



Time to reset ties

he ice-breaking visit of Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer to India provides an opportunity to reset bilateral ties that suffered a blow recently. In fact, the visiting leader set the right tone when he asserted that the two countries must put the bitterness of the recent past firmly behind them and look ahead to strengthen the traditional relations. He went on to promise that the island country was taking appropriate action to ensure that 'derogatory remarks', made against India in the past, were not repeated. The sentiments expressed by him, during his meeting with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar, must be welcomed. India's relations with the Maldives rest on the twin important pillars of mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity. An unsavoury saga created tensions in the bilateral relations a couple of months ago when three Maldivian ministers - Mariyam Shiuna, Malsha Sharif and Hassan Zihan - made "derogatory remarks" targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep to promote domestic tourism. They were subsequently suspended. The ties were further strained after President Mohamed Muizzu set a May 10 deadline for Indian military personnel to leave the archipelago nation. Tourism, the backbone of the Maldivian economy, took a se-Maldivian Foreign vere beating as the anti-Minister set the India remarks, amplified right tone when by the social media posts, he asserted that triggered angry reactions the two countries from India with many Inmust strengthen dians cancelling their traditional plans to visit the popular relations tourist destination. The flow of tourists from India

06

VIEWPOINT

HYDERABAD, Saturday, May 11, 2024



66 I do not accept the status of the Assembly which it has been degraded to. It is an undemocratically degraded institution which we can at best call a glorified municipality

AGA SYED RUHULLAH MEHDI NC candidate from Srinagar



While Israel-Palestine conflict is not about religion, religion is nonetheless an element fuelling emotions. I can strike a pose...burn flags. It is cathartic, but does it help people who desperately need help?

LEE HSIEN LOONG Singapore Prime Minister

We are demanding dismissal of Haryana govt and holding of fresh elections under President's rule. We will go to people and seek their mandate. We will not form a govt in this scenario

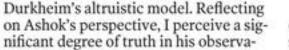
BB BATRA Senior Congress leader

Shades of Hades

Through our collective actions be it enmity or environmental degradation — we create chances that lead to our self-destruction



B MARIA KUMAR



Yet, the scientific community has its own paradoxes, especially when considering their humanitarian impact. It might surprise some to learn that it was the philosopher-scientist Albert Einstein who urged the American President Roosevelt to initiate the atomic bomb project. It was also the spiritual scientist J Robert Oppenheimer who developed the bomb. Even the peaceloving philanthropist Alfred Nobel profited from inventing and selling the menacing dynamite long before the 20th century dawned. Having witnessed the bloodstained corridors of history, we are still taken aback by the scientists who continue to develop increasingly sophisticated and sinister weaponry, potentially to be used by humans against their own kind. Is this a manifestation of a suicidal trait, or a Samson option? Whatever the future holds, as my friend Ashok postulates, the human instinct for self-destruction marches on eccentrically. What then is the solution to this existential peril?

ate need to explore viable judicious techniques for humanising top-tier international diplomatic affairs. Freud introduced the concept of libido as the life energy that fuels our existence and essence, while also warning of the death instinct in his psychoanalytic model, which Edoardo Weiss termed "destrudo." Given that the human mind is hardwired for self-defence against both imaginary and real threats, destrudo often takes a dominant role in decision-making unless intervened in time. This dynamic might explain the high-risk rhetoric being used by parties on both sides of current conflicts - a move that only serves to exacerbate already volatile scenarios. Amidst these frictions, even nations that are not parties directly and are known for their high quality of life, equality and happiness begin to show signs of aggression and anxiety previously unseen. But Freud was optimistic about redirecting such impulses from deathly thoughts to existential delights through sublimation, shifting focus to aesthetic, benevolent and artistic pursuits that highlight life's beauty. Draw-ing on the valuable lessons of reconciliations that safeguarded human lives following the past world wars, the most effective strategy for ending the present wars might be for all parties to embrace ego-effacing diplomatic mindsets. This approach prioritises the safety of humanity and acknowledges the vital necessity for mutual coexistence, essential for the survival of all. A few days ago, during our regular phone call, Ashok made a captivating remark. He quipped, "Leadership minds should think and act benignly, not ruinously." And that is the sole mantra capable of keeping the world safe.

dipped 42% in the first four months of this year compared to the same period in 2023.

While the Maldives received 73,785 tourists from India between January and April of 2023, tourist arrivals stood at 42,638 in the same period this year a decline of 31,147 tourists in absolute terms. The dip in arrivals from India resulted in a revenue loss of Rs 468 crore, prompting Tourism Minister Ibrahim Faisal to make a fervent appeal to Indians to be part of his country's tourism as its economy depended on it. It is an indisputable fact that economic cooperation with India has been integral to the Maldivian economy. The Maldivian people have benefited from the debt and numerous grants from India. It must be pointed out that India was always the first nation to come to the rescue of the tiny island nation, be it the tsunami in 2004 or the drinking water crisis a decade later. India was never found wanting in providing assistance, humanitarian or military. Though the presence of a small group of Indian military personnel, mostly for humanitarian roles, poses no threat to Maldivian sovereignty, Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) had whipped up anti-Indian sentiments and campaigned on 'India Out' plank, seeking to oust the Indian military personnel from the country. The PNC's landslide victory in last month's parliamentary election has further entrenched Muizzu's hold over the country's political landscape.

s the ongoing deadly conflict between Russia and Ukraine sharply intensifies and the violent tensions between Hamas and Israel escalate further, the situations in both regions are becoming alarmingly severe. The dangerously provocative rhetoric from all sides is amplifying global concerns, heralding potentially apocalyptic consequences. These developments bring to mind a conversation I once had with my longtime friend and colleague, Ashok Dohare, during an informal gathering many years ago. Ashok, a distinguished alumnus of IIT Delhi and IISc Bengaluru, made a profound assertion that has stayed with me. Each day, as I sift through the latest war reports, his intriguing words resonate with me.

Suicides by Proxy

Ashok proposed that the ultimate culmination of human existence might closely resemble suicide. He clarified that he was not referring to suicide in the traditional sense. Instead, he suggested that through our collective actions — be it through enmity, reckless accidents or environmental degradation — we inadvertently create circumstances and chances that lead to our own self-destruction. These actions, according to him, are essentially suicides by proxy.

As I peruse the latest news headlines in the mornings, I invariably find myself compelled to include warfare on top in the list of these self-destructive behaviours. Many soldiers, driven by a passionate sense of patriotic duty, position themselves on the front lines, willingly making the ultimate sacrifice. These acts, in both their intent and execution, represent in a way mass suicides a la tions. From a Sartrean perspective, his statement implies that in our blind pursuit of various unnecessary objectives, we often deceive ourselves through bad faith and orchestrate our own destruction. Then, does this mean that Hades, the god of death, dances in the moody shades of our choices? This introspection not only deepens my understanding of capricious human behaviour but also strongly influences how I identify and interpret contemporary geopolitical confrontations.

Nuclear Sounds

As talk of nuclear strikes resounds nowadays on an almost daily basis from Eastern Europe to the Middle East, it seems that scientists are among the few who are taking these dangerous trends seriously. When the Ukraine war began, it was the scientific community that first sounded the alarm about the potentially catastrophic repercussions of nuclear fallout. Our world has already been grappling with multiple human-made disasters - from climate change and epidemics to rising infertility - all of which are pushing humanity rapidly towards extinction. Empirical data on rising temperatures across our lands and oceans indicate that Earth is on a trajectory to resemble Venus, where surface temperatures are so high that lead melts instantly.

Pollution is flourishing unchecked, raising the spectre that carbon dioxide could dominate our atmosphere, displacing oxygen, within a few millennia. As the doomsday clock ticks ominously faster, scientists warn that detonating thousands of atomic payloads could be the quickest way to seal humanity's fate, should current AI-powered clashes turn into a nuclear Armageddon, either deliberately or accidentally.

Most Effective Strategy

Recently, during a visit to Delhi, I had an occasion to discuss some of these issues with Ashok at his home in Noida. He expressed concern that the world desperately requires a structural reset in its ethical framework, which seems to have been overshadowed by a onesided techno-economic drive. Prominent global minds insist on the immedi-

Leadership minds should think and act benignly, not ruinously the sole mantra capable of keeping the world safe

(The author is IPS (Retd) and a winner of National Rajbhasha Gaurav Award for the year 2022-23)

Letters to the

Editor

Concerning

The US is playing a double game. On one side it is supporting Israel with ammunition and on the other, threatens it to not use on Rafah (May 10). It appears that many world leaders are passively observing the ongoing conflicts in regions such as Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine without actively engaging in efforts to facilitate peace and ceasefire. This lack of involvement in resolving the conflicts is concerning. If the United Nations fails to take decisive action, there is a real risk that these localised conflicts could escalate into a larger-scale conflict. It's

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crucial for world leaders to recognise the urgency of the situation and take concerted action to promote peaceful resolution.

G VENKATA SUDHIR, Secunderabad

Right opportunity

By releasing Arvind Kejriwal on bail and allowing him to participate in electioneering, the Supreme Court has proved yet again that justice is very much alive and kicking in our country. This is not only a blow to the CBI but also to the BJP. We can now expect Kejriwal to use all his might and see that the NDA finds its Waterloo in many States, including Delhi. Hope he makes the best use of this opportunity and aligns with the other opposition parties. THARCIUS S FERNANDO, Chennai



India in the

hotspot

The Economist

Will chatbots eat India's IT industry?

What is the ideal job to outsource to AI? Today's AIs have a leaky memory... Where they excel is in manipulating numbers and symbols. This happens to be the forte of outsourcing businesses—India's IT companies.

The Washington Post

'Shadow' ads thriving on Facebook

Many political ads on Facebook in India during its election season are backed by organizations that hide their identity, threatening the integrity of a process intended to enforce transparency in a system full of emotional appeals.

The Straits Times

Chopra says belief key to success

Olympic and world javelin champion Neeraj Chopra said Indian athletes have shown they can compete with European powerhouses of the event and that the key to success at the Paris Games is maintaining their self-belief.

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Create space for the warmth of shadows

THINK



henever I am on a flyover that's flanked by residential apartments, I like to peer into the spaces. Taken as a whole, a group of buildings is a slice of the cityscape. However, rather than a feeling of cosy homeliness, the white tube-light clarity that shows through can feel like you are seeing too much, and even if it's evening, the homes exist in an awkwardly bright plane, as though the sun has gone inside to roost. I've been wondering how we have come to this: How have we as a culture come to see fluorescent light or unnecessarily bright lighting as essential to our homes? Is it possible that the general chaos of our lives in crowded cities, the obscurity of the forces that control our lives, that general feeling of helplessness when faced with potholes, corruption and rising taxes, means that when we get home, we want absolute clarity? I do think over-practicality and some level of emotional chaos management is at play when it comes to choosing lighting.

Light can elevate a place that's banal into one of domestic cosy, or make it a sterile environment that looks like it's trying to scare the dust mites. Junichiro Tanizaki, in his 1933 essay *In Praise of Shadows*, says, "In making for ourselves a place to live, we first spread a parasol to throw a shadow on the earth, and in the pale light of the shadow we put together a house." He goes on to cite

the example of Western houses, which he says are built to create as few shadows as possible and "to expose the interior to as much light as possible". Tanizaki's piece is essential reading on aesthetics and the psychology behind design decisions; many designers and architects swear by it. Yet, when it comes to actual space-making, the tendency to err on the side of too much—just like the Western example he's so disdainful of—has become one of the most egregious foibles of contemporary Indian interior design.

I was in Copenhagen recently and walking around the streets of Norrebro, a district lined with old brick buildings. By late evening, the flats in its neighbourhoods are twinkling with gentle orange light, usually dressed in white IKEA Regolit paper lampshades or Louis Poulsen designs. Seeing these warm spaces in the culture that has exported "hygge" as a design philosophy to the world, it was clear how much of that feeling was communicated through the quantum and nature of lights used. A friend's home had candlelight at the window, a floor lamp by the sofa and a hanging lamp above the dining table, creating a glow of welcome. In India, "hygge" is quoted by many interior designers in their project statements, but that Danish principle is about creating an environment of contentment and nurturing, achieving a lot with very little. In our cities, new interior design projects are usually flats in freshly minted real estate developments, most of which come outfitted with false ceilings that homeowners then accessorise with recessed lights to accentuate the ceiling itself or line with down-lighters. False ceilings also reduce the height of a room by several inches so the final effect is simply



The Americano restaurant in Mumbai with dark blue colours offset by gentle light.

unpleasant and too bright.

