she was taken, as in Pooja's statement to the magistrate, was not examined. Even though it was alleged that Ramesh's mother and sister witnessed the rape, they were neither charged for abetment nor examined as witnesses.

> The case — one of wrongful and protracted imprisonment — spotlights the need for improved police investigation protocols, prosecutorial autonomy, and judicial supervision

Multiple stakeholders overlooked what has been a notably weak case along the way. Section 173(8) of the CrPC allows a magistrate to direct further investigation in case of a flawed investigation. However, in this case, the magistrate committed the case for trial despite the glaring gaps in the investigation. The magistrate could call for the case diary under Section (172(2) of the CrPC, which may have revealed discrepancies or inadequacies in the investigation. The public prosecutor's endorsement of a patently weak charge sheet shows a lax attitude, and a failure to fulfil their duty, to the court and the public.

Focus on undertrial detention

Arbitrary and prolonged undertrial detention is, unfortunately, pervasive within India's criminal justice system. In this case, where an individual had to undergo over four years of incarceration, other than the judge noting that there were issues in the investigation, there was a startling absence of accountability directed towards the investigating officers or the prosecution. That there were no repercussions for those responsible for wrongful detentions perpetuates a culture of impunity and undermines public confidence in the integrity of judicial processes.

Pooja's version of events in her statement to the magistrate, her initial court statement, and her cross-examination all differed, which suggests coercion.

During the cross-examination, she attributed it to her mother and a police officer. Thereafter, during the sentencing hearing of her perjury case, Pooja's husband claimed that he told her to claim that her mother had coerced her to lie about the kidnapping and the rape so that they would not have to be bothered by the case any more. Even if not a minor, she was clearly a very young person who had been coerced by various adults. This was not taken into consideration by the court that sentenced her.

This is not to take away from the fact that Ramesh was a victim of the system. His trial dragged on in a fast-track court in Bareilly amidst the disruptive backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fast-track courts were set up to ensure swift justice for victims of sexual crimes and corruption cases.

Although, ideally, these cases are to be finished within a year of filing the charge sheet, this timeframe is rarely adhered to. The trial in this case spanned 1,559 days, in which there were 109 hearings (data from the e-Courts portal). The data also show that most of these hearings just resulted in adjournments, 13 of which were because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The examination of witnesses went on from November 2020 to February 2024. These timelines are shocking because the case itself was not complicated, given that there were only six witnesses and six exhibits. Ramesh remained in jail throughout this time.

The state of fast-track courts

The functioning of fast-track courts has been far from ideal. New courts with the necessary infrastructure and dedicated judges are not set up for fast-track purposes. Instead, existing courts are typically designated as fast-track courts, requiring judges to manage their regular caseloads in addition to these expedited cases. Without looking into these systemic challenges, the centrally sponsored scheme for Fast Track Special Courts (FTSC) has recently been extended till 2026, with a budgetary allocation of around ₹2,000 crore.

This case also raises questions about the issue of bail in India. Ramesh filed a bail application before the sessions court in 2021, but it was rejected because of the serious nature of the offence. His family did not have the economic means to file an appeal, so he remained in jail till his acquittal. Notwithstanding directives from the Supreme Court of India to decongest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ramesh was not granted bail even during this period. And, despite the constant discourse in policy realms and constitutional courts in favour of a reduction in undertrial detention, the grim reality within trial courts shows how indifference along with poverty prolong such detention.

Ultimately, the notoriety surrounding this case, cited to bolster the stereotype of women lodging false accusations against men, underscores a critical call for reforms within the criminal justice system. Rather than weakening laws safeguarding women, this case highlights the necessity for enhancements in police investigation protocols, prosecutorial autonomy, and judicial supervision to mitigate the risk of wrongful and protracted imprisonments.

The Baltimore ship accident, the high stakes for India



M. Kalyanaraman
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On March 26, 2024, when container ship *Dali* crashed into Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, United States, leaving at least six persons dead and property worth millions of dollars destroyed, the maritime and logistics world went into a tizzy.

The crash was a spectacular tragedy captured on video clip that went viral on YouTube. That it happened in the U.S. also made it one of the most high-profile maritime accidents after the *Exxon Valdez* tanker accident, in 1989, that led to an unprecedented oil spill off Alaska, in turn triggering extraordinary changes in maritime regulations and industry practices as well as awareness on maritime pollution.

Why the country is an industry player

Unlike in the past, India has emerged as a key player in global shipping as its seafarers man many of the ocean-going ships bringing in vital foreign exchange as remittances. Indian seafarer remittances are typically equivalent to some 15% of all foreign direct investment that comes into the country every year. Though the levers of power in global shipping as well as ship building, owning and financing continue to be outside the domain of India and Indians, India inevitably figures in maritime events as a source of seafarers and as managers of ships. So is the case with *Dali*, whose crew is almost all Indian.

Insurance experts have said that the *Dali* accident will equal or surpass the highest-ever marine insurance payout of $1.5 billion in the case of the *Costa Concordia* cruise vessel capsizing in 2012. The high expected payout in the *Dali* case is due to the loss to lives, property, and business also due to the shutdown of the busy Baltimore port. Synergy Maritime Group, the Singapore-based manager of *Dali*, is a company founded by and run largely by Indians but with a global footprint. With a large operation in Chennai, it employs thousands of Indian seafarers and has been an Indian success story in global shipping, managing more than 650 ships.

> The accident could damage India's reputation in the world shipping industry, of being a reliable source for competent seafarers

Though Synergy and the ship owner will not be handed a bill for $1.5 billion and the actual payout will be borne be insurers and a club of over 80 re-insurers, there may well be an eventual financial fallout for Synergy especially if it is proven that the managers had neglected in or avoided keeping equipment in proper operating conditions, in turn leading to the collision.

Synergy's rapid rise is attributed to the trust it has earned among ship owners – that it can operate ships smoothly and safely as per regulations at optimum costs. And that trust, which has helped Indian seafarers get lucrative jobs, is in danger of being eroded.

Indian seafarers in global shipping go as Indians – representatives of a nation. And, inevitably, but unfairly, their actions reflect on India as a whole.

Costa Concordia's captain was found to be a disgrace to the profession. His final act of ignominy was to bail out of the ship early whereas merchant shipping convention demands that the captain should be the last to abandon his ship. But, Francesco Schettino has been seen as an individual deviant, not a representative of Italians.

The interim report on the *Dali* accident put out by the investigators made it a point to talk about the causes of two onboard blackouts occurring in Baltimore port just 10 hours before departure. One of the causes was apparently a botched operation by a seafarer. There is a distinct possibility that the final report will seek to pinpoint botched or wrong operations by ship staff as contributors to, if not the causes of, the two blackouts that led to the loss of steering control and ship motive power, eventually leading to the collision.

This would put a question mark over the competence and certification of Indian seafarers which form the backbone of job worthiness of Indian seafarers. Most seafarers would testify to the rigorous Indian process that ensures only thoroughly trained and knowledgeable people are certified for various shipboard operations.

Swift moves

The Indian government acted quickly in the case of *Dali* to prevent any hasty and ill-founded damage to the reputation of Indian seafarers. It successfully impleaded India as a Substantially Interested State as per the Casualty Investigation Code of the International Maritime Organization.

Indian shipping officials are a part of the investigation on site. Before the final report is released, they will get a chance to see the report, add their comments, and contest any possible unfair damage to Indian seafarer reputation.

The pulls and counterpulls in the *Dali* accident are many. An act of god may not quite ensure a hefty insurance payout. Blame will need to be apportioned for that. But, at the same time, the U.S. government has taken in Indian officials in the investigation.

Soon after the accident, U.S. President Joe Biden lauded *Dali*'s Indian seafarers who, after losing control of the ship, promptly alerted the authorities so that they could shut down the bridge. Though it was found, eventually, that the *Dali*'s navigators were acting as per the instructions of the American pilot onboard, Mr. Biden's intent was clear. He wanted to tamp down anti-Indian sentiments.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The first stage is over

The scintillating and sober swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, followed by some of his colleagues, who included a few new faces, brings to an end the suspense over which party is to rule the country. The popularity graph of the Bharatiya Janata Party slid mainly because it never cared for the sufferings of the common man. Mr. Modi should also interact with the Fourth Estate periodically to feel the pulse of the nation. The ruling party should keep its ears to the ground.

Mani Nataraajan,
Chennai

Go back to the voter

There are no two opinions that a proper use of the 'right to vote' serves as the backbone of democracy. In the just concluded Lok Sabha polls, there was also a fairly significant percentage of the electorate, close to 35%, that chose not to vote. Many feel that the 'voting percentage' is a subject that deserves more attention and consideration. Visibly, the issue has only a short life every time at the end of voting processes.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) should give high priority to institute a voter study. It should collect first-hand information on why each voter did not vote. The reasons should be classified. There might be health issues and/or voter inability to be in the constituency or place of polling for individuals. But some people find it difficult to make a proper choice about the contestants in the absence of full information and the existence of fake news. Another sad truth is that many, out of experience, are fed up with the 'corrupt and criminalised' politics of the times. The ECI, as an independent constitutional entity, must take the trouble to present a clearer picture and suggest or direct solutions to each problem. Simultaneously, the ECI should analyse those who actually voted and the voting patterns. It should learn the rationale with which each voter made the choice. It should also review the use of pages listing criminal cases against candidates. Has any voter made use of this at any time? Many voters vote half-heartedly. This should change.

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Pandalam, Kerala

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Settling trade disputes through 'litigotiation'



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Much of international diplomacy involves walking on eggshells. Major differences, especially on trade and commerce, are often allowed to hibernate while countries focus on the big picture of bilateral ties. Bold leaps of statecraft are sometimes needed to help industry on both sides to settle such trade frictions. Quite remarkably, India and the U.S. have managed to do exactly that in just under a year, burying differences in the seven-long outstanding trade disputes at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

In late March this year, the two countries settled their last lingering trade dispute on poultry products at the WTO. India and the U.S. notified the WTO of reaching a mutually agreed solution in the poultry dispute, withdrawing their respective pending WTO cases in the matter, following the settlement reached between the two countries last September. This comes on the heels of the settlement of six other WTO disputes between the two countries, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. Yet the poultry dispute stands out for several reasons.

The dispute

To begin with, this dispute was filed more than a decade ago, relating to certain import restrictions taken by India against the imports of poultry products from the U.S. on grounds of avian influenza or bird flu. This is an unusually long time for a WTO dispute to remain unresolved, making it the oldest of the seven disputes between the two countries. Initiated by the U.S. in 2012, the dispute challenged India's import restrictions on poultry products on account of avian influenza which could potentially transmit to humans. This dispute marked one of the earliest instances where animal, and human health and safety-related measures, broadly referred to as 'sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures' initiated by a developing WTO member was brought before a WTO panel. The U.S.'s primary contention was that India, in deviating from internationally recognised standards set by the World Organization for Animal Health (formerly the OIE), failed to provide scientific justifications for its poultry measures, as mandated by the WTO's SPS Agreement.

Both the panel and the WTO Appellate Body ruled in favour of the U.S. Subsequently, India was given a year to modify or withdraw its inconsistent measures. The U.S. later alleged that India had still failed to meet its obligations, and filed a retaliation claim at the WTO. In response, India filed its own counter-dispute to establish that its revised measures conformed with WTO rules. Over the past decade, both these disputes have largely been kept in abeyance by the parties as they attempted to settle the matter mutually.

Now, with the fresh impetus and persistent efforts from both sides, India has dodged a yearly $450 million claim, as part of the larger settlement of pending disputes between the two countries. In exchange, India has agreed to reduce tariffs on select products such as cranberries, blueberries, frozen turkey, and premium frozen duck meat destined for luxury hotels. This is a fair trade-off, given the overall balance of interests and the long pendency of the dispute.

While this dispute may not rank as the most economically significant for India, particularly when contrasted with some of the other WTO disputes settled with the U.S. involving challenges to various Indian foreign trade policy schemes such as special economic zones and export-oriented unit schemes, its resolution represents a significant diplomatic breakthrough. The uphill task for negotiators from both sides in resolving this dispute is evident from the fact that it could not be settled alongside the six other pending disputes by mid-2023.

Collectively, the resolution of these seven disputes has achieved something unprecedented in international trade dispute settlement. It has demonstrated that despite complicated domestic compulsions, major trading partners can still rely on the advantages of diplomatic channels to effectively resolve sensitive trade matters. Along with India's participation in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, this puts wind in the sails of the India-U.S. partnership.

Takeaways from the outcome

Admittedly, settling disputes by arriving at a bilateral solution is not uncommon at the WTO. For example, the U.S. and the European Union's disputes over aircraft subsidies to Boeing and Airbus ultimately required a diplomatic resolution, despite several iterations of challenges before the WTO panels and the Appellate Body. In fact, WTO rules encourage countries to resolve disputes amicably, with litigation only to be pursued as a last resort. However, the significance of this settlement package lies in both the total number of disputes settled and the diversity and complexity of their subject matter – ranging from different types of subsidies to countervailing duties to SPS measures. In the absence of a functional Appellate Body (it became defunct in 2019), resolution of long-standing trade conflicts requires out-of-the-box solutions. It also points to a greater emphasis and thrust on using bilateral diplomatic channels to resolve such issues.

This outcome demonstrates that paralysis within a multilateral body need not prevent large trading partners from resolving differences through focused bilateral negotiations within the framework of litigation. This bodes well for newer attempts at fostering a more stable international trade environment where trade disputes are not allowed to simmer.

The artful settlement of complex disputes during litigation, or broadly 'litigotiation', was key to solving the long pending India-U.S. poultry dispute

The stakes are high for Kerala Congress (M)

The party has lost the Kottayam seat and its Rajya Sabha seat is set to expire

STATE OF PLAY

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The Kerala Congress (Joseph) has won the Kottayam Lok Sabha seat. The victory comes as a lifeline for the party which has been dealing with internal strife and defections by high-profile leaders, and fighting fiercely to reclaim its influence in Central Travancore.

The party's candidate, K. Francis George, secured a comfortable lead of over 87,000 votes. This win not only fortifies the Kerala Congress (Joseph) 's base in Kottayam but also gives it the official status of a State party – a recognition it has been chasing since its split from Kerala Congress (Mani). The party head, P.J. Joseph, is now hoping to reclaim the iconic symbol of the bicycle, which was frozen amid past disputes. Resolving these legal tangles is crucial for the party to revive its identity.

A big loss

Meanwhile, as Kerala Congress (M) reels from its defeat in the Kottayam Lok Sabha seat, speculations are rife about its future within the Left Democratic Front (LDF). Retaining Kottayam was not just a matter of pride but essential for its political clout. Since its abrupt switch to the LDF four years ago, the party has been a cornerstone in the Left's strategy to infiltrate the United Democratic Front (UDF)'s strongholds of Central Travancore.

This time, the inherent anti-Left character of the region and the anti-incumbency wave proved enough for the Congress-led coalition to notch up impressive victories in three seats in the region: Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, and Idukki.



Although the LDF has claimed to have retained its core vote base in the constituency, the fact that it could ensure a lead margin in just one of the seven Assembly segments in Kottayam has come as a shock. The emphasis on the plight of rubber growers – the core political agenda of Kerala Congress (M) – has failed to disturb the character of the constituency even slightly, including in pockets where the regional party traditionally wielded some command.

The loss has ignited fierce debates in the party about the Kerala Congress (M)'s future within the LDF, especially amid the perceived anti-incumbency sentiment among its Catholic base. Consequently, some people in the party believe that continuing in the LDF may not bode well for their future and view the defeat as an opportunity to consider leaving the coalition.

An opportunity

The UDF, on its part, has sensed this vulnerability and sees an opportunity to reclaim a crucial ally and strengthen its position in Central Travancore. However, uncertain about the UDF's capacity to challenge the LDF in the upcoming 2026 Assembly elections, Kerala Congress (M) appears to be in a dilemma. If it considers returning to the UDF fold, the party will still find asserting its 'natural claim' over the Kottayam Lok Sabha seat a daunting task. However, party chairman Jose K. Mani has refuted the idea of switching sides.

Talks within the LDF about Rajya Sabha have hit a roadblock. The seat held by Kerala Congress (M) is set to expire on July 1. As the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India are fighting to keep their seats, negotiations have intensified to placate Kerala Congress (M) with alternative positions, such as the chairman post of the administrative reforms commission. But the regional party remains unyielding. Its defeat in Kottayam, the lone seat it contested, has made the Rajya Sabha seat vital for its political survival in Central Travancore. This seat is also significant for the party since it is held by Jose K. Mani. Losing it could destabilise internal party dynamics, whereas its allocation to the CPI could enhance its status as the coalition's second-largest party.

For the LDF, this unexpected defeat casts doubts on its strategy to sway Catholic and rubber-growing regions leftward through the Kerala Congress (M). The coalition insists that the loss is part of a broader political wave and not a sign of internal weakness. However, how far this reasoning has percolated down to the party cadre remains to be seen.

As they navigate the rubber heartlands' complex landscape, Kerala Congress (M) and Kerala Congress (Joseph) face mounting challenges. Agricultural distress, wildlife attacks, and the growing influence of political Islam fuel the discontent of the Catholic Church, prompting direct intervention. With the Sangh Parivar ready to exploit these fractures, the stakes have never been higher for them.

In LWE affected seats and in Bihar, NOTA still matters

In 2024, less than 1% of voters in India chose the NOTA option, the lowest share since it was first used in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

While the share of voters who pressed the None of the Above (NOTA) button has continued to decline in the Lok Sabha elections, the option is still relevant in some seats. In 2014 and 2019, a significant share of voters in some select seats, particularly those impacted by Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), and many constituencies in Bihar exercised this option. This trend continued in 2024 as well.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, an unusually high share of votes (14%) were polled for NOTA in the Indore seat. The Congress urged the voters to choose the option after its candidate, Akshay Kanti Bam, withdrew his nomination and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the last minute. In November 2022, in the Andheri East Assembly by-poll in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) candidate, Rutuja Ramesh Latke, won comfortably after the BJP candidate withdrew from the contest. NOTA received the second highest share of votes (14.8%).

The remarkable results in Indore in 2024 and the Maharashtra by-poll in 2022 show that NOTA continues to serve a purpose. A significant share of voters use it from time to time to reject all the candidates in the fray. However, in the following analysis, we have treated the Indore result as an outlier and excluded it in Charts 2 and 3.

As shown in **Chart 1,** the NOTA vote share across India dropped below the 1% mark in 2024 for the first time since 2014 (when NOTA was introduced for the Lok Sabha polls). In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, 0.99% of voters opted for NOTA.

That said, a constituency-level analysis of NOTA vote share shows an interesting pattern. **Chart 2** shows the share of voters in each seat who chose the option in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Each circle corresponds to a parliamentary seat. Only those seats in which the NOTA vote share crossed the 3% mark have been depicted.

The Bastar constituency in Chhattisgarh, and Koraput and Nabarangpur, which are both in Odisha, featured in all the three years. Aruku in Andhra Pradesh featured in 2019 and 2024. The common thread linking these seats is that they are all impacted by LWE. This trend of the NOTA share being high in LWE-affected districts has been recorded in several Assembly elections as well.

Another trend that can be observed is that there is a relatively high number of seats in Bihar in which the NOTA vote share crossed the 3% mark both in 2019 and 2024. In 2019, the NOTA vote share was more than 3% in 11 seats in Bihar, while in 2024, this was the case in four seats. While some of this can be explained as an impact of LWE, many seats in the State which are not affected by extremism also feature on the list. Close to 4% of the voters in 2024 and 5% in 2019 chose NOTA in the Gopalganj seat in Bihar.

Dahod in Gujarat, where more than 3% of the voters chose NOTA in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, is the only seat outside Bihar to have consistently recorded such a high share. It is also not part of the districts affected by LWE.

Chart 3 shows the seat-wise NOTA vote share recorded in 2024 (in %) and the change from 2019 (% points). All the seats in Bihar have been highlighted. Clearly, most of the seats in Bihar stand out. Notably, while there was a significant decline in the NOTA vote share in seats such as Paschim Champaran, Saran, Nawada, and Jahanabad in Bihar in 2024 compared with 2019, in other seats in the State such as Banka and Jhanjharpur, the NOTA vote share increased significantly.

Taking note of NOTA

The data for the charts were sourced from the Election Commission of India and Ashoka University's Lok Dhaba

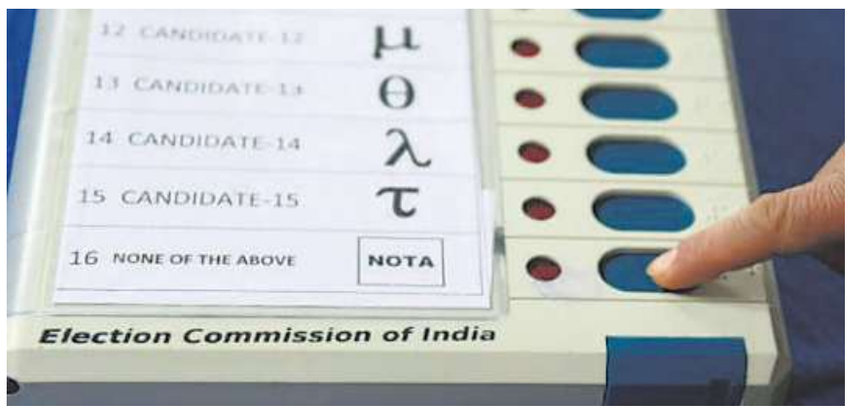


Chart 1: The chart shows the share of voters who chose the NOTA option across three Lok Sabha polls. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, 0.99% of voters opted for NOTA

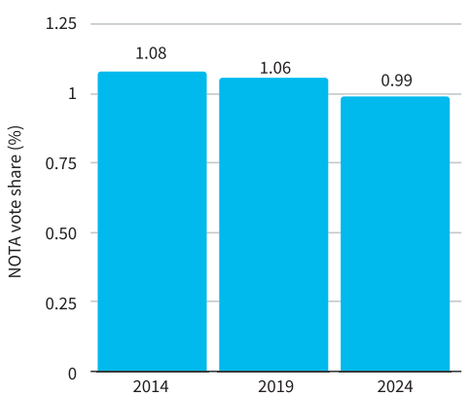


Chart 2: The chart shows the share of voters in each seat who chose the option in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Each circle corresponds to a parliamentary seat

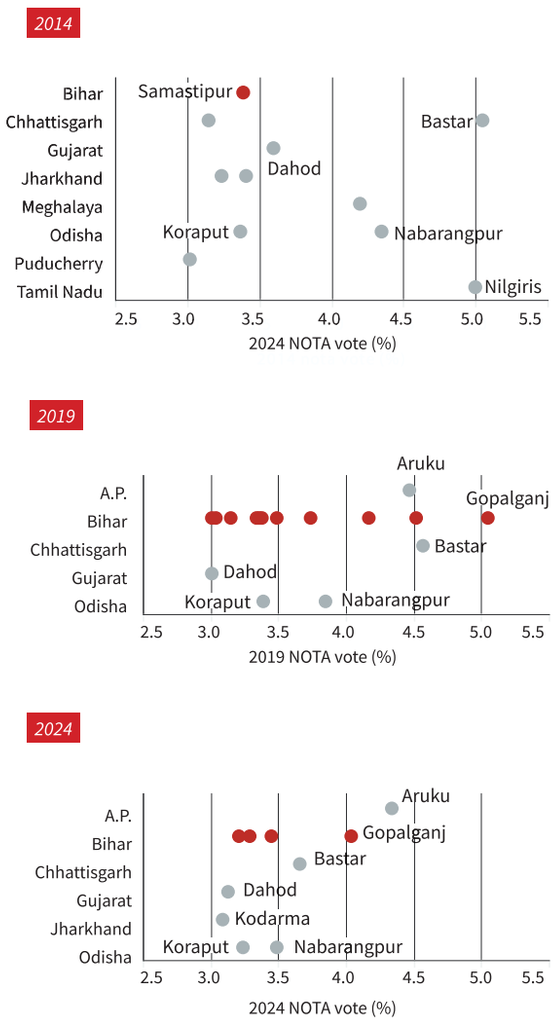
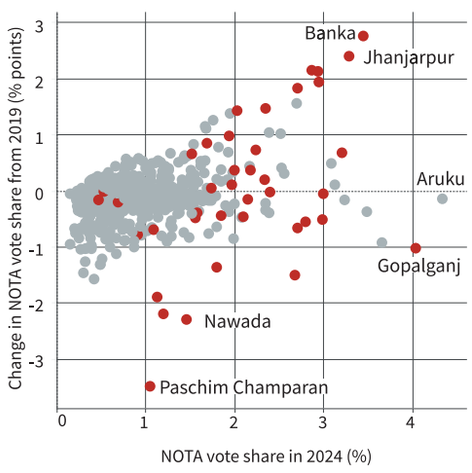


Chart 3: The chart shows the seat-wise NOTA vote share recorded in 2024 (in %) and the change from 2019 (% points). All the seats in Bihar have been highlighted



FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1974

Underground hydro power stations: Soviet plan

New Delhi, June 9: Soviet power engineers are planning to build hydro power stations deep underground which, they say, will produce more electricity with less water.

Power stations at a depth of between 800 and 1,000 metres have been planned by the Gidroproekt Institute in Moscow.

Water falling from such heights would have great force so that even a small quantity of water flow could turn the turbine wheels pretty fast.

According to the Soviet engineers, "it will take ten times less water" than required for the operation of a similar station on the ground.

To build such stations, the Moscow Institute plans to place the earth with vertical shafts (as in the coal mines) running to the "hard crystal rocks". There on a strong natural foundation, the engine room and the underground water basins will be located.

Underground hydro stations can be built in any area "having a comparatively small river or lake, and where the crystal rocks are at a depth of 1,000 metres or less," it is said.

According to calculations by the Moscow Institute, the capital cost of a hydro station at a depth of 800 metres will be the same as that of a similar station on the ground.

The Soviet engineers say that the development of underground hydro stations is a significant step toward curbing the "current rates of growth of water consumption for technical purposes."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1924

Heavy floods in North Travancore

Cochin, June 10: Heavy floods have occurred on several portions of North Travancore and in the neighbourhood of Trippunithura. Several roads connecting important centres are now submerged and near Trippunithura in Cochin State over 500 acres of paddy fields are under water. It has become impossible to transplant paddy seedlings and cultivators have to face heavy losses. Passenger service by motor between Kottayam and Kotharakkara has been suspended due to floods.

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Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of Palestinians killed in recent Israeli raid

274 Gaza's Health Ministry claimed that close to 300 Palestinians were killed in the Israeli raid that rescued four hostages held by Hamas. About 36,700 Palestinians have been killed since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023. AP

The rise in passenger vehicle exports in the last four years

2.68 in lakh units. Passenger vehicle exports from India rose in the last four financial years with Maruti Suzuki India accounting for nearly 70% of the incremental shipments during the period. PTI

Amount withdrawn by FPIs from equities in the month of June

14,800 in ₹ crore. Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) withdrew the amount from domestic stocks in the first week, influenced by election results and attractive valuations of Chinese stocks. PTI

The number of infra projects hit by cost overrun in April

448 projects. These projects, each entailing an investment of ₹150 crore or above, were hit by a cost overrun of more than ₹5.55 lakh crore in April 2024, as per the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PTI

Increase in defective number plates booked in 2024 in Delhi

286 in per cent. The Delhi Traffic Police has booked 16,859 people for defective number plates between January 1 and June 5, 2024. The figure was at 4,363 in the year-ago period. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is it time for proportional representation?

Which are the countries which follow proportional representation in their electoral democracies? Will it work in a large and diverse country like India? What is mixed member proportional representation?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The results of the Lok Sabha elections were declared last week. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has won 293 seats with a 43.3% vote share while the Opposition bloc INDIA (including Trinamool Congress) has secured 234 seats with a 41.6% vote share. Other regional parties and independents polled around 15% but ended up with only 16 seats in total.

What is first past the post system?

We follow the First Past the Post System (FPTP) in our elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. Under this system, the candidate who polls more than any other in a constituency is declared elected. This is the system that is followed for elections in democracies like the U.S., the U.K. and Canada. The primary advantage of the FPTP system is that it is simple and the most feasible method in a large country like India. Secondly, FPTP provides greater stability to the executive in our parliamentary democracy because the ruling party/coalition can enjoy a majority in the Lok Sabha/Legislative assembly without obtaining majority of the votes (more than 50%) across constituencies.

The issue with FPTP is that it may result in over or under representation of political parties when compared to their vote share. In the first three elections after independence, the Congress party won close to 75% of seats in the then Lok Sabha with a 45-47% vote share. Table 1, depicts a sample of this scenario after the general elections of 2014 and 2019.

What is proportional representation?

The Proportional Representation (PR) system ensures representation of all parties based on their vote share. The most commonly used PR system is the 'party list PR' where voters vote for the party (and not individual candidates) and then the parties get seats in proportion to their vote share. There is usually a minimum threshold of 3-5% vote share for a party to be eligible for a seat. India is a federal country and this principle if implemented should ideally be carried out at each State/Union Territory (UT) level. The scenario as it would have played out after the 2024 election results based on applying the PR system at each State/UT level is summarised in Table 2.

As can be seen, the PR system would have resulted in representation of parties according to their vote share. For example, in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, totalling 66 seats, the NDA won 64 seats with a vote share of 62%, 60% and 53% respectively. Under the PR system, the INDIA bloc would have secured 23 seats in these States. The Biju Janata Dal (classified in 'Others') with a 42% vote share in Odisha would have secured nine seats as against no representation at present under the FPTP system. Similarly, the NDA and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (classified in 'Others') would have had representation in Tamil Nadu where the INDIA bloc secured all 39 seats with a 47% vote share under the FPTP system.

The main criticism against the PR system is that it could potentially result in instability as no party/coalition may obtain a majority to form the government in our parliamentary democracy. Further, it may result in the proliferation of political parties based on regional, caste, religious and linguistic considerations that may promote casteist or communal voting patterns. However, the second criticism is not well founded since the present FPTP system has also not inhibited the formation of parties based on caste or communal considerations. This issue can be addressed by specifying minimum threshold for votes polled in order to make a party eligible for seats in legislative houses.

In order to maintain balance between stability and proportionate representation, the system of Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) can be considered. Under this system, there is one candidate who is elected through the FPTP system from each territorial constituency. There are also additional seats that are filled based on various parties' percentage of votes.

What are international practices?

Presidential democracies like Brazil and Argentina have the party list PR system. So do parliamentary democracies like South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. In Germany, that follows the MMPR system, out of the 598 seats in the Bundestag (their equivalent of our Lok Sabha), 299 seats (50%) are filled from constituencies under the FPTP system. The voters also provide their preference for a party in the ballots. The balance 299 seats (50%) are filled by apportioning them amongst parties, that secure at least 5% votes, based on their percentage of votes. Similarly, in New Zealand, out of the total 120 seats in the House of Representatives, 72 seats (60%) are filled through the FPTP system from territorial constituencies. The balance 48 seats (40%) are allotted to various parties, that secure at least 5% votes, based on their vote share.

This system is likely to provide the required stability in a parliamentary democracy like India while also ensuring representation for all parties based on their vote share.

What can be the way forward?

The law commission in its 170th report, 'Reform of the electoral laws' (1999), had recommended the introduction of the MMPR system on an experimental basis. It had suggested that 25% of seats may be filled through a PR system by increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha. While it had recommended to consider the entire nation as one unit for PR based on vote share, the appropriate approach would be to consider it at every State/UT level considering our federal polity. It is also pertinent to note that the delimitation exercise for increasing the number of seats is due based on the first Census to be conducted after 2026. The population explosion that happened in our country during the last five decades has been uneven among various regions. Determining the number of seats in Lok Sabha solely in proportion to population may go against the federal principles of our country and may lead to a feeling of disenchantment in the States that stand to lose through such representation.

However, in the event of increasing the seats during the delimitation exercise, the MMPR system may be considered for incremental seats or at least 25% of the total seats to be filled from each State/UT. This could assuage the apprehension of southern, northeastern and smaller States in the northern region by limiting the domination of larger States with increased seats solely through the FPTP system.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified.' He currently trains civil-service aspirants at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

An alternative seat-sharing mechanism

A Proportional Representation (PR) system ensures representation of all parties based on their vote share. The most commonly used PR system is the 'party list PR' where voters vote for the party, and the parties get seats in proportion to their vote share

Table 1 : The results of the 2014 and 2019 general elections

	2014		2019	
Political party (predominant State)	% of votes	No. of seats	% of votes	No. of seats
Bharatiya Janata Party (All India)	31%	282	37.3%	303
Indian National Congress (All India)	19.3%	44	19.5%	52
Bahujan Samaj Party [BSP] (Uttar Pradesh)	4.1%	0	3.6%	10
Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh)	3.4%	5	2.6%	5
Trinamool Congress (West Bengal)	3.8%	34	4.1%	22
All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [AIADMK] (Tamil Nadu)	3.3%	37	1.4%	1
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [DMK] (Tamil Nadu)	1.7%	0	2.3%	24
Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh)	2.6%	16	2%	3
YSR Congress Party (Andhra Pradesh)	2.6%	9	2.5%	22
Shiv Sena (Maharashtra)	1.9%	18	2.1%	18
Biju Janata Dal [BJD] (Odisha)	1.7%	20	1.7%	12
All other parties/independents	24.6%	78	20.9%	71
Total	**100%**	**543**	**100%**	**543**



Election fervour: Supporters of the Samajwadi party celebrate after the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha elections, in Lucknow on June 4. GETTY IMAGES

Table 2: If the PR system is applied for the 2024 election

Political formation	% of votes	Actual number of seats	Seats as per PR
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	43.3%	293*	243
INDIA bloc	41.6%	234	225
Others/independents	15.1%	16	75
Total	**100%**	**543**	**543**

Note: The conversion of vote share to seats is calculated at each State/UT level and aggregated. It is an overall calculation without the exclusion of smaller parties based on any threshold. *SKM has been added to the NDA.





Complete sweep: TDP supporters celebrate in Hyderabad on June 4; a Trinamool Congress supporter celebrates in Kolkata on June 4. NAGARA GOPAL, ANI

THE GIST

The First Past the Post System (FPTP) is followed in our elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. Under this system, the candidate who polls more than any other in a constituency is declared elected.

In order to maintain balance between stability and proportionate representation, the system of Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) can be considered. Under this system, there is one candidate who is elected through the FPP system from each territorial constituency. There are also additional seats that are filled based on various parties' percentage of votes.

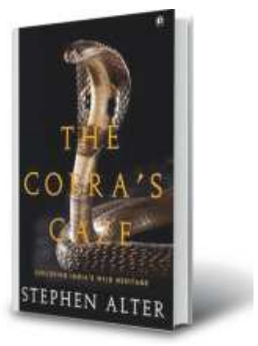
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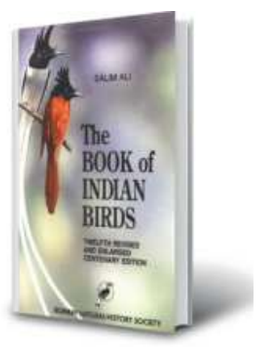
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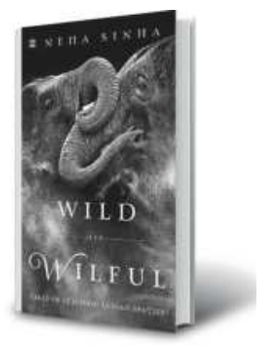
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BIBLIOGRAPHY









Murky reflections: Painted storks in search of food at a pond near Gannvaram of the Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh, on April 20. RAO G.N.

Why books on nature is essential art in the time of global warming

Flora, fauna, urban, rural — a host of writers from Salim Ali to Neha Sinha, Stephen Alter to Bulbul Sharma to Ruskin Bond, chronicle India's diversity in their quest for 'ecological truths', especially when 'nature', as we know it, is at risk

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

Look back at childhood and one memory would be common to most. Drawing mountains, a sun rising past those tall sentinels, a river snaking around, throw in some coconut trees and may be a thatched hut too. This is all about nature leaving a deep imprint. Some would have drawn well, others may have struggled but irrespective of the outcome, parents would have gushed as if Vincent Van Gogh himself was in town. Now recall the first poem learnt when we were a crying mess. Yes, it was 'Jack and Jill', and what did they do? They went up the hill.

That perhaps remains every generation's maiden exposure to writing about nature, even if it was just one word 'hill' but it made many imagine. There are all manners of putting pen to paper, or fingertips cruising on laptops, and the result could be formal prose, lines invested with poetry's allure, words bristling with satire or coated with angst's moisture, and in all this, writing about nature remains a magical skill.

Call of the wild

Be it fiction or non-fiction, nature has a distinctive role to play. It sets the mood, makes the reader curious, raises awareness, especially in this age of global warming. If bees turn extinct, we will die – this may sound morbid, but it is true.

Literature centred around nature is essential art. It reveals the threads that bind humanity with the flora and fauna around. Stephen Alter's latest book, *The Cobra's Gaze*, delves into nature's myriad hues. "Every naturalist is a pilgrim in search of ecological truths," Alter writes while registering his impressions from the rainforests in Agumbe, the hills of Kumaon and the valleys of Chambal.

The author explores the aura of the wild and its inherent vulnerabilities, while India hurtles towards rapid development and trees get axed. This has been a good season for nature-writing in India even while across the world, the genre is well evolved.

You could stumble upon a memoir like Peter Kerr's *Snowball Oranges* and chance upon this passage: "An ancient well, the source of all the water on which our fruit trees depended, stood in the corner of our *torrente* field, almost hidden behind a particularly lush mandarin orange tree whose branches were laden with ripe, juicy fruit. I didn't know why, but it was certainly the healthiest-looking tree on the whole farm."