If one end of the spectrum is excess, on the other end is the epidemic-level use of white light. The 9-watt white LED bulb (equivalent of a 60-watt traditional bulb) is the best-selling product from the light brand Philips, while 20-watt white batten LEDs are the best selling in their category across brands. The unilateral clarity of white light and the ability of a single one to throw light evenly make white battens a particularly attractive combination. That makes me wonder when we became so scared of shadows. What has caused us to need clinical views of our personal spaces? How did a culture that lived by oil lamp light for centuries suddenly

become slave to white light battens and spaces lit up like stadiums?

My friend, Sunil Eapen, a retired creative director who now lives in Bengaluru, says it was his ex-wife who first told him that "using white light in a home is lighting hara-kiri". Sunil's home is a gently lit space where ceiling lights are always off because he says the ambient light is too harsh and throws far too much illumination in places that don't need it. He never uses them. He planned his lighting on a "zigzag model"-twin lamps at the ends of his L-shaped sofa with a standing light and a smaller lamp sitting parallel to the twin lamps, creating a sort of "Z" line of light. "You have to consider the mood

you are creating," he says. "It's not about clarity. You want to feel warm and cosy." Too much light in the evenings can also be a serious disruptor to the circadian system. So, if you are facing sleep issues, you may want to examine how much light you are consuming in the hours leading up to your bedtime, particularly in the bedroom.

Another spot I love for its lighting is the Americano restaurant in Mumbai. Dark blue colours on the ceiling and the walls are offset by precise but gentle glinting light across the room. When it's filled with people, you hear the glasses chinking and people laughing, and there is a general feeling of convivality that is an emotional by-product of the

design decisions of its architect, Anne Geenen of the Mumbai-based studio, Site Practice. Geenen used mock-ups to ascertain how different lights would work in the space. "We tried to create an atmospheric design keeping in mind that while sitting at the table the light shouldn't shine in your eye, there shouldn't be shadows on people's faces. When people go out, they are dressed up and feel good, so it is important the light makes people look good." The signature brass fixtures in the restaurant were custom-designed by Site Practice, and are supported by a cluster of hidden light sources spread throughout the restaurant. Geenen says she minimised the number of lights, using only what was needed

Geenen uses the same principles for residential projects. "I always have just a few main lights from the ceiling, mostly one or two above the dining space and the living room. For the rest, I use loose lighting fixtures, various elements of task lighting such as a table lamp or a loose light that is at eye-level. I combine those with standing lamps so there are light sources at different heights." And most importantly: "The colour of the light bulb has to be warm, not harsh white light."

It's a great piece of advice for homeowners. Generations of us have grown up in white-light homes and so we think over-illumination is the key to lighting homes. But creating a homely feel is not always about banishing a house of its shadows, it is about highlighting its best features and creating a sense of warmth. Let the demons hang out in the closet, we don't need to see everything.

Manju Sara Rajan is an editor, arts manager and author who divides her time between Kottayam and Bengaluru.

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Al's true potential will be realised when it is used to fix issues in

"The most challenging part was figuring out who would make the best stories. Because in many cases, people are either unaware that they've been affected by AI vstems, or if they're aware, and if they've been harmed by it, they don't want to talk about it. They want to move on." Murgia's book comes at an interesting time. The pace at which AI has developed over the last three-four years, around the time she started working on the book, is exciting as well as alarming. "The big change in the last two years has been the pace of development of the technology, and how quickly it's been rolled out simultaneously. There's such a short gap between the two that there are a lot of misconceptions. It's hard to be aware when things go wrong, because it's all happening very quickly," says Murgia. "The challenge is throwing some cold water, taking a step back and trying to show the big picture, because right now there's just a lot of hype and excitement (around AI)," she says.

healthcare or climate and energy, says the author of a new book

Nitin Sreedhar nitin.s@htlive.com

he rise of AI has been rapid—going from science fiction to reality in no time. On the one hand, it can help you book an Uber or write your job application. On the other, it is being used to design cancer drugs of tomorrow and help space telescopes find signs of life on exoplanets light years away. Add generative AI to the mix, and you can see how AI is changing the way we live. In the middle is the "human" question: Are we aware of the consequences of AI entering our lives?

This is just one of the questions that London-based Madhumita Murgia, the first AI editor of *Financial Times*, tries to answer in her book *Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI* through 10 stories of individuals whose lives have been affected by AI and AI systems.

These stories from across the world look at everyone from gig workers (systematically underpaid and undercut by AI algorithms) to doctors and activists (who are profiled using facial recognition AI). In India, we learn about a doctor using an AI app to analyse patient X-rays and estimate the risk of tuberculosis.

Elsewhere, Murgia documents AI sweatshops in Nairobi, Kenya where young workers categorise and label graphic text and snippets (that describe child sexual abuse, murder, suicide, and other harmful topics), which help train AI engines to identify, block and filter such user queries. They also screen distressing content for clients like Meta, the social media giant that owns Facebook and Instagram. She touches upon the trauma that content moderators face after viewing hours and hours of such content. As the book illustrates, it is this outsourced work that ensures AI recommendation engines on social media apps don't spew poisonous content.

Murgia was clear that she wanted to look beyond Silicon Valley which, as she says in the book, is the nexus of technological power. "I wanted to travel and bring to life stories from places that other people don't... I wanted to be as geographically broad as possible," says Murgia, who was recently in India to promote her book, in Edited excerpts from the interview:

What led you down this path of looking at the people that have been impacted by AI?

I was always fascinated by how science impacts people, which is why I chose immunology for my master's. I was curious about what happens when science and society cross over. My first job as a journalist was at *Wired* magazine, where I got to know some of today's best-known entrepreneurs. Since then, the lens through which I've written about technology has been: who are the people behind it? How does it affect us as a society?

All of the media focuses on Silicon Valley and the big tech companies and the people we put on a pedestal, like Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and now Sam Altman. Even in India, it's about the people behind the big companies. I wanted to look at the rest of us—how is it (AI) changing our work, education, health, the way that we live.

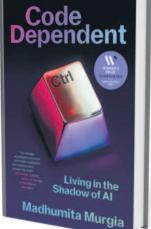
What's the one sector on which AI is having the biggest positive impact? And a sector on which it is having a negative impact?

Science and health are the areas where AI will have the biggest impact. The company that I focus on in the book, QureAI, which is Mumbai-based, is going to do an expedition up to Everest Base Camp and use their AI system to diagnose people in Nepal with specific chest conditions that go undiagnosed most of the time. That's just one example of how this type of technology can reach people who don't have access to the care the rest of us do.

In terms of negative impact, where I see the failings of AI the most is when you use it for social decision-making systems.



(above) A self-driving car trying a test route in Gothenburg, Sweden; and Madhumita Murgia.



Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of Al

By Madhumita Murgia, Pan Macmillan India, 320 pages, ₹699 A recent survey said that one in four Indians has come across a deepfake in the recent past and were not able to detect it. What could be the impact of deepfakes on society? The technology has become so sophisticated the

too much.

social services.

become so sophisticated that even people around the world who are aware of this cannot tell the difference. The issue then becomes: how does any-

Criminal justice, for instance. Should

somebody get bail, should somebody be

arrested? You see this in government

Often when we use a computer system,

we tend to rely on it more than we do on

humans. We don't notice when

things go wrong, or we trust it

body know what's real and what's fake? Especially when we live most of our lives online.

I think the result is going to be firstly, a huge flood of fake news. Not in the sense that it's false information, but websites that are entirely generated (using AI).

Social media sites are the ways in which we get our news now, especially young people with TikTok, Instagram and Snap, and so there will be a lot less trust in institutional news. The goal will be for us to figure out how to carve out a niche of trust

in an era where anything could be fake: images, videos, audio. You've written about real-life examples of AI bias and discrimination.

Why is it so hard to fix it? There are so many types of bias and discrimination.

When you look at criminal justice, you have communities in the US which are over-policed—African Americans, for example. There's more data about them in the system, so the AI system is more likely to identify an African American as a risk. This is all societal

behaviours, prejudices that get woven and coded into the system.

Now, we're replacing humans with the AI systems. So, when they do go wrong, nobody spots it because there's nobody who's accountable.

Evaluating AI systems is something

nobody knows how to do. You mention that making AI accessible is important. Could open-source AI play a role in this?

Definitely. That's always been the way with technology. You have the walled gardens like Apple and iOS, but then you also have open-source alternatives like Android. Both are making money and competing in the global market, but they have very different ways in which they approach the same technology. That is the case with AI as well.

Open source isn't necessarily just small companies. Mistral is a great example of a start-up. Meta is also doing an opensource version of AI and they are hardly a start-up. But I think because of what they've done and what Mistral is now doing—there are others like Hugging Face—you will have more participants. **There's always talk about where we see AI and humans in the future. What's the one aspect that excites you about it?**

What we could do with AI could be amazing. Solving medical mysteries things like that excite me.

An example I talk about in the book is about pain. This is a US-specific example, but African Americans always experience pain differently to Caucasian ethnicity patients. Nobody's been able to figure out why. But I spoke with Ziad Obermeyer, a physician and AI scientist, who looked at scans of people who had self-annotated levels of pain for their knee joints. He found that AI systems could much better predict levels of pain, particularly for African Americans compared to human doctors. This shows that we can use it to solve problems we haven't been able to as humans.

If we can address issues in healthcare, or climate and energy (using AI), or find a way to build a quantum computer, then that's real progress for me. - HARRY S TRUMAN







Muslim population myth is dangerous

t is a measure of the duplicitousness and chicanery that the election campaign run by the ruling party - also India's largest political party — has been fed by the seemingly scholarly Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister (EAC-PM) on the country's minority population based on only a Working Paper. This revealed that Muslims had the highest rate of change of growth of population among all religious communities from 1951 to 2015 and while this was up by 43 per cent, the rate of growth of Hindus was down by 8 per cent. Expectedly, this set off yet another round of airing of the same old myths about the Muslim community growing fast and concern about the future of Hindus in India. Truth is at a great discount here and the myths have gained the status of certainty in the Hindutva camp.

Why the EAC-PM chose the odd cut-off of 2015 instead of the last decadal Census of 2011 is less important than the fact that it decided to cherry-pick data that would perfectly suit the anti-Muslim narrative that has dominated the 2024 election campaign so far. There's a derisive reference to Muslims almost every other day from the BJP. It is difficult to not see that the scholars in EAC-PM consciously chose to focus on the rate of growth because the numbers brought (false) gravitas to the BJP's anti-Muslim narrative. They could - should -have considered two other data points to make an honest argument. One is the share of the religious communities in the total population, which increased by 4 per cent for Muslims and dropped by nearly 7 per cent for Hindus.

The other is the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which is declining among all religious communities but has seen the highest drop among Muslims. The TFR is linked most strongly to education and income rather than religion. The more educated a community and its women, the fewer children. Sliced across the board, what emerges is that Hindus added 69 crore to their total population since 1951 while Muslims added 14.4 crore and that, as a group, Muslims have been growing slower than that at any time. This underscores the need for a decadal Census which was due in 2021 but the Modi government has been disinclined to undertake. The EAC-PM has played a dangerous and mischievous game of pouring fuel into a raging fire — and has brought disrepute to India's statistics and scholar communities. Besides, this is only a Working Paper, not a peer-reviewed one published in a frontline academic journal. The mischief is hard to miss.

Importance of ICMR's dietary guidelines

he Indian Council of Medical Research released a dietary guideline after more than a decade. While it is admittedly a Himalayan task to recommend a healthy diet in a mind-bogglingly diverse and multi-cultural country like India where food habits and preferences change every 200-500 kilometres, the new dietary guidelines offer an important and timely telescopic view of where most Indians might be going wrong. For example, it says that instead of the recommended 500 grams of vegetables and fruits a day, most Indians eat just 100 to 200 grams. It must be noted that there are serious price issues for a large majority who find these expensive even if they are accessible. Another trend noted was the over-reliance on cereals and an excess consumption of sugar and salt in regular diets. Similarly, the guidelines came down heavily on protein powders though it pointed out that most inglans get less good protein than they should. The dietary guidelines are important because, in more than a decade, there is an official benchmark of how food choices and consumption patterns have led to an overwhelming burden of lifestyle diseases in the country, in both urban and rural areas. The 17-point guideline points out that healthy diets and adequate physical activity could prevent nearly 80 per cent of Type-II diabetes and a majority of coronary heart disease cases in the country. Most Indians consume an excess of carbohydrates and are increasingly relying on ultra-processed or convenience foods. The ICMR has sounded a warning. The guidelines make it incumbent on people to read food labels and exercise caution in their food choices. Food is, after all, an intensely personal and community affair. But this cannot be all. The guidelines make it obligatory for health authorities and policymakers at national and state levels to issue advisories, circumscribe certain foods like the ultra-processed and high-sugar foods in schools, and evolve a classification based on local culture of healthy and unhealthy foods.

Little justification to tax rich more



ith the elections going on in full swing and the man-ifestos of major parties out, discussion has centered on inequality. A corollary is the debate on whether the rich should be taxed more through a wealth tax or inheritance tax. The short answer is that there is little justification for this and there can be some tweaking of existing tax rates at the most.

Piketty and his colleague researchers found that the top 1 per cent of India's population holds 22.6 per cent of the total income and 40.1 per cent of the total wealth and the number of billionaires increased from 1 in 1991 to 167 in 2022. A conclusion drawn was that if a 2 per cent super tax was imposed on 167 individuals, it would amount to 0.5 per cent of GDP, which can be redistributed. While these numbers sound compelling, there is need to exercise some judgment.

India has a fairly comprehensive tax system that has gone through several levels of iterations, especially since the 1980s, to reach an acceptable level today which balances all objectives. In 1973-74, the highest marginal tax rate was 97.5 per cent, which has now come down to a comparable global level of 30 per cent (with additional surcharges). At such high levels there

was little incentive to work or invest to earn higher income as it was absorbed by the government. This was the logic for lowering the rates to reasonable levels as we moved away from ultra-socialistic ideology. It would be counterproductive in case such a system was mimicked by introducing a tax on wealth or inheritance just because people or families have gotten rich-

When Forbes ranks people or families in terms of being the richest, both income and assets are in-Income comes from cluded. salaries, interest on savings, and investment and so on. Assets includes stocks, buildings, homes, yachts, and aeroplanes. This is how LVMH. Amazon. Tesla. Facebook. and Oracle founders feature in this list. The same kind of list exists for India, too.

Inequality will always exist as those that show enterprise and go ahead will be the ones who are much better off than those who work in these companies. If these entrepreneurs were not there. there would be only rudimentary structures of production and the general level of income and prosperity would be low. People at the lower levels can rise in life only when there is faster growth which creates jobs and this is where the rich come in. While some are first generation entrepreneurs, others have risen because of inheritance. As long as the rules of law are being observed and taxes being paid. there should be no complaint about inequality. As the market is free. people can shift jobs, which they do, to have their services command

the right price. No one is stopped from starting their own enterprise and the start-up culture in India of late has been impressive. The question is whether or not the tax system addresses each component of income and wealth.

The income tax system has different slabs where the highest rate at 30 per cent also has surcharge up to 37.5 per cent, with an education cess of 4 per cent on top. Therefore, there is a progressive structure in place here. The highest effective rate of above 40 per cent would be one of the highest in the world.

While a large proportion of wealth of families is in the amount

Inequality will always exist as those that show enterprise and go ahead will be the ones who are much better off than those who work in these companies

of stocks that are held, value is realised only when they are sold or else it is notional. For those who are bestowed with stock options. there is a perquisite tax to be paid on the difference between the average prevailing price and the cost to the employee. Hence, this benefit is also taxed at the time of vesting Here the capital gains tax is levied across the board for amounts higher than Rs1 lakh per annum. When property is sold, the laws are clear on how the proceeds are taxed with allowances being made for investing in another property or in certain pre-specified bonds of public sector entities

There is, hence, already in existence a fairly rigorous tax system that covers all ends when it comes to income. The question then is whether the same exist for wealth that is now the bone of contention. Those who argue against any such action would justify their stance on grounds that when a person buys property from a taxed source of income, there cannot be multiple layers of taxation. This is a strong point. Besides, there is already a clause of having GST on houses purchased, which varies between 1 per cent for affordable homes to 5 per cent. Therefore, there is a tax in existence.

On the other side of the argument, those against the rich getting away would say that this is the

starting point of inequality where there are owners of companies, CEOs, film stars, sportspersons who buy property that could cost more than Rs100 crore. Here, there is a case for considering having a fresh set of GST slabs for properties according to the consideration so that those valued over Rs100 crore would be subject to 28 per cent tax.

This would, however, mean extreme taxation as there is already a stamp duty that is paid on any property transaction which automatically increases with the value of the deal. This too may not sound fair and would not be justified.

Putting all the pieces together it is hard to really justify separate taxes for the rich as the present dis-

pensation is progressive and the rich do end up paying higher level of taxes than others. Taxing the rich more merely because they are rich on grounds of making them pay for the upkeep of the poor may not sound right. The onus is really on governments to ensure that the taxes that are collected are used more for redistribution purposes which is what is being done through extensive programmes on subsidies, employment and housing. Governments should spend more on the lower income segment especially in education and health so that they can be elevated in the hierarchy.

As the Indian economy went in for reforms in 1991 and the government moved away from commercial activity, it is but natural that the private sector had a larger role to play. In the process of exponential growth witnessed in the last three decades, India Inc. did make a mark which has rewarded the capitalist more than the ordinary citizen who still moved up the in-come chain. Overall living standards have improved across all segments even if has created a pyramid like structure with the top 1 per cent residing at the top-end. As the tax system is already comprehensive, there is no need to have more taxes. Even if we tax the rich at higher rates, the question is whether the government uses the same for redistribution or other purposes. That's the puzzle.

Madan Sabnavis is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda, and author of: Corporate Quirks: The darker side of

Time to make religion a private affair

Fearless Talk

XAbhay Mokashi

or those who have witnessed campaigning for general elections in the elections in the past, the current level of campaigning must be traumatic, unless they have locked their brains, blinded by implicit faith in what their leader says.

Almost all political parties had great orators, who spoke on the issues before the country and the solutions they wish to offer for those problems. Of course, they had different perceptions on national is sues, they criticised each other, but rarely did they rely on falsehood and if a leader indulged in making false statements, the members of the audience were smart enough to catch it. The level of literacy among the voters was low, as compared to today's literacy rate, yet the voters were well informed and politically aware.

he political It was

which is often not based on facts. Given the increase in the literacy rate and access to information, thanks to the internet, it is easier for the public at large to verify the facts, provided they have an open mind, with a scientific temperament, which drives them to seek the truth and correct oneself when

Education is supposed to make recipients have a persevering mind, eager to seek the truth. Unfortunately, that is not what is seen in the country, at least when it

fought on religious grounds, but on approaches to handle the socio-economic problems before the country The political parties, which fought elections on religious grounds were by and large rejected or performed very poorly in electoral politics. Today, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) speaks of bring in Ram Rajya, but its leaders and candidates do not have the qualities of

one hand his speeches expose his ignorance on almost on all the subjects that he speaks on, while on the other there is enough evidence to show that he manipulates information and also speaks untruths.

The matter assumes importance not because he is a star campaigner of a national political party, but because he is the Prime Minister of the country. He keeps stating that India is the mother of democracy. She is in his case, given the freedom he is getting from the courts and the Election Commis-

Elections in yesteryears were not fought on religious grounds, but on approaches to handle the socioeconomic problems before the country

sion of India, by their silence, to make speeches inciting hatred between communities and seeking votes in the name of religion.

Modi has started speaking about Pakistan wanting to install a Congress government in the country and that it is for the benefit of Pakistan to have a Congress government. His party has gone to the extent of publishing adver

nation like Pakistan can control it. Pakistan's political parties would not want the Congress to be in power for two reasons, the first being that the party was responsible for the division of Pakistan, leading to the formation of Bangladesh and the second being that the Congress does not discriminate against Muslims and strives for communal harmony in the country.

A country ridden with internal strives, irrespective of the cause, is always weak and that is what Pakistan and China would want of In-

dia, where it is easy to fan communal passions and incite people to violence.

Instead of speaking on his progress report of 10 years, Modi has been stating that if the Congress comes to power, it will put a Babri Mosque lock on the Ram Temple at Avodhva and will give reservations to Muslims; a gullible nonulation believes it to he true The Ram Temple has been constructed on the judgement of the Supreme Court and government can veto it. Moreover. it was the Congress government that had opened the locks for Hindus to pray at the temple. The Constitution does not allow

reservation on the basis of religion, so there is no question of the Congress or any other party doing so for the Muslims or any other religion.

Leaders of all political parties are looking for electoral success, but they should bear in mind that the strengthening of the nation should be their topmost priority and the strength of a nation lies in the welfare of the people and their contribution to nation's wealth building. where they too have a share of the wealth. That does not seem to be happening today.

Just as a tall building stands on its pillars, the different castes communities in the country are the pillars of India. If these are weakened or shaken, the nation will crumble

While filing the nomination papers for the election, every candidate takes an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, yet many of them violate the Constitution during their campaign. The preamble speaks of secularism. The leaders have failed to understand the meaning of secularism: secularism is where the government does not practice any reli gion. It is time we practice secularism and make religion and religious isno sues a private affair

found to be on wrong premise.

comes to issues related to economics, social structure, which includes health, education and inclusive development, with people blindly believing the leaders' claims. Elections in yesteryears were not

FPJ Archives	INDIA 75 YEARS AGO May 11, 1949
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BOMBAT COMPANIST PRODUCT A PTERS Autor Call & The pre- side rest product of the pre- product of the pre- product of the pre- product of the pre- side rest product of the pre- product of the pre- product of the pre- product of the pre- product of the pre- transmission of the pre- product of the pre- transmission of the p	Annual and an

HEAVY WITHDRAWALS OF STERLING BY INDIA

London, May 10. Authoritative sources stated today that Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer, handed a memorandum to Pandit Nehru, when he was recently here, expressing the deep concern felt by the British Government at the very heavy rate at which India was drawning on her free sterling balances.

of the masses, the majority of illiterate, that our freedom whom where strengthened struggle, leading to freedom from one of the mightiest empires in the world. During those days, people had wisdom and knowledge. Today we are burdened with information,

represents the nurturing and

for a specific muhurat

and you can leverage

Legend has it of

tence, to provide enough food being.

for them when they were in

exile. Akshay means endless,

cilitate eternal prosperity.

to start almost any

Akshav Patra

project.

the energies on this day

Inviting Eternal Abundance

- Ritesh Aswaney

represents the vital life force, and then bear eternal fruit,

the masculine, and the moon much like the Akshay Patra.

nourishment critical for life, those around us, those that

the feminine. It is only natu-help us live our daily lives

ral that on the day that we see more conveniently, whether

these two celestial marvels it's the service staff at home

exalt in the heavens is or at work. Goddess Anna-

marked as extremely auspi- purna, who represents food

cious. Yesterday we celebrat- and nourishment, is believed

ed Akshay Tritiya, a day so to have appeared on this day,

auspicious that it is generally and therefore it is a great

believed that this is one day time to perform Anna Dana

when one doesn't have to look (or the gift of food) to a chari-

course that the **GUIDING LIGHT** you're offering

was gifted by Surya Dev to ing fulfil one of the basic ne-

the Pandavas for their subsis- cessities of a fellow human

popular culture also has it mother, the Moon being in

that it's an auspicious day to exaltation, this is also an op-

buy precious metals like portune day to dedicate to

mension to it, and helping fa- not been able to make time

angle around material pros- them. Material and spiritual

ent spiritual dimension that when there is a balance of

to start projects, if you've had all of us, and Akshay Tritiya

getting into voga or medita- is such a beautiful day to ac-

tion on your mind, then this knowledge this and take

ly start a practice, for you cer- that balance into our lives.

ur ancients knew a tainly have the backing of

thing or two about as- this auspicious day to help it

tronomy! The Sun develop into a regular habit,

It is also a day to think of

table cause of your

choice. As the ancient

texts say, Anna Dana

is one of the greatest

- that you can offer, but

Circling back to what we

started with, both the divine

for them, then to resolve to

forms of service

food and help-

Ram, even in the minutest form. This was the case with the now defunct Ram Rajya party, which was rejected by the voters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tries to project himself as a man of letters but his references from history seem to be to the contrary. On

appealing to voters to decide whether they would like to cast their vote in favour of Hindustan or Pakistan. By such statements Modi and BJP are insulting India and its population, because by his statement he is trying to imply that India is so weak that even a small

Voter apathy

The low turnout of 60 per

phases of polling shows there

focus on welfare measures but

theatricals or mudsling. People

want not just words but also

not on individuals or

cent in the first three

Shocking episode

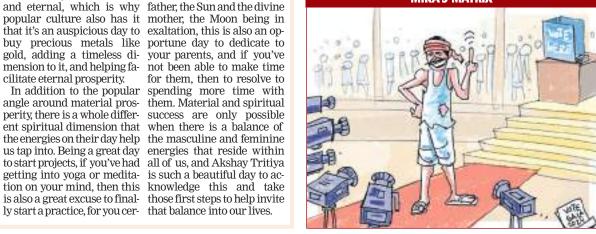
ETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

t is sickening to read that the Governor of West Bengal is involved in an alleged molestation case Keeping in view his constitutional office, it is very unlikely that the truth of the matter relating to his alleged sexual misconduct will be investigated impartially and expeditiously. Sandeshkhali, the shameful Revanna episode of Karnataka and the Brij Bhushan Singh case are recent examples to show that women's voices are stifled in cases involving the abuse of their modesty by the high and mighty. That the Governor, CV Ananda Bose, has shown the CCTV footage of the said date to a select audience

state, no place is safe for them.