The description has a languid air, and if you want a touch of lyricism then lean on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the 1997 Booker Prize winner, and savour these lines: "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun."

In urban spaces

To know about nature, long distances need not be traversed, because even in urban landscapes there will be slivers of verdant green supporting an ecosystem we tend to overlook. Neha Sinha's *Wild and Wilful*, one of the finest expositions of nature writing by an Indian in recent times, takes the reader up close with monkeys and crows in the cities and the falcons hovering far away. "The wildness of the Leopard is a sheath, an armour and a curse," Neha writes. These are words that make us understand nuance and ponder. Janaki Lenin too does a similar act in her collated book of columns, *My Husband and other Animals*.

You do have the primers too like Salim Ali's expansive *The Book of Indian Birds* or Vivek Menon's *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. These help in identifying the rich diversity around us. There is Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees*, that broadens perspective because often in nature-writing we obsess over living beings that move and tend to overlook our static friends offering shade, fruit and respite.

In this vast array of books, we get nuggets like Bulbul Sharma's *Grey Hornbills at Dusk* that highlights nature's delights around Delhi. Fancy the monsoon? Then dig into Alexander Frater's *Chasing a Monsoon*. Closer home, sample Allan Sealy's ode to the heavens opening up in his *The Everest Hotel* or Binoo K. John's evocative book on Cherrapunji titled *Under a Cloud*. These are books that offer knowledge and some delightful lines.

Of forests and dragonflies

Yearning for an old town's rustic vibe? Then look no further than R.K. Narayan's observations about his fictional town Malgudi. Nature-writing isn't entirely about forests, it could be just about a dragonfly traipsing under a sodium-vapour lamp in an old locality. The key is to look around. Like how Ruskin Bond does in his vast offering of prose, fiction and poems, and presciently lets a lone fox to dance in the jungle while he seeks an alternate path.

The most pithy components of nature writing offer enough food for thought, be it Khushwant Singh's *The Mark of Vishnu*, that defines the gaps between faith and science, or *Rikki Tikki Tavi* by Rudyard Kipling.

Next time you leaf through books, remember this, nature could be lurking inside, perhaps through the entire tome or in parts, and that should make you forget the WhatsApp blue-tick and look out of the window. There is a larger world out there and the finest of nature writing reiterates this point and helps empathy seep into us.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

The 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup is co-hosted by the U.S. and the West Indies. A quiz on the tournament which happens once in every two years

Soorya Prakash. N

QUESTION 1
Who is the only bowler from a non-test playing nation to have picked up a hat-trick?

QUESTION 2
Who is the only player to have won the player of the final award twice?

QUESTION 3
Who is the only player to have won the player of the final award and the player of the tournament award in the same edition?

QUESTION 4
Who is the only player to have ended up scoring the most runs in a single tournament twice, won most player of the match awards and also won the player of the tournament award twice consecutively?

QUESTION 5
Who is the only bowler to have picked up six wickets in an innings?

QUESTION 6
Who is the only Indian player to have scored a hundred in T20 World Cup history?

QUESTION 7
Who has stood as on-field umpire in three finals, most by any umpire?





Visual question:
Identify the players and the feat that connects them. AFP

Questions and Answers to the June 4 edition of the daily quiz: 1. This centre of learning awards the annual prizes for outstanding public service and achievement in American journalism. **Ans: Columbia University**
2. The number of categories for which Pulitzer prizes are awarded. **Ans: There are 23 Pulitzer categories and the winner in the Public Service category gets a gold medal**
3. The first Indian to win the award "for their coverage of science at the tercentenary of Harvard University". **Ans: Gobind Behari Lal**
4. The awardee for the 1957 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Biography. **Ans: John F. Kennedy; he is the only U.S. president to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize**
5. This individual is featured on the Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal. **Ans: Benjamin Franklin**
6. Name the poet who holds the record for most prizes with four to his name. **Ans: Robert Frost**
Visual: Name this India-born poet. **Ans: Vijay Seshadri**
Early Birds: Rajmohan. V| Sadhan Kumar Panda| Jyot Prakash Gulati



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

I am an alumnus of this college

The management has been given licence to expel students who have not attended classes

S. Upendran

What is the difference between 'stink' and 'smell'? (K. Nalini, Hyderabad)
Of the two words, 'smell' is a neutral term; a smell can be either pleasant or unpleasant. For example, one can talk about the smell of someone's dirty socks; it is also possible to talk about the delicious smell of sambar. 'Stink', on the other hand, carries with it a negative connotation. It is mostly used to suggest that the smell is very offensive or foul. In the case of a 'stink', the smell is so strong that you end up holding your nose.

I couldn't sit in his house for long. It was stinking of rotten eggs.

The pleasant smell of agarbathi reminded him of home.

There was a smell of rain in the air.

Is it okay to say 'issue a licence'? (Kumaresan, Coimbatore)
Yes, it is. If you were to visit any RTO (Regional Transport Office) website, you will find sentences like, 'a duplicate licence will be issued', 'RTO issues licence in India', etc. Native speakers of English use this expression as well. In addition to 'issue', another word which is frequently used when it comes to licences is 'grant'. Governments grant licences to individuals and companies.

The word 'licence' is often spelled or spelt in two different ways – the manner in which it is spelled/spelt, often depends on which side of the Atlantic you are from. The British spell the word 'licence' when they wish to use it as a noun, and 'license' when they use it as a verb. It is like the pairs 'advice/advise' and 'device/devise'. The Americans, on the other hand, spell it only one way, 'license' – for both the noun and the verb.

James Bond, better known as OO7, has licence to kill.

My company has been licensed to sell some new products.

How is the word 'alumni' pronounced? (R. Jayaraman, Mysore)
This word of Latin origin consists of three syllables. The vowel in the first sounds like the 'a' in 'china', while the second syllable rhymes with 'sum', 'chum' and 'hum'. The final 'i' sounds like the 'y' in 'by', 'my' and 'try'. The word is pronounced 'e-LUM-nigh' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'alumnus', meaning 'foster son' or 'ward'. Nowadays, 'alumnus' is mostly used to refer to an individual who went to a particular school, college or university. Although the word was originally used to refer to a male student, nowadays, 'alumnus' is used to refer to students of both sexes. The plural of 'alumnus' is 'alumni'. When you talk about the 'alumni' of a university, you are referring to all those who graduated from there.

Twenty alumni from IIT Madras are planning to meet in New York today.

upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Moxie:
fortitude and determination

Synonyms: backbone, grit, gumption, guts

Usage: *He proved his moxie by refusing to give up.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/moxiepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /mɒksi/

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

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the hindu businessline.
MONDAY - JUNE 10, 2024

Assets no longer

The RBI must keep up its strict vigil over ARCs

The private sector Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) model in India, once touted as the ideal route to relieve lenders of their stressed assets and expedite resolution, seems to be floundering. A recent Reserve Bank of India (RBI) directive against Edelweiss ARC, the largest private sector ARC, asked it to cease and desist from acquiring any financial assets including Security Receipts (SRs). Though resolution efforts can continue, the directive is likely to pose challenges to its ability to carry on business as usual and raise capital.



The supervisory action against Edelweiss ARC comes at a time when its peer JM ARC is facing capital shortfalls after providing for credit losses. Most other private sector ARCs are said to be struggling to meet RBI's minimum net worth requirement of ₹300 crore by the March 2026 deadline. RBI's latest regulatory action is bound to hobble the sector. But it really had little choice in the matter having given a fairly long rope to Edelweiss ARC to fall in line. The RBI alleges that it found Edelweiss ARC evergreening stressed assets of group company ECL Finance, by entering into structured transactions with it. It is also said to have taken over loans from non-lending institutions using ECL Finance as a conduit, incorrectly valuing SRs and sharing non-public information on clients with group entities. Though RBI issued a letter highlighting such deficiencies in 2021-22, Edelweiss ARC failed to bring this to the notice of its Board. RBI issued the cease-and-desist order only after fruitless attempts to engage with the Edelweiss senior management and auditors for over two years.

It is disturbing that such infractions persist despite RBI issuing specific guidelines in October 2022. These had recommended a Board-managed structure that required ARCs to have an independent director as Chairperson, with active Audit and Nomination and Remuneration committees. Deals for one-time settlement were to be vetted by an independent panel. These were in addition to existing rules requiring transactions between ARCs and lenders to be conducted on a transparent, arm's length basis. It has been over two decades since policymakers placed their faith in private sector ARCs as an efficient means to stressed asset resolution. Despite 29 ARCs springing up, they have largely failed to deliver on this objective.

Apart from struggling to raise capital and notching up a patchy record on resolution, some of them have also been accused of practices such as buying out stressed assets from banks at unrealistically low prices, getting into a nexus with defaulting borrowers and selling assets back to promoters barred under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. Given these factors, RBI must not backtrack from strictly enforcing its tighter net worth or governance norms on the sector. With the government-backed National Asset Reconstruction Company up and running, the sector will have a viable alternative even if large private players fall prey to a shakeout.

RBI strengthens resolve to fight inflation

OPTIMISTIC. With growth holding firm, the RBI believes monetary policy has more elbowroom to pursue price stability





HIMADRI BHATTACHARYA

At the conclusion of its second bi-monthly meeting for the current financial year on June 7, the MPC of RBI kept the policy rate unchanged for the eighth time in a row at 6.5 per cent. Similarly, there was no alteration in the stance of the policy. These outcomes were almost universally anticipated. There was a broad-based rally in the equity market on June 7, on the back of renewed optimism regarding stability within the coalition government at the Centre, on the one hand, and the RBI's upward revision of its growth projection for FY25 to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent previously. The prices of government securities rose a small bit.

INFLATION, GROWTH PROSPECTS

The RBI feels that it is on the right track in bringing down the CPI inflation: since February 2024, there was a further decline in the headline number from 5.1 per cent to 4.8 per cent in April 2024. However, food inflation continues to remain elevated due to higher prices of vegetables, pulses, cereals, and spices. Fall in crude oil price has happened apace since the first week of April 2024. A shift towards higher production by major OPEC+ countries is now underway, as a result of which the likelihood of crude price crossing $100 per barrel in the near future has diminished. Recent cuts in LPG and ATF prices in India reflect these developments. Core inflation eased further to 3.2 per cent in April, the lowest in the current CPI series.

The projection for CPI inflation for 2024-25 has been kept unchanged at 4.5 per cent. As per the latest estimate, real GDP growth for 2023-24 has been placed at 8.2 per cent — higher than the 7.6 per cent projected at the last MPC meeting in April. The projection for FY25 has now been raised from 7 per cent to 7.2 per cent.

The RBI believes that with growth holding firm in India, the monetary policy has greater elbowroom than before to pursue price stability to ensure that inflation aligns with the target of 4 per cent on a durable basis. In other words, in the foreseeable future, the RBI will focus its attention on price stability to effectively anchor inflation expectations and thus provide the required foundation for sustained growth over a period of time. This would mean that unless growth falters in a big way, the RBI would keep the policy rate unchanged in the remainder of FY25.

The RBI is certainly not guided by any principle to follow the Federal Reserve as regards its monetary policy formulation, in general, and more specifically for the commencement of its next easing cycle.

The Fed funds rate at its current range of 5.25-5.50 per cent is a 23-year high. The financial markets in India and elsewhere follow closely the developments there to assess the timing and quantum of change in the policy rate in future. Among other factors, the assessment of likely Fed action impacts movements in G-Sec prices and dollar/rupee forward premia.

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

Central banks are generally parsimonious with their words when it comes to making public their in-house agenda or plans for the future in respect of their areas of responsibilities. The articulation — cryptic though — of the RBI's aspirational goals in the run-up to 2034 — its centenary year — in this policy is certainly a welcome development. As the RBI has hastened to point out that the agenda document is not a static one and, hence, would be updated, going forward, one would expect to see some more clarity and precision in certain items such as its plan to address 'Balancing price stability and economic growth from an Emerging Market Economy (EME) perspective'.

One wonders if there is any *prima facie* evidence to suggest that balancing of inflation and growth in monetary management is a different ball-game in countries like India.

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One wonders if there is any *prima facie* evidence to suggest that balancing of inflation and growth in monetary management is a different ball-game in countries like India.

Also, one would expect that the proposed review exercise will not result in any dilution of the current inflation-targeting framework. If anything, the 4+/-2 per cent target structure needs a relook, since, in the light of the outcome of the recently held parliamentary election, it is amply clear that the pain threshold for inflation in India has declined.

The aspiration to make RBI's supervision a global model over the next 10 years seems to be in consonance with the likely growth in the country's economic heft and influence during that period. But how this intent is translated into an outcome-based ambition is the real issue. Frankly, the RBI will have to traverse a long distance, working hard all the way to upgrade its supervisory capabilities and standard to levels close to global benchmarks in this regard. The adage that 'the Indian banking system is highly regulated but poorly supervised' is still largely true.

To be sure, there has been significant improvement in the financial position and governance arrangements of banks, especially of public sector banks over the last 10 years or so. This could be largely attributed to a perceptible drop in political and bureaucratic interference in their decision-making. If the RBI were to realise its aspiration, the first and foremost requirement would be to have within its fold a critical mass of highly-skilled and well-trained supervisors and off-site and on-site examiners and a strong professionally competent leadership. Identification of personnel for this purpose needs to be based on a set of objective criteria and should also be process-driven. This is easier said than done, given the fact that there were few takers within the RBI for the move to create a separate cadre of supervisors and examiners a few years ago.

Publishing a risk management framework for managing climate-related financial risks in regulated entities would also be a formidable task as well as an excellent opportunity for advancing the cause of sustainable finance in the country. However, right now, significant knowledge and skill gaps in this regard exist both in the regulator and the regulated entities. All available policy options to bridge these gaps need to be carefully evaluated and actionable strategies should be formulated and made public as early as possible.

Another aspirational goal for the RBI could be to transform and upgrade itself as a model for central banks as regards governance, policies, procedure and risk management in respect of its position as a financial institution. In terms of the size of its balance sheet, the RBI is larger than the biggest bank in the country by several orders of magnitude. And it should lead by example: the RBI should disclose, in sufficient detail, i.e., more than the routine narrations in its annual reports, its own operational risk management framework, with particular emphasis on information technology and communication risk and business continuity plan.

The writer is a former central banker and a consultant to the IMF. Through The Billion Press

The curious case of import of share certificates

The issue of whether customs duty will apply here depends on whether the value of shares is tied to the certificate itself

Rohini Mukherjee
Divya Bhardwaj

Recently, the government mandated the conversion of shares of private companies into dematerialised form. This requires the physical share certificates which are often held by foreign shareholders outside India to be brought back to India for dematerialisation. In this backdrop, many companies are grappling with the question of whether customs duty applies to the import of such certificates.

While customs duty is typically levied on imported goods, the unique nature of share certificates raises concerns. Unlike tangible goods with market value, share certificates represent ownership of shares traded in the market. This raises the question of whether the value of the shares is tied to the certificate itself or if it is merely a document confirming ownership. These certificates cannot be sold in the market as such. In case anyone buys the shares of the company, a new certificate is issued to that person and the old certificate holds no value. This distinction is crucial as it affects the duty payments significantly due to the disparity between the value of the paper certificate and the underlying shares.

It is interesting to note that the doubts do not stop there. There are additional concerns regarding whether these certificates should be imported via courier or personal baggage. The customs tariff item 49070090 covers share certificates, leading to arguments that this classification applies when certificates are imported via courier. However, there is another entry under the Customs Tariff Act stating that if dutiable goods are carried in personal baggage without declaration, these are classified under customs tariff item 98030000. It is worth noting that the customs duty rate under both entries is different, one attracts a significantly lower rate whereas another attracts a higher rate of customs duty.

RE-IMPORT BENEFIT

Many industries are also considering to explore the option to avail the benefit of re-import under the customs law. However, in many cases, these certificates were not exported but sent to shareholders along with the employees, which restricts the eligibility of re-import benefit. Questions have been raised as to whether at the time of export of share certificates (after dematerialisation as these certificates will be cancelled) these will be identifiable goods.



TO TAX OR NOT. That's the question

Previously, the Central Board of Excise and Customs issued Circular No. 60/2000-Cus on July 12, 2000, clarifying the levy of customs duty on share certificates imported for sale or dematerialisation. It stated that all goods exported from India and subsequently re-imported are liable to duty, subject to conditions and restrictions under section 20 of the Customs Act. Nonetheless, exemption is provided under notification No. 94/96-Customs, dated December 16, 1996, for certain categories of Indian origin goods when re-imported, subject to specified conditions. As is evident, the Circular specifically addresses shares held by NRIs abroad, re-imported for sale or dematerialisation and provided only limited relief to the industries.

Given the uncertainties outlined above, this is an issue which is ripe for filing a representation seeking clarification. It is crucial for the government to provide clarity on the imposition of customs duty on the import of share certificates by way of a clarification, extending beyond mere re-import scenarios.

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FROM THE VIEWSROOM.

Of elections and numbers

B Baskar

Long after the dust of the recently-concluded general elections settles and the new NDA government gets down to governing the country, the numbers thrown up by the polls will continue to be diced and dissected. Political analysts and academicians will go through the election data with a fine-toothed comb and come up with their various analyses and explanations on why the Indian people voted the way they did.

But it isn't just the experts who are obsessed with the numbers. Ordinary citizens too, especially the ones who enjoy a good argument over politics, look at the numbers with particular interest. Though the numbers put out have a scientific validity and authenticity to them, our analyses of them often suffer from our in-built biases, predilections and baggage that we carry.

A typical example would be the BJP's performance in Tamil Nadu. That the DMK-Congress combine swept the elections winning all 40 seats (39 in Tamil Nadu and one in Puducherry) would certainly enthuse these parties' supporters. The BJP despite its high decibel campaign drew a blank. But its supporters would point to a significant jump in its vote share — from 3.5 per cent to over 11 per cent.

Similarly, at the national level, the INDIA bloc has done creditably, falling short by just 40 seats of the magic figure of 272. This will surely excite this combine's supporters. But the BJP supporters will argue that their party still won the largest number of seats and its NDA alliance went on to form the government. There is also the issue of whether the change in vote shares and seats correspond in a straightforward way.

Though most of us crave for objectivity and neutrality in political analyses, it is often incredibly hard to achieve.

BELOW THE LINE



Das ducks politics

On Friday, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das sidestepped any potential controversy, deftly avoiding questions about the potential shape of the new government and its fiscal strategy. When reporters pressed him for insights and expectations on the fiscal management strategy of the incoming government, Das firmly responded, "That is a question which falls in the realm of government, and I have nothing to comment on it."

Das's diplomatic evasion kept the focus firmly on his monetary policy, leaving the political speculations to others.

Naidu's tech renaissance

Whispers in the corridors of power suggest that Chandrababu Naidu, the tech-savvy TDP chief and key NDA player, is gearing up to catapult Andhra Pradesh into the tech stratosphere once again. Insiders reveal that Naidu is eyeing the crucial IT Ministry portfolio for one of his party's MPs, aiming to reignite the tech revolution he once spearheaded. Remember the days when Naidu as CM famously wielded a laptop, drawing global IT giants to Hyderabad?

Fast forward to today, and Artificial Intelligence is the new buzzword for Naidu. Speculation is rife that Andhra Pradesh could soon witness the establishment of major semiconductor or EV projects, backed by Central subsidies.

Rural distress

As the results of the Lok Sabha elections were being announced, a little bird said rural distress was one of the reasons for BJP's problems. The bird wondered why the Narendra Modi Government failed to take note of reports by dailies such as *businessline* on the dropping storage levels in the country and parts of the country suffering from drought. An El Nino year is tough on any government and given the fact that the media reported that 25 per cent of the country has been hit by drought, the government should have acted. "Maybe, it could have provided additional relief through PM Kisan Samman Nidhi," the bird said.

India Inc joins in

Following the recent poll results, top industry leaders of the country chose to remain silent and avoided immediate reactions.

The situation became tricky when a president of an apex industry chamber, who had scheduled multiple TV interviews for the evening of June 4, cancelled all interactions upon seeing the surprising election trends, where the ruling BJP fell short of the majority mark. Global leaders called Prime Minister Modi soon after the vote count, yet local industry leaders hesitated to respond. However, congratulatory messages started flowing in from industry leaders after Prime Minister Modi took his oath of office. These will surely continue after the portfolios of his cabinet colleagues become clear.

Odisha win

The victory of Bharatiya Janata Party in the State has been quite openly attributed to the power wielded by IAS officer turned politician VK Pandian over chief minister Naveen Patnaik, creating ripples of discontent through the rank and file of Biju Janata Dal — with Pandian, an "outsider", being seen as Patnaik's heir apparent. BJP benefited from Pandian's outsider tag.

With Pandian announcing his retirement from politics, Patnaik's challenge will lie in bringing the party top brass to the table and picking a worthy successor.

As BJP brought Patnaik's 24-year tenure to an end with a comfortable win, the poll conducted in four phases was also believed to be a factor that helped bring about the change. **Our Bureaus**

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A new beginning

Don't let coalition be a constraint for growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with the Union Council of Ministers, took the oath of office for the third consecutive time on Sunday. While returning to office after two consecutive terms in a diverse democracy like India is commendable, Mr Modi will this time depend on allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to run the government. While the basic priorities of the new government will be known in the coming days, there are concerns that it may be difficult to push reforms in a coalition government. Experience, however, shows coalitions have the potential to work effectively and bring structural reforms. India will need continued reforms to sustain higher economic growth in the medium term. It is worth noting that much-needed factor-market reforms proved difficult even with single-party majority governments.

Building a consensus on such reforms may take time, but the government can start with initiatives that allies are unlikely to object to. For instance, the government must quickly initiate the goods and services tax (GST) rate and slab-rationalisation process in the GST Council. Although GST collection improved in recent years owing to greater compliance, the multiplicity of rates has meant that the indirect tax system has underperformed, affecting fiscal outcomes at both central and state levels. A simple GST system with fewer slabs will improve revenue and the ease of doing business. Besides, there are at least three major reforms promised in the Bharatiya Janata Party's election manifesto that can be initiated immediately.

The first is strengthening India's statistical system. For a rapidly developing economy like India, it is crucial to have reliable high-frequency data to enable better decision-making by both the government and the private sector. The last census in India was conducted in 2011. Although the government recently published the data from a consumer expenditure survey after a long gap, economists argue that another one should be done before revising the gross domestic product and consumer price index series. India also needs a producer price index to get a better sense of the production side. Further, it is important to have frequent and reliable employment data. Given that some indicators are based on outdated data, they may not accurately reflect the current situation, potentially compromising the quality of policy decisions and affecting economic outcomes.

Second is the National Litigation Policy to expedite the resolution of matters in courts. About 50 million cases are pending in different courts. India needs to considerably improve its judicial capacity. Speedily disposing of cases in courts will significantly improve both the ease of doing business and living in the country. Third is fiscal autonomy for Panchayati Raj institutions. In most advanced and fast-developing countries, basic government services are provided by local bodies. In India, local bodies depend mostly on grants that are often infrequent and inadequate to achieve anything. As a recent study by the Reserve Bank of India showed, local taxes and fees contributed only 1.1 per cent to Panchayats' revenue. Empowerment of local bodies will be a big step forward. Although this would require support from states, the idea must be pursued to improve developmental outcomes. Overall, for achieving better policy outcomes over the next five years, it will be important that Parliament is allowed to function properly. The onus will be on the government to appropriately engage with the Opposition to attain better legislative outcomes.

Rational policy pause

Food prices tend to obstruct the disinflation process

The first Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting after the Lok Sabha elections rightly decided to leave the policy repo rate unchanged last week. Although the headline consumer price index-based inflation rate came down in recent months, it is expected to remain above the target of 4 per cent this financial year. However, the upward revision in growth projection surprised many on the street and helped push up the stock market. The MPC expects the Indian economy to grow 7.2 per cent this financial year, compared to the previous projection of 7 per cent. Notably, the Indian economy expanded by a higher than expected rate of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24. The upward growth revision reflects the MPC's view of sustained economic momentum. If the economy grows as projected, the current year will become the fourth consecutive year to record 7 per cent or more gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

In terms of policy action, the decision of the MPC to maintain the status quo — despite two of its six members voting for a rate cut — reflected the majority view that the disinflation process should be allowed to be completed. The headline inflation rate moderated to 4.8 per cent in April from 4.9 per cent in the previous month. While the headline rate remains significantly above the target, the core inflation rate moderated to 3.2 per cent in April, the lowest in the current series. The headline inflation rate is largely driven by food prices, but the outcome is not entirely surprising. Research findings featured in the Reserve Bank of India's latest Annual Report show core inflation in India, on average, takes a year to return to the pre-surge level in the absence of an overlapping shock. However, convergence in headline inflation to the pre-surge level is obstructed by food-inflation volatility. An analysis of the periods before and after the adoption of flexible inflation targeting (FIT) shows, while the timeline of movement in core inflation to the equilibrium is similar, owing to structural factors and policy transmission lags, the surge in the core inflation rate has been much lower after the adoption of FIT. This suggests better anchoring of inflation expectations in the post-FIT period. Therefore, convincing monetary policy action can help contain the surge in inflation rates.

Nonetheless, dealing with food inflation remains a challenge and its volatility is always hard to gauge. It is thus critical to wait till the target is durably achieved. A premature rate reduction can affect expectations and complicate monetary policy operations. A normal monsoon this year should help moderate food prices. Additionally, better than expected GDP growth provides the RBI the policy space to remain focused on inflation management. Further, it made sense at this stage to wait and see the fiscal stance of the new government, which assumed office after a largely unexpected verdict. There are concerns in the financial market that managing government finances will become more difficult, given the nature of the election verdict. A deviation from the fiscal consolidation path would have implications for inflation outcomes. Finally, while the stated stance of the RBI is that it doesn't follow the US Federal Reserve, it is wise to consider the Fed's stance, given the implications for capital flows and currency markets.

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Organising for the energy transition

Greater effectiveness will come from improved organisation design in the Union government

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Sceptics about government bloat in India have long argued that the entire Union government ought to be fitted into 15 ministries and Raisina Hill. Every Cabinet formation is an opportunity to rethink the activities of the Union government. Many areas of mission creep are into areas where government involvement in the economy is unnecessary or even harmful. In the fields where the presence of government is required, the present organisation design often hinders performance.

The field of energy is one such. Multiple departments create an environment of silos. The Ministry of Coal pursues the objective of more coal. The Ministry of Renewable Energy pursues the objective of less coal, and the Ministry of Power pursues the objective of more electricity. The Ministry of Environment thinks about climate change but has little influence upon the energy ministries. This results in policy incoherence: Initiatives of different parts of the executive are in inconsistent directions.



AJAY SHAH & AKSHAY JAITLY

This incoherence hampers the performance of the Union government within India (in its engagement with state governments, where the bulk of the electricity system lies) and outside India (in its engagement with the external world). Compared with many other fields, energy transition is one in which the external world matters more. Economic statecraft is harder to conduct when the policy strategy, and the national interest, is relatively incoherent.

Energy transition is not a unique problem where the structure of departments and ministries is faulty. In the Indian policy environment, bureaucratic inertia often trumps a rational organisation design. Similar problems are found in transportation. The finance complex is also poorly organised: There is a Vijay Kelkar-chaired committee report titled "A Ministry of Finance for the 21st Century", and the first 24 years of the century have witnessed low improvements.

What is the present arrangement? Energy transition is the work of the following ministries or departments: (1) coal; (2) environment, forests and climate change; (3) new and renewable energy; (4) petroleum and natural gas; (5) power; (6) atomic energy (7) electric vehicles is at heavy industries; and (8) economic policy is at economic affairs. Most people would agree this is not a good arrangement. How could it be done better? There are five areas for work.

1. We need to rethink the list of departments. Do we need a Ministry of Coal and a Department of Atomic Energy? For example, there could be just two departments, one for carbon-based fuels and another for carbon-free fuels.

2. It is possible to fuse everything connected with energy into a single Ministry of Energy, which could have a Ministry of External Affairs-style structure with many departments headed by secretary-rank officers and then a leadership by one minister and one energy secretary. This delivers less than meets the eye, because the fundamental unit of government is the department, and under this solution, we would still have a proud Department of Coal, which is trying to increase carbon emissions.

Fusing a set of departments into a new ministry has ample precedent. There is a long history of departments moving from one ministry to another. Hence, such changes are quite feasible. It may make sense to merge heavy industries into energy. But it would not make sense to merge the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) into energy. The Allocation of Business Rules require a fresh look and many modifications to reflect the problem of energy transition.

3. To improve coordination among multiple ministers, there is a case for a Group of Ministers for Climate Transition, which brings together the eight or fewer ministers concerned with this. This is a good solution in that there is an institutional memory and bureaucratic capability around Groups of Ministers (GoMs). At the same time, such Groups have been a bit unsatisfactory in the past. A key limitation is that there is no technical secretariat that supports the Group: We are down to ministers competing for influence where each has been briefed by their officials based on the interests of their department.

The interests of existing energy departments could be partially addressed by having this GoM chaired by the Minister of Finance, who should have strategic economic policy capability in the DEA. A key failing of GoMs in the past was the lack of a technical secretariat. A group of research organisations can be drawn to work together as the technical secretariat to the GoM.

4. Alongside the traditional three branches of the state, we in India have a new concept of a state organisation, the regulators, which pack tremendous power through fusing executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Improving organisation design for energy transition requires rethinking these regulators also.

5. Alongside the organisation design of the executive branch, there is the problem of state capability in the legislative branch. Fragmentation at the level of Parliamentary Standing Committees can be solved by creating a unified Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Energy Transition and fusing the work of standing committees for seven of the eight departments into this. Here also, it will help to have a (different) group of research organisations supporting the Standing Committee.

India is unusual in having an excessively fragmented and sprawling Union government. It is interesting to see that in other countries also, where such a pre-existing problem was not present, new government structures have been established in recognition of the difficulties of climate change. In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) oversees energy transition policies. In France, the Ministry for the Ecological Transition focuses on climate change. In Spain, there is the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge. In Uruguay, energy transition falls within a Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mining. In Indonesia, energy transition is done through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. In the US, John Podesta is the "climate czar" who is playing a unique role. This solution, however, sits uneasily in the Indian constitutional arrangement, where the machinery of government is run through the Cabinet, Cabinet ministers, and departments.

Shah is a researcher at the XKDR Forum, and Jaitly is partner, Trilegal, and founder, Trustbridge

Agenda in the time of climate change

As you read this, India will have a new-old government for the next five years. In my view, the agenda for the next government is the old one, but with a fundamental difference. This must be India's agenda for development in and for the age of climate change. There is also the fact that the list of priority action areas remains the same. We have unfinished business when it comes to virtually everything — from energy to water and sanitation to food and nutrition to, of course, health and education. We know that the last government had schemes in place and budgets allocated for all these issues.

But we also know that ensuring the welfare and well-being of people is a work in progress. During this election, as journalists fanned out to listen to the opinions of voters, we heard that unemployment was a major concern; lack of clean drinking water and sanitation topped the agenda; the energy crisis was still wicked as the price of the liquefied petroleum gas cylinder was unaffordable and electricity unreliable. Farmers are still distressed. So, a lot of work still needs to be done, and in areas that the last government said it had checked off on its to-do list.



DOWN TO EARTH

SUNITA NARAIN

This should not come as a surprise. India is a vast country, with a massive deficit in governance. The last mile for any government scheme is about making sure that it reaches people — not once but every time. This is now combined with the impact of climate change where every day some or the other part of the country is being battered by at least one extreme weather event. This has huge implications for development programmes — unseasonal rain and extreme weather lead to more drought, flood, and loss of livelihood, putting an additional strain on the resources of the government.

This is why the future agenda must recognise that the imperative of development is about scale, speed, and imagination, which takes into account the need to do development differently. We need a new imagination in the design of development schemes.

For long, governments have been caught between a welfare approach — which is often dismissed as a handout — and a capitalistic minimum-government approach. In my view, this age of climate risk needs a new narrative. The government needs to rework and re-engineer development so that it is inclusive, affordable and, so, sustainable. This means re-imagining the way we work in almost every sphere — from the supply of clean water, so that it is not resource- or capital-intensive, to the access to energy so that it is clean but, most importantly, affordable. This will require changes in design and then in delivery. We need a new development paradigm that can work for the planet, but for this, it needs to work for every last person.

What is important to note is that in most cases, the government has schemes and budgets. What we need is to learn from what is working and what is not. We need transformational action; and for this we need to ensure implementation -- and as I said with drive and obsession.

But for all this to be possible we need two next-generation reforms. And this then is the make-or-break agenda for the government in my view.

One, we need to strengthen the ground-level institutions, where local people take part. We need participatory democracy to make development programmes work. It is now over 30 years since the country passed the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution to empower people's institutions — the Panchayati Raj in rural areas and the municipal system in urban India. We have also experimented with deepening democracy by strengthening Gram Sabhas or village assemblies. But all this is unfinished work. We have much more to do to give control over natural resources to village and city governments. We need them to manage funds and schemes; to create green jobs; and to invest in natural resources for livelihoods. We need to celebrate the noise of democracy.

We also need to strengthen the institutions of governance for a new India. Over the past few years, most conventional institutions have been deliberately, or by sheer neglect, allowed to decay. But the fact is governance and regulation need institutions that can apply deterrence with accountability and have the ability to navigate inconvenient and tough decisions.

Two, even more tomorrow than today, governance will need increased feedback and accountability. This needs tolerance for voices that differ. It is important to understand that alternative information is not dissent or targeted criticism. The more we learn about what is working and what is not, the more governance improves. Currently, most differing voices have been silenced. It is like an echo chamber where only cheerleaders thrive. In my view, this only makes a government poorer — they hear nothing and learn little.

Rebuilding trust is the key — not just for schemes to succeed but also for societies to thrive. This has to be the agenda. This is the time for change; for society to build green because it is inclusive; to build growth, because it is sustainable.

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The other side of nonviolent resistance

BOOK REVIEW

LINDA VILLAROSA

In his 1958 memoir *Stride Toward Freedom*, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr laid out a series of principles — courage, friendship, spiritual transformation and so on — for combating racism and other forms of oppression. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus Christ, King urged that the acceptance of suffering, even violence, without retaliation put one in accord with the universe and armed just people with the power to defeat hate.

The practitioners of nonviolence fought with "the weapon of love," King wrote, and their method became a foundational tactic for many civil rights activists. Think of the 1950s and 1960s, when young men and women were shoved and spit on for sitting at lunch counters. Ideally, they simply waited out the assault without so much as raising a hand. Underlying this strategy is the hope, in King's words, that "unearned suffering is redemptive" and can open the door to understanding.

Since the civil rights era, iterations of King's nonviolent approach have remained the most familiar, acceptable and celebrated forms of opposition to racial oppression. You can see the roots of King's philosophy of nonviolence in the marches and hashtags in the summer of 2020 after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many others.

But is this singular approach the best that activists can do, even when fine-tuned for different generations or movements? Where do they look for other models? In her compelling and often counterintuitive new book, *We Refuse,* Kellie Carter Jackson, a professor of Africana studies, argues that the usual chronicles of this resistance are both narrow and watered down. "Our culture's fixation on nonviolence has caused us to miss entire histories of Black responses to white supremacy," she writes. "Nonviolence on its own is not at all expansive enough to rectify the harm that has been caused by racism."

Her book warns against the dangers of misremembering the past and offers a broader and more nuanced picture of resistance through the frame of refusal. It is "a halting hand, a pointed finger waving from side to side or a powerful raised fist. It is a barrier that prevents oppressed people from being consumed."

She divides her exploration into five categories — revolution, protection, force, flight and joy. Her chapter on revolution centres on the Haitian Revolution. Beginning with a revolt of enslaved people in 1791, the uprising lasted 13 bloody years and led to the end of colonial rule in Haiti. The fighting inspired people from Brazil to Philadelphia to agitate for freedom and equality. In 1807, a nervous American government passed an act to make the international slave trade illegal.

Carter Jackson believes revolutions don't always involve fatalities, but they must result in forfeiture and equitable redistribution of wealth and other resources. "At the core of revolution is structural change, not violence," she writes.

Her chapter on protection covers the ingenuity of the Underground Railroad, and the chapter on flight presents the Great Migration as a mass abandonment by six to eight million Black Southerners who took their "skills, genius and artistry" with them. These concepts overlap and intersect. "Sometimes revolutions involve force," Carter Jackson writes. "Sometimes flight is motivated by protection. Sometimes flight and force are joyful."



WE REFUSE: A Forceful History of Black Resistance
Author: Kellie Carter Jackson
Publisher: Seal Press
Pages: 291
Price: $30

The book is most effective in unearthing the stories of little-known, everyday rebellions, especially from the lives of Black women. These histories have been at best under-told, if not lost altogether. Her chapter on force is by far the sharpest, most convincing and surprising.

Force, a remedy of last resort, states Carter Jackson, can be a strike, a boycott, a vote — or it can be armed self-defence. Carter Jackson remembers stories of the men in Louisiana, including her grandmother's brothers, who spent weekends in jail to protect themselves from being lynched. "The white men in town used to get drunk on weekends and hang Black folks," Carter Jackson's grandmother explained, "so if you were already in jail, you were safe."

Throughout the chapter, Carter Jackson offers a catalogue of Black history heroes who owned guns, often unexpectedly so. In 1906, the scholar W E B Du Bois, who was teaching in Georgia and had considered himself a pacifist, bought a double-barrelled shotgun and two dozen rounds of shells after a riot in Atlanta that left lynching victims hanging from lampposts. "If a white mob had stepped on the campus," he wrote, "I would without hesitation have sprayed their guts over the grass."