MIKA'S MATRIX



Abhay Mokashi is a senior journalist and media trainer. He tweets at @a mokashi

phases, starting at 69.4% and ending in 61.7% with an overall 67 7% turnout However researchers said that this year a reverse phenomenon could be underway, with voting percentage poised for a marked improvement in the subsequent phases. Despite a low turnout, more votes cast than in 2019 is an impressive sign.

MR Jayanthy, Trichy

Women unsafe

The saga of the so called godmen abusing women continues with the reports of PV Srinivas Sreelekha such a godman raping and blackmailing a woman at Mira Secunderabad Road in Mumbai. It is time that women are especially wary of godmen who may know little about religion but know much about psychology and which buttons to press to get the desired responses and results. They also know the women to target. The police can take pro active measures by using decoys to trap these unscrupulous criminals operating openly without fear and giving religion a bad name

Anthony Henriques, Mumbai

Marked by compassion

The tremendous contribution of nurses to humanity has set the profession apart. International Nurses Day (INC) is observed all over on May 12, since 1965, to commemorate the birthday of Florence Nightingale, who is synonymous with compassion. Patience, love, forgiveness. dedication and selflessness are

the pillars on which nursing is assiduously built. Thus, a nurse is described as an "universal gift" to mankind. It is heart warming that nursing has gone beyond the gender stereotype.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Quota guestion

The rhetorical shift by the BJP to a Hindu-Muslim binary began with the comparison of the Congress manifesto to the Muslim League. It reached a crescendo when Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared "As long as Modi is alive, I will not let reservations of Dalits. Adivasis, OBC to be given to Muslims on the basis of religion." Political analysts interpret this as the impact of the opposition charge that the BJP wanted to change the Constitution and scrap reservations if it won 400 seats in the 2024 general elections. However, in the given situation, it is practically impossible to alter the structure of reservations while remaining within the contours of the Constitution. It was the Telugu Desam Party chief Chandrababu Naidu, an NDA ally now, that promised a 4 per cent reservation to Muslims a few days ago. Naidu asserted his party had "hired the best advocates and fought for 4 per cent Muslim reservations in the Supreme Court"

Haridasan Rajan, Kozhikode

Dear reader

We are eager to know your opinions comments and suggestions. Write to letters@fpj.co.in with the title of the letter in the subject line. Using snail mail? Send your letters to The Free Press Journal, Free Press House, Free Press Marg, 215 Narimar Point, Mumbai 400021.

implementation of various measures that would benefit them **Optimistic forecast** The completion of the third phase of polling on May 7 means we are close to the halfway mark in the Lok Sabha electins. In 2019. turnout figures had shown a Avinash Godboley, Dewas declining trend over the seven

is not much enthusiasm among the public given the present political scenario. The summer heat could also have reduced the number of voters. To increase number of voters to more than 80 per cent. debates in legislatures should

chosen by him makes the case look more suspicious. If women are not safe in the presence and office of the Governor of a

The Statesman Incorporating and directly descended

from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

Air sickness

erging two airlines into one is a task fraught with risk, as Air India and Indian Airlines Learnt to their discomfiture more than a decade and a half ago when a merger was forced on them by then Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel, overriding concerns voiced, including by this newspaper, that the scheme was hare-brained. The present Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia, may have little to do with the merger pangs being faced by Air India and Vistara, or by Air India Express and the former AirAsia India, but the difference this time round, and one that he must address, is that passengers are being put to severe inconvenience while being asked to pay extortionate fares for flights that are seemingly cancelled at whim.

The consequences of the disruptions caused by industrial action resorted to by pilots of Vistara last month and the cabin crew of Air India Express this week, have been two-fold. First, supply has been unable to keep up with the demand for airline seats, resulting in huge increases in fares. Second, with the holiday season having begun, passengers are being forced to redraw itineraries at considerable cost and inconvenience.

In addition to the problems being faced by Vistara and Air India Express, there are additional complications posed by the withdrawal of several of its aircraft by Indigo because of problems with Pratt & Whitney engines, and curtailed operations by Spicejet, which is struggling to survive. And finally, of course, it has been a year since GoAir was grounded after its owners filed for bankruptcy. While Mr Scindia cannot be blamed for the way airlines are managed, or mismanaged, the government, as a regulator, has a responsibility to citizens ~ of ensuring safe, trouble-free and fairly priced air travel. In this task, Mr Scindia has failed abysmally. Air India Express has responded to the step taken by its cabin crew ~ of "reporting sick" without notice ~ by sacking several of them. Clearly the airline hopes the severity of this action will force other "sick" crew members to regain their health and good sense. Termination letters have accused the crew members of acts "subversive of public interest", and of causing damage ~ monetary and reputational ~ to the company. While all this is true, it must also be admitted that there has been little engagement between the airline and its staff, to understand grievances of the latter and to attempt to find solutions. Leaving the dispute to be handled by the Labour department of the Delhi government will clearly not yield a solution, and it is here that the Ministry of Civil Aviation tasked with "formulation of national policies and programmes for the development and regulation" of the sector must step in. The fact of an impending election must not stop Mr Scindia from immediately choosing to play an effective role in resolving the issues that are causing such great distress to passengers.

Precious Snakes

It is ironic that while we are so concerned about greenhouse gases and their impact on the environment, we are more or less oblivious to freshwater consumption and its impact on the environment and population. In a world where one in every five persons does not have access to fresh water, and particularly when the demand for water resources in the whole world is increasing, the issue of water footprint needs to be taken seriously



of meat, we are consuming money available per child will

Vol. CXXXXVIII 111



A MEMBER

OF THE

he current discourse surrounding social media regulations is focused on bringing those platforms under legal and taxation framework. However, a critical aspect missing in the efforts to regulate them is how to safeguard our interests around the democratic information landscape and hold them accountable for, or at least make them support intervention to minimise, the problems they may aggravate.

Regulation of social media platforms is a widely discussed topic worldwide. In Nepal, after the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology published the controversial Social Media Bill draft, social media regulation became a buzzword among civil society organisations and media. However, there is a criticism of the bill for not distinguishing between platform and content regulations, and the restrictive nature of the bill that aims to bring social media companies into the local legal and taxation system.

A significant aspect missing in the discourse is how to safeguard our information landscape by saving journalism and local media from giant social media companies. While paving the path for international social media companies to enter Nepal, we must ensure that our national and democratic interests ~ beyond taxation issues ~ are well protected. Local journalism ~ and, therefore, our media system ~ is one of the interests which

Difficult choices

s the political landscape continues to evolve in the United States, President Joe Biden finds himself walking a precarious tight-rope, balancing the demands of traditional alliances with the rising tide of activism among young voters. The surge of campus protests ~ now having reached some 140 campuses across 45 states and Washington DC ~ challenge Mr Biden's stance on Israel's conflict with Hamas and are already beginning to force a rethink on American foreign policy.

While Mr Biden is bound by longstanding foreign policy commitments, he cannot ignore the shifting values and priorities of a new generation. The challenge is clear: how to reconcile unwavering support for Israel with the growing discontent among progressive constituents who view that country's actions in Gaza as unjust and disproportionate.

The protests also reflect a broader frustration with the status quo and a desire for meaningful change. They are fuelled by a sense of moral outrage at the loss of life in Gaza and a belief that the United States should use its leverage to hold Israel accountable for its actions, while ensuring that funding to that country be curbed. Yet, they also pose a dilemma for Mr Biden and the Democratic Party, threatening to alienate key constituents and sow division within the ranks. Mr Biden must walk a tight-rope.

On the one hand, he must condemn any acts of anti-Semitism that may arise in the course of the demonstrations, reaffirming his commitment to combating hatred and discrimination. On the other, he must also recognise the legitimacy of peaceful protest and engage with the underlying grievances driving the movement. The President's response has, by his lights, been measured, condemning anti-Semitism while expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people. But his critics believe his policies reflect a confused mind. His reluctance to fully embrace the demands of the protesters has drawn criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. Republicans accuse him of weakness and indecision, while some Democrats warn that failure to heed the concerns of young voters could have dire consequences at the ballot box. In truth, Mr Biden faces a no-win situation. No matter how he chooses to navigate the current crisis, he is bound to incur the wrath of one faction or another. Yet, therein lies the essence of leadership ~ the ability to make tough decisions in the face of adversity, guided by principle and a commitment to the common good. As the protests continue to unfold, one thing is clear: the stakes could not be higher. The outcome of this struggle will not only shape the future of US foreign policy but also define the soul of the Democratic Party for years to come. In the end, it will be up to Mr Biden and his allies to rise up to the occasion, forging a path that reflects the values and aspirations of all Americans, young and old alike.

research team comprising scientists from Mac-16,000 liters of water unknowquarie University in ingly ~ the amount of water Australia, Oxford Unineeded to raise livestock to get versity, UK, the University of that amount of meat. Adelaide, Australia, the Universi-Or, when we have a cup of ty of Witwatersrand, South coffee in the morning, we con-Africa, and the Vietnamese sume 150 litres of precious water

Academy of Science and Technology, did a focussed study on reticulated pythons (Malayopython reticulatus) and Burmese pythons (Python bivittatus) and reported that snake meat is not only a good source of protein but also the best alternative for sustainable living. This appeared in the journal Nature's 14 March 2024 issue under Scientific Reports (DOI:10.1038/s41598-024-54874-4).

mon etc.

is considered.

Kong is famous for its snake

soup which has been consumed

the consumption of snake meat

to be accepted worldwide easi-

ly, except maybe in some parts

of Asia. But they are batting for it

for serious environmental rea-

sons ~ from the point of view of

water conservation.

Scientists are not expecting

for over 2,000 years in China.

metric he has christened 'virtual wa-The researchers studied more than 4,600 pythons and ter'. The amount of found that reticulated and Burvirtual water conmese pythons, in particular, reqsumed through uired less food to produce, say, a food and clothing pound of meat compared to is many times conventional farm products more than the such as chicken, beef, pork, salamount that we consume for drinking and house-Pythons grow rapidly to reach the 'slaughter weight'

hold purposes. India exports within a year after hatching. According to Dr. Natusch, the about 20 million kg

first author of the paper, "pythof coffee annually, and is, thereons outperform all mainstream fore, responsible for exporting about 420,000 million litres of livestock chicken and cattle" when food to protein conversion virtual Indian water with it. Countries like Argentina, Brazil Eating snake meat is nothand the US export billions of ing new. Snakes have long been litres of virtual water every year consumed in Southeast Asia and while countries like Egypt, Italy China as a high-protein, low-satand Japan import billions of virurated fat food source. Hong tual water.

> It was Professor Arjen Hoekstra who introduced the concept of 'water footprint' as a metric to measure the amount of water consumed to produce goods and services.

from the earth unknowingly. The

cotton T-shirt that we wear is

equivalent to about 2,000 litres

of the University of London who

It was John Anthony Allan

of water wrapped around us.

invented a method

of estimating the

amount of fresh

water needed to

produce different

commodities, a

In other words, the water footprint helps to comprehend how much water people consume daily in their lives, and is similar to the ideas of 'carbon' When we consume one kg footprint' or 'ecological foot-

print' that most of us are familiar with.