Decades later, the voting rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer explained that she kept "a shotgun in every corner of my bedroom, and the first cracker even looks like he wants to throw some dynamite on my porch won't write his mama again." Even the paragon of civil disobedience, Rosa Parks, sometimes had her kitchen table covered with guns, Carter Jackson writes, "in case of an emergency."

Black women used guns to stop trouble, Carter Jackson asserts, not start it. "Rarely were guns fatal," she says. "Instead, they nearly always served as warnings — bullets fired in the air to quickly quell the violent desires of the mob."

Is Carter Jackson advocating armed resistance at the next protest? Her book is not an instruction manual for activists. But she does suggest that every era gets the protest movement it needs and deserves. History — complicated, clear-eyed and unrepentant — is her warning and her weapon of choice.

The reviewer is the author of Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation, *a 2023 Pulitzer Prize finalist*

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{ OUR TAKE }

Compulsions of a coalition council

The BJP will have to be more accommodative towards allies to ensure smooth governance

After a decade of dominance in Parliament and government, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi starts his third consecutive term in office as the head of a coalition government. On late Sunday evening, 72 ministers (including the PM) were sworn in, with most of the heavyweights from the previous government and representatives of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — barring the NCP (Ajit Pawar) — finding a place in the Modi 3.0 government. The ministry could be expanded later if the PM wishes to address any possible regional or social underrepresentation as well as shortage of expertise. In his second term, PM Modi had inducted specialists — S Jaishankar, for instance — to improve governance. That all of them find space in his third government, and the allies have been given only 11 slots in the council of ministers perhaps suggests that the BJP has had its way; 39 of the council have been Union ministers before; and 43 have served at least three terms in Parliament.

That said, it is important to recognise that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) with 16 MPs and the JD(U) with 12 MPs will be the twin pillars on which the third NDA government will rest. This arrangement, where the BJP with 240 seats is dependent on at least 15 allies to stay in office, may force the party to recalibrate its priorities. The BJP will have to acknowledge that it is an NDA government and recognise that governance needs to be a wider consultative process which may call for both negotiation and accommodation. This could cut both ways — the compulsions of coalition politics can work as a mechanism for checks and balances in government, but it could also skew policies. It is a given that some of the BJP's more contentious agenda will have to wait — the TDP has already expressed its reservations about repealing the Muslim quota in some states, promised by the BJP during the poll campaign, and the Uniform Civil Code — just as some existing policies may now need to be tweaked; the JD(U), for instance, has already expressed concerns about the Agnipath scheme.

The challenge for the PM is to separate genuine policy concerns from pressure tactics and play accordingly. Here, Modi could borrow from the playbook of Atal Bihari Vajpayee who managed the NDA with aplomb between 1999 and 2004. He did that by setting aside controversial agendas and crafting a governance agenda agreeable to allies. It will help if the NDA draws up a common minimum programme and appoints a convenor for floor management within the coalition to avoid friction among allies. Institutionalising the coalition management mechanism can help the government ride the growth momentum, and address crisis points such as unemployment and inflation, which influenced poll outcomes.

Joy and sadness of being Sunil Chhetri

Last week, on June 6, the 39-year-old Sunil Chhetri played his last match for India. The football icon retired as India's highest goal-scorer (94 goals), most capped player (151 caps). For a team that often struggles to score, he was an inspiration, a creator and a finisher, all rolled into one. When he stepped out to play for India one last time, there were tears in many an eye, for his kind of player doesn't come around easily — especially for India. And that, in essence, is why his exit rankles those who care about Indian football. A replacement, of better or even similar quality, is nowhere near ready. Few sportspersons retire at their peak, most are pushed by younger talents. But Chhetri played on because there was no one to push him.

Former India striker IM Vijayan was pushed by Bhaichung Bhutia, Bhutia himself was pushed by Chhetri, but the India No 11 stood alone at the top right till the end despite making his debut for the country in 2005. For a while, it had looked like Jeje Lalpekhlua might be the man to take the baton from Chhetri. He scored 23 goals in 56 matches for the country, but his form fell away, and he retired in 2023 at the age of 32.

So, we are once again confronted with the same question: Who after Chhetri? The answer is not clear — and given that India is a country with strong footballing aspirations, this is a travesty. So, while we celebrate Chhetri we must ponder over why India doesn't have someone to step into his boots. It's a situation that does not reflect well on AIFF, and its president Kalyan Chaubey, a former footballer himself, must take steps to address the gap that Chhetri's retirement has exposed.

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }



Shashi Shekhar

Balancing the needs of alliance and party

Prime Minister Modi will have to bank on his political experience as an organisation man to navigate the many complexities of running a coalition government with demanding allies

Narendra Modi has taken the oath of office as Prime Minister (PM) of India for the third time. He is only the second PM in the country's history, after Jawaharlal Nehru, to be chosen for a third term. However, unlike in his previous two terms, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) does not hold even a simple majority this time. He heads the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) only because the alliance has secured the most seats in the Lok Sabha. The pressing question now is whether this change will hinder his working style and future plans.

Before answering the question, consider this: While releasing the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) manifesto in Amaravati, the party's leader Chandrababu Naidu said: "We will preserve the 4% reservations for Muslims and provide ₹5,000 in financial assistance every month for mosque maintenance in the state." Naidu has offered women in Andhra Pradesh a monthly allowance of ₹1,500, free bus travel, and ₹3,000 a month for the unemployed. The Andhra Pradesh government will need a large sum to implement these recommendations, which it cannot raise on its own.

According to the Reserve Bank of India, Andhra Pradesh is one of the most indebted states. Despite this, Naidu intends to radically transform the state's capital, Amaravati. It will require a separate investment of ₹3.5 trillion. During Modi's first term, Naidu had clashed with the Centre over such issues. Today, when the TDP is NDA's largest partner with 16 seats, we should remember that Naidu is renowned for his bargaining skills.

The NDA's second-largest partner is the Janata Dal (U). Nitish Kumar has defied the NDA twice over the last 10 years. In 2013, he openly opposed Modi's candidature for prime ministership. Like Naidu, he, too, seeks special status for his state.

Besides, his views on matters such as the Uniform Civil Code and the Agniveer scheme diverge from the BJP's declared stand.

There is one other thing: Almost all the current allies of the BJP, including the TDP, were part of the United Progressive Alliance (now the INDIA bloc) one way or the other. Also, Kumar has been described as an ideal candidate for prime ministership from time to time by his party.

Is this a good or bad omen?

The Oppositions in states continue to remind these regional leaders of their pledges. In Bihar, in response to Nitish Kumar's decision to go with NDA, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav said : "Chacha is in the role of kingmaker, so now he should get special status for the state and be able to get a caste census conducted across the country."

Be it Naidu or Nitish, Chirag Paswan or Ajit Pawar, Eknath Shinde or Jayant Chaudhary, everyone has regional demands. Modi cannot ignore these. Power in politics entails obligations. Every political leader must balance the interests of her/his constituents with the benefits of power. For this, all constituent parties will strive to secure the highest number of posts and key departments in the council of ministers.



People who understand politics know the basic distinction between government and organisation. Modi has juggled both really well ANI

How will Modi and his associates handle this?

The answer is not particularly difficult. Take a look at Modi's career. He rose to his current heights through hard work. Before he became chief minister (CM) of Gujarat in 2001, Modi had worked for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and then BJP in various capacities. He played a significant role in establishing the BJP in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.

People who understand politics know the basic distinction between government and organisation. When someone is in government, the baton of power is in their hands. In organisation, it is important to keep everyone united without the power of government. Modi has done both really well. This time, his party has clearly stumbled, but it would be premature to attribute this to the PM's personal failure.

Another attribute that distinguishes Modi from his predecessors is his extensive experience as CM. The BJP had stints in office and in the Opposition (at the Centre) when Modi was Gujarat CM. Regardless of the political landscape, Modi consistently delivered exceptional results for Gujarat. His ability to navigate these complexities demonstrates his adeptness at walking a tightrope in the political arena.

In keeping with the Indian tradition of wishing everyone good luck in their new endeavours, let us extend our congratulations to the entire cabinet of Modi's third government and believe they will meet the expectations of the voters. The NDA will, hopefully, work responsibly over the next five years. History is watching them.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

Adding arrows to new regime's policy quiver

With the electoral process now behind us, the focus has shifted to the government formation and markets are speculating on the possible policy directions of a coalition government after 10 years. To start with, the general domestic macro backdrop is quite favourable for the new government. FY24 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at above 8% is encouraging and the momentum seems to be continuing even in FY25. India is probably the only large country demonstrating above-average growth that is also accelerating further. Macro stability parameters of inflation, current account and fiscal deficit are within the broad comfort zone.

This probably suggests that there is no immediate need to change the overall policy thrust of the government which has been a two-pronged approach. One, emphasis on the supply side through infrastructure, manufacturing, digital, technology, etc, and two, focus on macro and financial stability to provide a long runway to growth.



Samiran Chakraborty



Baqar Zaidi

Based on a closer scrutiny of the election results, the government will have to decide what needs to be added to the objective function. In particular, there could be two directions in which new ideas and policy actions might be spread. First, if voting data provides some support to the hypothesis that there is considerable distress among the rural/poor/youth, then the government might contemplate some demand boosting/redistribution strategies. Second, if there is an aspiration to push India's potential growth even higher, then further productivity-boosting reforms will have to be considered to attract capital along with better deployment of human resources through large-scale job creation.

Let us delve into the specific policies if these are the broad objectives that the government would want to push. On the supply side, the earlier government has already laid out a comprehensive plan with a combination of infra build-up to reduce logistics costs, trade policies to protect competitiveness and industrial and fiscal policies to enhance profitability. It will be important for the government to continue with these and hence not take the foot off the pedal on infra capex. Depending on the success of the PLI schemes, they can be extended to other sectors. Digital India is on auto pilot now and would not need much government handholding. It will be interesting to see how the new government ramps up the proposed R&D fund to usher in advanced technologies.

Over the last 10 years, the government has steadfastly improved the macro and financial stability parameters to shed the "Fragile Five" tag. Progress on this front has been quite remarkable, though in an uncertain global environment, there is no scope for complacency. We would expect the upcoming budget to respect the 5.1% of GDP FY25 fiscal deficit target announced in the interim budget as a red line to keep the country on track with debt reduction. The rating agencies are warming up to the idea of considering an upgrade and foreign bond investors are increasing their allocation towards India on the back of index inclusion. Adhering to macro stability would be integral to progress on these fronts and the budget document needs to reconfirm the government's commitment to the fiscal glide path.

The new government will have to find a balance between the macro stability objective and the need for a demand nudge if a requirement of that is felt. We think that given the higher RBI dividend and lower fiscal deficit for FY24 (5.6% of GDP vs 5.8 earlier), there is ~0.4% of GDP additional fiscal space available to the government for FY25 even if it wants to meet the exact interim budget target of 5.1% of GDP. Targeting this additional expenditure would obviously involve not just economic but also political considerations. In this economic cycle, the demand side has been lagging the supply side in our view and hence, a calibrated demand nudge should not be immediately inflationary but one needs to be also mindful that the fiscal bonanza from the RBI dividend might not be available every year to run large populist schemes.

The contentious structural reforms (land, labour, legal, agriculture, privatisation) to improve productivity of businesses might have to wait for the coalition government to become more cohesive and credible. We do acknowledge that a lot of economic policy agenda can be pushed through executive action rather than requiring legislative approval and surely does not need any super majority in Parliament. It is important for the government to keep business optimism high to take advantage of the favourable tailwinds, like the drifting of global capital towards India. Also, we think that domestic private investment is already in a nascent recovery stage and would benefit from constructive support from government policies. Even if the structural macro reforms are delayed, there could be several micro-level reforms to unclog regulatory bottlenecks, provide predictability to the policy environment and improve the ease of doing business.

If the assessment is that lack of job opportunities was a deciding factor in the election, then employment creation could move up on the economic agenda of the new government. India's labour market is multi-layered, and the employment strategy would have to be more nuanced too. At one end of the spectrum, manufacturing and high-end services would fulfil the needs of the skilled workforce. However, at the other end, a renewed focus on skill development or channelising more credit to foster self-employment is essential for the 250 million people who have been brought out of poverty in the last 10 years.

An economy which is performing several steps ahead of its peers, does not need an overhauling of the policy framework. Judicious additions to the bouquet would prepare it for higher growth with better distribution.

IF THE ASSESSMENT IS THAT LACK OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES WAS A DECIDING FACTOR IN THE POLLS, THEN EMPLOYMENT CREATION COULD MOVE UP ON THE AGENDA OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Samiran Chakraborty is managing director and chief economist India, and Baqar Zaidi is economist, Citigroup. The views expressed are personal

{ JOE BIDEN } PRESIDENT OF THE US

Democracy is never guaranteed. Every generation must preserve it, defend it and fight for it.



HT

INDIA bloc needs to stay together, build on gains

Uttar Pradesh (UP) was pivotal in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s tally falling. Till recently, UP was "blessed" with a narrative of good governance backed by the so-called two-engine perception. The bulldozer and encounter politics, odious to some but applauded by others, never got traction as an election issue. The "five *nyay*, 25 guarantees" of the Congress manifesto was backed by the Picchde, Dalit, Alpsankhyak (backward classes, Dalits, and minorities), or PDA, the outreach of the Samajwadi Party (SP), carefully crafting a non-Yadav backward profile. The results have certainly come as a shot in the arm for the two major alliance partners, but require some analysis to uncover the truth under the surface.

The apparent outcome of the alliance does not reflect any real-time performance of the parties that have dominated UP politics. The SP had contested 63 seats while the Congress was given 17. The final tally was 38 and 7, respectively. The Congress had initiated negotiations with a wishlist of 24 (mostly the surviving winners of 2009), but the SP prematurely announced a list of candidates in constituencies on our wishlist). At that stage, we were not unduly confident, there were clear signals that Muslims had turned to us in large numbers, while, in the 2019 assembly polls, 99% had voted for the SP. In the worst-case scenario, they could desert the SP completely. But we were firm that the need of the hour called for an honest alliance. We made efforts to negotiate better allocation but finally settled for what we were offered, to quickly clinch the date for a road show in Agra. Many of our leaders thought we deserved 25 seats but a sacrifice had to be made to oust the BJP. At that stage, we had one seat in UP (Rae Bareli) and the SP had five (in their alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party). Some people kept up the refrain of a tie-up with the BSP, but that was stillborn. There was no enthusiasm for the BSP among the SP negotiators although the SP's standing at the time was a contribution of their previous election tie-up with the BSP.



Salman Khurshid

The feel of the election turned increasingly positive with each passing phase. It must be said that, with a few exceptions, the workers of our two parties coordinated honestly despite different political cultures. The result is there for all to see.

It is very early to look at the path ahead, given the INDIA bloc does not look like forming a government in the near future. Working cohesively as the parliamentary Opposition can make a great difference, but will have to wait till the MPs settle down. Perhaps more important is the road ahead at the ground level in UP. We have often been at loggerheads in routine, daily politics, all of which was put on hold during the campaign. But we will have to learn to live together without obliterating our respective identities. Fortunately, we belong to the same side of the ideological divide in politics with minor differences in emphasis and, perhaps, style. It would be useful if we were quickly able to define our respective understanding of socialism and secularism. There may not be much difference beyond the words that are employed. But there may be some difficulty in matching our respective assessment of the voter segment that was drawn to us although there would have been aggregation amongst voters because of the alliance.

One nationwide indicator of this election is the mass movement of Muslims to the Congress with UP being an exemplar. We need to be clear that there are expectations that we must address if we want to revive a long-term relationship.

This is also true about Dalits and some segments of the general castes. This has a lot to do with self-generated hopes and expectations amongst minorities as indeed with our conscious endeavour to overcome their hesitations caused by history. Similarly, Dalits and OBCs have looked at the Congress as the outspoken saviour of the Constitution. Of course, Akhilesh Yadav has consolidated the Yadav vote that the BJP was constantly trying to wean away.

Sitting down to draw up lists for electoral contests is tough enough but sharing the ground after election results is far more difficult. It would not be fair to the INDIA partners if we restrict each other's freedom to grow and reward our committed supporters even as we share the advantages of having fought this historic election together. There will be elections again in the future and the lessons learnt in 2024 may well show us how to deal with the road ahead. Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, even UP, have shown that political dominance cannot be taken for granted.

Salman Khurshid is a Congress leader and former minister of external affairs. The views expressed are personal

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OUR VIEW

PTI



RBI optimism is tinged with chronic concerns

India's economy may be in a sweet spot, but consumption and private investment are still taking painfully long to pick up, even as RBI faces continuing uncertainty on food inflation

There are many ways in which designing a monetary policy differs from drafting a Union budget. The budget is an account of money received and spent, overlaid with plans for how to structure expenditure over the next 12 months—depending on a combination of pressing political exigencies and economic imperatives—and proposals for raising money to meet this spending. At the end of the year, it does not matter if the end-result deviates from the original, as testified by fluctuating budget deficits over the years. But, for monetary policy, the central bank's think-tank has to use past data to hack a path to the near future, hoping to maintain a comfortable equilibrium between inflation, growth and financial stability. The monetary policy unveiled on 7 June, in which the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy committee decided to hold the benchmark interest rate at 6.5% and persist with its stance of withdrawing accommodation, was based on April inflation data. Even though the narrative emanating from Mint Street emphasized that India's economy is in a sweet spot, growth having revived post pandemic and retail inflation somewhat under control, some wrinkles are visible in the central bank's policy statement.

The first sign of anxiety, though minor, is RBI's apparent compulsion to keep an eye on policy actions by central banks in advanced countries. While the US Federal Reserve usually serves as the fulcrum for globally coordinated central bank action, the European Central Bank decoupled on 6 June and cut interest rates ahead of most other major central banks. This has put RBI in a piquant position, even though it is at pains to emphasize its policy independence. If it cuts rates prematurely, it could lead to some retrenchment of foreign exchange reserves; if it leaves them untouched for too long, it may have to manage capital inflows and the resultant inflationary pressure. This extraneous dependence comes on top of India's flexible inflation-targeting regime in which factors that push up price levels (government expenditure, for example) have no accountability, but RBI has to submit a report to the Centre if its tools (higher policy rates or tighter liquidity) fail to control inflation.

The 7 June policy statement may seem mundane to most untrained eyes. But drilling a bit deeper and reading between the lines, two-three creases underline the cheer and hope that the document tries to convey. The first is slowing private consumption, which has grown by only around 4% during 2023-24, a clear sign of compressed incomes and economic stress. The second source of unease lies in the private sector's tepid response to the government's front-loading of investment expenditure. And though the RBI governor did state that capacity utilization has exceeded its long-term average, circumspection underscores RBI's expectation of an investment revival. But the biggest worry is reserved for food inflation, which averaged around 7% during 2023-24 and touched 7.9% in April, even though there was noticeable price moderation in other categories (including fuel). What could inject further uncertainty to the trajectory of food inflation are extreme weather events traceable to climate change. Worse, it could spill over into generalized retail inflation and raise inflation expectations. Willy-nilly, over the next few quarters, RBI will yet again have to deal with the consequences of occurrences over which it has no control.

THEIR VIEW

Economics should go back to its basics for a fast-changing world

The discipline can't be divorced from politics and we must renew efforts to grasp evolving dynamics



KAUSHIK BASU
is a professor of economics at Cornell University and a former chief economic adviser to the Government of India.

The world economy is at a turning point. As global supply chains face frequent disruptions, the structures underpinning markets and international trade are unravelling, leading to economic instability which is spilling over into other domains and fuelling conflict and political polarization.

It is worth asking why, despite an unprecedented influx of data, mainstream economic thinking and policymaking appear to be failing. I believe that the problem lies in the lack of theoretical research, particularly when it comes to exploring overarching ideas needed to connect and interpret seemingly disparate data points and trends.

The growing backlash against economic theory in recent years has tended to focus on the field's reliance on developing mathematical models for their own sake rather than to inform and improve public policy. Many argue that instead of trying to imitate physics, economists should emphasize data-based empirical analysis. But while I do not doubt the importance of collecting data and addressing urgent social issues, major turning points demand that we direct our attention to more fundamental issues and consider the need for an economic paradigm shift.

History is rife with such shifts. The Industrial Revolution was a period of rapid technological innovation that enhanced our ability to produce goods but also changed the rules of the game, as feudalism gave way to wage labour and large-scale factory production. Children were put to work on the shop floor, and the skies darkened with smoke and pollution.

Initially, no one understood how this new industrial economy worked. But the Industrial Revolution coincided with some of the biggest breakthroughs in economic theory, from Adam Smith's seminal *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 to Léon Walras's *Elements of Pure Economics* in 1874. These works led to innovative and necessary policy interventions, such as Britain's introduction of income tax in 1842 and the passage of the US Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890.

Crucially, the burgeoning discipline was not yet synonymous with mathematical modelling, which is why both Adam Smith's lucid math-free analyses of political economy and Walras's mathematical work were able to transform economic theory and provide us with invaluable insights into the new paradigm that emerged during the Industrial Revolution.

After Walras's work laid the foundations for neoclassical economics, mathematical principles became integral to public policy. For a while, this approach worked well. But the neoclassical revolution assumed perfect information, and this became embedded in the discipline, even though most economists knew it was a chimera.

By the early 1970s, Nobel laureate economists George Akerlof, Joseph Stiglitz and Michael Spence demonstrated that information is not just imperfect, but asymmetric, and that this had more dramatic consequences than people had realized. Corporations know more about the products they sell than buyers do, just as used-car dealers know more than their customers about the cars they sell. Their groundbreaking work upended some of neoclassical economics' fundamental assumptions, leading to a paradigm shift that provided new insights into how to design public policies to protect consumers and workers from exploitation.

Economics is now again on the cusp of a profound transformation, owing to the digital revolution and the rise of artificial intelligence. By redefining the meaning of labour and giving rise to new forms of economic warfare that disrupt global supply chains, these rapid technological advances are changing the nature of markets and trade.

Policymakers appear slow to recognize this new reality, leading to frequent economic 'firefighting.' But just as fighting fires does not eliminate the need to develop new types of non-flammable materials, economists must devote more energy to studying the dynamics of today's emerging technological paradigm.

One way to do this is to go back to basics. Before the late 19th century,we had no discipline called economics; it was known as 'political economy,' in recognition of the intertwined nature of the economy and the polity. This began to change with the publication of Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* in 1890 and the subsequent rise of marginalism. With its separation from the study of politics, economics became a distinct mathematical discipline.

While this exclusive focus has allowed economists to focus their research and enabled the discipline to mature by leaps and bounds, it has also created an artificial separation between economic policymaking and politics. In the real world, markets, trade, politics, and international relations have become so interconnected that we miss a lot if we try to study them separately.

Fortunately, the rise of game theory over the past century has provided economists with an analytical framework that, unlike marginalist mathematics, can encompass both economics and politics. Reviving the classical tradition of political economy would provide us with the intellectual tools to study—and understand—our rapidly changing world.

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10 YEARS AGO


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Senses, Nifty record new closing highs

Govt starts to prepare for a shortfall in monsoon rain

Narendra Modi govt promises to reboot India

Mining, sale of coal may be privatized

JUST A THOUGHT

The first lesson of economics is scarcity: there is never enough of anything to fully satisfy all those who want it. The first lesson of politics is to disregard the first lesson of economics.

THOMAS SOWELL

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

A theory of why the BJP did poorly in the elections

MANU JOSEPH



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

A few days ago in my colony, I overheard a quarrel between a man who lived in a villa, like me, and a gardener. The master wanted some additional work to be done, and the gardener said that would cost him a few hundred rupees more. The master exploded in rage at the "greed" and poor work ethics of migrants. He said, "You be careful. See what happened to Kejriwal? He acted too smart, not realizing his size." A few hours earlier, Delhi chief minister Kejriwal had been arrested on corruption charges.

When the quarrel began, I thought there was something unusual about the moment, because by the laws of probability, it was likely that both men were in the vote base of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The master is not the average BJP voter, as his wealth and income are well above that level, but a very vocal one in the eyes of migrants. The urban master hides an underrated clue to why the BJP lost 92 of the 303 seats it had won in 2019 (it won new seats to reach 240).

There was a time when the master and the gardener used to do the same things, like vote for the Congress and watch the same Hindi films. There was even a period when their children went to the same school, or at least studied the same text books. But then, India changed and different classes did not do the same stuff in the same room anymore, unless one was serving. As the BJP rose to assume power at the Centre, different classes once again voted for the same party, and even the same ideology. But this was an odd state of affairs and not fated to last.

Apart from politicians and some paid actors, who are the BJP's ambassadors? Upper middle-class people in propaganda, journalism, cinema and the culture business., mostly. There are others who are not so prominent but are still ambassadors of the party. They are among the urban upper classes; they are employers of house-helps, drivers and gardeners. They are mascots of the BJP because they cannot stop talking about how everyone else should be. And they are the worst ambassadors a political party can have.

Intellectuals tend to venerate voters when the results go their way. So it was not surprising that economist Raghuram Rajan complimented the intelligence of the Indian voter for diminishing the BJP. But we can understand elections without the myth of the voter's pious soul. When we understand what people dislike the most, I think we get most of what they do.

Political observers now say that "hubris" harmed the BJP. In the Indian lexicon, this means arrogance and not self-confidence. In any case, culturally, Indians equate self-confidence with arrogance. But I do not think that professional politicians, even from the BJP, were as overtly arrogant as critics of the party claim. In fact, for the past several months, they have been exhibiting considerable nervousness. Those who were full of bluster, those who were truly cocky, were actually the sidekicks, like the man in the villa. Millions of average voters who once voted for the BJP saw the cockiness of its most visible ambassadors.

The urban upper-class BJP fan who employs poor migrants is the party's worst ambassador

Generally, people do not share the ideology of those they despise. This is the reason why intellectuals find it hard to transmit wisdom. The problem is never that people are too dumb to see wisdom. People dislike wisdom if they dislike the mouth it comes from. It was a phenomenon that at first favoured the right-wing in India. But when the BJP found its own upper-class ambassadors, it probably had an adverse affect on the party's voter base.

Observers cite several factors that influenced the verdict of these Lok Sabha elections. The most persuasive among these is high food inflation. There are other reasons given by election analysts, like high unemployment among the youth, that I don't find so convincing. It is hard to imagine why BJP voters would think some other party would enrich them. This year's electoral verdict, however, does have a punitive element to it. In the eyes of millions in India, the BJP had probably become a party of *sahebs* and bullies.

So, when the BJP deployed the political tactic of using law enforcement against inconvenient politicians, it came across as a corroboration of the cockiness of the party's upper-class sidekicks. And the hard tactics of the previous government de-intellectualized a complex nugget of intellectual wisdom—institutions have to be independent or one man may walk away with everything.

I admired one quality of the previous government in which the BJP had an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. As a citizen, I felt that someone was in control of the country, and even its future, and that was unprecedented.

Before the previous government, the imprisonment of a politician in India was rare. There was probably a practical reason for that. It was political courtesy. Politicians in power knew that one day they would not be in power and they expected new winners to extend the same courtesy. But there was a time till recently when it appeared that the BJP was not afraid of ever losing power at the Centre. Several rival politicians went to prison.

A diminished BJP may have to conduct more meetings and drink more sugary tea to push its economic agenda, but would also need to be more considerate and tolerant to other views.

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THEIR VIEW

The MPC has done well to keep policy interest rates unchanged

It is naive to believe the recent election verdict did not figure in (or shape) its decision to maintain status quo on the policy rate



MYTHILI BHUSNURMATH
is a senior journalist and a former central banker.

BLOOMBERG



The outcome of the latest meeting of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) rate setting committee, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), was a no-brainer even before votes were counted. With growth doing well (latest estimates put gross domestic product or GDP growth for 2023-24 at 8.2%), but inflation yet to show firm signs of declining on a sustained basis, the case for *status quo* was compelling enough to begin with. And had become doubly so after the election verdict for a reason that no central bank would ever like to admit publicly: political realities, if not compulsions!

"We don't think about political events, we don't think about politics, we think about what is the right thing to do for the economy," said US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell, responding to a question on the impact of the impending US presidential election on the Fed's actions. A similar sentiment was voiced by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das when queried about the likely impact of the Lok Sabha elections on its rate action at the press conference following the April 2024 MPC meeting and reiterated at the latest press conference. Das simply refused to be drawn into a discussion on the subject, saying that the question is in the realm of "speculation."

The myth (for it is largely a myth) of independent central banks has long been a touchstone in modern economies. This is not surprising. Their credibility, and hence the faith of the public in central banks, rests on their seeming invincibility and imperviousness to political pressures.

Under the RBI Act, as amended after the adoption of inflation targeting in 2016, RBI's mandate is clear: ensure price stability (defined as ensuring retail price inflation remains within the 2-6% band) while keeping in mind the objective of growth. This *de facto* independence of RBI ensures that it can frame monetary policy regardless of electoral verdicts.

That's on paper! In practice, it is naïve to assume that the outcome of the recent Lok Sabha elections would not have figured in the MPC's discussions. On the contrary, it is a fair guess that RBI and the MPC would have pondered long and hard on what the verdict means, both for the future course of the economy and for monetary policy. We'll have to wait for the minutes of the meeting to know more, though, as Governor Das, once again, refused to comment when queried on this.

Remember, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) no longer enjoys a Lok Sabha majority on its own, but is dependent on coalition partners who are bound to demand their pound of flesh and, more importantly, be in a position to get it. In such a scenario, the MPC would necessarily have had to wrestle with an important question. Will the next five years see the government walk the straight-and-narrow path to fiscal consolidation with the same zeal as earlier to reach the avowed goal of below 4.5% fiscal deficit by 2025-26?

The answer to this is key to determining the course of monetary policy. More so since RBI is a full-service central bank charged with managing both the country's monetary policy and the government's debt. When the two roles come into conflict, as, for instance, when monetary policy demands higher interest rates even as the government seeks to borrow at lower rates, fiscal dominance of monetary policy ensures the latter (low interest rates) takes precedence. As in the period immediately after covid, when RBI kept interest rates low for much longer than warranted. Recall its repeated interventions in the market to prevent the yield on 10-year government securities from rising above 6%, with Governor Das terming the Reserve Bank's active management of the yield curve a "public good."

In such a scenario, the MPC has done well to keep rates unchanged (for the eighth time running) even if it was with a split verdict of 4:2, with two MPC members, Ashima Goyal and Jayanth Varma calling for a 25 basis points cut in the repo rate. Likewise, the MPC must be commended for remaining "focused on withdrawal of liquidity," again by a 4: 2 majority, despite dissent from Goyal and Varma who voted, somewhat inexplicably, for a change in the stance to neutral.

The reality, as Governor Das (in common with US Fed Chair Jerome Powell) admitted, is that "the final leg of the disinflation journey may be tough." With real GDP growth for 2024-25 projected at 7.2%, higher than the 7% projected by RBI earlier, and inflation yet to reach the 4% target on a durable basis, there is no case for rushing through with a cut in the repo rate (the rate at which RBI infuses liquidity into the system).

It is possible, of course, that RBI, chastened by hugely under-estimating GDP growth last fiscal, is over-estimating growth a little this fiscal. But with growth holding firm by all indications, "monetary policy has greater elbow room to pursue price stability to ensure that inflation aligns to the target on a durable basis." "Sustained price stability," said Das, "would set strong foundations for a period of high growth." He couldn't be more right on that.

MINT CURATOR

Policy rate divergence is not a narrative that will last for long

The ECB's rate cut diverges from Fed policy. Don't over-interpret it



DANIEL MOSS
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The ECB's Christine Lagarde is confident Eurozone inflation is under control AFP

After a period of relative uniformity among major monetary authorities, it's suddenly fashionable to talk of divergence in the path of interest rates. Unfortunately, this easy description papers over some important—and subtle—differences that have emerged over the past year. Such course corrections are healthy. The US central bank, the Federal Reserve, is not the only show on earth.

When traders speak about separation in the direction of borrowing costs, what they tend to mean is that one of two central banks from the G7 are doing something before the Fed. The notion has been given momentum by rate reductions from the Bank of Canada (BoC) and European Central Bank (ECB). They followed similar steps by Sweden and Switzerland. Protagonists play down the risks of moving before Washington: We do what our domestic conditions warrant, we don't have to march in lockstep. Yes, we are worried about dollar strength, but we are sovereign, etc. In decades of covering central banks and markets, I have heard a lot of that talk. Sometimes, there is substance to it.

Of course, officials have domestic mandates and, absent crises, must be guided by the local terrain. But look at a broader horizon and there's a noteworthy fading of synchronization that doesn't get as much attention. Important central banks in Latin America have been trimming rates for a while: Brazil has been at it since August, while Mexico, Chile and Peru have also made policy easier. China didn't hike at all, and economists are pencilling in a few cuts. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand considered resuming tightening, while its Australian counterpart has repeated *ad nauseum* that nothing is ruled out. Indonesia surprised with an increase.

The separation represents a shift from the early days of the pandemic, when massive easing was commonplace and done with startling alacrity, often in emergency meetings. The contemporary variety is also a turnaround from late 2021 and 2022 when the supply-chain constraints that accompanied the reopening pushed inflation up rapidly. The uniformity during these two dramatic periods led me to wonder in 2022 whether the era of the global central bank, a contentious assertion, had arrived. That harmony is fading.

The BoC's Senior Deputy Governor Carolyn Rogers put it well: "Although we were quite coordinated on the way up—and that was really helpful because a big part of inflation was global—you're going to see some divergence on the way down and that makes sense." Rob Subbaraman, head of macro research at Nomura, was more succinct at a conference in Singapore: "We are moving away from the global shocks that held things together." The MSCI Emerging Markets Currency Index has almost climbed back to its levels of three years ago.

Looked at from a truly global perspective, the ECB and BoC are less bold departures and more like components of a mosaic. The shifts reflect the strength of underlying economies and the tenacity—or otherwise—of uncomfortable levels of inflation. Canada's central bank was heartened by a fourth month of price gains staying within the target range. In the euro zone, growth is far weaker than across the Atlantic. ECB President Christine Lagarde says she is confident inflation is under control. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has the benefit of a more resilient economy and has said there is no rush to cut. He's also been chastened by hot inflation data.

There will be limits just how far in front of the Fed some of these central bankers are prepared to get. Most economists do predict some reductions from Powell, this year, though later than anticipated in January. A gap of a few months doesn't make for an enormous disruption. The rate cycles may not match perfectly, but they do tend to broadly align over time. Unlike the present, it's often the Fed that makes the first move. That's tough this time, with Powell's preferred measure of inflation at 2.7% in April, compared with a target of 2%.

One of the more memorable quotes from 21st century banking came from Wim Duisenberg, the ECB's first chief. The Fed had cut in the early weeks of 2001 and, with the euro-zone economy softening, Duisenberg was regularly quizzed on when he would follow. Duisenberg was a hawk. His response at one point was "I hear but I do not listen." Nevertheless, the ECB did eventually ease and kept doing so. The Fed casts a long shadow, as does the greenback whose value it is required to protect. When Bank Indonesia ratcheted up rates last month, its governor began his press conference with a mention of the Fed.

'Divergence' will do well on internet searches for a bit. Enjoy the moment while it lasts. Just remember there's far more to it than what's uttered from podiums in Ottawa and Frankfurt. ©BLOOMBERG

THEIR VIEW

RBI regulation: 'Unpredictable' only when it should be

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The latest salvo from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was its supervisory action against two Edelweiss group entities, including an asset reconstruction company, after its scrutiny found areas of concern. The belief that a financial regulator like RBI should be passive is mistaken. It uses a rigorous process before taking hard decisions, engaging in a two-way dialogue with its regulated entities (REs) to articulate its concerns and provide opportunities for issue resolution. Before taking any action, the regulator carefully considers relevant submissions from the entities involved.

Yet, penalized entities often express surprise, contending that RBI was satisfied with their responses before harsh steps were taken. Many of these entities happen to count former RBI officials among their advisors, consultants and board members.

While RBI remains broadly predictable and steadfast in its adherence to macro policies, regulatory frameworks and supervisory objectives, it appears to avoid predictability when it comes to specific supervisory outcomes. This approach works, for it prevents undue influence on the regulator from within the financial sector. Its independence stems from the rules it goes by, although key aspects of its role being under the ambit of legislation can subject this ostensibly independent body to political forces.

Looking back, RBI's resolve became clear soon after the 2018 collapse of IL&FS, with its knock-on effects reverberating throughout the financial system. This crisis was compounded by frauds that came to light at entities like Yes Bank, DHFL and PMC Bank. In response to the PMC Bank crisis, the government bolstered deposit insurance and terminated dual-regulation of cooperative banks. Subsequently, Lakshmi Vilas Bank also collapsed. In each instance, RBI faced criticism for being caught off-guard and failing to act decisively and promptly.

In recent years, RBI has being putting REs to extra scrutiny. Its recent strictures on Kotak Mahindra Bank followed action taken against several others. It placed curbs on HDFC Bank back in 2020, with its dragnet extending to PayTM, Bank of Baroda's app, IIFL Finance, JM Financial Products, Bajaj Finance and Mahindra Financial Services, among others; fintech players and asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) have not escaped its lens. While some may argue that some executives involved received lenient treatment, it's crucial to recognize that RBI did take a firm stance that befits its institutional stature and reputation of integrity.

There has been considerable market discussion on concerns of collusion among lenders, non-bank financial firms, ARCs and other entities in the practice of "evergreening" loans or "balance sheet washing." Can RBI confront all of them simultaneously? This is not advisable and RBI's pattern of regulatory action shows that it has opted for a systematic approach instead, targeting each class of REs separately. By focusing on one industry category at a time, RBI sends out signals that offenders will be held accountable without causing panic across the sector.

RBI's rulebook adherence is predictable but penalties that surprise could act as effective deterrents

Further, RBI has explicitly been communicating its expectations to the boards of REs, including their independent directors, making it clear these can't be taken lightly.

Considering the risks that need mitigation, RBI has aptly chosen to enforce compliance by targeting areas where breaches could have a significant impact. While it has been imposing monetary penalties, it's worth noting that such fines are often too light to serve as effective deterrents. A bigger worry for REs may be the reputational blow delivered by the publicity of punitive curbs being imposed for failing to meet RBI norms. Stopping REs from onboarding new customers until system deficiencies are rectified, for example, not only alerts customers to potential hazards, but also adversely affects the entity's financial performance. This directly impacts the top management's performance and diminishes the value of CXO stock options, thereby fostering a sense of urgency to ensure compliance, invest in remedies and address loopholes. Another tool at the disposal of RBI, albeit under-utilized thus far, is the authority to prevent the continuation of key management personnel in entities that are repeat offenders or exhibit lax practices. This mechanism enables RBI to hold boards accountable, particularly their nomination and remuneration committees.

In all, the regulator has adopted a combination of specific and broad-based tools. Its imposition of higher risk weights for unsecured lending is an example of systemic risk mitigation, while its Kotak Mahindra Bank curbs are mainly aimed at cyber safety.

All this should be welcomed, as a robust and effective regulatory framework is beneficial eventually to individual REs as well as the entire financial sector. An alert RBI also enhances investor confidence in the ability of REs to generate revenues and profits in a risk-controlled manner.

Credit is due to the institutional responsiveness of RBI and the leadership of its governor for implementing stricter oversight and taking stringent measures in a sector grappling with disruptive technological changes and shifts in consumer behaviour. The central bank has displayed a willingness to take decisive action against large institutions, even those with significant influence. If tea leaves are to be read of its regulatory role, it's conceivable that RBI will toughen its stance against any risk of regulatory capture through a network of personnel.

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

WRITING LAWS IS EASY, BUT GOVERNING IS DIFFICULT.
— LEO TOLSTOY

The Indian EXPRESS
FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RAJDHARMA & COALITION

Continuity amid change with consensus and cooperation — this should mark new NDA's governance, this is its mandate

THE NARENDRA MODI government 3.0 has taken charge, and this is a moment to celebrate the power of the world's largest democracy, and the institutions, processes and habits that make it a strong and shining example. The inauguration of the NDA government Sunday is a testament to the will of the people and it also marks a transition. To do justice to the mandate, the new, returning NDA, will need to be a different government amid promises of continuity and stability. With the BJP falling short of the halfway mark, in its third version, the NDA will need to function as an alliance, in both letter and spirit, of parties that come from different regions and states of this large country. Going ahead, the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi must own the responsibility that comes with it — to listen and to build consensus. Their real challenge will be to give allies, be it Chandrababu Naidu's TDP or Nitish Kumar's JD(U), a hearing and a place at the decision-making table not just because they are constrained by the numbers or because the government's survival depends upon it. They must do so because, after a verdict that has urged it to look within, this is the best way forward for the party — as it is for a large and diverse country.

Speaking to the newly elected NDA MPs in Central Hall on Friday, Prime Minister designate Narendra Modi seemed to be responding to the call of the mandate. He celebrated the NDA — it was the most organic and most successful alliance, he said. And privileged consensus over majority. If "bahumat (majority)" is necessary to run a "sarkar (government)", he said, "sarvmat (consensus)" is needed to steer "desh (country)": "Ham sab ka dayitva hai ki ham sarvmat ka prayas karein (it is our responsibility to strive for consensus)". He seemed more mindful of, and attentive to the need for the Centre to carry along the states. He held up a model of a competitive and cooperative federalism, and said that regional and national aspirations must hold each other close, be bound together inextricably. While there was some rancour that seemed to have lingered on from the just-concluded electoral battle, Modi underlined that the Opposition opposed the government, not the country ("rashtra ke vipaksh nahin, hamare vipaksh mein hai"). There were new words in that speech, and arguably, the beginnings of a new language. It will take more time for the change to settle in and become more complete. But it is also clear that all sides will have to do the rearranging, not just the BJP.

The new government has been sworn in, the new Opposition must follow. It has been given a leg-up by the verdict and after a decade of being pushed to the edge, it can now take up its role more robustly. It must no longer take recourse to boycotts, or refuse to engage on crucial issues, in Parliament and outside it. The people have indicated in no uncertain terms that they want an accountable government and a strong Opposition. One is not possible without the other, and that's the bottomline of the verdict. Congratulations and welcome to the new government at the Centre — and the Opposition in the 18th Lok Sabha.

BEING NEIGHBOURLY

Leaders from India's neighbourhood at swearing-in in Delhi is a freeze frame that captures shared stakes in stable ties

THE PRESENCE OF leaders from South Asia and the Indian Ocean at the swearing in of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India for the third time underlines Delhi's continuing commitment to the "neighbourhood first" policy. It also represents the stakes India's neighbours have in strong and stable ties with this country. Familiarity with Modi gives the world leaders comfort and confidence in engaging India. As he begins a second decade at India's helm, Modi is also one of the world's senior leaders drawing much personal credibility — an intangible but important element at the global level. India will need all the goodwill it can command in order to navigate the increasingly complex world marked by intensifying conflict among the major powers and the restructuring of the global economic order.

India also inherits familiar foreign policy challenges in the neighbourhood. Over the last decade, Delhi's engagement with the smaller neighbours has seen many twists and turns, frequent crises have become part of the regional landscape. But the presence of their leaders at the start of Modi's third term underlines the deepening trend of interdependence that provides a basis for stability. To be sure, the absence of Pakistan's leadership on the occasion reflects the continuing challenge of normalising Delhi's ties with Islamabad. Presumably, the government is keeping the back channel open, and exploring the possibilities for picking up threads from the talks that led to the announcement of a ceasefire in February 2021. Those talks indicated that the two sides were ready to unveil a series of incremental steps to ease bilateral tensions but the lack of consensus in Pakistan prevented the movement forward.

A bigger challenge awaits India in managing ties with China and seizing new opportunities for deepening ties with the West. PM Modi will have an opportunity to meet with Xi Jinping next month on the margins of a regional summit in Kazakhstan. The gloating in Chinese official media at the Modi-BJP's failure to get a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha calls for caution in estimating the possibilities for an uptick in bilateral ties. From Beijing's perspective, Modi's reduced Lok Sabha majority reinforces the imbalance in power in favour of China. The West, in contrast, sees the resurgence of the Opposition in India as a triumph of Indian democracy. Although geo-economic (India's growing market) and geopolitical factors (rebalancing Asia) were driving India and the West closer to each other over the last decade, widespread concerns in America and Europe over India's so-called democratic backsliding had cast a shadow over the deepening strategic partnership. Those Western concerns would arguably recede amidst the revival of competitive domestic politics and accelerate security and economic cooperation between India on the one hand, and the West and its Asian allies on the other.

FREEZE FRAME — E P UNNY



The message from rural India



New government must bring far-reaching changes in agriculture, increase farm incomes, fine-tune priorities

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

THE ELECTION RESULTS are out. No one has complained about the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). The INDIA bloc that was alleging massive rigging when exit pollsters were predicting a huge win for NDA, did not speak a word about the manipulation of election results. Lesson: India's democratic process is reasonably good and foolproof. The Election Commission deserves some credit for that, especially for organising an election exercise at a scale the world has seen for the first time in history. As the Election Commission said, "*Parinaam main hi pramaan hai*" (The proof is in the results), so the EVM debate now should be buried forever.

Psephologists will keep debating the results and the factors behind them for several days. The exit pollsters have lost their credibility as the margin of error ranged from 20 to 30 per cent. Although the INDIA block could not muster the numbers required to form the government, it seems more than happy to pose a strong challenge as the Opposition. The BJP suffered badly as its tally dropped from 303 in 2019 to 240 in 2024. It will be heavily dependent on the NDA allies, especially Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar. The two might extract much more from the BJP than their absolute numbers suggest.

Everyone has an opinion on why the BJP's numbers fell, based on the prism from which they are looking. Was it the fear that the Constitution would be fundamentally changed, caste or religious factors, or economic factors like unemployment, high inflation, crony capitalism, widening inequalities, and the promises of "freebies" to women and youth or a combination of all of these?

It is hard to decipher the influence of all these factors. My take is simple: Look at where the BJP lost most, constituency by constituency. It would be interesting to note that the BJP's tally in rural-dominated constituencies came down from 253 in 2019 to 193 in 2024, a slide of 60 of the 63 seats the party lost in the election. It seems that rural India has sent a strong message to the BJP. More importantly, there are lessons for the new government as well as for those who have lost the elections.

> On the agriculture front, the growth in agri-GDP in 2023-24 (FY24) was just 1.4 per cent as per the latest provisional estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The second advance estimate of this was, in fact, only 0.7 per cent. However since the overall GDP growth in FY24 was 8.2 per cent, the euphoria in business circles and media dominated the news. It seemed that India is in top gear with the highest growth rate amongst all large economies of the world, including the G20. There is no doubt about that.

Almost two-thirds of India still lives in rural areas, and their average per capita monthly expenditure was only Rs 3,773 in 2022-23 as per the NSO Household Expenditure Survey. Given the average family size of around 4.4, this translates to a family monthly expenditure of only Rs 16,600. Even if you adjust for inflation and meagre savings, broadly speaking, an average rural family's income is not more than Rs 20,000 per month. There is no doubt that the Narendra Modi government has introduced major changes in rural areas through its schemes to build toilets, houses (PM-AWAS), drinking water (har ghar, nal se jal), rural roads, and electricity supply. Even then, rural income levels remain low. And within the rural space, the income of agricultural households is even lower. It clearly shows that the rural economy has not been doing well. A good indicator of that can be tracked with the growth in real wages in rural areas, which have been largely stagnating or even marginally declined in the Modi government's second term.

On the agriculture front, the growth in agri-GDP in 2023-24 (FY24) was just 1.4 per cent as per the latest provisional estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The second advance estimate of this was, in fact, only 0.7 per cent. However since the overall GDP growth in FY24 was 8.2 per cent, the euphoria in business circles and media dominated the news. It seemed that India is in top gear with the highest growth rate amongst all large economies of the world, including the G20. There is no doubt about that. But if the agriculture sector is growing at just 1.4 per cent, and it engages 45.8 per cent of the workforce, one can imagine what is happening to the well-being of the masses. Giving people 5 kg/per capita/month of free rice or wheat is not enough. That's a dole. Instead, their real incomes must be raised substantially.

How do we do that? This is a lesson for all political parties who want people to gain from the development process or demand that the growth process become more inclusive. In this context, three things must be remembered.

One, there are too many people dependent on agriculture. They need to move to higher productivity, non-farm jobs. This could be in rural areas to build rural infrastructure, or outside the rural economy to build urban India. It would require massive investments in skill formation for higher productivity jobs. The industry needs to pitch in to train people for meaningful jobs.

Two, within agriculture, the focus needs to shift from basic staples, especially rice which is in abundant supply, to high-value agriculture such as poultry, fishery, dairy and fruits and vegetables. High-value agriculture, being perishable, requires fast-moving logistics in a value chain approach — like the AMUL model in milk. The new government needs to chalk out a robust strategy for that.

Three, given the increasing number of climate change-induced extreme weather events (heat waves or flash floods), India needs to invest heavily in climate-smart agriculture, including agrivoltaics — solar as a third "crop" for farmers that can give regular monthly income even when other crops fail due to drought or floods.

We need an experienced person heading agriculture and rural development in the Modi government. Shivraj Singh Chouhan — who is in the cabinet and under whose leadership Madhya Pradesh agriculture registered the highest growth in the last 15 years or so — might be the best person for the job.

Gulati is a Distinguished Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

ONLY 13.6 PER CENT

Women were central to poll promises in 2024, but fewer were elected



AKSHI CHAWLA

THE 2024 LOK Sabha elections mark an important point of departure in modern India's political history. While there is much to analyse and celebrate, on one front, we have taken a step backwards. The 18th Lok Sabha will have 74 women along with 469 men. While this cohort certainly includes powerful, gritty and diligent representatives, they comprise only 13.6 per cent of all MPs. Not only is this share abysmally skewed, it is lower than the share of women elected in 2019 (14.4 per cent).

If we consider the context in which the 2024 elections took place, women's representation should have recorded a notable improvement. After all, this was the first parliamentary election after India passed the historic Women's Reservation Bill that seeks to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women.

When the Bill was passed in Parliament last year, political parties of every hue went out of their way to express their support and claim credit for the historic development. Women also remained an important demographic in this election. From party manifestos and campaign speeches by top leaders, to making sense of their voting preferences, the Indian woman remained a fairly conspicuous (and somewhat enigmatic) presence throughout.

But women remained limited to voters and beneficiaries in this imagination, not so much leaders and representatives deserving equal participation. Consider this: Only 9.6 per cent of all candidates in this election (and 11 per cent of candidates contesting on a party ticket) were women, according to data compiled by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). This is barely up from 2019, when the share of women among candidates was nine per cent. To add insult to injury, several women who contested the polls faced misogynistic jibes from their peers.

> Although parliaments continue to be dominated by men in most parts of the world, India lags further behind most of its peers. For instance, in 2023, 52 countries around the world held parliamentary elections — on average, 27.6 per cent women were elected, data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) shows. In fact, globally, women comprise 26.9 per cent of all MPs currently.

If such few women get to contest an election, their representation among those elected will likely remain marginal. Although parliaments continue to be dominated by men globally, India lags further behind most of its peers. For instance, in 2023, 52 countries around the world held parliamentary elections. On average, 27.6 per cent women were elected, data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) shows. In fact, globally, women comprise 26.9 per cent of all MPs. Before the election of the 18th Lok Sabha, India ranked 143rd among 185 countries, as per IPU data. But with this dip in women's representation, the ranking is likely to fall further by five or six positions.

One day before the results in India, another historic election result unfolded in a different corner of the world. In Mexico, where general elections were held to elect representatives to various political offices, Claudia Sheinbaum was elected by a comfortable majority to the top political office. This is the first time a woman has been elected as the country's President. But the shattering of this glass ceiling is not an aberration, only the logical next step in Mexico's journey to make its politics more representative.

Over the past few decades, propelled by grassroots feminist movements, the country has introduced and implemented a set of legislative reforms to ensure not just increased representation of women, but rather gender parity, in its politics. The law requires parity in all spheres of government, and mandates that parties put forth candidate lists with gender parity across elections. As a result of these reforms, Mexico has parity in both houses of its Parliament, along with women occupying several important political offices. In 2024, the top two contenders running to be President were women, a rare development with few parallels across countries.

This is not to say Mexico is without its share of problems, political and gender-based violence remains a serious concern. But it shows that progress is possible through deliberate and thoughtful reform despite entrenched gendered norms. Many other countries have taken steps to make their politics more representative and gender-sensitive.

India has led from the front in expanding women's political participation at the local level. It is high time that we show a similar commitment in addressing the gaps at the state and national levels. This will require reform from the top, but the ultimate onus of ensuring progress will lie on the shoulders of our political parties. This dip in women's representation should not be trivialised. When it comes to enabling the participation of women (and traditionally marginalised groups), progress is rarely linear, and never guaranteed. Eternal vigilance is essential, and we must remain on our guard every step of the way.

The writer works at CEDA, Ashoka University and was the author of the 2022 and 2024 editions of IPU's annual report on Women in Parliaments. Views expressed are personal



JUNE 10, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

TWO JAWANS KILLED

Terrorists killed nine persons, including two jawans of the security forces, at different places in Punjab during the last 24 hours while curfew was further extended all over the state with relaxations for a few hours. A 24-hour curfew was reimposed in Chandigarh from 9am as a preventive measure following threats by people of a community to take out a procession in the city in violation of the prohibitory orders.

CURFEW IN POONCH

INDEFINITE CURFEW was clamped on the border town of Poonch following looting and arson by members of the banned All-India Sikh Students Federation. Armed forces have taken control of the town and troops are on patrol. Official reports said that the measures were taken when miscreants harassed shopkeepers and threatened to blow up shops. They also attempted to loot some banks, the reports said.

REVIEW OF PUNJAB ISSUE

WHILE SECURITY FORCES in Punjab are continuing their mopping up operations, the political leadership is busy assessing the situation and planning immediate steps to ensure that the Army action has no backlash either in Punjab or elsewhere in the country. The Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet met with Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi chairing the meeting and reviewed the situation.

LONDON ECONOMIC MEET

THE LONDON ECONOMIC summit of seven Western nations ended with the participants patting themselves on the back for the global economic recovery, and asserting that this would help the Third World more than anything else. The summit declaration said that the global recovery was the result of the brave efforts of the summiteers to curb inflation. More of the same policies were needed to spread the benefits of recovery, especially to developing countries.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Historical lessons should be correctly absorbed and distilled into timeless wisdom, rather than being arbitrarily... exploited for contemporary political interests. The commemoration of the Normandy landings should be viewed within the context of the entire global struggle against fascism." — **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA**

Moving on from the past

For the new government, difficult policy choices facing the country should take precedence over a well-rehearsed identity politics



DEVESH KAPUR



C R Sasikumar

AS THE HUBBUB of the elections fades, the prosaic realities of governance loom. Sadly, the renewed emphasis on identity politics by the main parties during the election campaign meant that once again there was little attention on the difficult policy choices facing the country. The Prime Minister spent much of his energies vilifying minorities. What happened to *sabka saath, sabka vikaas*? Meanwhile, the Congress belatedly discovered the virtues of a caste census. Naturally, now that Bihar has done one, the state will soon be blessed with social justice and prosperity.

Identities matter and have unequivocally adversely shaped the lives of those unlucky to have drawn the short stick in the lottery of life. But an obsession with the past makes it much harder for the country to grapple with the profound changes taking place both within and outside. The heat waves amidst the elections were a grim foretaste of what the future portends. The water crisis in Bengaluru highlighted just how badly states have handled urbanisation, which should be propelling growth and social change. Meanwhile, all parties were shedding crocodile tears for farmers, knowing full well that for the vast majority of India's marginal farmers — the two-thirds of cultivators with less than a hectare of land — prosperity is less likely than a glacier in the Thar desert.

Perhaps, the single biggest economic and social challenge facing the country is the lack of decent employment. For much of the period since Independence, the problem was disguised as severe underemployment, in both agriculture and informal sectors. Agriculture can no longer be the sponge for both demand and supply reasons. As levels of education increase and aspirations change, fewer young people want to work in agriculture. It's not just about incomes but also its perceived low status in marriage markets.

More than a century ago, Ambedkar had argued that "strange though it may seem, industrialisation of India is the soundest remedy for the agricultural problems of India". But other than singing hosannas to him, there was little in the campaign on how this might be achieved.

The competitive pressures on more welfare for votes was in sharp contrast to the virtual absence of attempts to grapple with the core question on how to build competitive advantage to attract the investments needed to create jobs. Some countries (like Germany) have tried to build a workforce with strong technical skills. Others (like Singapore) have built their competitive advantage on the "ease of doing business". China has done so by building excellent infrastructure. The US and Switzerland have built theirs on strong national innovation systems. What about India?

Many of the basic elements of "ease of doing business" — whether corruption, contract enforcement or the predictability and certainty in government policies and regulations — continue to be fraught. Key factors of production, whether electricity or land, are relatively expensive. Land acquisition and clear property rights continue to be problematic. Innovation is stymied because the most powerful Indian private sector firms have little incentive to do so. Comparing the patents filed by Reliance and Adani to a South Korean company of equal size is embarrassing — although apparently not for the two Indian heavyweights. The Global Capability Centres (GCCs) of MNCs are doing much more innovation in India than most Indian firms because they have to compete globally. So, it can be done in India by Indians. But not apparently by Indian firms.

What about India's most abundant factor — labour? For many decades, India failed to school them. When it started to do so, it handicapped them with limited skills because the schooling system does not prioritise learning outcomes. The most severe structural labour market challenge has been the lack of job options for those who complete high school. At India's level of development, most jobs — whether in factories, malls or in the gig economy — do not require a college degree. Indeed, they require even less the sorts of college degrees that confer few skills while incurring high opportunity costs of time and money. Yet, the mantra of all governments is to revel in just how much India's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education has been increasing even though the country's GER has been much higher than others at comparable levels of development. Its quality is apparent in the number of desperate parents, who cannot afford to educate their children in Western countries, sending them to study in places ranging from Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Philippines. States clamour for more central higher education institutions even as they neglect their own. The central government, meanwhile, puts ideological affinity over academic competence in staffing these institutions.

Nonetheless, given the sheer scale of the system, it still manages to produce large numbers of self-motivated young people. But the allocation of this talent is skewed. The leading technical institutions prefer to publicise their graduates' salaries rather than how many are going into research or industry. Little wonder that the number of Indian students doing PhDs in the United States has stagnated even as the number of Indian students in that country has ballooned.

While public policy in India has created a wide range of market distortions, nowhere has that been as extreme as in labour markets (other than agriculture). This is not just with regard to regulatory strictures on firms. It's even more apparent in hiring by the government itself. There is no bigger lie that politicians peddle than the promise that more government jobs along with higher reservations will somehow solve the employment problem while simultaneously improving social justice for a range of social groups. Certainly, it will do so for the handful lucky enough to get the few government jobs.

While public policy in India has created a wide range of market distortions, nowhere has that been as extreme as in labour markets (other than agriculture). This is not just with regard to regulatory strictures on firms. It's even more apparent in hiring by the government itself. There is no bigger lie that politicians peddle than the promise that more government jobs along with higher reservations will somehow solve the employment problem while simultaneously improving social justice for a range of social groups. Certainly, it will do so for the handful lucky enough to get the few government jobs.

The result is millions of young people spending some of the best years of their lives in rote learning to clear exams where very few will be successful. So much risk-taking in order to get a risk-free job. For the unsuccessful millions, it's not just the opportunity cost of the lost years or the money spent in coaching classes but also that all this effort does little to equip them with skills that could be helpful in other endeavours.

The political class has played a masterful con that coveted government jobs await India's young people. But then, in many ways, India has always done a con job on its young. Poor nutrition and sanitation bestowed on babies and children that impair their cognitive and physical development; indifferent and uninspiring schooling; and a college education where the disgruntled teach to the disheartened. Of course, there are exceptions. Given India's size, that's a substantial number. But the median baby, the median child, and the median college student have already been handicapped even before they enter the labour market. And the median job aspirer has virtually no chance of getting a government job. She could, of course, get solace by going to the Ram temple or filling out the caste census form. Maybe we do know that ultimately that's all we can offer her.

The writer is Starr Foundation Professor of South Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Unity with diversity

Let the unique characteristics of our democracy — heterogeneity, federalism, constitutionalism — be implemented in letter and spirit



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

THE AMERICAN-ISRAELI political scientist Daniel Elazar famously warned that it is a "mistake to present unity and diversity as opposites". Instead, he contrasted them, respectively, with disunity and homogeneity. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, the ultimate sovereign, and the real *parmatma*, of our nation has told the new government in unequivocal terms: Do not undermine the noble ideas of diversity, constitutionalism and federalism.

Constitutionalism is the idea of limited government. It demands that governmental power should not itself be destructive of the values it was intended to promote. Civil liberties operate as restrictions on the power of the state.

The real masters of our Republic have told the incoming government that India is a "Union of States", not of Union Territories, and so nothing should be done to diminish their importance and powers. Cooperative federalism should not be reduced to mere rhetoric.

Our Constitution begins with the expression "we, the people of India" — diverse groups bound together, not by religion, language, caste or region, but by the idea of "constitutional patriotism". Can we really exclude over 15 crore Muslims from the "people of India"? Should the government not pay heed to the RSS chief's assertions that "Hindus and Muslims have the same DNA" and that "Hindutva cannot be imagined without Muslims"? No ruling party leader referred to these statements in their election speeches.

Since 2019, several liberal scholars have been predicting a bleak future for Indian Muslims. In a previous article, this author had written that Muslims need not worry ('Note to the minority', *IE*, May 28, 2019). As an eternal optimist, this author had little doubt that the rhetoric of elections would soon prove to be just a strategy or *chunavi jumlabazi* which would soon make way for the slogan of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas". Still, the *vishwaas*, or trust, of Muslims stands shaken by statements of the kind that used to be made only by the fringe earlier, but are now part of the mainstream.

One of the primary issues on which this election was fought was the treatment of Muslims. Some of the statements about them were patently false, some were part of the myth system and some were outright aimed at polarising voters. In the past, Indian Muslims have faced several existential crises but each time, they have survived with support from enlightened sections of Hindus. After Babri Masjid's demolition, did the people of Uttar Pradesh not vote against Kalyan Singh? The 2024 election results in general, and the results from Ayodhya-Faizabad and other places related to Lord Ram, like Chitrakoot and Sitapur, in particular, tell a similar story.

The diminished strength of the BJP in no way means that religious polarisation would lose its attraction. If we want future elections to be fought on the development agenda, the performance of the incumbent government and election manifestos, we must put an end to our biggest fantasy — that of the Hindu Rashtra, which includes the idea of Muslims being thrown out or denied citizenship or, at the very least, being disenfranchised.

In a previous article, this author has gone so far as to say that even assuming that one day India becomes a Hindu Rashtra, the heavens are not going to fall for the Muslims as all their fundamental rights as citizens shall remain intact ('Minorities, too, are fed up with this facade of secularism', *IE*, March 21, 2020). The Hindu Rashtra cannot deny any citizen the right to vote or equal rights with fellow citizens. As a matter of fact, the declaration of Hindu Rashtra may help in ensuring non-communal election campaigns in the future. There are things which people understand only after experiencing them. This author continues to believe that declaring Hinduism as the dominant spiritual heritage of India may be a good thing for our secularism. Unlike Europe, we do not value secularism because we never experienced a real theocracy.

The silver lining of the election results is that at least some of us have realised that the salvation of souls is not the business of the state. A few are now convinced that secularism is good for religions, including Hinduism. It is the idea of secularism that protects religions from the control of the state.

Despite provocative speeches, Muslim Backward Classes would continue to enjoy the benefits of reservation as OBCs and some Muslim tribes would continue as STs. A liberal Supreme Court bench may, in the future, even order their inclusion within SCs. With the TDP and JDU as coalition partners, the new government cannot take a position against backward Muslim classes. The Uniform Civil Code too may not be enacted easily and without consensus within NDA in the near future. However, this author believes that Muslims should themselves initiate reforms in their personal laws. These laws must be made gender just and consistent with the Constitution. The UCC cannot be postponed forever. Of course, a just code is far more desirable than a mere UCC.

Let the government implement the slogan of "justice for all, appeasement of none". The absence of minority MPs in the NDA coalition is bad for the government's international image. The nation's diversity must be reflected in it. Muslims want nothing but justice — social, economic and political. Each Muslim citizen as an individual is fully entitled to live with dignity. Let the government punish those who routinely indulge in hate speech, give calls to boycott Muslim businesses and publicly vow to take up arms. There is no unity without diversity and an organised and meaningful diversity is unsustainable without unity. Let the myths about Muslims outnumbering Hindus and Hindus being under threat be dismantled and make way for a more harmonious relationship. Let the unique characteristics of our civilisation and Constitution, such as heterogeneity, federalism, and constitutionalism, be implemented in both letter and spirit.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal



An election defeat in Hassan

Why it resonates beyond one constituency

JANAKI NAIR

PRAJWAL REVANNA'S DEFEAT in the Lok Sabha elections must give solace to both the people of Hassan and those who marched on the morning of May 30, 2024. Thousands had gathered from all parts of Karnataka at the Maharaja Park to stand in solidarity with the women of Hassan who had been allegedly ravaged by the excesses of one man, and then punished all over again in the videos that were circulated of the horrors inflicted on them. The people of Hassan thronged their balconies and rooftops, many with cameras in hand, capturing what was indeed a historic occasion in that small town of less than two lakh.

The rally, though coming nearly a month after news emerged of the alleged ordeal of Hassan's women, expressed both solidarity and rage. The announcement that Revanna would return from Germany and present himself to the SIT was no satisfaction to the marchers. We knew he had no choice but to return before his diplomatic passport expired on May 31. The powerful symbolics of having an all-woman police team take the man into custody as soon as he landed was also cold comfort to the women's organisations. The crucial question of the next few months (or years) will be: How will all those who participated in this sordid process be held accountable and made to pay the price? More important, will they be held accountable? And will the women of Hassan get justice?

The women and men gathered, as the statement issued by the women's organisation Naavu Niladidare ("If we don't stand up...!") has it, to demonstrate that the people of Karnataka would forcefully enter this feudal enclave, dominated by one family, and rewrite its destiny. NN gave heart to the scared, timid, intimidated, and fearful, women and men, of whom a mere three have actually entered the public domain with their testimonies. The rally and public meeting, attended by at least 5,000 people, was a show of strength at the height of a national election in which the principal accused was a candidate supported by the ruling party.

Will she or won't she? Will the many women who have been silenced come forward to testify against their alleged tormentor? Or will the legions who have viewed the videos by now — not the courts — judge the women on the crucial question of why they held their peace for so long, whether they had "consented" to being abused, molested, tortured, or raped, and whether those tapes indeed pertain to the man who has thus far been identified as the principal perpetrator?

The women surely need more than just justice in the courtroom. First, they need forms of psychic healing that will embolden them to believe that they are the wronged, not the accomplices who need to feel ashamed. The steps taken in this direction by the state are unclear.

Second, they need to feel empowered to act against the structures of power, both within and outside their families, perhaps even against those many men in their families who may have been complicit in the cruelty that they were made to bear in silence. While the harm has no doubt been monstrous, the women of Hassan cannot be content with the efforts to "psychologise" their experience. They must return to the old feminist slogan that the "personal is political", and unite to save their sisters, mothers, daughters, from a similar fate.

Third, this should be a signal to the police to take seriously the complaints of women who seek protection from stalking, threats or violence. The grotesque abuse of power and the manner in which the alleged perpetrators evaded police scrutiny casts a shadow on police independence even in a state that is recovering from the blatant misuse of police powers under the BJP regime.

To be fair, the Congress' Shakti scheme has allowed large numbers of women to claim a measure of independence and freedom from domestic tyrannies, and helped them wrest some economic and legal liberties. But this may generate its own contradictions: More women have undertaken pilgrimages. At least one report has it that the Gruha Lakshmi scheme, which gave Rs 2,000 per month to women-headed households, has been mobilised by local powers (including *mathadishas*) to fund temple refurbishment and *rathotsavas* in rural areas.

Large numbers of women in the public sphere helps greater security. Whether it will translate into more women entering the workforce is yet to be seen. But they still need protection from the predators who eye their incomes and independence.

So, finally, what role can the state play in ensuring this urgent transformation? We must remember that the case of Prajwal Revanna is no aberration. No political party is an exception to the misogyny on which their politics is founded. The belligerence of the Bajrang Dal members who broke up a Women's Day party at a hotel in Shivamogga, the attacks on hijab-wearing students, the constant surveillance of couples, whether interfaith or otherwise, the public chastisement by men in power of married Hindu women who choose not to wear *kumkum* on their foreheads, and grotesque "son preference" leading to sex selection on a shocking scale are all examples.

An individual accused of being a sexual predator has ironically received a boost by the rampant circulation of pen drives. In the cacophony that has followed, no political party has emerged unscathed. The state government's responsibility, above all, is to break the resounding silence of women themselves, and encourage them to rise in rage against one of the most egregious crimes in recent history.

The writer is a Bengaluru-based historian

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CRICKET FEVER IN US

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'America's new game' (IE, June 8). Be it sports or politics, nothing is more heartening than the triumph of an underdog. That's what happened in the US's surprising victory over Pakistan in the T20 World Cup this week. In the hierarchy of cricket-playing countries, the US was a nobody. But its victory against Pakistan, which makes the team a genuine contender for a Super Eight spot, is an announcement of their presence. The triumph has found sweet reactions across India because players of Indian-origin are part of the US team. The host's improbable triumph has lit up a tournament that had prompted criticism about the vicious pitch in New York. Yet, it remains to be seen how much interest the sport can garner in America.

Sanjay Chopra, *Mohali*

ABYSMAL NUMBERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A woman's place' (IE, June 8). With the 128th amendment of the Constitution, women are to get 33 per cent reservation in Parliament. However, due to the delimitation exercise, the implementation is deferred to after 2029. Women voters were 31 crore out of a total of 64 crore, which makes their participation almost 50 per cent. Only 797 women contested and 74 were successful, four less than those in 2019. Congress fielded 41 women while BJP fielded 69. BJP's 30 women candidates and Congress's 14 candidates won. It is evident that proportionate representation is still not being given to women. It is time to offer adequate opportunities to women. The world's largest democracy must take the lead in ensuring gender parity.

Subhash Vaid, *New Delhi*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A woman's place' (IE, June 8). Though the Bill granting reservation in Parliament and state assemblies was finally passed last year, as it turned out, of the total 8,360 candidates who contested the 2024 elections, only around 10 per cent were women. If this election has shown anything, it is that after 70 years of democracy, the number of women MPs increased only marginally from 4.4 per cent in 1952. India lags behind the UK, the US and South Africa, which have 30-46 per cent women legislators. All political parties must take initiative to induct and nurture women politicians, and not merely view them as proxies for the men in the party. Women come from varied fields with their own set of experiences that can allow for greater diversity in decision-making, which benefits everyone.

Khokan Das, *Kolkata*

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Agnipath scheme: why it was introduced, the opposition to it

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

BOTH JD(U) AND Chirag Paswan's LJPRV have called for a review of the Agnipath scheme, even as they seem set to be crucial alliance partners to the BJP in the new Lok Sabha.

The scheme for military recruitment has faced opposition from political parties and Armed Forces veterans alike, since it was introduced by the BJP-led government in 2022. During the recent Lok Sabha elections, it became a key campaign issue in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, where the Armed Forces remain a sought after employer.

EXPLAINED POLICY

What is the Agnipath scheme?

Agnipath is aimed at recruiting 'personnel below officer ranks' — soldiers, airmen, and sailors who are not commissioned officers — to the Indian Armed Forces for a period of four years. At the end of this tenure, upto 25% of these recruits, the so called 'Agniveers', can join the services on a permanent commission (another 15 years), subject to merit and organisational requirements.

Aspirants between the ages of 17.5 years and 23 years (up from 21 years initially) are eligible to apply. At present, all sailors, airmen, and soldiers, except the technical cadre of the medical branch, are recruited to the services under the scheme.

In the Army, two batches of 40,000 Agniveers have completed training and are under posting. A third batch of 20,000 began training in November 2023. In the Navy, three batches of 7,385 Agniveers have completed training. In the IAF, 4,955 Agniveers have completed training.

How are Agniveers different from soldiers with permanent commission?

Agniveers draw a basic salary of Rs 30,000-Rs 40,000 per month, and are entitled to other risk and hardship allowances.

They contribute 30% of their monthly emoluments to the Seva Nidhi fund, which the government matches. At the end of their service, they receive approximately Rs 11.71 lakhs (with interest) as a tax-exempt lump sum severance package from this fund.



Candidates at the First Army Agniveer Recruitment Rally in Ludhiana. *File*

If they die on duty, Agniveers' families receives a lump sum of Rs 1 crore (including the Seva Nidhi package), and full pay for the period which the soldier could not serve. In case of disability, an Agniveer gets upto Rs 44 lakh as compensation.

Unlike soldiers in regular service, Agniveers do not draw pensions post-retirement. Only the 25% of Agniveers who get absorbed into the forces after four years will receive pensionary benefits, although the initial four years of service will not be considered for retirement benefits.

This is the biggest change that Agnipath has brought in, which will lead to a considerable cut in the defence pension bill — a major concern for governments for many years.

Why was Agnipath introduced?

Apart from the unsaid intention of reducing the Armed Forces' wage and pension bill, the government has argued that the scheme will ensure the forces' "youthful profile". Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in January 2023 that "Agnipath is a game changer for the Armed Forces… [and make them] youthful, high-tech and ultra-modern".

When the scheme was brought in, the average age in the Armed Forces was 32 years, which Agnipath will bring down to 26 years, according to Defence Ministry calculations.

The government has also said after the completion of their service, Agniveers will contribute to the civil society "through their education, skill, discipline and other qualities".

Lt Gen Anil Puri, additional secretary, Department of Military Affairs, had said during the scheme's announcement that the government will help rehabilitate soldiers who leave the services after four years, and provide them with skill certificates and bridge courses.

Why has the scheme come under criticism?

Critics say that the scheme creates a "lesser" cadre of soldiers, who work on the same tasks as those with full commission, but with lesser pay, benefits, and prospects.

A day before Punjab and Himachal Pradesh went to polls on June 1, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi wrote an open letter to President Droupadi Murmu. "I write to you… with an appeal to provide justice to Agniveers, who lay down their lives in service to the nation. The discrimination in the nature and extent of benefits accorded to the families of our slain Agniveers, compared to regular soldiers warrants your urgent attention," he wrote.

On the ground, lesser benefits and a shorter tenure has caused significant disaffection among those who see military recruitment as a path to economic stability and upward mobility. Multiple parties, including the Congress, AAP, RJD, and Samajwadi Party have called for the scheme to be scrapped. Others have asked for a rethink.

Is the government willing to roll back the scheme?

Recently, the government indicated that it is willing to alter the scheme if required, but without compromising on the Armed Forces' youthful profile. *The Indian Express* reported last month that the Forces are carrying out internal assessments on Agnipath's impact, based on which they will make recommendations to the government on possible changes.

All three services are learnt to have submitted their observations to the Department of Military Affairs.

EXPLAINED HISTORY

HOW HORSES GALLOPED INTO HUMAN HISTORY: WHAT A NEW STUDY SAYS

THE ADVENT of horse-based transportation represented one of the seminal moments for humankind, connecting ancient peoples by enabling them to move quickly over long distances for the first time while also transforming how wars were waged.