It is ironic that while we are so concerned about greenhouse gases and their impact on the environment, we are more or less oblivious to freshwater consumption and its impact on the environment and population.

In a world where one in every five persons does not have access to fresh water, and particularly when the demand for water resources in the whole

(WHO), water scarcity impacts world is increas-40 per cent of the world's popuing, the issue of

water cycle ensur-

es that as a whole,

the water will ne-

is jokingly said that

it is quite possible

that the water that

you drank just

While that is certainly true

for a closed system, with the

dichotomy of increasing popu-

lation and finite resources,

resource management is crucial

to maintain the minimum

requirement of water per indi-

inheriting a fixed amount of

money that can be used only for

the benefit of one's children.

However, the amount of money

spent per child (per capita) will

diminish if the number of chil-

dren increases, and with more

An analogy may be seen in

lation and 700 million people water footprint are at risk of being displaced as a result of the water crisis needs to be taken seriously. by 2030.

The earth is By 2040, almost 1 in 4 chilindeed a closed dren will live in an area of system and the extremely high water stress. Among the many options suggested by WHO to mitigate the it neither loses nor water crisis, attitudinal change gains water, and so is a prime one.

fall below what is needed to ful-

using water will help to avoid, or

at least delay, any future catas-

trophe. The water footprint of a

country is also an indicator of

the efficiency of the nation's

water management and agricul-

the World Health Organization

According to the report of

Being a little conservative in

fill their basic needs.

tural practices.

Many conventional livestock fail to satisfy the criteria ver be depleted. It for sustainability, and there is an urgent need to explore alternatives. Snakes are probably the best alternative.

now was once Snakes require minimal used by Mama water and can live with the dew Dinosaur to give her baby a that settles on their scales in the bath! Critics have legitimately morning. They also need very questioned the need to conserve little food and live off rodents water, given that all that we use and other pests that attack food crops.

> Although large-scale python farming is common in Asia, environmentalists suggest that the same is needed in other parts of the world too.

Considering the potential benefits, this will be a bold move and the project requires encouragement from all corners of society.

In the distant future, if a snake burger is served instead of a meat burger in a restaurant, do not get perplexed but think of the precious snake that helped save the enormous amount of precious water of Nature.

THE KATHMANDU POST

must be protected from social media platforms. Local journalism needs protection for two reasons. First, it is integral to a functioning democracy. Second, it is one of the best interventions against the rise of misinformation.

Much of today's journalism is probably for business, but despite that, media serves the citizens, government and democracy of any country. In a functional democracy, the people have a voice in state matters and choose their representatives, thereby making informed decisions to choose a government. To make that decision correctly, the citizens must have correct information on public matters of the state. The government's duty to ensure that citizens are served with information on public issues is entrusted to the media. Because of this role, the state supports and provides special protection and facilities ~ such as elevated rights to seek information and movement or equipment and papers on subsidised rates ~ to the media.

For democracy to be functional, the people in power should be accountable. The media is also responsible for bringing accountability into play and questioning the decisions and roles of those in power. The media also serves as a platform where matters of public interest are critically discussed and debated. All these serve democracy's purpose by strengthening public participation. The current information ecosystem is messy, especially due to the unprecedented rise of misinformation. Its spread is the greatest threat to humanity, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024. The abundance of fake information in the public sphere means there will be false discourses and fake debates; it can elect the wrong people to significant positions and may misguide the citizens on important issues.

progeny, a time will come when

vidual.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

SUPRAKASH

CHANDRA ROY

The writer is a Member,

National Commission of

History of Science, INSA and was Editor-in-Chief of the

journal Science and Culture

for about two decades

will be returned.

Nuanced understanding

the West expected all countries

A TRIUMPH





SIR, This refers to 'Western Bias' by Govind Bhattacharjee. In the intricate web of India-West rela-

tions, one discerns a tapestry woven with threads of cooperation, interwoven with occasional tensions and historical complexities. Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that the narrative of incessant denigration from Western quarters is but an oversimplification of a relationship far more multifaceted.

Initially, one encounters points of friction, wherein strategic divergences stand prominent. India's longstanding policy of nonalignment, coupled with its close affiliation with Russia, particularly in matters of defense, often poses challenges to Western aspirations, notably amidst conflicts such as the Ukraine war. Moreover, concerns regarding human rights, amplified by Western nations' emphasis on such liberties, cast a shadow over India, prompting scrutiny over treatment of minor-

ity groups and diminishing press freedoms. Economic disparities also loom large, as India's inclination towards self-reliance through protective measures clashes with the free-market ethos championed by the West, culminat-



ing in trade disputes and intellectual property disagreements.

Furthermore, the specter of Hindu nationalism, ascendant within Indian politics, evokes apprehension in Western circles, fearing the marginalization of religious minorities and erosion of India's secular fabric. Yet, amidst the thorns of discord, there exist verdant pastures of cooperation. Shared security concerns, especially in the face of a rising China, unite India and the West in the Indo-Pacific theatre. Economic interdependence further binds their destinies. Moreover, despite differing democratic models, a mutual commitment to democratic principles and rule of law serves as a cornerstone for enduring collaboration on global issues.

In moving forward, a nuanced approach beckons, one that eschews the simplistic dichotomy of denigration in favour of a more comprehensive understanding.

Yours, etc., Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh, 7 May.

JAUNDICED VIEW

SIR, This refers to the article Western Bias (*The Statesman*, 7 May) by Govind Bhattacharjee, where he has rightly argued that



epaper.thestatesman.com

to follow their unique model, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

From the ninth largest economy in the world in 2010, India rose to the fifth spot in these few years, surpassing countries like France and the UK.

The German business model has weakened and Japan has an ageing population while India is poised to be an economic powerhouse.

We have all the necessery ingredients ~ leadership, entrepreneurs, and a congenial atmosphere to conduct business.

The Global North has a rigid and specific perspective of itself; and has remained stubbornly uninterested in how other cultures perceive it, unless being threatened by such views.

They are run by a profoundly entrenched ecosystem of technobureaucrats, whose worldview is dominated by the neo-cons among them. India is a growing power with an independent foreign policy.

It has the strategic geography and military capability that make it critcal to US interests. The author has rightly asserted that the West wishes India's democracy to be under its continuous vigilance and control. Hence, it never misses a chance to denigrate



SIR, It is a moment of great pride that a 30-year-old Thansen from Chennai has become the first double-hand amputee in Tamil Nadu to obtain a 4-wheeler driving licence. His unflinching desire to drive a car despite his physical challenges is truly inspiring. Thansen's feat not only showcases his determination, but also underscores the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in society. His landmark achievement challenges the traditional belief that hands are indispensable for driving.

His attainment not only provides hope for others with disabilities, but also prompts a change in how fitness certification is viewed for individuals facing similar challenges. Succinctly put, Thansen's story is a triumph against tragedy.

> Yours, etc., Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai, 8 May.

India's rise.

Yours, etc., Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, Kolkata, 7 May.

PUTIN AGAIN

SIR, This refers to the report, "Putin begins 5th term as president, more in control of Russia than ever", published in *The* Statesman today.

Arguably one of the most powerful political leaders of all time, Vladimir Putin begins yet another term as President of Russia. Is it good news for the global community? Well, that's tough to say. For the western world, Putin will always remain a threat, as



Russia has traditionally been anti-capitalist and shares diplomatic alliances with China and North Korea ~ two heavily milita-

rized nuclear powers with an anti-US stand.

There is also the fact that Russia has already demonstrated its massive military prowess, but the more concerning issue should be Putin's warning to use its nuclear weapons.

For India however, another presidential term for Putin apparently means a consolidation of already strong ties between the two countries..

Yours, etc., Anupam Neogi, Kolkata, 8 May.



¬he Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) is once again regrouping in Telangana to fight one of its toughest electoral battles following the debacle in the Assembly elections last year. It is leaving no stone unturned to prevent the Congress and the BJP from making the ongoing Lok Sabha polls a twocornered fight. In an interview with Anindita Chowdhury of The Statesman, BRS Working President K T Rama Rao talks about his sister K Kavitha's incarceration in the Delhi excise scam, change in Telangana politics after the elections, and why he thinks Hyderabad, with its large minority population, will become a Union Territory if the saffron party gets a third term at the Centre.

erspective

Excerpts:

Q: In Telangana, is this election bipolar or a triangular one?

A: It is clearly a triangular fight. But even in this triangle, there are several pockets where the Congress is our principal opponent and in others, it is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). BRS is one party which is everywhere, and the BJP and the Congress seem to be playing a game where they are dividing the task to defeat the BRS through tacit understanding. In at least five to six seats, look at the candidates they (Congress) have fielded. Look at Secunderabad, Chevella, even Malkajgiri, Adilabad, Nizamabad -- in all these seats, the Congress has fielded candidates who are uninterested in that particular seat or some absolutely random people.



from the BRS. He wanted the Chevella seat for his wife. At the last minute, she was thrust into Malkajgiri because they did not have any candidate there. So this person now becomes a non-local, newbie and their heart is not into the campaign. Jeevan Reddy wanted to fight from Karimnagar, but he has now been fielded from Nizamabad. And they fielded a rank outsider and complete newbie in Karimnagar. In KCR, Hemant Soren, Pinarayi

A: If we had a deal with the BJP, Kavitha would not have been in jail in the first place. It is quite foolish to even think like that. Let me ask a counter question. How come all party leaders fighting Modi are in jail and the Congress, which is fighting it tooth and nail, its leaders are not in jail? Every single regional party, their top leaders or family members have been attacked, starting from Kejriwal,

magic figure by themselves. So tomorrow, there can be a third formation as well. We have seen the Congress supporting a coalition government where a majority party supported a minority government. There are 13 political parties which are non-aligned to either NDA or INDIA such as the BRS, YSRCP and the BJD. What is the guarantee that parties which are in NDA or INDIA will stick with them?

Q. You are raising local issues like misgovernance, water and power crisis in the ongoing parliamentary election.

A: Absolutely. Our slogan to the people has been "Give us 10-12 seats and KCR will rule the roost in state politics again".

Q. How would that be possible?

A: We will ensure the agenda of the BRS and that of the people is implemented once again. Also we foresee a lot of political uncertainty beyond June 4, both in Telangana and the Centre. The chief minister here is facing cases. He is himself on a razor thin edge. Therefore, in politics when a party like the Congress is at the helm of affairs, you have seen strange things happening in the past.

Q. Are you referring to the cashfor-vote case against Chief Minister

Rahul says Adani is a fraud, Revanth says he is a friend. On Modiji, Revanth says he is 'Bade Bhai', while Rahul keeps calling the Prime Minister 'chor' (thief).

On the Gujarat model, Rahul says it is a 'golmaal' (dubious) model but Revanth Reddy says 'bahut accha' (good) model. On liquor scam, Rahul says there is no scam, while Revanth differs. About Rohith Vemula, Rahul says he wants to introduce an act to protect Dalit youth and students in large institutions, but the Revanth Reddy government went ahead and said he was not a Dalit.

Q. You have been saying in your rallies that Hyderabad, after remaining the joint capital for 10 years, will be made a Union territory. Isn't it fear mongering?

A: Not at all. I am talking about how Hyderabad (with one MP and 7 MLAs from AIMIM) will be made a Union Territory because the BJP has no presence here and I do not see any change in the status quo in the near future.

Likewise, they (BJP) will go for lopsided delimitation so that the voice of the south is suppressed because they do not have a hold here. Look at what is happening in Delhi - a UT state, how they are using the office of Lieutenant-Governor - a non-elected, nominated fellow to hound a democratically elected government. This is a danger not only for Hyderabad, but also for Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai. The reason is that other than Mumbai, none of these are under BJP's administration. They want a stranglehold on this country. The whole 'one nation, one election' is just a ruse to control the entire country's electoral process.

100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 11 MAY 2024

To a. good many people one of the most interesting items in the news of the day will be the announcement that ships are being turned in Colombo harbour. To home-keeping Britons the statement may seem prosaic and lacking in thrill. Not so to the sun-baked dwellers in the plaint of Bengal, British or Indian, who are still enduring the torrid conditions of the spring months. As the hot season draws towards its close all eyes are turned longingly southwards, and it is a welcome sign when we hear that the usual arrangements are being made in Colombo harbour in anticipation of the expected monsoon and that the berths of vessels there are now facing the south-west breakwater. The monsoon, of course, has not yet broken at Colombo, and whether the harbour authorities are expecting it earlier than usual or whether they are merely getting ready for it in good time we cannot tell. In the ordinary course we might expect the monsoon to make its way from Colombo up the Bay to Bengal during the first half of June; but, here as everywhere else, ordinary weather usually consists of departures from the normal. Whether the eagerly awaited south-west monsoon should be early, punctual, or late, however, the preparations at Colombo at about this time of the year always cheer us with the reminder that the rains will soon be at hand. Meantime the chota bursat is doing its best to give the country measure of relief.



Q. But didn't they poach leaders from your party?

A: That is exactly my point. They took Patnam Mahender Reddy

around seven constituencies, the Congress is, in fact, helping the BJP. This may sound incredible, but the Congress and the BJP had done this in the last Lok Sabha election as well because their objective in Telangana is to corner us - the BRS.

Q. But Congress is alleging you have cut a deal with the BJP to get your party MLA Kavitha released from jail?

Vijayan, to Stalin even Abhishek (Banerjee) is going through his ED cases. If you look at the entire country, barring the Congress, every major party fighting the BJP is under the scanner.

Q. Since you are neither in the NDA nor INDIA bloc, what is the way forward?

A: Neither NDA nor INDIA bloc looks like they are going to get the

Revanth Reddy?

A: Yes, the final hearing in this case is on July 24.

Q. What is your take on the controversy surrounding the closure report in Rohith Vemula case?

A: Revanth Reddy seems to be on a mission to defy Rahul Gandhi. He seems to be toeing the line of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has differed with Rahul on every count.

Iran's message resonates with Muslims

SHAHRAM AKBARZADEH

'ran's leadership has been a direct beneficiary of the monthslong war in Gaza. With every L missile that Israel fires on Gaza, every US veto of a UN Security Council ceasefire resolution, and every arrest of an anti-war protester on American university campuses, Iran's rejection of the US-dominated world order gains more credibility in the Muslim world.

The ruling clerical regime in Iran has built its foreign policy on the pillar of anti-Americanism, rejecting what it frames as the "injustice" of US domination and "bullying" of other countries. Washington's continued support for Israel's war on Gaza in the face of an increasing international backlash has only reinforced this narrative.

While the US has tried to backtrack and signal that humanitarian considerations should guide Israel's conduct of the war, the damage to US credibility has been done. Many around the world – and specifically in Muslim countries – do not see the belated US warnings to Israel as genuine.

And Tehran's message of anti-Americanism is resonating with large segments of the public in the Muslim world.

In one regional opinion survey in late October, for instance, just 7 per cent of respondents said the US had a positive impact on the war, compared to 40 per cent who viewed Iran's role as positive. And in December, the highly respected Arab Barometer reported that approval ratings for the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had surpassed those of the Saudi crown prince and Emirati president.

This change in Iran's standing in the region is being watched with concern by the political elite in the neighbourhood.

Iran's image has been further enhanced by the fact it is the only Muslim state to attack Israel against the backdrop of public outrage over the war in Gaza.

The Iranian missile and drone attack on Israel on April 13 was calibrated to achieve two key objectives.

First, Iran's leaders sought to preserve the country's image as the selfappointed head of the "axis of resistance", comprised of its proxies in the region – Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and other militia groups in Iraq and Syria. Iran also wanted to demonstrate the effectiveness of its deterrence model, which is based on the threat of retaliation against Israeli aggression through its proxy actors and expanding missile and drone technology.

afford to outsource its response to its proxies. While Iran was clearly not ready to start a war with Israel, not responding in-kind to the Israeli attack would have made it look weak and seriously diminished its standing among its allies and proxy groups.

But Iran's leaders sought to minimise the damage and mitigate the risk of escalation by warning Israel of its attack in advance through intermediaries. This way, Iran could save face without getting embroiled in an all-out war.

Iran's second objective was to demonstrate to the world that it has the drone and missile technology to hit back at Israel, if it chooses.

Israel's limited response to Iran suggests that war has been averted, much to the relief of neighbouring countries. But the long-term implications are more favourable for Iran. This show of strength has likely helped its rejectionist foreign policy find receptive ears in the Muslim world and beyond.

When Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Pakistan on April 23, for example, he was greeted like a celebrity. This was ironic as, earlier this year, Iran and Pakistan had engaged in titfor-tat aerial attacks.

The two countries agreed to boost bilateral trade to US\$10 billion a year, about five times the current level. They also released a joint statement calling on the UN Security Council to take action against Israel, saying it had "illegally" targeted neighbouring countries and foreign diplomatic compounds. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also offered a message of support to Iran, saying: "China noted Iran's statement that its action was restrained and

was an act of self-defence in response to the attack on its embassy".

The implications of a more emboldened Iran for the region are severe. The Iranian authorities feel vindicated by the events of the last seven months. This means their anti-US and anti-Israel rhetoric will remain staunch as ever.

Iran's drone and missile research and development programme is also likely to receive a boost. And Iran's support for its network of proxies and allies will remain firmly in place, as this enables the Iranian leadership to project power beyond its borders and retain its deterrence capability.

None of this bodes well for Iran's neighbours. An ideologically energised Islamic regime in Iran would be less accommodating to regional concerns, particularly those aired by governments that have already normalised relations with Israel (such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain), or are believed to be heading in that direction (Saudi Arabia).

Moreover, the political credibility of many Arab leaders has suffered in the eyes of their citizens due to their perceived ineffectiveness in supporting the Palestinians in Gaza.

Iran's leaders did not plan the series of events that started with the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7. In fact, they were just as surprised by Hamas' actions as the Israeli intelligence agencies. But they are the obvious beneficiary of the turn of

MR. Lloyd George, in a letter to The Nation and the Athenaeum on the prospects of British industry, says:

When peaceable conditions finally arrive and currencies are stabilized we shall be face to face with the trade rivalries of nations which have perfected their machinery while they were engaged in wiping all their debts off the slate.

I view the immediate future of British trade with considerable misgivings. A farseeing manufacturer utilizes periods of slackness to repair his machinery, to re-equip his workshop, and generally to put his factory in order.

I suggest that the nation ought to follow that wise example, and that this is the time to do so.

No man who has examined the use now being made of our national resources can believe that we are making the best of them. Capital and labour are alike strangled by vested prejudices and traditions. Both are capable of producing infinitely more wealth for the benefit of the community than they are now creating.

The best means of achieving production seems to be the most urgent task of our industrial and political leaders at this hour.

BOMB DROPPING

Questioned by Sir Waller Schwabe with regard to the bomb dropping on Gujranwala, Lord Chelmsford agreed that aeroplanes should not be used except as a last resort, and this was a last resort at Gujranwala. Had the disturbance not been suppressed terrible things would have happened there.

Sir Walter Schwabe asked the reason of Sir Sankaran Nair's resignation from the Viceroy's Council.

Lord Chelmsford said Sir Sankaran was disturbed with regard to the countenancing of Martial Law in the Punjab and the refusal to allow barristers from outside to enter the Punjab. He was very anxious to put an end to Martial Law. Lord Chelmsford said he approached the Governor and the military authorities in the Punjab, but the Afghan war then broke out and that made all the difference as the Punjab was the centre of railway communications. The military authorities pointed out that with Martial Law 500 men could keep the railways safe, but without it 5,000 men would be required. Therefore he thought it inadvisable to withdraw Martial Law. Sir Sankaran Nair did not agree. Lord Chelmsford said that he was as anxious as Sir Sankaran Nair that there should be free trade in barristers in the Punjab and consulted the Punjab Government. Sir Michael O'Dwyer informed him that he had consulted the Chief Justice, and his military advisers who were of opinion that the majority of the barristers who would come to the Punjab would make disturbing speeches. Sir Sankaran Nair, Lord Chelmsford added, did not say he was "unable to countenance the atrocities in the Punjab," and never put it so strongly. The court was then adjourned.



Coming two weeks after the Israeli attack on its diplomatic mission in Damascus, Iran could not

For more than a decade, Iran has showcased its missiles during annual military parades to support its claim it can hit Israel if threatened. Its attack last month involved more than 300 drones and missiles. Notwithstanding the fact the damage was minimal, the attack was proof Iran now has the capacity to inflict pain on Israel.

events.

The United States and Israel are gifting Iran and its message of defiance enormous appeal, well beyond the imagination of Iranian authorities.

(The writer is Convenor of the Middle East Studies Forum (MESF), and Acting Director the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University. This article was published on www.theconversation.com)

2 3 4 5 6 7	ACROSS	13 City's playing against Lazio for final	24 Part of bulb cracked (5)	3 Fling is overlooked by female, I suspect	14 Popular setter secures right to get
10 10 VESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 10 10 USELESSEDISTURB 12 12 USELESSEDISTERDAY'S SOLUTION	 What makes bio big and worthless? (4-3-7) Possibly start with Latin, changing it back to English? 	 (8) 15 Look round, taking in baron's summerhouse (6) 17 We`re told gag, an unfortunate sort 	 25 Unfortunate, having to quit holding sway (9) 26 Renovation of store's no reason to take it easy (4,2,4,4) 	 (5) 4 Centre of Paris sadly has good and bad drivers (4,4) 5 Evidently short of time too 	pay rise (9) 16 Old English houses start to captivate member of church (8) 18 Summary of largely
14 15 R E L O C A T I N G T R E K 14 15 16 Image: Constraint of the state	(9) 10 Teenager's not entirely happy out here	 (6) 19 At home, renowned boxing legend initially gets angry 	DOWN	 (6) 6 He explored two British writers (9) 7 Series shout 	impressive book (7) 20 A disfigurement concealed by Mum's
21 0 1 E M E V A M I T E H I N T E V A I P A N A D L H S T R O I R A D L H	(5) 11 One stops interfering, becoming vociferous (5)	 (8) 22 Nick's encouraging report on newly- wed's health? (9) 	1 Desperately we ask – no, beg – Charlie not to retaliate (3,4,3,4)	 7 Series about entertaining English individual displaying a bit of nerve (7) 8 Gent almost picked 	cosmetic (7) 21 Chuck Norris's heading for paradise (6)
25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 25 2	12 Shifting hair oil, American makes killing (9)	23 Tenor's given award, mostly for opera (5)	2 Belted hunter scoffing at speech (7)	up prize in game – a piece of furniture (5,2,7)	23 Charges pound to block opening up (5)









A FEAT OF STRENGTH

AN extraordinary trial of strength has just been performed at Deeping St. Nicholas, in South Lincolnshire.

To settle a wager a twenty-threeyear-old horseman named Warboys, employed by Mr. George Freir, farmer, carried an 18st. sack of wheat for one mile down a main road without stopping.

Warboys carried the sack across his neck and shoulders, and did not seem in the least worried by the weight, doing the mile in the remarkable time of eighteen minutes. Such a remarkable performance is considered unique in agricultural circles. Warboys is 6 feet 2 inches in height, a total abstainer, a moderate smoker and unmarried.



NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | MAY 11, 2024 the pioneer



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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Testing times

Stakes could not be higher in Haryana's political chess, with the outcome remaining anybody's guess

he recent developments in Haryana's political circles have again brought to the fore the intricacies of coalition dynamics. The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), a key player in the State's politics, has decided to align with the Congress in demanding a floor test for the BJP-led Government in the Haryana Assembly. This comes on the heels of the withdrawal of support by three Independent MLAs to the ruling coalition, turning it into minority with 44 legislators in the House of 90. The Congress, buoyed by the latest developments and perhaps sensing an opportunity to tip the scales in its favour, has seized upon this moment to mount pressure on the BJP Government. However, in the backdrop of this high-stakes political manoeuvring, the JJP finds itself grappling with internal discord. Reports have emerged suggesting that three of its MLAs held clandestine meetings with former Chief Minister ML Khattar, raising eyebrows and fuelling speculation about potential defections. The apparent



dissonance within the JJP underscores the complex interplay of interests and ambitions that often characterises coalition politics. For a party like the JJP, which emerged as a key player following the fractured mandate in the last State elections, maintaining cohesion within its ranks while balancing competing demands from its coalition partners is no easy feat. To jog the memory, it was in Haryana that 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' culture started, which continues unabated. The outcome of this internal tug-of-war will not only shape the immediate political landscape in Haryana but also have far-reaching implications for the State's future.