But the timing of equine domestication and the subsequent broad use of horse power has been a matter of contention. An analysis of genome data from 475 ancient horses and 77 modern ones has revealed that domestication actually occurred twice — the first time being a dead end — and traced the rise of horse-based mobility to around 2200 BC in Eurasia, centuries later than previously thought.


Genghis Khan founded the massive Mongol Empire on the back of horse power. *Wikimedia Commons*

Two domestications

The genomic evidence showed that horses were first domesticated in Central Asia about 5,500 years ago. But this domestication was based on obtaining meat and milk, not movement, and did not spread. The feral Przewalski's horses of Mongolia descended from these horses.

The domestication of a second equine bloodline began roughly 4,700 years ago in the western Russian steppes, trotting along for a period of centuries before horse-based mobility suddenly galloped across Eurasia about 4,200 years ago, a study published in the journal *Nature* showed. All modern domestic horses have their origins in this event.

The genomic evidence revealed that people doubled horse production capacity by halving the time between generations from eight years to four. "We detect close-kin mating only from that time, and not in the deeper past. This is a practice that wild or domestic horses tend to avoid unless breeders force them to mate with their relatives, to maintain and select for certain valued traits such as increased docility," Pablo Librado, evolutionary biologist at Barcelona's Institute of Evolutionary Biology, and the study's lead author, said.

Transformative event

Horse-based mobility allowed people to move quickly over large distances, speeding up communication and trade networks across Europe and Asia and enabling exchanges and interactions among diverse cultures. Chariots and cavalry reshaped warfare. "How many empires rose and fell because of a powerful cavalry?" Librado asked.

"Animal domestication, in general, changed human history, but no other animal was a king-maker as the horse was… Think of Genghis Khan, with an empire stretching from the Sea of Japan to the doors of Europe. The world as we know it today has been shaped by horses. Think in agriculture, how important horses were as working animals. Think in New York or Washington 200 years ago, with carriages pulled by horses in the streets," Librado said. **REUTERS**

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EXPLAINED CLIMATE

Highway to 'climate hell'

There is an 80% chance that the world will temporarily cross the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold in the next five years. A long-term breach would accelerate and intensify the catastrophic impacts of climate change

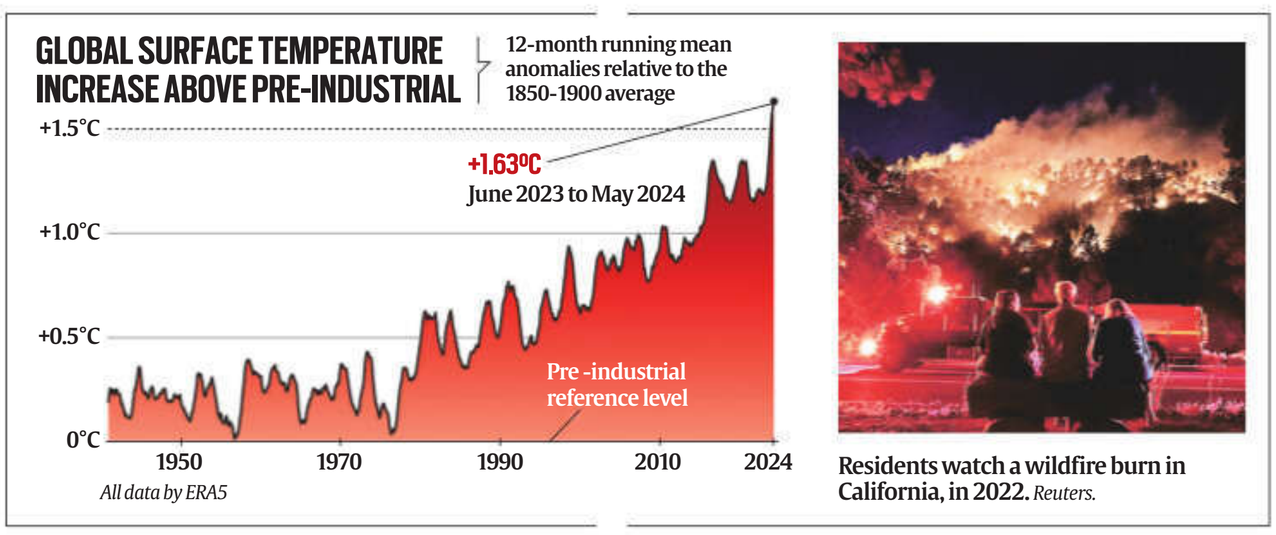
ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

THIS MAY was the warmest May ever. In fact, each of the last 12 months have set a new warming record for that particular month, Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said last week.

The average global temperature last month was 1.5 degree Celsius above the estimated May average for the 1850-1900 pre-industrial reference period. For the 12-month period (June 2023 – May 2024), the average temperature stood at 1.63 degree Celsius above the 1850-1900 average.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), in a separate report published on June 6, said there is now an 80% chance that at least one calendar year between 2024 and 2028 would see its average temperature exceed 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial levels — for the first time in history. Just a year ago, the WMO had predicted a 66% chance of the same.

Scary as these facts are, they do not imply that the world is about to breach the commonly talked about 1.5 degree Celsius temperature threshold. That threshold refers to a warming over a longer period, with usually a two or three decade average taken into consideration.



Residents watch a wildfire burn in California, in 2022. *Reuters.*

What is the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold?

In 2015, 195 countries signed the Paris Agreement, which pledged to limit global temperatures to "well below" 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. It also said countries would aim to curb warming within the safer 1.5 degree Celsius limit.

While the Agreement did not mention a particular pre-industrial period, climate scientists generally consider 1850 to 1900 as a baseline, since it is the earliest period with reliable, near-global measurements. Some anthropogenic global warming had already taken place at that time — the Industrial Revolution began in England in the mid-1700s. Nonetheless, a reliable baseline is crucial to measure the rising temperatures today.

Why 1.5 degree Celsius?

The safer 1.5 degree Celsius limit was chosen based on a fact-finding report, which found that breaching the threshold could lead to "some regions and vulnerable ecosystems" facing high risks, over an extended, decades-long period.

The 1.5 degree Celsius was set as a "defence line", to ensure that the world avoids the disastrous and irreversible adverse effects of climate change which would begin to unfold once the average temperature increases by 2 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial levels. For some regions, even a smaller spike will be catastrophic.

What happens when threshold is breached?

The 1.5 degree Celsius threshold is not a light switch which, if turned on, would trigger a climate apocalypse. It is just that once this threshold is breached for a long period of time, the impact of climate change such as sea level rise, intense floods and droughts, and wildfires will significantly increase and accelerate.

Speaking to *MIT News*, Sergey Paltsev, deputy director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, said: "The science does not tell us that if, for example, the temperature increase is 1.51 degree Celsius, then it would definitely be the end of the world. Similarly, if the temperature stays at a 1.49 degree increase, it does not mean that we will eliminate all impacts of climate change. What is known: The lower the target for an increase in temperature, the lower the risks of climate impacts."

The world is already witnessing these consequences, to some extent. For instance, the severe heatwave over North and Central India in late May, which saw temperatures nearing 50 degree Celsius in Delhi and Rajasthan, was nearly 1.5 degree Celsius warmer than past heatwaves. The heatwave reportedly caused hundreds of deaths, and can be attributed to rising global temperatures.

In April, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said the fourth global mass coral bleaching event has been triggered by extraordinarily high ocean temperatures. This could harm ocean life, and the lives of millions of people who rely on reefs for food, jobs, and coastal defence.

Last year, a report found that five major climate tipping points are already at risk of being crossed due to warming. Climate tipping points are critical thresholds beyond which a natural system can tip into an entirely different state. They cause irreversible damage to the planet, including more warming. Scientists have identified a number of these tipping points across Earth, which fall into three broad categories: cryosphere (for example, melting of the Greenland ice sheet), ocean-atmosphere (change in water temperature), and biosphere (death of coral reefs), according to a report by the European Space Agency (ESA).

How can the world stay within the threshold?

2023 was the warmest calendar year ever recorded. The WMO reported that the average global temperature reached 1.45 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial levels. But the unusually high temperatures were also partly due to the onset of El Niño, an abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. This weather pattern is known to lead to record-breaking surface and ocean temperatures in some parts of the world.

El Niño has now peaked and is likely to transition towards the cooler La Niña in the following months. Nonetheless, the world is most likely to temporarily breach the 1.5 degree Celsius limit in the next five years. Each year between 2024 and 2028 is predicted to be between 1.1 degree Celsius and 1.9 degree Celsius higher than the pre-industrial average, the recent WMO report found.

The only certain way of remaining under the threshold is to immediately, and radically, curb the emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases (GHG). To do this, the world needs to stop burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, which release GHGs into the atmosphere. So far, countries have failed to make a significant dent in this regard.

In 2023, the levels of GHGs in the atmosphere reached historic highs. Carbon dioxide, which is the most abundant anthropogenically produced GHG, rose in 2023 by the third-highest amount in 65 years of recordkeeping, according to NOAA.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on June 5: "We are playing Russian roulette with our planet… We need an exit ramp off the highway to climate hell, and the truth is we have control of the wheel."

AP vs Telangana: unresolved issues between the states that went to court

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

POLITICAL ANALYSES of the TDP's kingmaker position in the NDA have discussed the years of efforts that Chandrababu Naidu has put in to obtain Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh (AP), which would compensate for the loss of revenues suffered after the undivided state was split to create Telangana in 2014. A decade on, several issues relating to the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 (APRA) remain pending between the two successor states, and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has said he hopes they are resolved soon.

The creation of the new states was followed by division and apportionment of the assets of undivided AP. Courts were required to adjudicate several disputes that arose; a few of the major legal disputes are as follows. The states are embroiled in some other disputes as well, including over competing claims on pending power generation dues, division of the AP State Financial Corporation's assets, and over the sharing of Krishna and Godavari waters.

Ninth and Tenth Schedules of AP Reorganisation Act

In December 2022, AP approached the Supreme Court claiming that the division of assets contained in the Ninth and Tenth Schedules of the APRA had not commenced even though the Act clearly apportioned them between the two "successor states".

According to the petition, the Act lists 245 institutions or assets (142 in Schedule IX, 91 in Schedule X, and 12 unmentioned in the Act) owned by the erstwhile State of AP, valued at "about Rs 1,42,601 crores" and that 91% of these assets are located in Hyderabad "clearly to the benefit of Telangana".

As of June 2, 2024, Hyderabad is the capital city of Telangana alone, and no longer the shared capital of both states.

These institutions, says the petition, "perform a range of basic and essential functions", including agriculture, dairy development, education, medical services, minority and backward class development, etc. None of these assets have been apportioned between the successor states, it says.

According to AP, Telangana's inaction "has led to a multitude of issues adversely affecting and violating the fundamental and other constitutional rights" of the people residing in the state.

AP has asked the SC to direct Telangana to start handing over assets specified in the Ninth and Tenth Schedules of the APRA under the supervision of a neutral arbitrator or a retired judge of the SC.

In December 2023, the case was listed for a final hearing in March 2024 by Justices Sanjiv Khanna and S V N Bhatti. However, the case was not taken up, and remains pending.

EXPLAINED LAW

AP State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE)

In 2016, the Supreme Court decided on a dispute where Telangana claimed ownership of all funds and assets of the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE).

The state of Telangana argued that the APRA does not contain any provisions for the apportionment of institutions under the Tenth Schedule (such as the APSCHE). As a result, since the assets of the APSCHE were located in Hyderabad, the state of Andhra Pradesh had no right to them.

The SC rejected this argument and invoked Section 47 of the APRA which states that the apportionment of assets can be subject to adjustment "as may be necessary to secure just, reasonable and equitable apportionment of the assets and liabilities amongst the successor States".

It directed that APSCHE assets should be divided between the two states based on the population ratio.

AP Dairy Development Co-operative Federation Limited (APDDCF)

In 2016, the Telangana government transferred the assets of the Dairy Development Board in Hyderabad to the Telangana State Dairy Development Cooperative Federation (TSDDCF) from the APDDCF.

The APDDCF challenged this Government Order at the Telangana High Court, arguing that as a Ninth Schedule institution, its assets had to be fairly apportioned in the manner provided by the APRA. The TSDDCF, however, claimed that the APDDCF headquarters were located in Telangana, and its assets belonged to the state in which it was located.

In 2021, the HC held that the APDDCF's assets should be divided between it and TSDDCF in the ratio of 58.31:41.68 after a complete valuation of the assets by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India.

Both states have filed petitions challenging this judgment at the Supreme Court. The matter was last heard by Justice Sanjay Karol in October 2023.

AP Mineral Development Corporation (APMDC)

The APMDC and the newly established TSMDC arrived at a plan to divide the assets of the APMDC (of the undivided state), another Ninth Schedule institution, in March 2018 based on the population ratio of 58.31:41.68.

The AP government approved this plan in 2019, but the Telangana government took no action on the proposal. In 2020, the Andhra government approached the Telangana High Court arguing that the Telangana state's inaction in implementing the proposal was arbitrary and illegal.

The court called the Telangana government's conduct "baffling" and "inexplicable", and ordered it to begin distributing the assets in terms of the proposal agreed to in 2018.

But the TSMDC and the State of Telangana challenged this decision before the Supreme Court in 2021. The matter was last heard by a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud in February 2024.

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ON ACCURACY OF FORECASTS

We have 1,500 sensors but one faulty reading doesn't mean all are malfunctioning. We have checked them, especially those in northwest India, where temperatures are higher. Only one sensor was found to be faulty



WHY MRUTYUNJAY MOHAPATRA

Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra is not just Director-General of Meteorology, India Meteorological Department (IMD), but is a significant voice in climate change policies as vice-president of the World Meteorological Organisation. He is known for accurate forecasts of cyclones, their wind speed and their likely impact on life and property. His timely warnings during the cyclone Fani enabled authorities to evacuate millions of people. During his tenure, IMD has improved weather alerts, reduced the margin of forecast errors and helped evolve SOPs for disaster control.

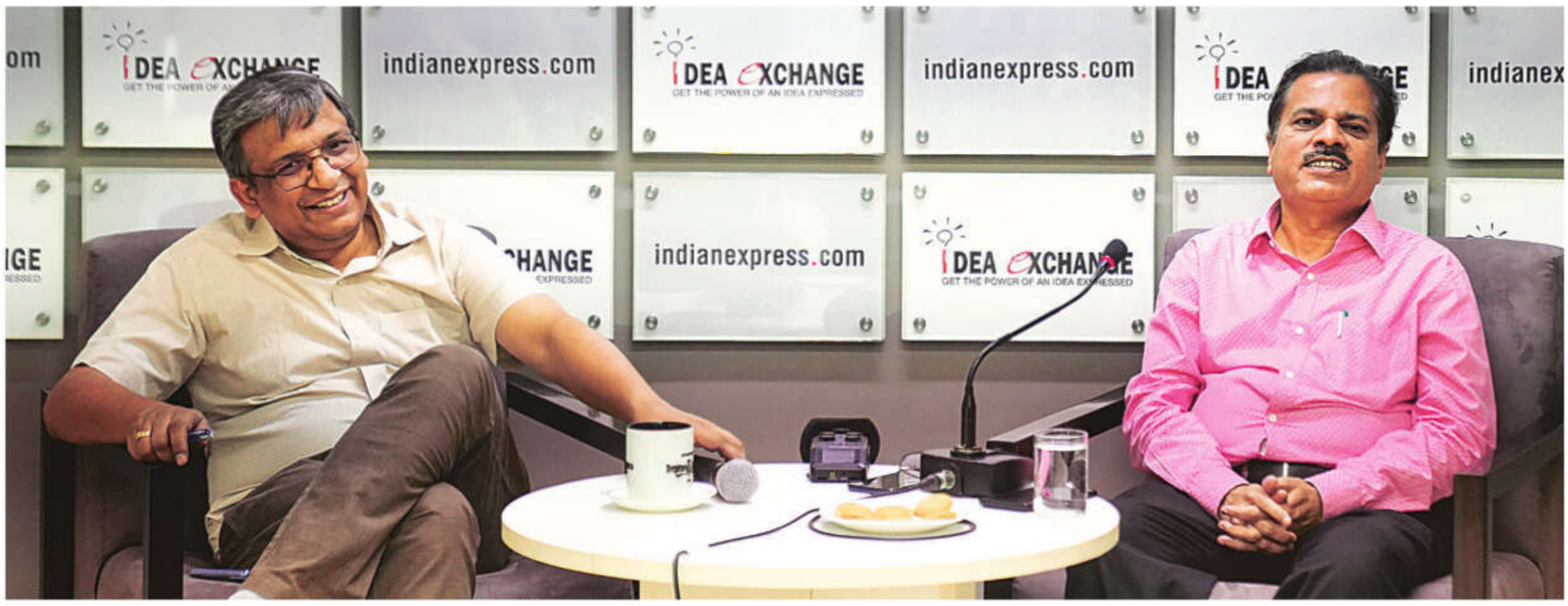


ON MICROCLIMATE MODELS

We have different forecasts for different parts of the city. Under the 'Har Har Mausam, Har Ghar Mausam' model, you get the weather forecast specific to whichever location you are at

'Heatwaves will now become more frequent, durable and intense'

Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director-General of Meteorology, IMD, on 50°C plus temperatures, the efficacy of forecasts and detection mechanisms and impact of climate change on rainfall. The session was moderated by Science Editor Amitabh Sinha



Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra (right) with Amitabh Sinha at the *Indian Express* office in Noida. *Abhinav Saha*

Amitabh Sinha: Going by past records, has the country experienced its most intense heatwave yet?

This has been the longest spell because it has been experienced for about 24 days in different parts of the country. In April, the heatwave condition was most intense and prevalent over the eastern and southern parts of India. In May, it shifted to the core region, that is, northwest and central India, while it persisted over the eastern parts of the country. Up to May 15, there was regular rainfall activity due to passage of western disturbances and thunderstorms. From May 16, heatwave conditions started over west Rajasthan and spread, becoming more intense over the eastern parts. If you count the number of days, it was most intense over Rajasthan and Odisha. In April, the spell was longer in the eastern part of the country.

You can say that the heatwave was more durable in both these months. But it is decreasing as the monsoon is slowly covering the peninsula and expected to touch south Gujarat by June 12. We are expecting the monsoon to hit northwest India as usual, by the last week of June.

Amitabh Sinha: The 52.9°C degree temperature in Delhi made headlines. You issued a clarification but does the reading of an automatic weather station (AWS) become unreliable in extreme temperatures?

The day a station recorded 52.9°C, we immediately cross-checked with 17 other stations in Delhi and found that it was an outlier. None of these stations had reported temperatures higher than 49°C. We constituted an expert committee, which observed readings for the next two days and found there were problems in the sensor. We compared parallel readings by our departmental observatory, which has five such stations. We found no such difference there either. Then, after two days or so, a station in Nagpur, too, reported 56°C. Sensors contain semiconductors. So their functioning depends upon the temperature and resistance of semiconductors. Resistance varies with temperature. Therefore, we have to investigate whether an erroneous reading is because of higher temperatures or a malfunctioning sensor.

We have 1,500 sensors but it doesn't mean all of them are malfunctioning. We investigated and decided that all instruments, especially in northwest India, where temperatures are higher, would be checked. So far, only one sensor has been found to be faulty, which we have replaced. Also, we do not enter one or two odd observations into our records.

Every 15 minutes, the temperatures taken by the AWS are updated on the website automatically. If there is a continuous bias, because of sensor malfunctioning at higher temperatures, then bias correction can be made. We inspect the AWS every six months. But in between a bird or a monkey can disturb it. Another source of error is the radiation shield. If a shield gets heated and is trapping energy, the sensors may record a different reading. AWS is utilised globally and such errors are common.

The country has progressed in terms of meteorological observations, monitoring and forecasting. By the way, we have a seamless forecast for heatwave conditions. As soon as the season starts, we do monthly, weekly and daily forecasts. During heatwave conditions, we provide two readings, one for the morning and the other for warm nights. Warm nights are when the day temperature is above 40°C and the night temperature is about five degrees above normal. We predict warm nights for about five to seven days, both city-wise and district-wise, so that people can get a sense of what the impact will be. The 40°C temperature in Delhi and Bhubaneswar will have different impacts. Delhi has dry heat, Bhubaneswar has humidity between 50 per cent and 70 per cent. With higher humidity, the sweat factor goes up and the same 40°C temperature will feel like 45-47°C. That's why we have introduced the temperature humidity index on a weekly basis for the last two years so that you get an idea about what a "feels-like" temperature could be.

Amitabh Sinha: Is loo different from a heatwave?

A heatwave is dry with stagnant air. Loo is when you have strong north-westerly winds. A land breeze enhances the impact of a heatwave. Similarly, wind in the coastal belt, what we call sea breeze, reduces the impact of the heatwave. Our wind forecast helps you gauge physical conditions. Then we have a composite index, which factors in the maximum and minimum temperatures, humidity, wind and heat persistence, the kind of consistently high temperatures we saw in the last week of May.

We forecast daily weather in a colour-coded format and have introduced dos and don'ts, not only for human beings but also for livestock. A heatwave entails huge economic loss in terms of its impact on agriculture and the power sector. A predictive temperature map can help power companies plan their load distribution better and avoid power cuts. Similarly, if you are travelling by train, the water and AC requirement in the coach will increase during heatwave conditions. The new forecast parameters can, therefore, help surface transport operators like national highways and the railways. For example, we colour-coded each railway station, red and orange, indicating the severity of heat and indicating the responsive action to be taken. Similarly, we provided forecasts for each constituency in each phase of the election five days ahead of voting day. All this information is easily available to common people on a geographic information system (GIS) platform. A common alert protocol has been developed with the help of the National Distribution Authority and state governments. So the moment we identify an area where a heatwave is expected, an SMS goes to mobile users within that area.

Amitabh Sinha: Is 50°C the new normal for Delhi?

Human activities, increasing population, industrialisation and transport mechanisms are leading to increased concentration of carbon dioxide, methane or chlorocarbons. Globally, temperatures have gone up by 1.15 degrees in the past 100 years. In India, it is 0.66 degrees over the same period. This increase is also not uniform across the globe or India. In the polar region, it is higher, in the equatorial region, it is lesser. Northern India is getting more intense and southern India is getting less intense. In India, the maximum temperature has risen by about 1.1 degrees, the minimum by 0.28 degrees. Therefore, the average is 0.66 degrees.

Once these gases are transmitted to the atmosphere, they will not degrade on their own. So, the temperature will continue to rise. Second, if we continue our radiative concentration pathways and release our radiative energy into the atmosphere, then there will be an accelerated increase in all greenhouse gases that could raise temperatures. Therefore, we are endangering not only ourselves but also our future generations. Also, with a one-degree rise in temperature, the relative humidity in the atmosphere increases by seven per cent. So heatwaves will be more frequent, durable and intense, if precautionary or preventive measures are not taken.

Harish Damodaran: Do you think that El Nino impacted temperatures more than rainfall earlier this year?

The El Nino had a stronger effect on the monsoon last year and played a role in frequent and intense heatwave conditions this year. But you cannot overlook the development of anticyclones — when wind rotates in a clockwise direction at about 3 to 5 km above the earth — in the peninsular region. That means the wind has to go down. Once air moves towards the surface of the Earth, it gets compressed because it cannot penetrate the surface. This warms it up. That's why the temperature rose in the background of El Nino conditions.

Without western disturbance, the temperature rose in northwest India. At the same time, there wasn't any anticyclone over the Bay of Bengal, which could provide moisture. So in May, there was no thunderstorm activity in the eastern part of the country, which experienced very intense heatwave conditions.

Nikhil Ghanekar: IMD is part of a high-level technical committee on glacial lakes and installation of AWS and early warning systems. Can you share details?

The Central Water Commission has been given the responsibility of glacial lakes because IMD is not the nodal agency for that purpose. So our ambit is to provide 40 location-specific forecasts for hydropower and flash flood guidance for watershed areas. When we talk about glacial lakes, there are geological parameters other than the weather like earthquakes, geological dislocation of various hills and avalanches. This requires a multi-modal approach by all agencies.

Rinku Ghosh: With climate change, each city has its own microclimate. Does this make forecasting difficult?

When I took over, we decided to factor in the microclimate in major cities. We now have different forecasts for different parts of the city. For example, in Delhi, we provide forecasts for 18 places. This year we've introduced a model called "Har Har Mausam, Har Ghar Mausam." This means that you will get the weather forecast specific to whichever location you click on our dashboard. In Mumbai, we've got around 120 automatic rain gauge stations (ARGs), 32 in Delhi. We are augmenting observation systems in every city and will be upgrading radars. Megacities will get expanded radars. Delhi has got three such radars, one each in Palam, Lodi Road and Aya Nagar. The Aya Nagar radar covers 100 km. Chennai will get four radars, Kolkata will get another one. If one radar fails, another one is there for specific information.

At present, we have got a global model with a resolution of about 12 km. That means every 12 km you will get a forecast. Since that won't be sufficient for a city, we've introduced a 2-km model. We will improve the resolution further because we are in the process of procuring a high-performance computing system. Then we can move to the one kilometre and sub-kilometre domain to provide forecasts in a location-specific manner within the city itself. This model can help preparedness in disaster-prone areas like the Himalayas and areas vulnerable to cloudbursts and flash floods. We now have 10 expanded radars in the northeastern Himalayas. The plains will get another 11. By 2025, at least another 25 radars will be added.

Liz Mathew: Of late, many cities have gone through difficult times because of cloudbursts. Can they be predicted?

A cloudburst is a very small scale phenomenon. It occurs over a radius of 1 km or so and lasts one or two hours at the most. If the rainfall exceeds 10 cm in one hour, we call it a cloudburst. We have mapped areas most prone to cloudbursts — Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Northeastern states and Western Ghats. Sometimes cloudbursts happen in plain areas because of a low pressure system. We need many radar systems in our hilly areas. But you also need electricity and telecommunications to use the data on a real-time basis. With augmented technology, we are trying to improve our observation systems in the hills. From the current 85 per cent of covered area, we hope to cover 100 per cent in the next two years.

Once the detection mechanism is right, we can look at predictions. I already mentioned the sub-kilometre resolution model. Our regional model will be updated from three kilometres to one kilometre in about three years. Then we can predict not just the cloudburst but the rainfall intensity as well. We are now tracking mini cloudbursts that cause five-centimetre rainfall with experts at IIT Mumbai and other scientists.

Sophya Mathew: Last year Delhi faced severe flooding during the monsoon. Can the city prepare better with warnings?

Any planning involves early warning, preparedness, prevention and mitigation. I can talk about early warning, where I look at historical data to know about hazard and vulnerability. So if heavy rain is predicted in Delhi, data shows us that Minto Road will get flooded. Now people should be made aware of how to use this information while stepping out.

We also have Nowcast, which is being provided for different parts of the city. For the long-term, we are planning three more extended radars in the outskirts of Delhi so that the entire NCR region can be alerted.

Anonna Dutt: With soaring temperatures, how do you see the impact of climate change?

Climate change has three aspects — One is science, the other is adaptation, third is mitigation. IMD is responsible for the science or detection of climate change. Every January, we make an annual climate statement based on temperature and rainfall patterns of the previous year and compare that to the past 100 years. Every change is not climate change. There are other factors like increase in carbon dioxide or methane levels that have to be considered.

You need attribution science, which is about understanding the role of climate change versus natural weather patterns and climate variability. There is limited progress here. For this, there should be sufficient monitoring of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases in different parts of the country. There should be a regional climate assessment. Certain states have set up a climate change cell and are working with IMD.

We have to track bipolar patterns too. For example, we find that the total rainfall of the country is not changing but the distribution of rainfall is changing. Western Rajasthan, which is usually a drought-prone area, is now experiencing rainfall. In the Northeastern states, Jharkhand and Bihar, rainfall is decreasing. Within the season itself, the rainfall is not uniformly distributed. That means the frequency of heavy rainfall has increased but the frequency of light rain or moderate rain has decreased. The frequency of thunderstorms is increasing.

Now a thunderstorm requires four parameters — intensity, humidity, an unstable atmosphere and a triggering mechanism like western disturbance or low pressure. Out of four, even if three conditions are favourable, the frequency of thunderstorms will go up. Also, the temperature is not rising everywhere in the atmosphere. It is rising in the lower troposphere, up to a height of three kilometres. If you go to the middle troposphere level of five to six kilometres, the temperature starts falling. And this prediction was made by the Nobel-winning climatologist and meteorologist from Japan, Syukuro Manabe. More thunderstorms are happening because of this temperature difference.

For the occurrence of cyclone, we should have higher temperature and humidity in the middle troposphere. If the temperature is falling here, then humidity will be less and cyclones cannot be generated. So, both the genesis and frequency of cyclones are decreasing. But once genesis takes place, the heat energy transfer increases because of an unstable atmosphere. Therefore, the intensity of cyclones is increasing. Over the Arabian Sea, the intensity of cyclones has been increasing from 1990 onwards.

Sandip Das: Last year, we had the driest August in 100 years. What's August looking like this year?

By the beginning of August, La Nina conditions (when ocean surface temperatures cool down) are expected to set in. Once that happens, there will be higher rainfall in the second half of the season and you can expect rainfall in August. But rainfall will remain dependent on low pressure systems. Last year, there was no low pressure system in August. It developed in June, July and September. July rain is very important in terms of agriculture because it is the sowing month. Crops can survive.



ON THE TECH EDGE

The country has progressed in terms of meteorological observations, monitoring and forecasting. We now predict a 'feels-like' temperature, warm nights and wind patterns

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Opinion

MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2024



A UNITED OPPOSITION

INC President Mallikarjun Kharge

"Our determination is that the INDIA group must continue. We must function cohesively and collectively both in Parliament and outside

Welcome signal

Modi's third term must ensure neighbours have a greater stake in India's growth story

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST REMAINS a foreign policy priority of Narendra Modi who was sworn in for a historic third term as India's Prime Minister on Sunday. When he first assumed office in 2014, the then premier of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, attended his inauguration with other members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc). For the oath-taking ceremony for his second term in 2019, members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) were invited. But, for the swearing-in function on Sunday, Pakistan and Myanmar were not invited while leaders from Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka along with Seychelles, Maldives, and Mauritius attended. Due to India's ongoing tensions with Pakistan — bilateral relations have been in deep freeze since 2019 — Saarc has steadily receded from the priorities of PM Modi in favour of regional groupings like Bimstec. Pakistan has so far not congratulated Modi although he had greeted Shehbaz Sharif on his re-election as PM earlier this year.

India's challenges in priortising the neighbourhood, however, are daunting. Besides the growing role of China in the region and Indian Ocean, there is the need to address the desire of neighbours to seek more strategic autonomy in their relationship with India like the Maldives, for instance. India's relationship with the island nation — a key maritime neighbour with a special place in its vision for Security and Growth for All in the Region — is passing through testing times. There is a pro-China regime change in the Maldives with the president, Mohamed Muizzu, formally requesting India to withdraw its military presence from that nation. The fact that Muizzu is one of the invitees for Modi's swearing-in ceremony clearly indicates that India will keep engaging with neighbours on the basis of mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity. This also applies to our relations with Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh even as they also engage with China to further their ambitions on economic development.

To further its neighbourhood first policy, India must also resort to unilateral and non-reciprocal measures to ensure that such nations have a growing stake in our growth story. Allowing them to export more to us will blunt the edge of their resentment of registering only growing trade deficits with India. Unfortunately, this has been a diminishing priority focus as India's two-way trade with the region declined by 8% to $30.8 billion or 2.8% of its global trade in FY24 from a year earlier. The fact that China has notched up two times larger trade volumes with South Asia than India — and trades more with Pakistan and Bangladesh — is a painful reminder of India's failure to deepen regional integration. Another ground for concern is the interest expressed by Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and possibly Maldives to join the Sino-centric Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, from which India had walked out at the eleventh hour. This further entails the enlargement of a China-dominated network of trade rules and relations around India.

India also cannot address the unfinished agenda of South Asian integration without Pakistan. Bimstec might be Saarc without Pakistan. Despite the chill in the bilateral relationship, there are interdependencies that must be seized on the trade front. Otherwise, there will be a huge loss in potential opportunities. Of late, there has been a flurry of signals from Pakistan regarding the resumption of bilateral trade. Responding to this issue should preoccupy Modi in his third term.

Big alcohol's monopoly isn't worth breaking up

SOMETIMES MONOPOLIES ARE best left alone. That's often the case when they aren't harming consumers, but it can also be true when they are — for example, if their product is unhealthy, for customers and society, and higher prices mean people will use less of it.

The Federal Trade Commission is said to be preparing a lawsuit against Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits, on the grounds of price discrimination under the Robinson-Patman Act. The premise would be that the company, which is based in Florida and distributes alcohol in 44 states, is charging higher prices to small retailers than to large chain stores, which may be keeping small retailers out of the market and limiting supply. The investigation has been going on since at least last year.

I say this as a longtime advocate of abstention, so make of it what you will, but: If Southern Glazer's actions are limiting the supply of alcohol and boosting its price, then so much the better.

There is an overwhelming body of evidence that drinking alcohol leads to more traffic fatalities, reduced productivity and higher rates of violence, not to mention the unquantifiable cost in ruined lives. Legal prohibition of alcohol proved unworkable, but some of the benefits of reduced consumption can be gained by allowing prices to rise and to stay high. One NIH investigation estimated the costs of alcohol use amounted to 2.6% of US GDP.



TYLER COWEN
Bloomberg

There are many instances of unlawful monopoly power in market economies, and most of them are best ignored. The FTC does not have unlimited resources. Government workers usually are underpaid relative to the private sector, particularly in antitrust law, where pay tends to be much higher in the companies with monopolies and the law firms that defend them. So why spend resources on a case unlikely to make society better off?

The FTC has not brought a price discrimination suit since 2000, in a case involving kitchen spices. Have there been no violations of the Robinson-Patman Act in the last quarter-century? Of course there have. But the FTC has reasonably decided to pursue higher priorities. A degree of discretion in these areas is unavoidable, so why not invoke some here?

The FTC has never enforced the law literally, blind to the broader social consequences of particular decisions — least of all now. Chair Lina Khan is renowned for her view that antitrust authorities should consider the long-term ecosystems of the sectors they oversee and regulate, and take a very broad view of how antitrust should be enforced. Most of all she has applied that doctrine to the larger technology firms. Whether or not you agree with her, that has been the status quo.

The FTC this week has declared that it will bring very close scrutiny to the AI sector, and to its alliances with large tech companies such as Microsoft. Again, whether or not you agree with that decision, it was taken because AI is considered a matter of great social and economic importance. There is in fact a lot of competition in the AI sector, including OpenAI, Anthropic, Google and Meta, not to mention thousands of start-ups. You still might think that FTC investigation is justified. But it would be hard to make that argument if this were, say, the toothpick industry.

Or you might argue that a higher tax on alcohol would be better than allowing a private monopoly. Then at least some of the revenue from higher prices would go to the government. But even if you would prefer government have that money, there is in reality very little chance of higher alcohol taxes. The drinks lobby would oppose them, as would many drinkers and the restaurant industry, which earns a fair amount of profit from alcohol sales.

Sometimes monopolies should be tolerated because they can be more innovative, as Joseph Schumpeter stressed. Other times they should be allowed because higher prices are flat out a good thing — or at the very least not worth fighting about.

Again, I don't drink myself, and I have no sympathy for the supplier here. Still, I hope the FTC applies some common sense. Americans should be allowed to enjoy the benefits of a higher price for alcohol.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

THE LESSON FOR ALL POLITICAL PARTIES IS TO FOCUS ON RAISING REAL INCOMES SUBSTANTIALLY

A message from rural voters



ASHOK GULATI
Distinguished professor, ICRIER
Views are personal

FINALLY, THE ELECTION results are out. No one has complained about the electronic voting machines (EVM) or voter verified paper audit trail. The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) that was alleging rigging just a day before, when exit pollsters were forecasting a massive win for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), did not speak a word about manipulation of election results. The lesson: our democratic process is reasonably good and fool-proof. Our Election Commission deserves some credit for that, especially organising such a marathon exercise at a scale that the world has never seen before. As the Election Commission said, "Parinaam main hi pramaan hai" (The proof is in the results), so the EVM debate now should be buried forever.

Many psephologists will keep digging for days to identify factors behind the election results. The exit pollsters lost credibility as the margin of error ranged from 20-30%. Although the INDIA bloc could not gather enough numbers to claim government formation, it is more than happy to challenge the incumbent government. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffered badly, as its own tally dropped from 303 in 2019 to 240 in 2024, and now it will be heavily dependent on NDA allies, especially Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar. Both will extract from the BJP much more than their absolute numbers suggest.

On the factors behind a major fall in the BJP tally, everyone has an opinion based on their vantage point. Was it the fear factor that the Constitution will be fundamentally changed; caste or religious factors; economic factors like unemployment, high inflation, crony capitalism, widening inequalities, and the promises of "freebies" to women and youth, etc.; or a cocktail of all of these?

It is hard to decipher the influence of these several factors, but my take is simple: look at where the BJP lost most, constituency by constituency. It would be interesting to note that its tally in rural constituencies came down from 253 in 2019 to 193 in 2024, a whopping slide of 60 seats out of the 63 the party lost in this election compared to 2019. So, it is rural India that has sent a strong message to the BJP, but it has lessons to all those who are forming the government today or who have lost elections.

If the agriculture sector is growing at just 1.4%, and it engages 45.8% of the workforce, imagine what is happening to the well-being of the masses

Almost two-thirds of India still lives in rural areas, and their average per capita monthly expenditure was only ₹3,773 in 2022-23 according to the National Statistical Office household expenditure survey. Given the average family size of around 4.4, it translates to a family monthly expenditure of only ₹16,600. Even if you adjust for inflation and their meagre savings till day, broadly speaking, an average rural family's income is not more than ₹20,000 per month. There is no doubt that the Narendra Modi government has made inroads into rural areas through its several ramped-up schemes to build toilets, houses (PM-Awas), drinking water (Har ghar nal se jal), rural roads, electricity supply, etc., yet the rural population's income levels remain much lower. And within the rural space, the income of agricultural households is even lower. This clearly shows that the rural economy has not been doing well. A good indicator of it that can be tracked is the growth in real wages in rural areas, which have been largely stagnating or even marginally declined in the second term of the Modi government.

The agri-GDP in FY24 was just 1.4% according to the latest provisional estimates released by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation. The second advance estimate of this was, in fact, only 0.7%. But since the overall GDP growth in FY24 was 8.2%, the euphoria in business circles and media dominated by urban news was that India is in top gear with the highest rate of growth among all large economies of the world, including G20. There is no doubt about that. But if the agriculture sector is growing at just 1.4%, and it engages 45.8% of the workforce, one can imagine what is happening to the well-being of the masses. Just giving them 5 kg of free rice or wheat per capita per month is not enough. That's literally a dole. Instead, what is needed is to raise their real incomes substantially. But how do we do that? And this is a lesson for all the political parties, who want masses to gain from our development process, or make the growth process more inclusive.

In this context, three things must be remembered. One, there are too many people dependent on agriculture. They need to move to more productive, non-farm jobs. These could be in rural areas to build infrastructure, or outside the rural economy to build urban India. It would require massive investments in skill formation for high-productivity jobs. Industry folks need to pitch in to train them for meaningful jobs. Second, within agriculture, the focus needs to shift from basic staples, especially rice, which is in abundant supply, to high-value agriculture such as poultry, fishery, dairy, and fruits and vegetables. High-value agriculture, being perishable, requires fast-moving logistics in a value chain approach, a la the AMUL model in case of milk. The government needs to chalk out a robust strategy for that. Third, given the climate change already causing extreme weather events (heatwaves or flash floods), India needs to invest heavily in smart agriculture, including agrivoltaics, which means solar as a third crop for farmers, giving them regular monthly income even when other crops fail due to drought or floods.

If these things have to be done right, we need an experienced and wise person heading agriculture and rural development in the Modi government. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, under whose leadership agriculture in Madhya Pradesh registered the highest growth in the last 15 years or so, would perhaps be most suitable for this job.

The road ahead for new government



ANISH SHAH
President, FICCI

India's global leadership can be achieved through strong manufacturing and services, supported by sustainability and security in food, water, and energy

THE MANDATE BESTOWED by the Indian electorate to re-elect the ruling party places India on a strong footing. Business sentiments are high and there is an expectation of continuity of the reform agenda.

As India races towards becoming the third-largest economy in a few years, we must further strengthen the economic landscape. India's global leadership can be achieved through a strong manufacturing and services sector, supported by sustainability and security in food, water, and energy.

Domestic manufacturing must take a giant leap for India to be a manufacturing hub and a product nation, with a targeted global share in manufacturing of 12% from the current 3.1%. For this, we would have to position India as a nation that promises quality, and achieve scale and localise innovation. A 360° planning of the entire value chain from design to manufacturing must be done, especially in hi-tech areas such as defence, electronics, and semi-conductors.

Over the next few years, India must enhance its overall research and development (R&D) spend to more than 1% of GDP (from 0.7% currently). A collaborative approach for creating innovation clusters is required, co-locating the private sector, academia, investors, start-ups, and government-funded R&D institutions for critical areas such as renewable energy, water, smart mobility, new materials, and life sciences.

As we focus on building our competitiveness in the manufacturing sector, efforts towards reducing the cost of doing business and enhancing ease of doing business must continue. The government must focus on factor market reforms. Expediting implementation of labour codes, making land available at affordable costs, lowering power costs for industry by ending cross-subsidy, reducing logistics costs by expediting the completion of dedicated rail freight corridors, and bringing down rail freights will be transformational in making Indian industry competitive. We also look forward to the inclusion of fuel products under the goods and services tax, a long-standing demand of industry.

While big-ticket reforms are important, addressing ground-level issues that ensure inclusive and balanced development must continue. A critical pillar of inclusive development is the female labour force participation. India could boost its annual growth by 1.5 percentage points if around 50% of women could join the workforce. With right skilling and supportive policies and schemes, we can place many more women in manufacturing roles. We must also make it socially attractive for women and their families to find it easy to come to factories for work. Allowing women to work in night shifts with all safety measures in place (as done in a few states like Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka), setting up working women hostels and crèches in industrial clusters, as well as creating a robust ecosystem around the care economy are some key measures that will promote greater participation of women in the workforce.

Efforts towards reducing the cost of doing business and enhancing ease of doing business must continue

Economic growth must be inclusive, especially ensuring the well-being and prosperity of our farmers who are integral to our nation's success. Structural reforms in agriculture should be a priority, ensuring increase in farm productivity, enhanced incomes of farmers, reduction in food wastage, and sustainability of agriculture. The government may consider pilot reforms with the introduction of modern farm laws in select states to begin with. The focus should be on creating an efficient farm-to-fork ecosystem across the country. A collaborative Centre-state approach towards establishing potential agri-clusters may be considered. Developing farm gate infrastructure including scientific storage, grading, processing, lab testing, packaging, point of sale/purchase, and transport facilities will be critical to modernise agriculture and reduce post-harvest losses (from current 40% to 20%). The government should also promote solar energy-driven cold storage for perishable commodities, portable cold storage and tech-enabled agri-logistics for real-time tracking of goods in transit to improve supply chain efficiency.

A mission mode approach for enhancing farm productivity is required. The government can look at launching an agricultural yields mission for the bottom 100 districts on the lines of an aspirational districts programme. Our agriculture practices must be sustainable. India must work on developing climate-resilient seeds through R&D collaboration between the private sector and agri-research institutions. A greater thrust is required on farm mechanisation and the optimal usage of agri-inputs. FICCI has suggested introducing "One Nation, One Licence" to simplify and standardise licensing requirements across states for seeds and agri-inputs to reduce time to market from 5-8 years to 3-5 years.

The government should aim at skilling three million village locals as farm technicians to provide new technologies and services to farmers. These technicians could specialise in areas such as soil testing, micro irrigation, drones, sensors, farm machinery, post-harvest technologies, as well as operation and maintenance of the in-village water supply system. The Agri Stack will play a crucial role in India's agriculture progress. The government must lay out a roadmap for a full-fledged agri-digital stack with multiple use case applications such as predictive analysis for yield optimisation, crop management, pest management, precision spraying, and market forecasting.

Lastly, sustainability must continue as the focus area. Be it the green transition in energy and other sectors; circular economy; or sustainable cities with clean air, water, and transport; the government must create a road map and a practical framework, enabling policies for implementation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Balanced mandate

Since 2014, we haven't had an official Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha (LS). So, majorities can make up rules or revive defunct rules when it suits them. Since 2019, we haven't had a Deputy Speaker in the LS, normally a nominee of the Opposition. Since 2014, we have had very few bills being sent to parliamentary committees for deliberation and scrutiny. This trend might reverse now, which could significantly improve the quality of scrutiny of bills. In the new House, one of the smaller coalition partners may end up getting the post of speaker. Not having the speaker from the largest party could bring impartiality and fairness in the functioning of the role. The opposition is still vulnerable to poaching and misuse of agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement Directorate. So a lot of caution is required, particularly among the people, to prevent the revival of autocracy. The opposition must keep the heat on the government. A balanced electoral mandate was just the beginning, the real work starts now.
—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Loss of a media mogul

Cherukuri Ramoji Rao, a luminary in Indian media and founder of the Ramoji Group, passed away on June 8 at 87. Rao's legacy is prominently tied to *Eenadu*, the highly successful Telugu daily he founded. He is lauded for his pioneering advancements in language use, presentation style, and technological integration within Telugu media. Beyond media, the Ramoji Group's diverse ventures included Ramoji Film City, the world's largest film production facility. His passing is a significant loss for the Indian media industry.
—Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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EDITORIAL



Uncertainty is normal in the first few days of a new government — Victor Ponta

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

— Ramnath Goenka

TRANSPARENCY MUST IN PANEL'S FINDINGS ON INFLATED NEET-UG SCORE

TO change the headline or otherwise amid the din over the shock verdict of the general elections, the National Testing Authority (NTA) of the education ministry announced the NEET-UG medical entrance exam results the same day and walked into a minefield. The first aspect that caught the eye was 67 students getting the perfect score of 720 on 720, an all-time record. Granular analysis showed that some got 718 and 719, which was not normally possible. For, it's a pen-and-paper exam where the marking system is +4 for each correct answer, -1 for each incorrect answer and none for unanswered questions. To address the subsequent uproar and demands for a retest, the NTA revealed that the high scores were due to the revision in an answer key in the physics exam and on account of compensatory marks for loss of time at a few centres. As many as 44 of the 67 got 720/720 following revision in the physics answer key. Six others became toppers due to compensatory marks for loss of time. The NTA went on to add that the benchmark for extra scores came from a Supreme Court formula in a previous case. In all, there were over 1,500 beneficiaries in six centres. Since the matter continued to snowball and landed in various courts, the education ministry set up a four-member high-powered committee to review the grace marks and submit its recommendations within a week.

The NEET-UG is considered one of the world's biggest competitive exams. Over 23 lakh students appeared for the test this year. Its score is used to fill over one lakh seats at government and private institutions for Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, 28,088 Bachelor of Dental Surgery seats, 52,720 AYUSH and 525 seats for the Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry courses across the country.

While the probe panel bought the education ministry a bit of breathing space, its report also ought to address the question of accountability. The full report must be made public for transparency and restoring people's confidence in the testing system. It should also not affect the admission process and add to stress. Students have already hit the streets demanding a retest in cities like Varanasi. The unrest could spread. The anomaly is a bad advertisement for NEET that is already in the crosshairs of political parties. The ministry must set its house in order. Now.

GROUNDS LAID FOR LOWER BOND YIELDS

HIGH cost of capital has been one of the major reasons for the muted growth of private sector capex. Being the biggest borrower in the capital market, the central government has often been blamed for crowding out the private sector from the bonds market. With the average borrowing cost for the Centre having been over 7% whole of last financial year, and the government bond yields still trading persistently above 7%, the private sector has found it expensive to raise debt domestically. However, two events – RBI's ₹2.11 lakh crore dividend to the government and the government's bond inclusion – may force the yields to go down below 7% on a more consistent basis. Two other factors – continuity at the Centre of an NDA government, which has a proven track record of being fiscally prudent, and an estimated benign inflation in the current financial year – also strengthen the case for lower yields in the near future.

Government bond yields have been trading over 7% for over a year; only briefly did it go below the 7% mark in May this year. However, a bumper dividend from the RBI means that the government borrowings in the current fiscal may be lower than projected. The government has already budgeted for a lower fiscal deficit of ₹16.85 lakh crore than FY24's revised estimate of ₹17.34 lakh crore. With ₹2.11 lakh crore in dividend from RBI compared to ₹87,000 crore last year, the government is in a sweet spot as far as fiscal deficit is concerned. Therefore, government borrowing should be much lower this year, bringing down the yields on government bonds. Indian government bonds will be included in the JP Morgan bond index beginning 28 June 2024 and Bloomberg Bond Index from 31 January 2025. The inclusion of government bonds in international bond indices in the ongoing financial year should also help bring down bond yields lower – sub-7% mark. This should have a rub-off effect on the rest of the debt market, and corporate bond yields might also come down from the current levels. A lower interest rate regime should give a boost to private sector investment adding to the country's GDP growth in the current financial year.

QUICK TAKE

FOR MORE FORENSIC EXPERTS

THE Delhi High Court recently refused to admit photos as evidence of adultery in an alimony case, stating, "We may take judicial notice that we are living in the era of deepfakes." The justices said the charge needed to be proved in trial. It's not surprising that modern technology is changing the way evidence works. But it's puzzling that raising a cadre of trained forensic experts who can authenticate such evidence does not seem to be high on the government's list of priorities. As this paper has held earlier, this needs to change. Forensic opinion provides scientific basis and neutrality that helps instil confidence in the justice delivery system.

While Modi's BJP previously enjoyed a massive mandate, it will now have to operate more effectively within the broader framework of a vast, diverse & multi-party democracy

RECALIBRATING THE NEW MODI GOVT TO COALITION POLITICS



MAKARAND R PARANJAPE
Author and commentator

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

MONDAY, June 9. As Narendra Modi assumes the office of the Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term, India stands at a crossroads. Are we to expect a continuation of the Modi 2.0, with its bold and controversial interventions such as demonetisation, the abrogation of Article 370, Citizenship Amendment Act, and rebuilding of the Ram Mandir? Or will there be a significant and substantial break from the past? Will Modi's brand of "Hindutva socialism" continue or will it be overrun by "rewadi-populism", just to appease coalition partners and an opposition that is expected to be increasingly strident?

Special status for Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Hundreds of lakhs of crores for the former's new capital in Amravati. Several plum cabinet positions bartered in exchange for continuing support. Even the sacrifice of key leaders, not just cabinet posts. But will this be enough? Will it work? This is the question on everyone's mind.

For starters, Modi 3.0 will flounder, even come unstuck, if there isn't a newer avatar of the "Hindu *Hriday Samrat*". No more the singular, authoritarian, centralised style, or a one-man show. Modi will not only have to share photo ops with other "lesser" mortals, he may even have to consent to be "co-garlanded" with alliance partners and regional satraps. Will eating humble pie come naturally to Narendra *bhai*?

Re-elected with a sizeable but sobering reduction in seats, Modi's leadership remains unchallenged within the BJP, as also among a substantial section of India's populace. Indeed, his previous two terms have seen the commanding heights of a distinct brand of governance marked by a pronounced presidential style.

Now, he has to change from the presidential to parliamentary style. To sustain India's growth trajectory and maintain its democratic fabric, Modi will need to alter this approach to ensure a more calibrated "coalition *dharma*". This means much lesser assertive central leadership and much more accommodative federalism.

Just as well. Coalition *dharma* was, until not too long ago, the defining feature of our democracy, the essential balancing act of managing political, religious, social, cultural and geographical diversity. By offering not so much a fractured but moderated mandate, the electorate has sent a definite signal to Modi: be less autocratic and more accommodating. From that point of view, the return to coalition *dharma* may actually be good for Indian democracy.

The term "coalition *dharma*" is particularly significant in the context of Indian politics. On one hand, it may refer to indecisive and compromised leadership, unable to carry out big-ticket reforms or work for the genuine interests of the nation. But on the other, when too much power is concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a small coterie of supporters, it may not necessarily mean something positive.



SOURAV ROY

An unwritten code of conduct governs the behaviour of parties within a coalition government. This code necessitates mutual respect, consensus-building and a balancing of myriad interests. While Modi's BJP has previously enjoyed a massive mandate that eliminated the immediate need for coalition partners, now the party and its leadership will have to recalibrate itself to operate more effectively within the broader framework of a vast, diverse and multi-party democracy.

Modi's mettle will be tested given the criticism levied against him for centralising power using strong-arm tactics against opponents. Civil society has also been vocal about the control of mass media and the erasure of dissent in the public sphere.

The essential question, then, is whether Modi, once labelled "divider-in-chief" by his critics, can now metamorphose into "uniter-in-chief" for the Indian republic. This will require engaging constructively not only with coalition partners, but with opposition parties. Because implicit to coalition dharma is cooperative federalism.

Modi will also do well to listen to stakeholders of society at large, including activists, intellectuals and marginal groups rather than silencing their voices or resorting to the proverbial "shooting the messenger". Welcoming competing narratives of national unity rather than pushing compelling ones could reposition him as the champion of a cohesive and inclusive nationalism.

Can Modi 3.0 underwrite a more open and plural style of strong yet responsive governance rather than trying to force major reforms such as the farm laws without sufficient consultation? That was a tactical as well as practical error, which may have actually boomeranged and cost him several seats in this election.

Such a grand reconciliatory approach might include institutional revitalisation, wherein Parliament, judiciary and media function without perceived executive encroachments and diktats. Such a transformation would not only revive democratic institutions but also bolster Modi's legacy as a leader who fortified India's institutional integrity and democratic polity.

Finally, to the international arena. Modi's diplomatic overtures in previous tenures have often been outstanding and bold, with significant emphasis on augmenting India's global stature. These must be continued, without diluting India's role as a major player on the world stage, despite the reduced mandate at home.

As the geopolitical environment grapples with power realignments, Modi 3.0 must navigate relationships with the US, China, and Russia, while strengthening ties in the Indo-Pacific region. This requires shrewd diplomacy and strategic partnerships. Would the vision of India as a "*Vishwaguru*" or world teacher, as espoused by Modi, necessitate some dilution while building these international bridges?

Will Modi rise to the occasion? Will he make a successful transition from the me-first personality cult to the humbler leadership style as demanded by coalition dharma? I believe he can. In fact, he must. He has already taken the first step by publicly bowing to the Indian Constitution as his first act after being reelected as the NDA's prime ministerial candidate. Being a consummate political performer, no task is too big or too difficult for him.

If his first visuals—with his 72-member coalition Cabinet—across our screens are any indication, the start of Modi 3.0 is impressive and inclusive. History is being scripted as the Modi era continues.

(Views are personal)
(Tweets @MakrandParanspe)

HOW A GREAT *BHAKTI* POET WAS AWAKENED



RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

THIS week, I would like to revisit the incredible legend of Meera Bai, the *Bhakti* poet. Meera came to Chittor in 1513 as a bride of fifteen, clutching her foot-high bronze statue of Krishna, her best-loved possession since she was five. She called him 'Shyam Sundar', the 'Dark, Handsome One'. A visiting ascetic at the Dakorji temple in Meera's grandfather's kingdom, Merta, owned it, obtained from across the Vindhyas. Meera wanted it the minute she saw it and wept inconsolably, and so he let her have it.

Meera's husband Bhojraj, the Crown Prince of Chittor, let her be once he understood she could not be a wife to him, for she was married already in heart and head to Krishna. No children appeared to contest this rumour. Bhojraj died in battle against invaders, as did her tolerant father-in-law Rana Sangram Singh, king of Chittor.

The clan god of the Sisodias of Chittor is Shiva, whom they worship as Eklingji in his grand temple. But despite being taught that 'God is One', Meera clung to the singing-dancing path of Krishna-love. Meera saw him as her lord, and found poems pouring out of her. Many poems are attributed to her by the doting common folk of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Brijbhumi, the old stretch of Krishna-country along the Yamuna. They sang her songs for nearly five centuries after she died in 1547 at Dwaraka. But for 21 years, Meera was immured in the Chittor palace.

Outside lay the bustle of the byways and temple fairs. Groups of wandering mendicants and devout lay people thronged the discourses of saints. A new movement, a spiritual revolution, had refreshed the common people for some time. It made them love God anew with the direct personal devotion called *bhakti*.

After Bhojraj died and his step-brother Vikram became king, Meera was unrelentingly persecuted. Her sister-in-law Uda Bai, who never liked her, was the new king's confidante. Uda's family pride was hurt by Meera's obsession with Krishna. Her complaints had not dented the lofty natures of her father Rana Sangram Singh and brother Bhojraj. But Vikram was a pleasure-seeker who lacked kingly qualities.

At Uda's urging, Vikram sent a snake concealed in a basket of flowers to Meera but somehow it failed to bite her. He ordered poisoned thorns to be scattered on her couch but nothing pierced Meera's tender skin. Vikram put Meera into solitary confinement in a ruined old house said to be haunted by demons, a place of cobwebs, rats and bats. No food or water was allowed to her for ten days. But he and Uda found Meera serenely meditating on Krishna. Vikram then banned Meera from going to the Krishna temple or meeting the sadhus that came there to hear her songs.

Now Meera had to decide what to do. But whom could she consult? Was there no wise, honourable person who understood that a life without Krishna-love was a howling wilderness? "I know existence is just a passing illusion," thought Meera, with a sudden, lonely shiver. "But while we exist, we need love. The best love is to love God, and through that refining filter, love everyone with equal respect. But I am a woman and a royal woman at that. I have no rights at all. Who can advise me?"



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Despite being taught that 'God is One', Meera Bai clung to the path of Krishna-love, even in a kingdom that worshipped Shiva. Meera saw him as her lord, and found poems pouring out of her. Many poems are attributed to her in the old stretch of Krishna-country along the Yamuna

Faint sounds from the outer courtyard broke into her tortured thoughts. The clink of cymbals, the beat of the hand-drum and a strain of pilgrim song wafted in through the window. '*Janani, main na jiyun bin Ram…*' she heard, 'Mother, I cannot endure to live without Rama', from Goswami Tulsidas's new Ramayana in the common people's language. Surely, Tulsidas would understand her desperate situation?

Meera asked her maid to discreetly ask the pilgrims to convey a letter from her to Tulsidas at Varanasi. The maid came back with their promise. Meera poured her heart out to Tulsidas:

"My humble greetings to the noble poet and true devotee of God. I write to say that I cannot forsake Krishna whom I have loved from childhood, merely because my relatives constantly torture me. I am no longer able to worship Krishna freely in the palace or meet God-minded sages and ascetics as is my practice. I have made Krishna my friend since I was a little child and am wholly unable to break that bond. Please advise me on the proper thing to do. Meera salutes you most respectfully."

An agonised wait followed. A fresh crisis appeared as a chalice of poisoned kheer. "Drink it, Meera. The king will be pleased that I watched you drink it," said Princess Uda. Meera was about to raise it to her lips when she noticed her maid's wide, terrified eyes, silently warning her not to drink. "I accept it, Krishna," said Meera and drank it. Flushed with emotion, she began to dance and sing, "I, Meera, dance with my anklets on. The king sent me a poisoned chalice but I drank it and laughed."

Uda ran away with a wail of terror. Within minutes, the tale flew from the palace to the bazaars of Chittor. Vikram and Uda were helpless against the tide of public opinion that surged through Chittor and in a few days, through all of Mewar.

Tulsidas's startling reply finally arrived. The legend goes that he wrote: "Abandon those who cannot understand you, even if they are your dearest relatives. Prahlad left his father Hiranyakashipu for that reason. All other relationships are unreal and transient. But not God-love."

That very day, Meera sent for permission to go on pilgrimage. Given the strong public mood in her favour, the king dared not withhold it, and Meera left Chittor forever to find Krishna.

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MAILBAG

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Great leader

Ref: *A mandate for constitution and consensus* (Jun 9). Modi's invincibility took a slight hit, but that doesn't take away his status as a leader. Modi needs to ramp up his adjustment quotient to take the nation to greater heights. He is not as intransigent as he is made out to be, as was seen when he withdrew the three farming laws after a consensus was not arrived at between farmers and the Centre.
Venkat Desikan, Chennai

Consensus imperative

The performance of the NDA is apparently poor as their projections were too ambitious. But taking into factors like anti-incumbency and misinformation campaigns, the performance is not dismal, though they have to depend on their pre-poll alliance partners for survival. For any major policy decisions, consensus will be imperative.
Dharmarajan A K, Thalassery

Rahul's efforts

Ref: *Congress asks Rahul to be Leader of Opposition in LS* (Jun 9). Congress officially became the opposition party in the Lok Sabha after ten long years. Without Rahul Gandhi's yatras from South to North and in the Northeast, it could not have been possible. In the nation's interest, Rahul should accept the role in the Lok Sabha without hesitation.
P Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai

Better candidates

Rahul Gandhi always seems to avoid responsibility in the party, either inside or outside Parliament. His record in Lok Sabha was rather pathetic as a speaker. Further, he seems to avoid sessions where major decisions need to be taken. Congress has almost 99 MPs; they should go for a well-balanced speaker rather than going after an unwilling horse.
Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

Unnecessary exercise

Exit polls are a sensitive exercise to be done by unbiased agencies with scientifically chosen samples. But huge competition and overconfidence have resulted in failure. Exit polls are certainly redundant and do not add any value. The time, energy and money spent do not culminate in any tangible benefits.
Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

True inspiration

The death of entertainment pioneer, Padma Vibhushan Ramoji Rao, is saddening. His contributions to the world of journalism, entertainment and media cannot be understated. He not only transformed the face of news but also inspired future generations to push boundaries and strive for excellence.
T S Karthik, Chennai

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What to Expect From NDA 3.0's Budget #1

An elaborate signal for policy continuity, reforms

The new NDA government's budget is likely to bake in higher-than-expected growth in the previous year and an unexpected bounty in central bank profits to aim for speedier fiscal correction. This course would support growth by lowering interest rates. If the budget sticks to the medium-term budgetary roadmap, it would be on account of pushing ahead with capex, which is serving as a ballast to slow consumption growth. The desired crowding-in of private investment is in evidence, although widespread capacity expansion is held back by rural consumption. A middle path — and the most probable scenario — would be a somewhat quicker fiscal consolidation in the budget alongside a delayed tapering of capex.

Revenue mobilisation, on its part, is also being propped up by higher growth. In keeping with recent experience, the budget can be conservative with revenue projects as administrative improvements raise the buoyancy of direct and indirect taxes. Scope for tax rate adjustments is limited in direct taxes, although GST offers much more leeway. Asset sales are unlikely to be high up on the budget agenda if the public sector turns in higher dividends because of higher government capex. Telecom spectrum sales should add comfort to the revenue side. The budget should aim for greater control over revenue expenditure by plugging leaks in welfare delivery, which can translate to improved social security coverage.



The budget, as a significant policy instrument, could signal GoI's social security agenda over the medium term. This will affect the economic momentum. PLIs for manufacturing exports are delivering results in select sectors, and the budget would be a good occasion to review import duty structures to make an even larger impact. The budget, scheduled to be announced next month, will be the government's most elaborate signal for policy continuity, and structural changes to the economy can be expected through reforms in the works.

Time to Turn Off Trickle-Down Politics

Water is essential to life. So, while it needs to be politicised — in the sense of its universal availability being part and parcel of the state's delivery bouquet — playing politics with water is, to put it mildly, bad form. Last week, the Supreme Court underscored this fact again when it ordered the BJP-ruled Haryana government to facilitate the flow of 137 cusecs of surplus water from Himachal Pradesh to AAP-ruled Delhi 'without any hindrance'. The order is welcome. Delhi had approached the top court earlier, stating that record-high temperatures have led to an excessive surge in water demand, leading to shortage. It also claimed that though it had taken all administrative measures to ensure optimised, rationed and targeted water supply across the city, shortage remained acute.



With the demand for water rising, interstate rivalry over its resources will only intensify. To pre-empt such conflicts, it's crucial to develop a legally binding mechanism for sharing river water across states and within states, among local governments and different user classes, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural.

Any water management framework must prioritise equity, user needs, and preservation of our rivers' environmental health. It should be adaptable to seasonal variations in water availability. The practice of offering free water as a handout (in exchange for votes) must be discouraged. It's also crucial to focus on improving health of our water bodies and promoting groundwater recharge. Efficiency in water use, waste reduction, and advanced water treatment and recycling are equally vital. No state can afford to squander water, as the Supreme Court reminded the Delhi government, and expect other states to bail it out.



JUST IN JEST

One felt the heat watching Sunday's ministerial oath-taking ceremony

Witness to a Sweating Bandhgala Ceremony

At 38°C, the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, pretty and pretty imposing as it may be, isn't the best place to spend a Sunday evening. The practice of a new government of India being sworn in usually takes place inside the presidential barracks for the simple reason of comfort. But with too many people invited — and RSVPs can be dodgy on such occasions — the option of an indoor ceremony may not have sufficed. Thus, despite the standing fans and scattering water droplets, Sunday's ministerial oath-taking ceremony looked sweatier than an oily oil painting. Adding to the heat were many of the poor dearies wearing 'official' gear. Bandhgalas in June can be stifling beyond the neck.

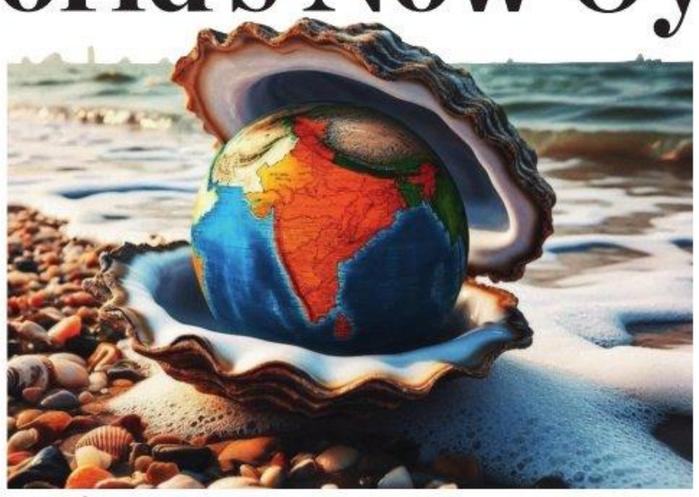
Making ministers sweat may show the nation that GoI means business. But a sweating cabinet with the bhavan's 12 Tuscan pillars looking on doth not a classical picture make. Usually used for ceremonial receptions of visiting heads of state and government, and for the 'change of guard' ceremony, those occasions usually take minutes, not over 2 hours. It's the kind of Sunday programming that's best watched from one's bhavan — if one is inclined towards entertainment of this variety — not seated under a Delhi sweltering evening sky with the surroundings still giving off the day's 40°C-plus temperature. And as an aside: why do we have such a hungama ceremony again?

A coalition gov representing wider political opinion will add to India's geopolitical heft, not reduce it

The World's Now Oysterer



Saibal Dasgupta



Now to shore up more support

Whatever the level of euphoria in the opposition ranks, Narendra Modi's success in winning a third term as prime minister has greatly enhanced his global image. The fact that he will now speak as a leader of a coalition government representing diverse political parties will add to India's geopolitical weight, not reduce it.

The election, which returned the opposition parties in strong numbers, has been widely seen in the West and in India's neighbourhood as a triumph of Indian democracy. The country's democratic credential is an important reason why the Modi government has been able to smoothly transition from the non-aligned philosophy of past governments to a pragmatic multi-aligned policy.

At a basic level, there is unlikely to be major shifts in India's foreign policy because the four personalities who influence it — PM Modi, home minister Amit Shah, foreign minister S Jaishankar and defence minister Rajnath Singh — remain unchanged. The only reported exception would be NSA Ajit Doval, who has completed his term and has expressed unwillingness to continue.

Modi sarkar's Hindu rightist image should modify with the NDA government now a coalition with the likes of TDP and JD(U)



Some tweaks in foreign policy are likely. Despite Modi's presence on the world stage, his government has been widely seen, and often described in the Western media, as a Hindu rightwing, majoritarian entity. Despite New Delhi's growing strategic closeness to Gulf countries, this has affected India's relationship with the Muslim world from time to time.

For instance, Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) objected to anti-Islam statements by two BJP leaders in 2022 when BJP national spokesperson Nupur Sharma and BJP Delhi media chief Naveen Kumar Jindal made disparaging remarks about Prophet Mohammad. The BJP leadership was quick to react and suspended and expelled Sharma and Jindal, respectively. MEA described OIC's statement as 'unwarranted and narrow-minded'. But the episode did create a good amount of diplomatic unease.

More recently, Maldives has seen an 'India out' movement that contributed, among other things, to the success of the pro-China Mohamed Muizzu in becoming that country's president in November 2023. Interestingly, Muizzu was one of the foreign guests at Sunday's swearing-in ceremony.

A section of opposition political activists in Bangladesh tried, without much success, to use social media to whip up a similar 'India out' movement early this year. Both Maldives and Bangladesh are Muslim-dominated countries where a section of the people was concerned about the 'Hindu rightwing' government in India.

This rightist image should modify with the government now a coalition with the likes of TDP and JD(U), regarded as secular, even minority friendly. During the Lok Sabha election, Bihar CM and JD(U) chief Kumar told Muslim voters, 'You must be aware of communal conflicts earlier. The graveyards remained unattended. I got fencing done. Never forget this.' TDP, on its part, has made it clear that it will continue with the policy of giving 4% reservation to Muslims under the OBC list. This is in direct contrast with BJP's campaign to end reservations under 'Hindu' OBC quotas for Muslims. BJP leaders directly or indirectly making barbed comments against India's Muslims won't sit pretty with the new checks and balances.

The Modi government has already set out to tweak its image. In his first address to NDA members on June 7, the PM said his government believed in the philosophy of 'Sarva Panth Sambhava' (all religions are equal)'. At the diplomatic level, the image of a friendly and more accommodating government would help win many more friends, particularly in the oil-producing Arab world, and disable Pakistan's continued campaign against India.

In a sense, Modi began testing the waters even before Sunday's swearing-in ceremony when he exchanged messages for the first time with Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te. But he took care not to call Lai 'president' — China doesn't recognise Lai's election to the position last month.

China, which regards Taiwan as its territory, is sufficiently needled. Beijing reminded India that it was committed to the 'one China' policy, which doesn't recognise Taiwan as a separate entity. 'India has made serious political commitments and is supposed to recognise, be alarmed about and resist the Taiwan authorities' political calculations. China has protested to India about this,' said Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning last Thursday.

New Delhi is expected to make a major push to encourage Taiwan's semiconductor companies to invest in India in the coming months. China would fiercely oppose such a move. The big question is whether India would also use the Taiwan card to negotiate the border issue with China. Beijing gets extremely nervous if any country develops direct relations with Taiwan.

The heads of neighbouring countries — Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Mauritius and Maldives — were present at Sunday's swearing-in ceremony. These countries also happen to be countries being wooed by China with lucrative offers to switch allegiance from India. Beijing has made some headway with Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. But it has not been able to successfully use these countries to create problems for India.



Modi began testing the waters even before Sunday's swearing-in ceremony when he exchanged messages for the first time with Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te

An important question is whether the new government will pursue BJP's desire to reopen the issue of PoK at the international level. Shah has repeatedly said that 'PoK belongs to us, and we will take it back'. He did not clarify whether this would be a diplomatic move or a military action.

The new NDA government will be seen as the old BJP government with the right checks and balances. And that's good news for India on the world stage.

The writer is author of Running with the Dragon: How India Should Do Business with China

ChatGPT
SHAIRI OF THE DAY

There once was a journalist crew,
Who found bravery out of the blue,
For one week they wrote,
With fiery, bold note,
Till their papers switched back to 'Subdue'.

...

Biggest Miners

Worldwide, a total of 104.1 billion tonnes of biomass, fossil fuels, metal ores, and non-metallic minerals were extracted in 2023, according to the UNEP's Global Material Flows Database. This is up from 96.5bt in 2020. Asia and the Pacific accounted for the largest share (55%) with 56.9 billion tonnes. China was the world's biggest extractor. India (8.03bt) was next, overtaking the US (7.98bt) for the first time to become the second largest extractor of these materials in 2023...

Largest extractors of domestic materials* in 2023

Domestic extraction (in billion tonnes)
Domestic extraction per capita (in tonnes)

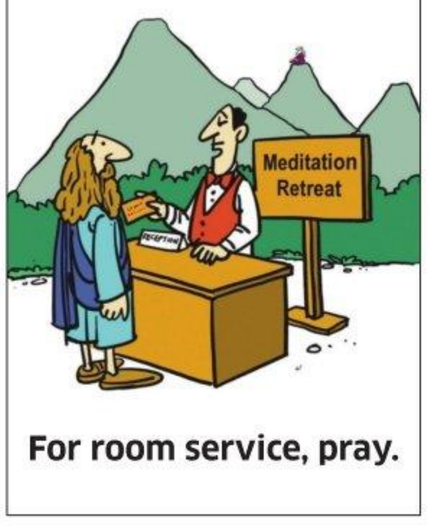
China	34.20	24
India	8.03	6
US	7.98	23
Brazil	5.00	23
Russia	3.10	22
Australia	2.70	102
Indonesia	2.70	10
Canada	2.60	67

*Biomass, fossil fuels, metal ores, and non-metallic minerals

Source: Statista

SANJEEV RAJ JAIN

Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



For room service, pray.

12 Lessons From Polls '24



Kiran K Somvanshi

Elections 2024 and formation of the third NDA government have several lessons in governance and strategy for corporate India.

1. It's not lonely at the top Competition is maximum among those who want to reach the top. Consequently, the market leader cannot afford to be complacent. Even companies that have been category leaders for decades must remain agile to protect and expand their turf. For example, Asian Paints has been facing competition from several players foraying into the paints sector.

2. Competition is good Competition can be beneficial if a company's management explores opportunities to cooperate with competitors to arrive at win-win solutions. For instance, domestic pharma companies compete with MNCs in India, but also collaborate with them to sell their in-licensed products.

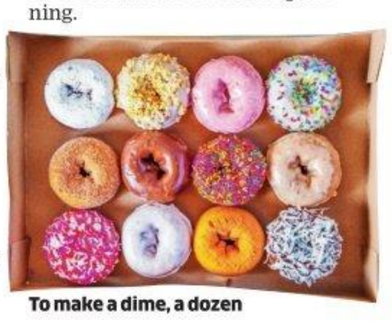
3. Listen to feedback Having one's ears on the ground and paying heed to what your foot soldiers say will pay off much more than any third-party feedback. Employees working on the ground need to be empowered to share their discerning market insights, especially regarding rivals. Managers, in turn, must be trained to listen to those reporting to them to better shape the decision-making at the top.

4. Communication is key One of the most clichéd words in corporate jargon is 'communication'. But its importance is typically undermined. How effective are channels used to communicate to and from the organisational hierarchy? Do they weed out miscommunication, or encourage the grapevine to spread unsubstantiated information? How effective is the message the organisation's top leadership give the world? How effectively is social media being leveraged?