As alliances shift and allegiances waver, the only constant is the relentless pursuit of power and the drive to stay one step ahead of the competition. With the House strength being 90 members, a political party needs the support of 46 MLAs to cross the halfway mark and form a Government. After the withdrawal of support by three Independents, the BJP is short of two MLAs to continue in the Government. The BJP now has 40 MLAs, besides the support of a lone Haryana Lokhit Party legislator and at least three Independents (earlier, it had six Independents in support), which brings to a total of 44 in the House. For the BJP, it is a double whammy, all this is happening days ahead of the Lok Sabha polls to the 10 Haryana seats on May 25. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won seven of these seats in Haryana with a 35 per cent vote share. In 2019, the BJP won all 10 seats with a 58 per cent vote share. In the current situation, however, it might be a Herculean task. JJP's Dushyant Chautala has mounted pressure on the Nayab Singh Saini Government for a floor test, which he is likely to get the Chair's nod for. If the JJP breaks, it would give the BJP the much-needed elbow room but what is certain for now is that it is time for horse trading in Haryana.



Battle to save India's biodiversity



KANDASAMY

India's rich biodiversity is under severe threat due to climate change, as recent studies warn of potential economic losses and irreversible ecological damage

ndia, a land of diverse climates and rich ecosystems, is a global treasure trove of biodiversity. From the majestic Himalayan ranges to the vibrant coastal reefs, our country's biodiversity sustains countless life forms and plays a crucial role in regulating ecosystems. It's not just a vital resource for human sustenance, providing food, water, shelter and medicine, but also a critical indicator of our planet's health, a testament to our rich heritage and a responsibility we all share.

However, the delicate balance of India's biodiversity is now facing unprecedented threats from climate change. Recent studies warn that India may lose a staggering 35 per cent of its GDP by the year 2100 due to climate change, highlighting the deep interconnection between the nation's prosperity and its natural heritage. Rampant deforestation and habitat degradation, particularly in regions like the Western Ghats, are pushing carbon sinks towards becoming sources, exacerbating the climate crisis. The time for action is now.

Impact of Climate Change: A Looming Crisis

The repercussions of climate change are becoming quite evident in altering ecological balance, extreme weather events and increasing health risks. In an era marked by escalating environmental challenges, the climate crisis demands urgent and concerted action. According to a [i]United Nations' InterGovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, climate change is imperilling human well-being and planetary health, focusing strongly on interactions between climate, biodiversity and human society. The report suggests that the rise in extreme weather conditions has led to some irreversible impacts as natural and human systems are pushed beyond their

ability to adapt. Not only this, a report by the Reserve Bank of India highlights how climate change poses challenges for monetary policy, with frequent weather shocks threatening economic growth and stability. Moreover, a recent three major missions, name-

study predicts that climate change could cut global income by up to 19 per cent in the next 25 years, with the most vulnerable countries suffering the most severe impacts.

To overcome these challenges, India has embarked on a journey to mitigate climate change and safeguard its biodiversity. With the G20 presidency last year, India has positioned itself as the voice of the Global South to lead the way in climate action and leveraged this positioning to drive impactful outcomes in various realms related to climate action. Tackling deforestation, reducing emissions and restoring ecosystems are key strategies. With over 26 per cent of the country grappling with expanding drought conditions, urgent measures are being taken to build resilience against environmental degradation.

Pioneering Climate Action Tamil Nadu, a coastal State in the heart of southern India, is emerging as a beacon of hope and leading the charge in cil mate change efforts. The State has become a forerunner in climate action by announcing

INDIA'S **BIODIVERSITY, A** VITAL RESOURCE AND INDICATOR OF PLANETARY HEALTH, FACES **UNPRECEDENTED** THREATS FROM CLIMATE CHANGE, NECESSITATING **URGENT ACTION TO** MITIGATE IMPACTS AND SAFEGUARD ITS

ly Climate Change Biodiversity Conservation and Change; Greening; and Wetlands. Through initiatives like the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity and Greening Project (TBGP), the State aims to achieve a 33 per cent forest and tree cover by 2031. With approximately \$90 million in investments, Tamil Nadu's Climate Change Mission, Green Tamil Nadu Mission and Tamil Nadu Wetlands Mission demonstrate a commitment to sustainable development and ecosystem restoration. **Driving Solutions:**

Addressing the climate crisis necessitates collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. Supported by startups and Government interventions, public-private partnerships are essential to drive innovation and scale climate solutions. Startups are pivotal in developing innovative technologies that reduce carbon footprints while contributing to economic growth. International collaboration, **RICH NATURAL** exemplified by agreements like the Paris Agreement, provides a framework for collective action on a global scale. India's leadership in renewable energy, particularly through

initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), underscores its commitment to driving sustainable development and fostering a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. As India addresses the intertwined challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, the steps taken today will shape the legacy for future generations.

This demands reflection, unity and action to come up with sustainable solutions. In this crucial sustainability battle, India's role extends beyond its borders, contributing significantly to global biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation efforts. The recent Supreme Court ruling recognising the right against climate change as a fundamental right under Article 14 and Article 21 underscores India's steadfast commitment to climate action and environmental protection. This offers prospects for the Government, corporations and climate action companies to come together and work towards a sustainable future. (The writer is the CEO of ProClime; their *views are personal)*



HERITAGE

A herd of elephants grazes near a village at Boko, in Kamrup district of Assam

Use of lighting in Indian architecture



ABHIJIT VAISH

Lighting greatly enhances India's architectural heritage, turning historic landmarks into captivating spectacles

Illuminated against the night

sky, Roomi Gate symbolizes

the city's cultural legacy,

inviting locals and tourists

ture of the Signature Bridge

ndia's architectural heritage reflects a blend of L history, culture and tradition. In bustling urban environments, our heritage monuments stand as timeless witnesses to our rich past. However, these architectural marvels often fade into the background amidst the vibrant city scenes. Yet, through the strategic application of lighting, these structures are brought to life, captivating the imagination and enhancing their charm after dusk Enhancing Historical

Significance Through Lighting

Carefully designed external lighting has the power to breathe new life into heritage landmarks, illuminating their intricate details and historical significance. technology, renowned for its energy efficiency and controllability, offers a unique opportunity to showcase these monuments in a manner that respects their heritage while captivating modern audiences. By leveraging lighting solutions, cities across India are revitalizing their architectural treasures, ensuring they remain beaare mesmerized as the tem-



cons of cultural heritage for generations to come. Transforming Indian Architectural Landscape with Lighting

From the majestic Sun alike to marvel at its beauty. Temple in Konark to the Gujarat Bhawan: Nestled iconic Roomi Gate in in the heart of New Delhi, Lucknow, lighting has trans-Gujarat Bhawan serves as a formed India's architectural cultural hub representing the vibrant heritage of scene, infusing these structures with renewed splen-Gujarat. Through the integration of dynamic lighting, the Bhawan transforms, dour and magnificence. Sun Temple, Modhera: Nestled in the heart of becoming a luminous tribute Gujarat, the Sun Temple that honours the State's rich traditions. The interplay of stands as a testament to light accentuates its distincancient craftsmanship and architectural ingenuity. tive features, creating a cap-Through the application of tivating visual narrative for dynamic lighting, the temvisitors and passersby. Signature Bridge: The Delhi ple's intricate carvings and majestic outlines are brought Government's decision to to life after sunset. Visitors illuminate the entire struc-

ple emerges as a radiant underscores the city's com-spectacle, inviting them to mitment to enhancing its mitment to enhancing its architectural landmarks. embark on a journey through time and history. Towering above the city's Roomi Gate, Lucknow: As skyline, the bridge now a symbol of Lucknow's rich glows at night, offering a Mughal heritage, Roomi spectacular view to visitors Gate exudes grandeur and and residents alike. historical significance. Maryada Purushottam Shri Dynamic lighting accentu-

Ram International Airport, Ayodhya: This architectural marvel, features dynamic lighting that complements its unique design inspired by the Nagara style of temple architecture. Blending modern facilities with rich cultural heritage, the airport offers a captivating experience for travellers and visitors.

Lighting greatly enhances India's architectural heritage, turning historic landmarks into captivating spectacles. Embracing this technology allows cities to showcase their cultural legacy and create vibrant public spaces, enriching the lives of residents and visitors. As India progresses, lighting signifies innovation, guiding towards a brighter future for its architectural landscape.

(The author is the executive director at Instapower Ltd, views are personal)

THE EDITOR LETTERS 10

EVOLUTION OF MONETARY POLICY

Madam - This refers to the article, 'Evolution of monetary policy,' which was published on 8 May 2024. Even before India got freedom the Congress formed a committee to suggest the type of economic policy free India should adopt. The committee analysed and said the key infrastructure sector should be under the Public sector to help the investors with raw materials, power, transport and communication at a very economical cost.

This helps domestic ventures to produce more. None of the rich in India had so much reserve to invest in big projects and returns from such projects take some years. When Rajiv came to power he availed a small loan from the World Bank to develop mainly the telecom sector accepting the condition to to open our door slightly for foreign goods to be marketed here. Though the country went bankrupt between 1980-1990, it is to be noted that the assets of the top richest families swelled from Rs 8000 CR to Rs 40,000 Cr during the same period. So irrespective of parties the interests of the rich are well cared for and produced more than 200 billionaires in a short span under the present regime. This course continues and will go on to enrich the rich, the cost of the due share of the unprivileged section

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS

Madam — Apropos the editorial "The Name Game" published on 9th May, this is my response. There are guidelines issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs called "Endorsements know-hows" for celebrities, influencers and virtual influencers on social media platforms. The guidelines specify that celebrities must not endorse any product or service they have not personally used or experienced. Further, they are advised to be 'diligent'

before endorsing any product or service i.e. extremely careful by analysing the pros and cons of it to save the health and money of lakhs of their followers. some of them blindly accept and adopt what they say. An

War of words over industrialists



propos "Modi questions Rabul's silence on Ambani, Adani," The Pioneer, May 9, this is my response. The phenomenal industrialists Ambani and Adani have become fodder for the political slugfest between the ruling and opposition parties in our country. They have been pilloried by Rahul Gandhi, alleging Modi helped them grow. In contrast, this time Modi turned the tables

example of carelessly endorsing a harmful product is 'pan masala' that too on a sports channel during the live telecast of a cricket match watched by millions of youngsters, highly prone to its habit-forming usage. The Hon'ble Supreme Court has reiterated the above guidelines. The Government needs to punish the celebrities indulging in misleading promotions under the Consumer Protection Act by a jail term, not mere fines to instil responsibility in them as advocated by the Court.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

FOOTBALL IS NUMBER ONE

Madam — Though top football-playing nations are restricted to Europe, Latin America and African countries, the beautiful game's popularity is unmatched in non-football-playing nations as well. The game is a universal language, to say so and has nicely flowered over the decades through champion players of diverse socio-economic milieus gathering together for a common cause: regale the fans with skill and perseverance. No surprise, the lovely game is viewed as a promoter of uni-

against Rahul, alleging a deal between the business tycoons and Congress has silenced Rahul. It's a sad commentary in a country that aspires to emerge as a developed nation and laying the red carpet for the industrialists seeking investments to facilitate employment generation and, thus, economic growth - has engaged in attack-

ing entrepreneurs. India needs to encourage more and more entrepreneurship and innovation bringing more firms into the sphere as a country where millions of people join the labour force every month which can't be absorbed by a few conglomerates. However, the Congress party was exposed with its hand in glove with businesses in the allocation of 2G spectrum and coal. At the same time, the Modi Government brought in reforms to enhance transparency in the allocation of natural resources and the overhauling of the country's bankruptcy laws.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

versal peace despite the onfield acrimony. The exhilaration of great players will captivate fans forever.

No game evokes such intense emotions that emanate after every goal is scored. Parallelly, administrators and countries worldwide have displayed mostly unambiguous references towards the game. Now, in a huge honour to football, the United Nations General Assembly(UNGA) has adopted a resolution proclaiming May 25 as "World Football Day". May 25 marks the 100th anniversary of the first ever Football tournament. As aptly described by a diplomat at the UNGA, football is the "number one game played and followed across the globe". Additionally, as the resolution Stated, football creates a space for international cooperation. World Football Day is intended to encourage global peace, overall development and women and empowerment of women and girls.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

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FIRSTCOLUMN TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL PERSON

He dares to defv convention and breathe life into audacious ideas



RAVI VALLURI

here is a part of us that will not let us be content until we become all that we are capable of being. Life is not about resting on our past achievements and laurels and residing in our comfort zone. It is an adventure from being ordinary to extraordinary. One's current situation may be good, but if a greater opportunity presents itself, one must be open to expanding. This does not mean you are to run away or violate your integrity.