5. Happy supply chain It's not just the company and its employees, but also its supply chain partners who must be able to participate in the company's growth. The problem of a dissatisfied or unfairly treated supply chain becomes important when the product doesn't function while in use, leading to complaining consumers. For instance, investigations have revealed serious production-control problems within Boeing's supply chain operations. However, it's ultimately airline companies and flyers who bore the brunt.

6. KYC Knowing your consumer and her preferences is the key to getting the product-market fit, product pricing and packaging right. What works with urban consumers doesn't necessarily work with rural ones, and what works for Gen Z doesn't necessarily work for boomers.

7. Rockstar CEOs High-performing CEOs are like a double-edged sword. While such CEOs become great taskmasters and drive high performance, their strengths tend to become weaknesses for their companies. Such CEOs may not allow other leaders in the organisation to grow or outshine them. This may also lead to the growth of a 'yes-men' culture and issues related to succession planning.



To make a dime, a dozen

8. Outsiders as directors Having outside experts join the board as independent directors strengthens the company's governance standards, bringing more transparency, diversity, fresh thinking and work experience. It's little wonder, then, that heterogenous boards tend to function better than homogenous ones.

9. Watch out for underdogs Underdog companies (or startups) lack the resources to build solid brands and penetrate on a mass scale. However, if they offer the right value proposition for consumers, they find support among investors and other stakeholders.

10. Value for consumer No matter how fancy or functional a product or service is, it must create value for the consumer — not just once or twice, but every time the consumer uses the product or service. And not just for a few, but for all consumers. A few dissatisfied consumers can easily threaten the goodwill generated by many satisfied consumers. For instance, while shopping online, one bad product review has a higher recall than 10 good reviews.

11. No view on markets Irrespective of financial performance, a company's management should refrain from presenting a view on stock valuations. Even if it goes down well with investors, it may not go down well with Sebi. Management can provide guidance on performance metrics and leave the job of market valuations to stock market pundits.

12. Consistency is key At the end of the day — or year — stakeholders value consistency in performance, conduct and communication. If companies can consistently improve their business performance, investors reward them consistently on the bourses, and stakeholders reward them by support through economic cycles.

Kiran.Somvanshi@timesgroup.com

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Paimona

Zeb & Haniya

The plaintive rubab introduces us to this dazzling gem. Sung by Pakistani duo Zebunnisa Bangash and Haniya Aslam, better known as Zeb and Haniya, we magically understand the Pashto words of 'Paimona' without knowing the language the moment Zeb utters Omar Khayyam's 11th century words, 'Paimona bedah key khumar astam' — Pass me the wine cup, for I am suffering the effects of intoxication'.

Zeb's voice, and the music as performed in the legendary Coke Studio Pakistan Season 2, seems to skim invisible rugged peaks of mountains, hoping to land on the ground one happy day. The rubab literally plucks at the soul while Haniya's arrangements and guitar strums are like the mountain air.



What makes their rendition of Paimona truly glorious is the duo's ability to infuse the song with 'nowness' while keeping its timeless quality intact. When Zeb rises an octave to sing, 'Chashmat key bagh e Khutan memanaat/ Royat ba gulab haye chaman memanaat' — Your eyes have the beauty of the desert deer of Khutan/ Your face has the beauty of the roses of the garden — we *see* beauty for what it is, not lying in the eyes of the beholder, but something more raw, more innate.

THE SPEAKING TREE

Servant Leadership

SWAMI MUKUNDANANDA

Of all the essential traits, the single most important leadership characteristic is to serve. To be an effective social, political, economic and spiritual leader, one must be a good servant first. One doesn't lose leadership qualities when one serves; on the contrary, one naturally becomes a leader. It's because humanity is always inspired by the ideals and the empathy that they see in the lives of servant-leaders, and wish to follow them. A servant-leader, who makes service a top priority, automatically embodies all the required qualities that we look for in a leader. In other words, service attitude is the thread that runs through all the effective and virtuous leadership qualities.

Great leaders such as M K Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela and others like them, always endeavoured to serve others, which resulted in their leading humanity successfully towards life, liberty and happiness. A servant-leader being aware that work is not merely a matter of achieving results, but also growing up, facilitates others' development and encourages their growth... A servant leader leads through example: We learn best when we observe the behaviours of others and are driven to act accordingly. A servant leader, be it of a team, company, or nation, sets a good example, inspiring others with impeccable thoughts, words and deeds. In short, while serving selflessly, one becomes the torchbearer, inspiring others toward noble goals.

Chat Room

Handle With Care

Apropos the Edit 'We, the Children, Must Receive Protection' (Jun 8). It is a basic requirement of a civilised society to not incarcerate children. Prison does incalculable harm to a child's development, even more so when imprisoned with adults. Police must be sensitised to the objectives of an alternative system for handling juvenile cases, allowing them to exercise discretion to prioritise rehabilitation. Specialised juvenile police units should be set up under competent police officers in every district.

PRADEEP KUMAR
Surat

Many Miles To Go, Still

Parliament passed the Women's Reservation Bill in September 2023. However, when the 18th Lok Sabha convenes, it will have fewer women MPs than the previous one: 73 compared to 78. Political parties have recognised the importance of 'women's vote', hence the rise of targeted welfare schemes. But for women to have a significant impact in politics, they need to be treated more than just beneficiaries, but as leaders and decision-makers. We have more ground to cover to ensure real gender parity in politics.



M JEYARAM
Sholavandan (Tamil Nadu)

Exiting Exit Polls

Apropos the Edit 'Carry Out Exorcism On Our Exit Polls' (Jun 8). Year 2024 was not the first time that exit polls got it wrong. The story is repeated election after election since the last 20 years. Transparency of method and process is necessary for exit polls to be considered with seriousness. Media must rethink this exercise, as giving incorrect information fuels suspicions about deliberate misdirection rather than incompetence. Exit polls aren't necessary when actual results are close at hands.

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CONTRAPUNTO

Any coalition has its troubles, as every married man knows

–ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER

Third Time Tricky

Political compulsions of coalition govt may test BJP, on reforms and on the fisc

As Modi-led NDA assumes office with 72 ministers, BJP heavyweights have returned. They include, perhaps in a first, seven former CMs, bringing their considerable experience to the new govt. The coalition has a daunting task that 10 years of BJP govt struggled with – jobs, jobs and jobs. The new govt will need no reminder that NDA's, especially BJP's, performance tripped over cracks on the highway of speedy economic growth.

Inequality a deal-breaker | The new govt must take on board the reality that a central issue this election has been the uneven distribution of fruits of growth – variously seen in faster growth in consumption of better-off classes, pockets of rural distress, and joblessness and underemployment. Specific policies that promote low-skilled employment will be a priority.



Welfare by itself no solution | Filling such craters on the multi-trillion-dollar highway with a rash of welfare schemes can only paper over the fundamental problem. Handouts have been every govt's fallback option. But they have failed to kickstart the jobs engine and expand livelihood options and markets, especially for small and medium enterprises. Modi govt expanded free rations to more people and by 5 years more, earlier this year. Free food grain for 80cr of India's 142cr population is a sobering reminder of the economic precarity of 60% of India's population.

RBI & hurting food prices | The upcoming Budget is one reason RBI didn't cut the repo rate in the recent monetary policy. More important was that it acknowledged the stickiness of inflation, especially of food. As food prices, especially those of milk and vegetables increase, exceptional heat and low water reservoir levels will likely cause more stress on summer vegetables and fruits, RBI has noted. Its optimal 4% inflation rate is at present far below the rural food inflation rate of 8.75% recorded in May.

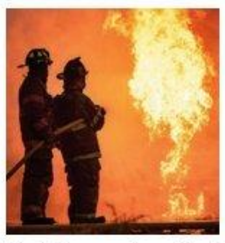
Coalition dharma | As portfolios find their ministers after hard bargains, the days ahead are a test for Modi, who has never headed a coalition. India's macroeconomic indicators are strong, but it's the micros where political compulsions of coalition will test NDA. Special status category for Andhra and Bihar, as Naidu and Nitish have demanded, will add to fiscal burden. Reforms will likely be slower. To run a stable coalition govt will be a new experience, and a challenge, for the third-term PM.

Safety Not First

Yet another Delhi fire underlines no lessons are being learnt. Regulations are up in smoke

On Saturday morning, there was yet another fire in Delhi. This time, it was at a food processing unit in Narela and left three workers dead. The seemingly endless chain of such tragedies underlines the callousness with which worker safety is treated in India. Statistics also stress that no lessons are learnt from such incidents: fires have been reported from as many as 194 factories in the capital in the first five months of this year alone.

A pan-India problem | Unfortunately, such incidents occur even in the more industrialised western and southern parts of the country, with a larger organised sector. In May, a boiler explosion at a chemical unit in Maharashtra's Thane district killed 8 workers.



In Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district, fire incidents in fireworks units killed 8 workers in May and 10 in Feb.

Migrants worst sufferers | More often than not, it is migrant workers who end up as victims of such horrific and completely avoidable accidents. With agriculture an unrewarding proposition, millions are migrating to cities and towns in search of jobs. But they often find themselves working long hours in inhumane and unsafe conditions, as has been reported from Narela. Factory owners flout rules and cut corners with impunity. Because regulators turn a blind eye.

Implementing rules key | Western Europe faced up to the underbelly of capitalism as long back as the 19th century. India is running too far behind. It must regulate the conditions under which labour works in factories and other enterprises, very strictly. And regulation does not imply merely laying down rules but their proper implementation. As things stand, greasing the palms of visiting govt officials is enough for it to be 'business as usual' at commercial establishments in urban areas.

Both jock & geek

How Netravalkar stars in the boyhood multiverse

Arnab Ray



What do young boys dream of? If you grew up in the 90s, in my time, you dreamt of being a good student. Wanting parental approval was burnt into our DNA, but it wasn't just that. He who studies well drives a car, is an English translation of a Bengali proverb.

As you can see, ambitions for financial well-being then were modest, capped by the possession of a personal vehicle. In any case, getting into a prestigious institute and studying an in-demand subject was the surest way to a secure future. And what could be more prestigious than getting into the best of the "phoren", a Stanford or an MIT, and in Computer Science too, for that was where we were told the future was.

But what boys truly dreamt of was cricket, of the glory of the Gods, of bowling the last over or hitting a last ball six in an India-Pakistan encounter, that too in a World Cup, winning the game, as the nation cheered in one voice, shouting out your name.



Unreal, these dreams all seemed, the best of study and the best of play, but what is a dream if not an impossible hope? Even when adrift from all reality, the heart still remained anchored to the fact that both couldn't be true together. If you went to the cricket field, the dream of being a stud in study would wane away. If you buried yourself in math books, why, of course, you would never play.

But we were wrong. It is possible. There does walk, in the realms of men, one such Titan.

He is a Computer Science graduate from Cornell. He is also a professional cricketer, not just any cricketer, no sir, but the one who won a World Cup game against Pakistan representing USA, bowling the stuff of dreams that curl up like tendrils of steam on a hot afternoon, that last over, that strike of sporting glory forever echoing in eternity.

Rise, Sir Saurabh Naresh Netravalkar. You are the personification of the impossible dream of boys. For you have straddled the multiverse of the jock and the geek.

All we, humble mortals, who have taken only one of the paths and not gotten far in either, can do is gaze in jealous admiration at the perfection that is you.

Fortifying NDA Against Storms

A large council of ministers is meant to project BJP strength in Modi's first coalition govt. It's a message to allies & opposition. It's also prep for Maharashtra, Jharkhand & Haryana polls

R Jagannathan



The defining characteristic of the new NDA cabinet is not the induction of ministers from non-BJP allies like TDP, JDU or Shiv Sena, but the strengthened presence of battle-hardened senior politicians from BJP itself.

Yesterday's swearing-in ceremony had the usual hallmarks of a Modi political extravaganza, with PMs from neighbouring countries, CMs and powerful politicians, showbiz and business celebs in attendance. The real hint, that this time things are different from 2014 and 2019, came from the overall ministry's sheer size, with more than 70 ministers sworn in, including 30 of cabinet rank. More parties and interests had to be accommodated.

4 political priorities | Choice of ministers reflects Modi's major political priorities:

- To emphasise that BJP is still calling the shots despite a 20% decline in the number of members elected to Parliament
- To send a message to voters ahead of assembly elections in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Haryana later this year, states where BJP did not do as well as expected in the Lok Sabha contest
- To underline NDA 3.0's commitment to the inclusion of Dalits and backward classes in its rainbow coalition of castes
- To decisively jettison the idea that BJP is a Hindi-heartland party, with poor traction in the south. Modi wants the north-south divide story to be buried forever.

Strength projection | While all the high-profile ministers from Modi's previous cabinet remain – Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, S Jaishankar, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Nirmala Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan, to name just a few – PM has added more ballast by including Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Manohar Lal Khattar, both former CMs, with Chouhan being a very successful one in MP.

To this we can add the political experience of two more former CMs from smaller allies, HD Kumaraswamy of JDS and Jitan Ram Manjhi of HAM. In contrast, the two major allies, JDU and TDP, seem to have got two ministers each, though this could be corrected later. However, it is equally possible that these parties would like their backing to Modi to be paid for in terms of economic benefits for their states rather than just ministries. Even during Vajpayee's govt, Chandrababu Naidu offered outside support and extracted economic benefits for his state.

Moving from party to cabinet is JP Nadda, whose term as BJP president ends this month. Missing are two major ministers from Modi 2.0. Smriti Irani may be a casualty of the party's UP debacle, but Anurag Thakur may have yielded a place to Nadda, who is also from Himachal Pradesh. Both Smriti and Thakur may be given larger roles in the party, though this cabinet is far from complete and will be expanded later.



Unstated message is BJP doesn't lack high-quality political talent. Modi's fortifying his cabinet with people who'll hold their own when push comes to shove

Caste arithmetic | The Dalit contingent has at least four prominent faces apart from Manjhi. Ramdas Athavale of RPI and BJP's own Arjun Ram Meghwal and SPS Baghel will now be joined by Chirag Paswan of LJP (Ram Vilas). These inductions are important because BJP was seen to have lost Dalit support in some states in these LS elections. With Arjun Munda losing in Jharkhand, Jual Oram of Odisha seems to be the cabinet's replacement tribal face.

Southern gesture | Most states now have a minister in the cabinet, and Kerala, which elected its first BJP MP, Suresh Gopi, got two ministers, including George Kurian. This not only makes a bold statement about BJP's arrival in the deep south, but also seeks to reassure the estranged Christian community. Telangana, where BJP won 8 of the 17 seats, and Karnataka, where the Lingayat-Vokkaliga alliance worked well, also get due representation. From Tamil Nadu, there is L Murugan. The state did not give the party any seats, but it saw a strong show on vote shares.

Message to allies, opposition | The unstated message in this choice of ministers is that while BJP does not have a majority of its own, it does not lack high-quality political talent to serve as a counterweight to the new inductees from powerful regional allies.

This is sensible, for unlike the last cabinet, which was deferential to the PM in most meetings, this time there could be pushback from ministers sent in by the allies. Modi is fortifying his cabinet with people who can hold their own when push comes to shove.

A significant absence from the ministry was Ajit Pawar's NCP, which got only one seat in Maharashtra and was reportedly offered only an MoS position. Praful Patel, working president of NCP, has gone on record to say that he could not accept an MoS position, having already served as cabinet minister in UPA.

This could also be an indirect hint to NCP that equations in Maharashtra could change again before the assembly elections. Who knows, a reach-out to Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena – which can't happen without an implicit understanding or merger with Shinde Sena – may be the option BJP is working on behind the scenes!

The presence of such a high-power BJP list may also be intended to give the party a strong presence in parliamentary debates, where opposition will be more aggressive than before. The allies may not always want to speak up on issues they are uncomfortable with.

Modi 3.0, or NDA 3.0, is preparing for the storms ahead.

Why BJP Partly Lost Its Way In Rajasthan

● Party misjudged local political relations ● It imported the 'wrong' caste leaders ● Parachuting a Brahmin debutant MLA into the CM's position proved costly ● Farmer protests took a toll

Anastasia Piliavsky & Bharat Hun





For decades, Rajasthan has been a *jhula*-state swinging hard between BJP and Congress, with opposing camps locked in searing debates on its streets and village *chabutaras*. This year, however, the state wavered.

In 2014 and 2019, BJP did not only sweep the state, it also gained a 25 percentage point vote-share advantage. This time, while it did secure most seats, it received only 12 percentage points more votes. For the first time since 1996, the national rivals have both secured seats in double digits: BJP 14 and Congress-led INDIA 11.

Meena-Gurjar miscalculation | It all began last year, when BJP decided to parachute a Brahmin and debutant MLA into the CM's position (the first Brahmin in 33 years to occupy the seat in Rajasthan), swiping aside both the two-time CM and royal Vasundhara Raje and the silverback MP Kirodi Lal Meena. And so, in one fell swoop, Modi alienated the powerful Meena community – losing 4 of 6 seats in Meena-dominated eastern Rajasthan – and the many Rajasthanis for whom Raje is "the Maharani". In the east, Om Birla, Modi's long-time associate and outgoing Lok Sabha speaker, scraped to a narrow victory against a BJP rebel. If in 2019 he won by 2.8L votes, this time he got only around 40k more.

BJP missed another major opportunity by drastically misjudging local political relations. In 2019, Gurjars, another powerful local community, abandoned Congress for refusing to make their neta, Sachin Pilot, the state's CM. This alone could have gifted BJP several seats, but it didn't. Sidelining many Gurjar heavyweights, BJP fielded but one imported Gurjar, believing that caste identity alone would do the trick. But in Rajasthan, as in much of India, political loyalties do not work in identitarian ways. Substantially, they track vertical, cross-caste patronal relations, which imported candidates lack. This is also how BJP lost Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, which went to a local neta fielded by Congress. This is how it lost Jhunjhunu, Churu, Sikar, Barmer and Nagaur, where BJP fielded "the wrong" import-Jats.

Bhil blow | BJP's misjudgment of local affairs, which cost it dearly in this election, has much to do with its centralisation. Party surveys, which give critical local feedback, and were historically conducted for BJP by committed party workers, are increasingly passed over to professionals, often Delhi-based youths on bikes prone to faking the surveys.



A young independent Rajput, Ravindra Singh Bhati, generated much media buzz as an anti-establishment rebel, in whom young Rajputs placed their hopes. Bhati lost, but the real star of this election, whom the media overlooked, is Rajkumar Roat, a Bhil from Bhartiya Adivasi Party, who beat a BJP silverback in Banswara by almost 2.5L votes. This is more than an isolated victory. It displaces Congress as BJP's main rival in southern Rajasthan, where from now on the battle will rage between BJP and BAP.

In northern Rajasthan, BJP's anti-farmer policies took a further chip out of their mandate. Much as in Haryana and Punjab, in Ganganagar the Jats and Jat-Sikhs who led farmer protests against corporate price control of agri products, took revenge on BJP by voting for Congress.

Urban bastion | BJP nonetheless held on to urban constituencies. Here, inflation and unemployment had little effect on BJP loyalties and Ram Mandir did have its desired effect. BJP also brought scores of urban middle-class women to the polls, many for the first time.

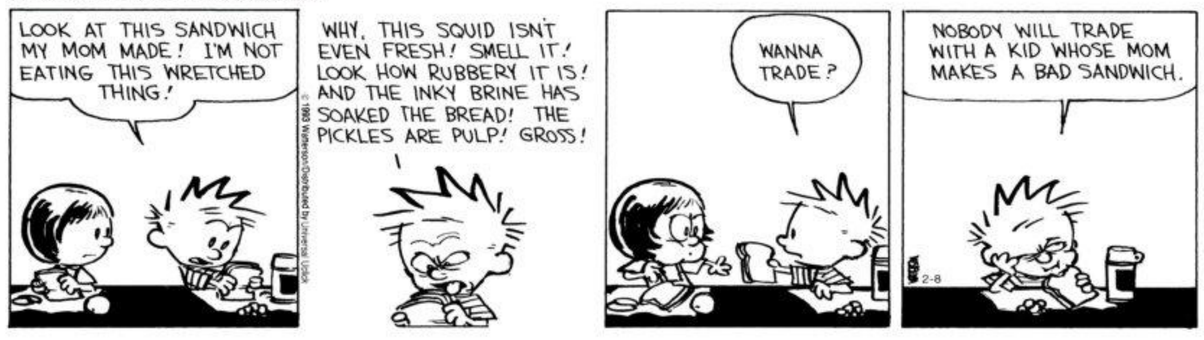
Fears of Rajput rage against BJP in response to outgoing Union minister Rupala's anti-Kshatriya comments proved unfounded. On the contrary, Rajputs rallied around BJP this year in Rajasthan. In the very Jalore-Sirohi constituency where Rajputs took public anti-BJP oaths, the Congress candidate, son of Rajasthan's three-time CM Ashok Gehlot, lost by 2L votes to BJP. Rajputs also helped carry BJP to victory in Kota, and delivered its biggest state victory in Rajsamand, a Rajput stronghold where the party won by nearly 4L votes.

BJP's Agnipath army recruitment scheme backfired. In Sikar, which sends more men to the army than any other district in India, this resulted in the surprising election of a CPM MP.

Laying bare every one of BJP's troubles – from problematic army reforms to its sidelining of local politics to farmer neglect – Rajasthan is BJP's wake-up call. It can as ill-afford to snub India's countryside, where two-thirds of the country still lives, as try to displace the complex world of local political relations with a centralised politics of identity-as-caste.

Piliavsky teaches anthropology and politics at King's College London. Hun is a social anthropologist

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



Above all else: go out with a sense of humour. It is needed armour. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life.

Hugh Sidey

Let's Put The Polite Back Into The Polity

Jug Suraiya

The protagonist in a John Barth novel always puts on his best clothes when he has to perform a manual chore, particularly if it's a messy one, like topping up the engine oil in his car.

He does this in a conscious departure from the convention of having separate 'work clothes', rough and ready wear, often stained and grubby, that we put on when we have to, literally and metaphorically, roll up our sleeves to perform a task that involves getting ourselves a bit mucky and grimy.

His reason for doing this is that sloppy clothes lead to sloppy work. When he puts on his best shirt and suit before performing a job that involves getting his hands dirty, he makes himself mindful of what he's doing, and how he's doing it, with precision and care, both for the work at hand and for the need to keep his clothes clean.

The words we use are said to be the clothes of our thought, of what we think and feel, or what we might call our mental wardrobe.

This wardrobe, so to speak, often reflects what we think and do. This is why different clothes are deemed suitable for different occasions. The festive finery we would sport at a celebratory event such as a wedding is very different from the sober raiment we would don to attend a memorial service, and in each case we would modulate what we say and do to suit the situation.

Such reflections on how we clothe our thoughts and deeds, how we address ourselves in public life, are not mistimed when we emerge from the heat and dust, the sound and the fury, of the biggest battlefield of the ballot box ever witnessed on earth, a Kurukshetra of democracy involving a billion participants.

Now, as "The tumult and the shouting dies;/ The Captains and the Kings depart", it might be appropriate to take a pause to consider and distinguish between the rough and ready verbal garb of the polemics of the electoral fray, and the original meaning of the word 'politics'.

THE SPEAKING TREE

The term is derived from the Greek 'politika', affairs of the city or polis. When Greece was made up of city states, like Athens and Sparta, the citizens were 'polites', residents of the polis.

The words polite, politeness, and politic, being prudent or wise, all have the same root. Similarly, the words civic, and civility, come from the Latin civilis, meaning citizens.

It was the obligation of citizens, inhabitants of the polis, to be care-ful not only about the administration of the city, civics, but also mindful of their interactions with each other, regulated by civility and politeness.

Politics is not just about elections, and the people who fight in them. Politics, like civics, is about how we, as citizens who supposedly share rights and responsibilities, behave towards each other, tempering even our disagreements with fellowship and good humour.

If words are indeed the garments of thought, if we pay regard to what we say to and about each other, like Barth's hero, we can get the often gritty job of democracy done without soiling the attire of our civic, and civil, discourse.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Parched Capital

The water crisis in Delhi shows no signs of abating, the SC's directions to Haryana notwithstanding

The water situation in the Capital has gone worse due to Haryana's and Himachal Pradesh's refusal to supply water to Delhi, especially during these sweltering months. The issue is especially vexed since a major amount of Delhi's water supply comes from these nearby States, affecting millions of people and several industries in the NCR. The Yamuna provides Delhi with most of its water, and Haryana is an important supplier via the Western Yamuna Canal. Himachal Pradesh, for its part, makes an indirect contribution to the river through its tributaries. The significance of upholding the current water-sharing arrangements among States has been emphasised and reiterated by the Supreme Court, the latest instance being less than a week old. This entails making certain that Himachal Pradesh and Haryana provide Delhi with the agreed-upon amounts of water, particularly during the hot summer months when the demand soars. The Supreme Court last week allowed Himachal Pradesh to release 137 surplus cusecs and directed the Haryana Government to facilitate this flow through Hathnikund barrage to Wazirabad uninterruptedly to Delhi to mitigate the drinking water crisis there. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP has demanded a special session of the Assembly to discuss the poor water situation. The move would help the issue receive quick and widespread attention, guaranteeing that legislators and bureaucrats give it top priority and move more quickly as a result of this urgency.



With almost 35 million people in Delhi as of 2023, there is every year major shortage of water as supplies from Himachal Pradesh and Haryana dwindle. The Delhi Jal Board, the city's water provider, finds it difficult to maintain steady supply levels, which frequently results in water shortages and rationing. Both wealthy and low-income households face severe inconveniences because water is available only a few hours a day. The residents are forced to depend on costly, unhygienic and erratic private water tankers. Public health hazards are made worse by this water problem. The possibility of water-borne illnesses rises when there is insufficient water available, which affects hygiene standards. The city's healthcare system may be further taxed by outbreaks of cholera, dysentery and typhoid brought on by poor sanitation. To redress Delhi's water scarcity issue, a multipronged response is needed to be put into place as a standard operating procedure. It is imperative that States stick to legal agreements and cooperate more with one another. Requirements for water infrastructure, such as treatment facilities and reservoirs, can be lessened with investment. Furthermore, encouraging water-saving behaviors and enhancing wastewater recycling might lessen the demand on the available water resources. To improve groundwater recharge, long-term initiatives should also involve rainwater gathering and the revitalisation of nearby water bodies.

PICTALK



A newly inducted officer with his wife after the Passing Out Parade at the IMA, in Dehradun PTI

Major losses for BJP, coalitions re-emerge



SHIVAJI **SARKAR**

The recent elections in India show the BJP's struggle due to divisive talk and policies, highlighting the importance of diverse coalitions



Coalitions naturally suit this diverse country, allowing all voices to be heard and leaving no room for hatred. The BJP's overemphasis on religion, anti-Muslim rhetoric and offensive language has backfired. The Lok Sabha's composition has shifted significantly for three States of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra. In Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, where the BJP excelled in 2019, it now faces significant setbacks. In West Bengal, it sank to 11 seats enduring conflicts with TMC workers even on polling day, the BJP's position has weakened. Democracy survives in this country because of the innate wisdom of the ordinary common people. The Samajwadi Party with 37 seats have emerged as the largest party. Along with six by its Congress ally, total UP tally is 43 for INDIA. The BJP which aimed at winning 80, is satisfied with a mere 34 with many of its central and State ministers losing. Voters in areas around Ayodhya have done the unthinkable. They voted against excesses for Ram temple construction by acquiring 64-acre extra land for the temple, demolishing thousands of houses, shops, temples and structures with impunity. Many homes and shops were demolished for the Ram Path in Ayodhya, leaving people questioning why the BJP Government chose to do so. Some wonder why the Government is involved in temple construction. Similar concerns arose in Varanasi, where PM Modi faced a close contest despite winning decisively in 2019.

Even Sitapur connected to Sita, not far off Ayodhya, elected an unknown Congressman Rakesh Rathor.

All these places had voted with vengeance against the highhandedness they suffered. Ganga remains as dirty as it was ten years before in Banaras. But the temple town which had varied temples of Shiv, Ganesh and other mandirs of several deities was razed for a beautification corridor that the locals never wanted. Even the main Vishwanath temple was not spared. It had images of other deities; they were all demolished to give it a new look. These 5000 temples and shops were the family livelihoods. They never expected to suffer from a Hindu party. Even a Muslim ruler did not do it.

Asked if they were acting like Aurangjeb, some senior BJP leaders replied

"he was the ruler then, now we are and would do whatever we can". The electorate did what they could. Chitrakoot and Vindhyachal repeated it vengefully for similar "beautifying corridors".

The Ram mandir had limited influence. Allahabad, the city named after Vaivaswat Manu's daughter Eela, from where Ram walked to Chitrakoot today is in a sorry State. For no rhyme or reason Eelahbad name was changed. Over 100-year-old houses were razed or partially demolished to create roads for toll or Kumbh Mela. Arbitrary actions have given the city a devaStated look. The BJP leaders told citizens, "Modiji ne kaha hai to hoga hi" - that was the guarantee.

Most demolition agents were related to one or the other BJP leaders or their friends in a distant western State.

The issue of Ram historically had never helped the BJP. In 1989, when BJP was agitating for shilanyas, it lost the UP State assembly elections. In 1992, when they demolished the temple structure as Hindus called it since 1949, which the BJP called a disputed structure, the BJP lost power for the next six years. As of now through a judgment based on continued occupation of a premises, the temple is coming up, the Pran Pratistha of not bal (infant) Ram but a balak (child) Ram is not taken kindly by Ayodhya residents.

> THE RECENT POLLS PROVE THAT HATRED, NAME-CALLING AND BELOW-THE-BELT STATEMENTS BY THE MIGHTY HAVE NO PLACE WHILE IN ELECTORAL FRAY. NOBODY IS AN ENEMY. THEY ARE JUST RIVALS

Residents in Ayodhya face confinement during celebrations, worrying about the missing infant Ram image. Locals resent security measures affecting their livelihoods. Temple visits are like airport security, requiring a long walk and Aadhaar. Footfall dwindles; people yearn for the original idol. Will the new one satisfy them?

Kalighat takeover

Even before the polls began, observers assessed severe losses for the BJP in West Bengal for unemployment, rapid price rises, agniveer and other issues. This was added by the frictions within the BJP fold. The BJP leaders were fighting more against themselves than with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool. It was not an easy challenge for Mamata Banerjee, to protect Bengali pride. She effectively did it launching her campaign for BJP-humiliated Mohua Maitra from Krishnanagar. The BJP tried to turn it into a VIP constituency by pitting an unknown Rajmata of Krishnanagar royal family of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy. The Krishsnanagar ploy not only did not work, it also became Waterloo for BJP. Its tally came down from18 to 11. Many ministers like Subhash Sarkar, former State party chief Dilip Ghosh, Sandeshkhali supposed rape victim Rekha Patr lost at the hustings.

Sandeshkhali was hyped up. It was busted by Mamata as fake and people believed her.

The famous Kalighat temple, supposedly one of the 51 shakti peethas also became a poll issue. A business house from Ahmedabad has reportedly illegally taken it over. It hurts the Bengali psyche.

Maharashtra was another waterloo where the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thakre) emerged as the real Sena. Along with Uddhav, Sharad Pawar and the Congress, the opposition won 30 of the 48 seats. While BJP had to cut a sorry figure. Maharashtrians have proved that Uddhav Thakre's is the real party. Even Muslims in large numbers did not mind voting Uddhav and Shiv Sena (UT) voted for the Congress. Their vote was against betrayal by the elected leaders Eknath Shinde, Ajit Pawar and BJP which rocked the BJP-Sena alliance.

The recent polls prove that hatred, name calling and below the belt Statements by the mighty have no place in electoral fray. Nobody is an enemy. They are just rivals. In a democracy there is no authoritarian leader. All are equal. It also proves that coalition is more natural in this country than a one-party rule.

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

Protecting health through food safety



BIJU **DHARMAPALAN**

Food fuels our health. Its quality influences, and aggravates, chronic diseases such as heart issues, diabetes, obesity and some cancer types

Food is an essential component of our life. The quality of food one consumes plays a significant role in developing and managing chronic diseases. Many chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity and certain types of cancer, are closely linked to diet and nutrition. Unfortunately, the public rarely looks into the quality of food one consumes. We can see the mushrooming of street food stalls across the nook and corner of the country, sans any hygiene or quality. Even the food items we procure from supermarkets do not guarantee quality. In many cases, there would be a mismatch between what is mentioned on the label and actual ingredients. Even enforcement agencies rarely check the quality of foods served by the vendors.

Food safety is crucial for maintaining public health, preventing foodborne illnesses and ensuring the economic stability of the food industry. These diseases are caused by consuming food or beverages contaminated with harmful microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, parasites) or



toxins. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 600 million people fall ill after consuming contaminated food each year, leading to 420,000 deaths. These figures underscore the severe health implications of unsafe food. Foodborne illnesses can cause long-term health problems, including kidney failure, chronic arthritis, brain and nerve damage and death. This year's World Food Safety Day theme, "Prepare for the Unexpected" , underscores the importance of proactive measures in maintaining food safety amidst various unforeseen challenges. The need for robust and adaptive food safety measures is of prime importance in the current scenario, where new pathogens are evolving and new toxic additives are added to foods to make money.

Earlier, every food item had a local flavour available in a particular place and in a specific shop. Since the production level was minimal, the manufacturers had control over the quality and safety of their food products. Unfortunately, the globalization of the food supply chain has increased the complexity of ensuring food safety. Food products often travel long distances and pass through numerous intermediaries before reaching consumers. This extended supply chain makes it challenging to trace the source of contamination and implement consistent safety standards. Reliance on technology in food production and safety monitoring introduces risks related to technological failures. For instance, breakdowns in refrigeration systems can lead to spoilage, while contamination in automated processing lines can spread quickly if not detected.

Bioterrorism, or the intentional contamination of food supplies, is a potential but severe threat. Members of the Rajneeshee (Osho) cult contaminated salad bars in Oregon with Salmonella, sickening 751 people. The quality standards should be fixed not on a nation's stature but based on its consumable stature. The quality of food products available in the Indian markets and overseas has a wide gap. Harmonizing standards globally can help address disparities in food safety practices across countries. There should also be active collaboration between agencies like WHO and FAO in evolving strategies to combat foodborne diseases and health issues.

Enforcement agencies should embrace tech advancements like blockchain for better food traceability and IoT sensors for real-time monitoring of storage conditions. Keeping food safe demands constant innovation and vigilance. As our global food system continues to grow and change, so must our approaches to ensuring its safety. Preparing for the unexpected in food safety is not just a reactive measure but a proactive commitment to safeguarding the well-being of all humanity.

(The is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MILK PRICES IMPACT HEALTH, TOO

Madam — Apropos the news story "Soaring milk prices may hit affordability, health," published on June 8, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, I'm struck by the paradox of India being a global leader in milk production yet facing rising milk prices, which threatens the affordability of this essential nutrition for many. With whole milk prices around Rs. 66 a litre, the common man's ability to provide nutritious milk for their family is at risk. Despite India's rich dairy heritage, the increasing cost could impinge on public health, underscoring the need to address the reasons behind these price hikes.

It's also concerning that while milk production is booming, with an impressive output of 231 million metric tonnes in 2023, 60 per cent of it still comes from the unorganised sector. This sector might struggle as urban consumers lean towards packaged milk from organised dairies. However, these packaged products often contain preservatives that pose health risks, raising questions about their safety. As we mark Milk Day, it's crucial to ensure milk remains accessible and safe for everyone, maintaining its status as a staple in our diet.

Kiara Rao | *Mumbai*

URGENT INVASIVE SPECIES CRISIS

Madam — Apropos the news story "Invasive species threaten Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary," published on June 9, this is my response. As a daily reader of the newspaper, the ongoing situation at Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) is profoundly concerning. Invasive species like Senna spectabilis are transforming this once-thriving biodiversity hotspot into a monoculture. The rapid spread of these species has overwhelmed local flora, disrupted the food chain and contributed to a decline in native wildlife, including tigers and elephants.

The Asian elephant's role in dispersing Senna seeds through its dung exemplifies how interconnected and delicate these ecosystems are. The forest department's 1986 decision to plant Senna, although well-intentioned, highlights the importance of thoroughly assessing ecological impacts before introducing new species. The Forest Department's efforts to control Senna are commendable but face significant challenges. Sustainable strategies and community involvement are crucial to restoring Wayanad's ecological balance. This situation serves as a stark reminder of how invasive species can cascade into widespread ecological and economic crises, urging us to approach conservation with greater caution and urgency.

Aditya Gupta | *Mysore*

SLEEP EARLY, STAY HEALTHY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Nightbirds, hit the sack early for mental health, longevity," published on June 9, this is my response. As someone who peruses the newspaper daily, I find the new study by Stanford Medicine quite enlightening. Grandma's advice about early bedtimes holds more weight than ever, transcending our natural sleep preferences, or chronotypes. The research, involving nearly 74,000 adults, reveals that late-night wakefulness correlates with higher rates of mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, regardless of being a night owl or a morning person.

The study's unexpected findings challenge the long-held belief that aligning sleep schedules with one's chronotype is key for mental well-being. Instead, the timing of sleep itself is crucial. Those who go to bed early exhibit better mental health outcomes. This discovery emphasises the importance of sleep hygiene and the potential benefits of adopting an earlier bedtime for everyone. Despite the difficulty in altering one's chronotype, strategies like morning sunlight exposure and consistent routines might aid in improving sleep patterns and, subsequently, mental health.

Aarush Mehta | *Agra*

Excitement for T20 clash



Apropos the news story "India Vs Pakistan: Spotlight on NY pitch as steady India take on wounded Pakistan," published on June 8, this is my response. As a regular reader of cricket news, I'm eagerly awaiting the high-stakes T20 World Cup clash between India and Pakistan this Sunday. India's confidence contrasts sharply with Pakistan's recent struggles, highlighted by their shocking defeat to the USA. The newly constructed Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, with its unpredictable pitch, adds an intriguing layer to the matchup.

The pitch's uneven bounce has been a major talking point, raising both safety concerns and doubts about its suitability for high-scoring games. Rohit Sharma's injury and his cautious remarks post-Ireland match underline the uncertainty. Pakistan's limited preparation time at the venue could be a significant disadvantage. However, their unpredictability, especially their formidable bowling led by Shaheen Afridi, keeps the contest balanced. India's strategy, possibly including the in-form Kuldeep Yadav, adds another dimension. This game promises to be a fascinating blend of skill, strategy and unpredictability, making it a must-watch event.

Dhruv Chatterjee | *Varanasi*

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FIRST COLUMN

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OUR ATTITUDES

Fear and affection stem from experiences shaping human thoughts and emotions



RAVI **VALLURI**

The Mahabharata is one of the greatest epics essayed in the subcontinent, perhaps in the world. It is believed to have been recited by the sage Veda Vyasa with Lord Ganesha himself playing the role of meticulous scribe.

The saga captures variegated attitudes and heterogeneous characteristics of humans in both the gross and subtle form. Human attitudes and standpoints emerge in all shades of the spectrum, rather than in simple black, white and grey.

Attitude is all

Lord Krishna, an avatar of Lord Vishnu decides to test the waters and mollify the ego, arrogance and anger of the Kaurava scion- Duryodhana. Social influences, overwrought emotions and environmental factors impinge upon human minds. Consequently, individual behavioural patterns become complex and often antipathetic in nature. The mind gets filled with cobwebs and nugatory thoughts and human attitudes towards self and others become ossified.

Duryodhana's mind was prejudiced against his cousins and this attitude was fuelled by his scheming uncle Shakuni, sibling Dushasana and bosom friend and fabled archer, Karna. History is replete with examples of such discriminatory practices. The genocide committed by the Nazis in Germany against the hapless Jewish populace is a singular and extreme example of how prejudice leads to hatred, discrimination and mass extermination of sections of people and humanity.



Compassion: an efficacious attitude

Aeons ago an estimable Zen Master assembled several monks and novices for vigorous sessions of meditation. During one of these sessions a tutee was caught stealing by his colleagues. The guilty was produced before the Zen Master and all those present demanded that he be expelled from the Temple of Knowledge as an exemplary punishment. The Zen Master ignored the entreaties of the monks.

Once again, the pupil was caught stealing. This angered the assembly of monks who demanded that the culprit recompense the losses he caused so that it had a salutary influence on all the inhabitants of the monastery. The Zen Master, after deep thought, forgave the troubled student, causing dismay among others. He believed the student lacked moral clarity while others had evolved through meditation. "I can't abandon him," the Master said. Touched, the student vowed to change, shedding his thieving ways to become a better person.

The consideration and compassion displayed by the Master was singularly responsible for this change. Psychologists opine that the inclination and slant of humans is immovably wedged in by certain predominant factors like the actor-observer effect arousal by various stimuli, attribution, balance maintained in day-to-day operations.

Likewise, the Zen tutee was overwhelmed by the tenderness and benevolence shown by the Master and he mutated into a better human being by eschewing the act of surreptitious pilferage.

Essentially human beings are social creatures and need to interact with and relate to others. This in turn shapes their attitudes and behavioural patterns. Individual attitudes evolve through a continuous learning process. Xenophobia and fondness are a result of various occurrences and their influence on the human mind. Impression formation takes place in a systematic manner and is exhibited as decent or indecent behaviour. The illustrious American business honcho, Harold S Geneen was to famously say, "Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitudes and in action."

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd.and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Uncertainty prevails after Lok Sabha polls



KUMAR **CHELLAPPAN**

Congress, with its allies, gains strength as Opposition. Modi adapts to a new landscape, reliant on diverse regional satraps for support



The dust has settled and the performers are back in their homes as the great election carnival has come to an end. What pervades all over India is a sense of uncertainty and indecisiveness. No political parties have an absolute majority of their own to form the Government though the National Democratic Alliance (also termed as Non Dependable Allies) has nearly 300 MPs, 27 more than the halfway mark. Though the Congress, the main player in the opposition, could not touch the three digit mark, together with its allies, the party has emerged as a striking force.

While reporting about the Bharat Jodo Yatra undertaken by Rahul Gandhi, The Pioneer had forecast that it was going to be the gamechanger of national politics. The question is whether Rahul could maintain the initial enthusiasm generated by the Yatra. He was handicapped by the absence of a team of leaders who could rise up to his expectations. Better luck next time.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not his normal self when addressed the party cadre on the day results were announced. Something was missing from his hitherto confident voice and the speech failed to inspire the party ranks, a rare incident in his decade long avatar as Prime Minister. This is not Narendra Modi who is familiar to the electorate. Modi had made a grant entry to New Delhi in 2014 after winning the Lok Sabha election. He had 282 seats of his own and 336 with the support of his alliance partners. The people offered India on a platter to Modi in the 2019 election despite the sustained campaign by a section of the New Delhi media. The BJP on its own won 303 seats while the NDA had 353 seats which made Narendra Modi the monarch of all he surveyed.

But 2024 turned out to be an entirely different scenario. The charismatic, uncompromising and powerful Modi is at the mercy of two regional satraps with national ambitions, Nitish Kumar of JD(U) and Chandrababu Naidu of TDP. Even before the NDA held its first meeting, Kumar and Naidu had put forward a set of demands including conducting the caste census and scrapping the Agniveer Scheme. Equally important is the opposition of these two leaders to the Uniform Civil Code, a dream project of Modi as well as BJP. These are in addition to Naidu's demand for the post of Speaker and four or five berths in the union cabinet. Nitish too has demanded an equal number of berths in the cabinet and that too with the coveted ministries like Railways, Agriculture and Rural Development.

Cut to 2014 when Narendra Modi led the Lok Sabha election campaign for the first time. Television images aired pictures of a sheepish Chandrababu Naidu walking behind Modi throughout the campaign yatra in Andhra Pradesh. Within two or three years, Naidu walked out of the NDA, cursing and abusing Modi. His ire was directed against the Prime Minister's refusal to accord Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh. He walked over to the Congress camp and declared that his mission was to oust Narendra Modi from the post of Prime Minister as well India. Some media even reported that Naidu is a strong contender for the top post of the country. But the 2019 assembly election shattered Naidu's dreams. Jagan Mohan Reddy, leader of YSR Congress, demolished Naidu in the assembly election with a massive win and was sworn in as chief minister. As part of his objective of finishing TDP once and for ever, Reddu launched a thorough probe into the charges of corruption against Naidu, his family and friends. Three years ago, Naidu's six-year old grandson Devansh had assets worth Rs 19.55 crore and there was nothing abnormal in an investigation by the Income Tax officials. Naidu faces a series of corruption charges for which he was arrested and imprisoned for months by the Jagan Mohan Reddy Government. When it was time for the 2024 assembly election, Naidu felt the need of support and that was how he cast his lot with BJP and Modi, till then his bête noir. Having got nore than what he aspired for, Naidu has set his eyes on the chair of the Prime Minister. We cannot expect anything better from a person who stabbed his father-in-law N T Rama Rao, the founder of the TDP and usurped the proprietorship of the party.

> THE UNCERTAINTY FOLLOWING THE 2024 ELECTION, WITH NO PARTY SECURING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, UNDERSCORES THE SHIFTING DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES FACING KEY POLITICAL FIGURES LIKE NARENDRA MODI AND RAHUL GANDHI

Nitish Kumar is no different from Chandrababu Naidu. He is emblematic of the Aaya Ram, Gaya Raam phenomenon in Indian politics. Even late Arjit Sen, the ace radio commentator of football and hockey matches may find it tough to describe Nitish's defection from one front to another laced with speed, agility and the Perfect 10 landing. It is not possible to say whether Nitish Kumar would be with the NDA by the time this article goes into press and reach the hands of the readers. Naidu and Nitish are two deceiving crutches and can lead Modi to a "no man's land" with their "dedication".

Both TDP and JD(U) are secular and liberal parties and that settles the issues. Naidu and Nitish have been entrusted with the task of saving secularism from "communal" BJP and once the mission is achieved they would cross over to INDI Alliance, a rainbow alliance launched by Nitish Kumar himself. The BJP is in a Catch-22 situation. Chandrababu Naidu has won Andhra Pradesh assembly election with a brutal majority despite the good works done by Jagan Mohan Reddy and Modi has become extra-luggage for the TDP leader. Naidu was instrumental in easing out the then Prime Minister Deve Gowda in 1997 after a ten month tenure much to the anguish of the latter.

Now come back to 2024. The present political imbroglio is BJP's own making. How many of us remember the five day long crisis in Maharashtra when Devendra Fadnavis, the then leader of the opposition was sworn in as chief minister in 2019 with Ajit Pawar (NCP) the chief minister only to make an ignominious exit after four days. Fadnavis and the BJP had termed Ajit Pawar as the embodiment of corruption but they found no qualms in forming a coalition Government with him. Despite Ajit Pawar returning to the Pawar Parivar within two days of swearing in as deputy chef minister dumping the BJP, Fadnavis solicited him again and right now the former is back in the Hindutva fold. Fadnavis should have understood the truth that BJP can never compromise with a dynasty party. Having failed to cross the magic figure (having failed to cross the half line mark) in the legislative assembly, the best option for him was to bid his time till the next assembly election or the disintegration of MVA. But he was in a hurry to become the Prime Minister of the country and this forced him to commit the hara-kiri. This reminds us of the kamikaze by Choudhri Charan Singh in 1979 ostensibly to teach the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai a lesson. Choudhri Saheb went down with the Janata ship and could not stage a comeback.

And the most important thing about the 2024 election is another hara kiri by J P Nadda, the BJP president. His declaration that the BJP has no links with the RSS and his outfit is free of "Bhagwa Dhwaj" , the flag of the Maratha Empire and emblematic of the followers of Hinduism. Nadda's claim was a cardinal sin because without Bhagwa, there is no Sanatana Dharma. The saffron is the color of Hinduism and all Sanatana organizations. The disownment of the Bhagva hurt the RSS karyakartas and swayam sevaks forcing them to cry off from the campaign trail. "Our flag was apparently created by Lord Indra himself. The flag carries the saffron color of the Lord. We chose the flag for our kingdom. The flag represents humanity and we need to ensure that we live up to its representation," Shivaji, the great Maratha emperor is quoted as telling his ministers and commanders. It is time for Nadda to move out of the presidency of BJP. He has neither inspired nor enlightened the people through his words and actions. With nothing to show as his credentials, Nadda is a burden for the BJP and Sangh Parivar. The ouster of Naddha is the need of the hour. What the country needs is a leader who is capable of generating oneness and enthusiasm amongst the Hindus. Nadda should read and learn about two gentlemen from South India, K Kamaraj and S Nijalingappa, both former presidents of the Congress and were rated as titans of Indian politics. (It is a sad twist of history that we have only Congress leaders wearing Titan watches made by the House of Tatas!). Nadda is occupying the seat which was once held by the likes of A B Vajpayee, L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi. BJP should identify persons with leadership qualities. Nadda has no qualities to be in that chair. The 2024 election has thrown a fractured mandate even as the BJP has emerged as the single largest party. Rahu Gandhi should remember the fight between Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe in the Wimbledon championship. McEnroe was beaten by Borg in a marathon five setter in 1980 but the former came back to claim the championship in 1981 by defeating Borg. Tennis and Politics have a lot of similarities.

(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

Women lead India's 2024 election transformation

Women's increasing involvement in Indian elections led to nearly equal representation in voter turnout, marking historic progress

REKHA **SHARMA**

The Lok Sabha 2024 elections in India this year marked the emergence of women as a significant contributor to India's destiny, reflecting 'she' as an important factor in the democratic process. For the first time, women constituted nearly half of the voter turnout, as the electoral gender ratio increased from 928 in 2010 to 948 in 2024. This shift reflects a critical evolution in the democratic process, highlighting women as a decisive voting bloc.

Public Choice Theory and Electoral Strategies

According to the public choice theory, as women become a decisive voting bloc, political parties will act in their self-interest to cater to 'she' needs. So, every political party in India gauged the importance of the female demographic bloc and put concerted efforts to engage female voters. They acknowledged and addressed the unique needs of women through various women-centric welfare schemes and community initiatives such as Ujjwala Yojana, the Swachh Bharat Mission, free bus rides, direct cash transfers and prohibition policies. These initiatives garnered substantial support from female voters, highlighting the electoral impact of gender-focused strategies.

Beyond Electoral Gains

The implications of these gender-focused strategies extend far beyond immediate electoral gains:

Improved Governance and institutional reforms: The increased competition among political parties to attract female voters has led to a promise of more responsive and effective governance. Parties are encouraged to deliver more and better public services, welfare programs; thereby improving overall welfare. This may also lead to institutional and legal reforms that protect and promote rights of women.

Challenging Patriarchal Norms: Rising literacy and civic participation among women signify a transformative shift. This shift challenges traditional patriarchal norms and expands the role of women beyond traditional caregiving responsibilities. This progressive attitude promotes economic growth and productivity.



Enhancing Capabilities: Drawing on Amartya Sen's "capabilities approach," enhancing women's abilities to participate politically, socially and economically not only improves their individual functioning but also boosts the overall human development level of the economy. Studies have shown that States with higher female representation have increased investments in public services such as sanitation, drinking water and education, leading to improved community well-being.

Role Models and Leadership: Women in leadership roles serve as role models, encouraging other women and girls to participate in public life and pursue leadership positions. This self-empowerment breaks down social barriers and fosters more inclusive and representative governance.

Vision for Viksit Bharat@2047

The focus on gender empowerment in the 2024 elections is pivotal for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, which envisions a developed and inclusive India. Political parties that recognized and acted upon this cultural shift have positioned themselves on the right side of history, understanding the changing dynamics of Indian democracy.

As Indian democracy continues to evolve, the empowerment of women in politics will pave the way for more balanced and equitable institutions, reflecting the true spirit of democracy. This evolution promises a governance system that is more inclusive and effective, ultimately contributing to the nation's development and the fulfillment of its long-term vision.

(The writer is Associate Professor Department of Economics Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

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The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Kangana 'slapgate'

Politicians, farm leaders must exercise restraint

THE farmers' agitation of 2020-21 continues to be an emotive issue in Punjab, going by the ugly episode involving newly elected BJP MP Kangana Ranaut and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) constable Kulwinder Kaur. The latter slapped the actor-turned-politician at the Chandigarh airport last week. This was apparently in retaliation for some controversial statements by Kangana, who had claimed that farmers were being paid as low as Rs 100 or Rs 200 to protest at Delhi's borders. The film star had also mocked the women who were part of the historic stir. Kulwinder's mother was presumably among the protesters who had laid siege to Delhi for a year over the three Central farm laws. These were eventually repealed, but not before 700-odd agitators lost their lives.

Some farmers' outfits have rallied round the suspended constable, saying that the incident needs to be thoroughly investigated, even as a CISF officer has stated that the suspect probably acted in a rush of blood. Kulwinder is receiving a groundswell of support on social media, while Kangana also has her fair share of backers, including fellow celebrities who have denounced the use of violence to express anger. True to form, she has voiced her concern over the 'shocking rise in terror and violence in Punjab'.

The deplorable incident is symptomatic of the anti-BJP sentiment in the rural belt of the border state. Party candidates and campaigners were shown black flags and prevented from entering villages during the just-concluded Lok Sabha elections. The BJP's poll debacle in Punjab was attributed to the prolonged standoff between the state's farming community and the Modi government. A new flashpoint emerged this year when the protesting farmers' *Dilli Chalo* march was brutally stalled. Amid the prevailing acrimony, it is imperative for both politicians and farm leaders to exercise restraint and avoid provocative remarks. A return to the negotiating table would be in order to defuse tensions.

Long-delayed justice

Punjab ex-cops jailed for 1993 staged killing

IN a significant verdict on Friday, a CBI court in Mohali sentenced former Punjab Police DIG Dilbagh Singh to seven years of rigorous imprisonment and ex-DSP Gurbachan Singh to life imprisonment for their roles in the 1993 fake encounter killing of Gulshan Kumar, a fruit vendor. This case, a chilling reminder of the dark days of unbridled police brutality in Punjab, highlights the systemic lapses that had plagued the state. Extrajudicial killings, illegal detentions and staged encounters had become distressingly common. The details of this case are harrowing. On June 22, 1993, Gulshan, along with his father and brothers, was abducted by a police team led by Dilbagh and Gurbachan. While the others were released, Gulshan was kept in illegal custody for a month before being killed in a staged encounter. His body was cremated as 'unclaimed', a common practice then to cover up extrajudicial killings. The case, initially overlooked, was taken up by the CBI in 1995 on the Supreme Court's directive, culminating in the conviction nearly three decades later.

The law has at last been catching up with rogue cops. In September 2023, three ex-officers received the life sentence for the 1992 fake encounter killing of three youths. A year before that, a retired sub-inspector was sentenced to 10 years in another fake encounter of 1992. These cases reveal a pattern of grave misconduct and long-overdue comeuppance.

The delivery of justice underscores the resilience of the victims' families amid numerous challenges, including the death of several accused during the trial and witness attrition. This is crucial for restoring faith in the rule of law and can serve as a deterrent against abuse of power.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 1924

Judicial whitewashing

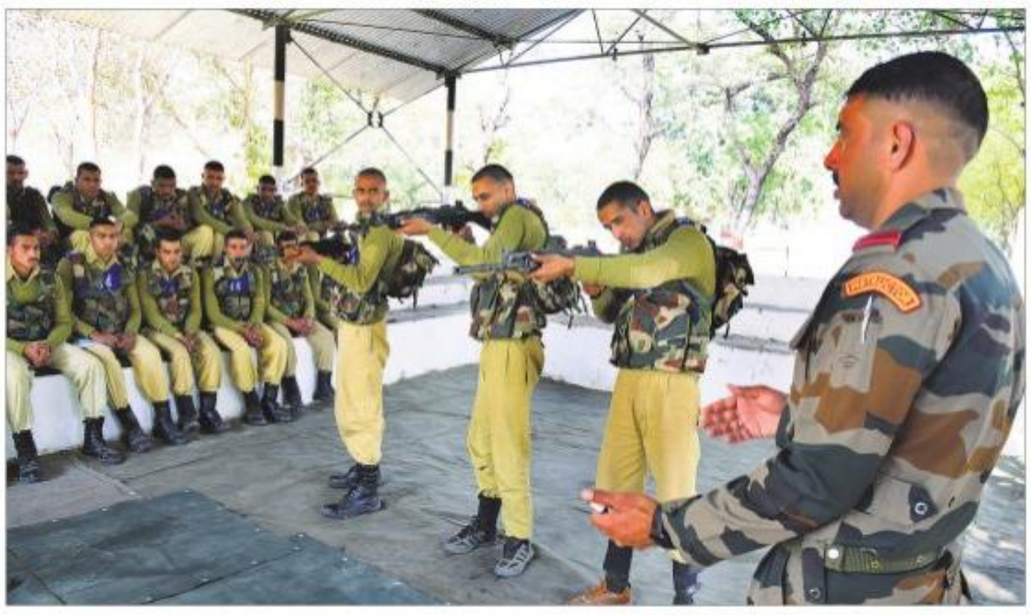
IF Mr Justice McCardie's whitewashing of Gen Dyer and of the whole body of wrong-doers under Martial Law was as bold a piece of judicial special pleading and absurdity as any Judge ever made himself responsible for, his whitewashing of the administration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer was scarcely less so. In both cases, the argument was much the same. Nobody had questioned the honesty of the officials concerned. This would have been a bad enough plea, even if the officials had been literally and technically on their defence before his lordship, especially in a criminal case. It was an entirely rotten plea, considering that the chief of these officials figured in the case, not as defendant but as plaintiff. Here the sole question was whether the defendant was justified, as a matter of fair criticism upon known facts, in making the remarks he had made. The honesty of the officials had nothing whatever to do with the matter. What the then Secretary of State said in his dispatch on the report of the Hunter Committee in regard to Gen Dyer is substantially true of all of them. The gravest feature of the case against them is their avowed conception of their duty in the circumstances which confronted them. It was literally a case of the path to a certain unnameable place being paved with noble intentions. Apart from this ingenious line of defence, there was another in the case of Sir O'Dwyer which clearly carried the absurdity a step further. "There was not a single witness," said the Judge in words which would have been more appropriate in the mouth of senior plaintiff, "who could say that he told Sir O'Dwyer (that terrorism prevailed in Punjab)."

Political compulsions back in calculus

Agnipath scheme finds itself under scrutiny, but not for professional reasons



C UDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY FOR POLICY STUDIES



COALITION PRESSURE: The JD(U), an ally of the BJP, wants the Agnipath scheme reviewed. ANI

THE defining outcome of the 2024 General Election is that India will be governed by a genuine coalition, wherein the BJP, the single largest party, needs critical support from two allies, the JD(U) and the TDP. Hence, both the form and content of governance in Modi 3.0 will not be similar to that seen in the past decade.

This shift has already come to the fore in the national security-military framework. The JD(U) has stated that a seemingly radical policy unveiled during Modi 2.0, the Agnipath scheme, needs to be reviewed. This scheme pertains to the induction of soldiers (Agniveers) into the military for a four-year period after a six-month training spell, and is a marked departure from the earlier model of pension and related benefits being provided to personnel below officer rank (PBOR) after 15 years of service.

In the run-up to the swearing-in ceremony, senior JD(U) leader KC Tyagi noted, "There is anger among certain sections on the Agnipath scheme. Our party wants those shortcomings removed." When the scheme was announced in mid-2022, there was considerable consternation in professional circles, for this decision appeared to have been taken by the PMO unilaterally. The military top brass was apparently not apprised of the fine print of the new scheme and nor was there a detailed discussion among parliamentarians.

Gen MM Naravane, who was the Army Chief from December 2019 to April 2022, has provided a valuable insight in his yet-to-be-published memoir about the Agnipath scheme. He notes that while he had mooted the idea of a 'tour of duty' pilot scheme to induct soldiers for a short-term tenure, the PMO's formulation unveiled in 2022 had a sweeping scope and included all three services. The memoir adds: "We, in the Army, were taken by surprise by this turn of events, but for the Navy and the Air Force, it came like a bolt from the blue."

In keeping with the tenets of a normative democracy, if the political leadership arrives at a policy decision, the military top brass has to comply, and this was the case with Agnipath. In hindsight, it is evident that budgetary considerations (saving on the pension bill) were the principal drivers for Modi 2.0 in pushing the scheme, and the impact on the combat efficiency of the military was a secondary consideration.

While the long-term efficacy and benefits to composite national security of the Agnipath scheme will be apparent after a decade or so, what the JD(U)'s demand has done is to bring political compulsions back into the military calculus. An alliance partner in a coalition government is compelling the BJP to review a policy initiative, but not for professional reasons. It is to assuage the anger and desperation among a large swathe of the youth in Bihar who have been denied what was an opportunity to don the uniform and have the security of a government pension. During the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, Opposition parties led by the Congress and the Samajwadi Party had voiced their reservations about the military recruitment scheme.

> As Modi 3.0 begins, it would be useful if parliamentarians and domain experts are permitted to take an objective view of last decade's big-ticket changes.

It is not a desirable sequence of events, wherein major national security decisions and policies are contested post facto. This could have been avoided if Modi 2.0 had engaged in consultative deliberations on the Agnipath scheme both within Parliament and with the military top brass before announcing it.

There is no denying that the Indian military and the higher defence management lattice are in dire need of a review and re-wiring. During Modi 1.0, there were four defence ministers and the only major decision taken was the grant of OROP (one rank, one pension) in November 2015, and it was welcomed. During his second term (2019-24), PM Modi took a bold and radical decision of creating the post of CDS (Chief of Defence Staff) and creating the DMA (Department of Military Affairs). Five years later, this re-organisation is still a work in progress.

Parliamentary forms of government evolve their own template of governance and policy formulation. In India's case, each PM — from Nehru onwards — has made the PMO more powerful. But traditionally, deliberations

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Use of violence to vent anger condemnable



SHERBIR PANAG
LAWYER AND COMMENTATOR

A CISF constable, Kulwinder Kaur, slapped actor and MP-elect from Mandi, Kangana Ranaut, at the Chandigarh airport on June 6. While the CISF promptly (and rightly so) suspended Kulwinder and handed over the matter to the local police, polarised narratives almost instantly overtook the events.

There were those who expressed support for Kulwinder, celebrating the act, offering her a job and suggesting that Kangana deserved violence because of the abhorrent statements that she had made about Sikhs, Punjab and the farmers' protest. On the other hand, there were the moderates, who rightly castigated what Kulwinder did as being contrary to the ethos of the uniform. And then, there were the not-so-moderate ones, who concluded that this was an act of terror and that Punjab was on the brink of secessionism by lazily correlating this incident with the election of Amritpal Singh and Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa. In short, the usual trope, devoid of reality, that has been peddled since the farmers' protest. Kangana, as if on cue, added her two bits of 'concern' and equated the incident with the 'rise of terrorism' in Punjab.

First things first — violence, for any reason whatsoever, is not acceptable. The use of violence to make a political statement is not okay. And violence by someone in uniform — who is sworn to protect the Constitution of India and all Indians alike — is not acceptable. Neither one's political beliefs and biases nor the actions of the recipient of violence should dictate how we feel about violence. There is no space for support to what Kulwinder did. There can be no justification for it and no ifs and buts or nuances associated with this position.

Kangana's abhorrent remarks on Sikhs and Punjab during and after the farmers' protest do not justify an act of violence against her, and I say this as someone who has sparred with her and attracted the vitriol and abuse of her supporters. We cannot justify someone in uniform making a political statement on duty — whatever the provocation. This is a slippery slope, and what the meme makers, stand-up comics, artistes and others fail to realise is that they could also be on the receiving end of violence one day. We must not forget that it was only last year that a constable of the Railway Protection Force killed four persons aboard the Jaipur-Mumbai Superfast Express, and at least three of the victims were allegedly targeted by him on account of their religion.



FACE-OFF: CISF constable Kulwinder Kaur (R) slapped Kangana Ranaut at the Chandigarh airport last week. PTI

> Kangana Ranaut's abhorrent remarks on Sikhs and Punjab during and after the farmers' protest do not justify an act of violence against her.

The uniform cannot be politicised, and if it is, it will lead to disastrous consequences. It would be incorrect to label the CISF an unprofessional force — which it is not — based on Kulwinder's unbecoming conduct, but it would be pertinent to also address the 'yeoman service' that some officers in the military and paramilitary forces have rendered to the politicisation of their offices. The rank and file observe their leaders. And if the leaders depart from their constitutional duties, join political events, make political statements in service and run as candidates of the ruling party immediately after demitting office, then politicisation will occur and manifest itself in different forms.

But equating what Kulwinder did to an act of terror is highly objectionable and sinister. To constantly take every incident involving a Sikh or Punjabi and call into question their patriotism is no longer a laughing matter and must be unequivocally condemned. That it has been normalised is deeply concerning. It finds its genesis in the not-so-civil discourse that surrounded the farmers' agitation and the events thereafter.

The right to protest in a democracy is fundamental and absolute, as is the right to oppose those who protest. Therefore, it was entirely within the growers' right to hold a stir against what they believed were unjust laws, and others are entitled to disagree with their cause. That the Government of India saw merit in their demands and ultimately repealed the laws is lost on various IT cells of political parties and trolls. Unfortunately, the discourse at the time reached the lowest of lows, and whoever protested or disagreed with the government was labelled an anti-national, a terrorist, an urban Naxal or a member of some fabled '*Tukde Tukde*' gang and was subjected to hate and bigotry and faced calls for violence.

This has now been stretched ad absurdum, and Indians are being called on to answer for the statements and actions of the diaspora as well. Collectively, this is the greatest disservice one Indian can do to another, and that we do so with impunity is nothing we should be proud of. But the damage that these bizarre narratives have done in creating social fissures and fractures is going to last long and will only be compounded or fanned by statements of prominent BJP leaders.

There is no terrorism in Punjab, and the state rejected the idea of Khalistan long ago. Does Punjab have deeper social, economic and political challenges? Absolutely. And do these challenges create fissures and give rise to a fringe? Yes, they do. But has Punjab adopted the fringe en masse? Absolutely not. I am not doing a detailed analysis of the Khadoor Sahib election in this piece, but I will say that Amritpal's election has got nothing to do with what Kulwinder did. The fearmongers don't understand Punjab and that Amritpal and his supporters have not won all 13 Lok Sabha seats. Nor do they take note of the fact that Simranjit Singh Mann lost in Sangrur and that Amritpal will soon be taking an oath on the Constitution of India.

Let me conclude with something I am pained to say. I should not have to say it, but I feel compelled to — that for most members of my generation — we are Indian, Sikh and Punjabi. And there is no contradiction between any of these identities. While the second and third are interchangeable, the first is not.

Biased predictions to blame for exit poll fiasco



ATANU BISWAS
PROFESSOR, INDIAN STATISTICAL INSTITUTE, KOLKATA

I have never been a fan of exit and opinion polls. Rather, I consistently say that we shouldn't treat them seriously; they should be regarded as game shows. Thus, I am not at all astonished by the exit poll fiasco in the just-concluded Lok Sabha elections.

Usually, people are bewildered by the disparate predictions of exit polls. The uncertainty persists until the EVM votes are counted. But it was a different scenario this time. Nearly all exit polls got it wrong.

These days, dozens of these polls are conducted by various organisations, with sample sizes ranging from a few thousand to a few lakh. I have heard that those conducting a recent exit poll claimed that its sample size was one crore! But how do the polls stand? How do the investigators question the voters? Unfortunately, I was never asked whom I would vote for or had voted for by an exit poll or opinion poll surveyor. I asked my acquaintances, and to my surprise — and regretfully — none of them were ever approached by a pollster. Overall, such a low-probability event might have happened to me by chance. However, how do pollsters make poll predictions worldwide? It's primarily a statistical task, for sure. One must choose a sample size that will keep the prediction within a predetermined error range, say 3 per cent. One requires a sampling frame, random sample selection and proportionate representation across society. And then one must appropriately analyse the data using some auxiliary information, such as the voter list or other demographic data.

However, since the majority of the pollsters don't disclose information about their sampling frame, sampling technique and summary statistics across several margins, we are unable to determine where they make grave mistakes and how those mistakes accumulate to produce a blunder.

Ideally, an exit poll survey should be conducted on voters just leaving the polling booths, which ought to be chosen at random with appropriate weightage. Every fifth or 10th person in a chosen booth must be questioned about his or her vote; this is called 'systematic sampling'. The investigator has to decline if some overly enthusiastic people want to opine in between. Are our exit polls adhering to these standards? Do the investigators cover voters at different periods of the day? Do the pollsters visit sensitive booths in the right proportion or in the most remote areas of the country for their surveys? Usually, we don't know the answers to these questions. Only the estimated magic numbers are provided by the pollsters. To us, everything is merely an output from a black box, and we are unable to assess its quality.



PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT: Pollsters attempt to gauge respondents' political inclinations. PTI

What about sample sizes? The claim of a one-crore sample size by a polling organisation brought to mind a prediction made during the 1936 US presidential election by a reputed magazine, *Literary Digest*. The poll, which had a sample size of 24 lakh, showed that the Democratic candidate, incumbent President Franklin D Roosevelt, would receive only 43 per cent of the votes and the Republican nominee, Alfred Landon, would get 57 per cent. In reality, the outcome was even worse than the opposite: Landon received only 38 per cent of the votes, while Roosevelt got an overwhelming 62 per cent. A retrospective examination showed that the sample had a serious selection bias: the people chosen for this opinion poll were drawn from lists of magazine subscriptions, club memberships and telephone directories, all of which at the time were considered to be indicators of wealth. A significant non-response bias was also present in the sample; out of the one crore people the magazine approached for their opinions, only 24 per cent replied. However, this was an opinion poll survey. Thirty-one years later, in the Kentucky governor election, pollster Warren Mitofsky of *CBS News* would conduct the first exit poll.

> Would everyone feel comfortable telling an anonymous pollster what they really thought about voting, especially if their choice ran counter to the prevailing wind?

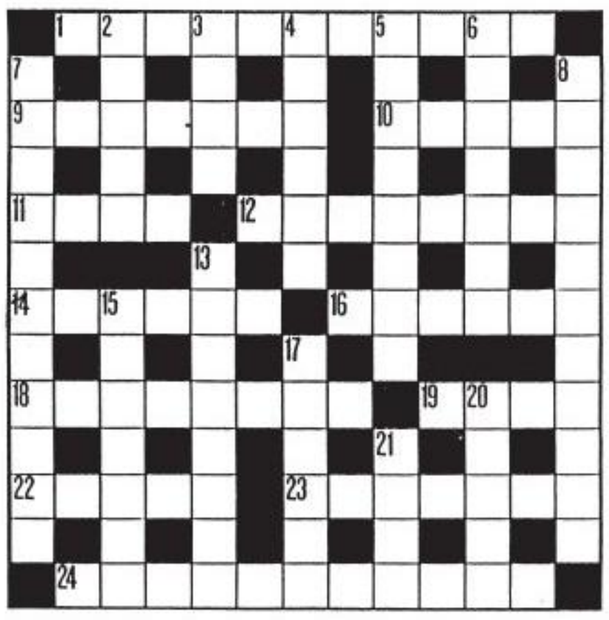
In any event, both exit and opinion polls have consistently produced inaccurate results across the globe. Politicians of all hues would concur that these predictions can't be blindly believed.

The key point is that poll predictions can go horribly wrong, even when pollsters adhere diligently to statistical rules. The rationale is that the poll is really a psychological one in which researchers attempt to gauge respondents' political inclinations, a very delicate subject. In a political society like ours, this is an even more delicate matter. Would everyone feel comfortable telling some anonymous pollster what they really thought about politics and voting, especially if their choice ran counter to the prevailing wind? Thus, if respondents' comments are believed at face value, the poll's predictions would be glaringly inaccurate. However, one doesn't need to know who is lying specifically; only a reasonable estimate of the overall proportions of individuals supporting various parties would suffice. Do our pollsters employ a suitable methodology in order to make sense of their predictions by using suitable statistical filtering of the responses? I have never heard of a pollster claiming to have used any kind of methodology for filtering in his or her predictions, at least.

Let's acknowledge that supporters of particular political parties are reluctant to participate in these kinds of surveys. As a result, supporters of Opposition parties have artificially boosted the sample. In that scenario, one should expect a skewed and biased prediction. In the UK, pollsters are aware of the 'shy Tory factor' or the reluctance of Conservative party members to participate in such surveys. A similar 'shy Trump factor' surfaced following Donald Trump's election in 2016. Do our pollsters know which party's supporters are reluctant to participate in these kinds of exercises? Do they alter the sampling design appropriately to address this important issue?

Following its dismal 1936 predictions, *Literary Digest* did not conduct the exercise subsequently. Perhaps it understood that this wasn't its task. Nonetheless, throughout the Assembly elections scheduled for later this year, we will be inundated with poll predictions. And perhaps their 'success' would be applauded if some of them turned out to be true — by chance.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Enemy within the gates (5,6)
9 Effective (2,5)
10 An obsession (5)
11 Be entitled to (4)
12 Keep one's distance (5,3)
14 Unequalled (6)
16 Shade of meaning (6)
18 Act of retaliation (8)
19 Rouse (4)
22 Escape from by guile (5)
23 Flow in drops (7)
24 He, she, it, they (5,6)

DOWN
2 Deduce (5)
3 Become sour (4)
4 Bring into being (6)
5 Giving out light (8)
6 Seasonal Indian Ocean wind (7)
7 Show mercy to enemy (4,7)
8 Lacking enthusiasm (4-7)
13 Military insurrectionist (8)
15 Call in question (7)
17 Short of money (4,2)
20 Outlawed by social custom (5)
21 Habitually untruthful person (4)

SATURDAY's solution

Across: 1 Demote, 4 Shambles, 9 Lonely, 10 Claptrap, 12 Rife, 13 Balmy, 14 Plan, 17 Milk-and-water, 20 Bureaucratic, 23 Ache, 24 Alley, 25 Fair, 28 Tolerant, 29 Dawdle, 30 Crevasse, 31 Flimsy.

Down: 1 Doldrums, 2 Manifold, 3 Toll, 5 Half measures, 6 Mope, 7 Lordly, 8 Supine, 11 Hard feelings, 15 Value, 16 Zebra, 18 At random, 19 Scarcely, 21 Baltic, 22 Shelve, 26 Area, 27 Fall.

SU DO KU

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

MEDIUM

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

JUNE 10, 2024, MONDAY

Shaka Samvat	1946
Jyeshtha Shaka	20
Jyeshtha Parvishte	28
Hijari	1445
Shukla Paksha Tithi 4, up to 4.16 pm	
Dhruva Yoga up to 4.47 pm	
Pushya Nakshatra up to 9.40 pm	
Moon in Cancer sign	
Gandmoola Start 9.40 pm	

FORECAST

SUNSET: MONDAY 19:24 HRS
SUNRISE: TUESDAY 05:21 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	43	28
New Delhi	44	28
Amritsar	42	27
Bathinda	43	25
Jalandhar	41	26
Ludhiana	43	27
Bhiwani	44	27
Hisar	43	27
Sirsa	44	29
Dharamsala	33	22
Manali	26	13
Shimla	29	17
Srinagar	29	11
Jammu	41	24
Kargil	26	11
Leh	22	06
Dehradun	40	24
Mussoorie	29	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C