Muscles stay strong and flexible only by use and stretching and so does our mind. The challenge is the way of the universe and showing us the path that the bigger we assume that form and shape. We should bless our dreams and our desires to identify the opportunity that is lurking as there would be several chances arising around the corner. We need the courage and humility to ask the Universe to provide such opportunities, leave behind all our limitations and step forward to live life as magnificent and gigantic as ordained by the Universe. Successful people stretch their hands and take up responsibility which empowers them to enter uncharted territories. This increases the level of their prana/chi, attention span and nature of work, adding a new dimension to the personality. Successful people are never straightjacketed in their approach and revel in taking risks. Only risk-takers become game-changers.

Rahul Bajaj's sons Rajiv and Sanjiv embarked upon a fascinating idea to salvage the scrap of the decommissioned INS Vikrant to manufacture scooters. It was an innovative idea, utilizing scrap in a novel manner. While the bottom line of the exercise may be to generate profit, the unattainable thought is audacious. Therefore, successful entrepreneurs never kill an idea. An ingenious idea can be a platform for a radical discovery



An awesome idea is breathtaking and amazing, stunning and aweinspiring. When the idea germinates, something stupendous takes place. Think big and do not listen to people who tell you it can't be done. "Life is too short to think small", writes Tim Ferriss. The Universe listens to our deepest thoughts. If the thought is positive, we are blessed with positive results.

The cardinal principle in life is to ensure that we receive and circu-

Precision agriculture: Key to food security



analys \$ 07

PARAG ACHARYA

The future of Indian agriculture hinges on a blend of tradition and innovation. Precision agriculture offers a crucial pathway to sustainably feed 1.7 billion people

ndia's population is projected to reach approximately 1.7 billion by 2050. It would be a significant challenge for Indian agriculture to meet the food demands of such a vast population amidst the emerging challenges of climate change. Additionally, the sector faces issues such as an ageing farmer population. Younger generations are increasingly veering away from taking over the family agricultural farm, choosing other, more lucrative and less labour-intensive career paths over agriculture. To address these challenges, the adoption of modern farming techniques like precision farming and digital smart agriculture becomes imperative to ensure sustainable food production and the future prosperity of Îndian agriculture.

A recent parliamentary panel has emphasized the importance of promoting agricul-tural mechanization, particularly for small and marginal farmers and has advocated for the integration of tiny robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Indian farm operations to address the challenges posed by fragmented land holdings. Furthermore, the panel recommended the establishment of a 'National Institute of Agricultural Robotics and Artificial Intelligence' to ensure that India remains at the forefront of agricultural development both domestically and internationally. On August 23, 2022, regarding Farm Mechanization, the Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education revealed that India's mechanisation level stands at 47 per cent, trailing China (59.5 per cent), Brazil (75 per cent) and the US (95 per cent). The level of mechanisation varies greatly by region inside India too. Northern States boast higher rates (70-80 per cent), driven by fertile land, labour decline and State backing. Southern and eastern States lag (35-45 per cent) due to fragmented land holdings. North-eastern States struggle due to terrain, equipment costs and socio-economic factors.

Certainly, agriculture has evolved steadily from a traditional, labour-intensive model to a sophisticated, technology-dri-ven system. Key milestones include the establishment of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). The development of highyielding, cost-effective, disease/pest-resisant and climate-resilient varieties and tech nologies across crops, horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries sciences by ICAR has significantly bolstered production and productivity. However, while acknowledging these strides, it's imperative to recognize that the pace of progress must match the urgency of our times. Throughout history, people have always sought easier, faster and more efficient ways to get things done. This pursuit has sparked a technological revolution that merges age-old farming practices with cut-ting-edge innovations like the Internet of Things (IoT) known as Ag-IoT. It is a huge change in farming that could shake up how we grow, manage and protect our food. Its solutions are not merely about efficiency; they are about empowering farmers to achieve greater time efficiency, productivity and precision in their daily tasks. It's like having a super smart assistant that can take care of land, animals, crops and farms without needing humans to do everything. People also call it precision agriculture, smart agriculture, or digital agriculture.



It is like a big step forward in farming because it uses data to make decisions, making everything more efficient and productive. Through Ag-IoT, the very pulse of plant and animal needs can be sensed. The farmers can keep an eye on the soil all the time, control watering systems from afar and even check on the health of their animals without being right there. It's super handy because it can predict how much THE INTERNET OF THINGS IS A HUGE crops will grow accurately. In every aspect, Ag-IoT stands poised to rev-CHANGE IN olutionize the landscape of crop management, insect and pest sur-FARMING THAT veillance, food warehousing, live-COULD SHAKE UP stock care, disease monitoring, dairy operations, supply chain HOW WE GROW, logistics and beyond.

The evolution of drone technolo-MANAGE AND gy has opened up boundless pos-PROTECT OUR sibilities in the realm of crop assess ment and monitoring. One such pioneering initiative, the NaMo Drone Didi Initiative, stands as a beacon of empowerment for rural women. In a momentous gesture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally handed over 1000 drones to 1000 Namo Drone Didis across 10 locations nationwide at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in Pusa, New Delhi. These drones will help them do things like check on crops, spray fertilizers and plant seeds. Prime Minister Modi's announcement of the 'Drone Didi' yojana 2023-24 further underscores the Government's dedication to leveraging technology for the betterment of society. Significant financial allocations during 2020-21 and 2021-22, by the Indian Government including INR 1756.3 crores and INR 2422.7 crores respectively to States for the integration of cutting-edge technologies

like drones, artificial intelligence, blockchain, remote sensing and GIS into agriculture and INR 7302.50 crores and INR 7908.18 crores were made in the same periods to ICAR for R&D, further demonstrate the Government's dedication to modernizing agriculture. Technological strides like RFID tags

(radio frequency identification) and systems like NLIS (National Livestock Identification Scheme) and INAPH (Information Network for Animal Productivity & Health) have propelled Precision Dairy Farming.

With swift electronic scanning and data integration, farmers can efficiently manage cow health, productivity and records, marking a significant shift in the dairy industry towards precision and efficiency. ing through AI. The 'Saagu Baagu' pilot in Telangana's Khammam district, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Digital Green, exemplifies this success. With over 7,000 farmers benefiting, chilli yields surged by 21 per cent, pesticide use decreased by 9 per cent, fertilizer usage dropped by 5 per cent and unit prices improved by 8 per cent. Consequently, farmers doubled their earnings, with incomes rising by over INR 66,000 per acre per crop cycle. Overall, AI interventions at 175 farms in India have boosted crop yields by 30 per cent, as per the Indian Council of

Agricultural Research (ICAR). In conclusion, the future of Indian agriculture hinges on a blend of tradition and innovation. With a burgeoning population and dwindling resources, precision agriculture offers a crucial pathway to sustainably feed 1.7 billion people. If established, the 'National Institute of Agricultural Robotics and Artificial Intelligence' would catapult Indian agriculture into unprecedented realms of excellence. The benefits of farm mechanization must permeate every corner of our nation, bridging divides and fostering inclusivity. We cannot afford to overlook those who are marginalized by the digital divide, particularly our smallscale farmers. As we look towards the future, let us remain committed to nurturing a vibrant, tech-enabled agrarian ecosystem that empowers farmers, preserves natural resources and ensures food security for generations to come. (The writer is a scientist, at Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhawanipatna; their views are personal)

late only positive thoughts. We should ensure that we are surrounded by efficacious people. Keep shouldering responsibility and ensure that we possess a YES MIND. Successful enterprises ensure that their workforce performs in harmony and synergy while working in teams. The Universe believes in the Laws of Attraction, the Laws of Abundance, the Laws of Gratefulness and the Laws of Spiralling Effect. All this gets transformed into what Darren Hardy calls the Compound Effect. Next, we ought to always feel blessed and have faith that a superior power is guiding us in our endeavours. There is a superior intelligence that is always creating wonderful opportunities for us and these should be grabbed and seized with humility.

A triumphant individual hinges his belief on the thought that the Divine will take care of everything and by simply reposing faith in that Superior Power. Successful People work on these principles where the football swerves like a parabola and enters the net and we are benumbed, giving a standing ovation. That is the miracle performed. Choose to call it the power of the Almighty or the architecture of the Universe. But this works on the premise of the power of positive thinking and becoming successful.

> (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)

FOOD. ITS SOLUTIONS ARE NOT MERELY ABOUT EFFICIENCY; THEY ARE ABOUT **EMPOWERING** FARMERS TO ACHIEVE GREATER TIME EFFICIENCY, PRODUCTIVITY AND PRECISION IN THEIR DAILY TASKS

Meanwhile, in the aquaculture industry, companies like Aquaconnect and Shrimpbox are leveraging technology to revolutionise shrimp farming. Aquaconnect employs artificial intelligence and satellite sensing technologies to monitor farm per-formance and provide advice to shrimp and fish farmers, predominantly small to medium-scale operations. Shrimpbox, on the other hand, specializes in shrimp farming in colder climates and landlocked areas, boasting impressive productivity with minimal water usage and without antibiotics. Cropin Technology, based in Bengaluru, has developed Aksara, an open-source microlanguage model tailored for climate-smart farming. In India, the World Economic

Forum's AI for Agriculture

Innovation (AI4AI) initiative, led by

C4IR India, is revolutionizing farm-

Revisiting Rohith Vemula's death after eight years As the dust settles, revelations by the Telangana Police shed new light on Vemula's untimely death

R^{ohith} Vemula(26), a PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad was found dead in his hostel room on 17 January 2016. Had he lived for another fortnight, he would have celebrated his 27th birthday on January 30. But he was called back by the Maker as it is said that He prefers the favourite ones to join Him ahead of others. The untimely demise of

Vemula opened a Pandora's Box all over India. Opposition parties led by the Congress staged a nationwide protest and agitation blaming the Narendra Modi Government at the Centre for the death of this young man. The CPI(M)'s frontal organization SFI called for education bundh the next day and



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Rohith Vemula's suicide. demanded the resignation of A major political outfit pro-Smriti Irani, the then union moted by the all-powerful minister for human resources development and Bandaru minority community had Dattatreya, a minister of State declared a solatium of Rs 25 from the council of ministers lakh to the family of Vemula blaming the duo for the death within days of his unfortunate of Rohith Vemula. Poets affildeath. Though it is more iated with the CPI(M) and than eight years since he other Left organizations wrote poems and short stories bade farewell to this world, his mother or brother has not been given the promised based on the life and times of Vemula. The fact that Vemula amount. When Radhika, the belonged to the Harijan com- mother

of

Vemulacontacted the leadermunity added to their ire and this was discernible from the ship of the said party, they power of the words with which they blamed the "comfeigned ignorance about the amount and the matter was munal and fascist" given a silent burial. Government at the Centre. More than eight years after

Many articles and features the suicide of Vemula, the that appeared in regional newspapers and satellite TV Telangana Police which was entrusted with the probe of channels blamed the finding out matters that led doorsteps of Smrithi Irani for Vemula to resort to the extreme measure concluded that Rohith Vemula was neither a member of the Harijan community nor any Other Backward Community (OBC) student as he had claimed. The fear that the university was likely to detect the truth behind his caste status which would put an end to his political aspirations had made him take the drastic step, said the police report. Rohith The unanswered question in



the whole episode is why the investigating officers failed to track the phone calls made by Vemula during the last few days of his life. This would have thrown more light on the reasons behind the suicide of the research scholar. Many of his colleagues attribute a failed love affair as

Months before he committed suicide, Vemula had led a demonstration under the auspices of the Ambedkar Students Association on the University Campus to protest the death penalty awarded to Yakub Memon, one of the prime accused in the Mumbai serial blasts of 1993 which claimed 260 lives. There were reports that the soft-spoken Vemula and his friends had bashed up a member of the

rival union and the victim needed hospitalisation. Moreover, there were charges against the University of Hyderabad for non-payment of a monthly scholarship of Rs 25,000 to Vemula though the university authorities denied the allegation.

Rohith Vemula was neither the cause behind his suicide. the first Harijan student in the The kind of fire from the opposition faced by Smrithi Irani was unprecedented and strange. The Rohith Vemula affair cost her the office of the HRD ministry and she was relegated to minister of textiles Opposition party leaders have all the right to criticize the Government and ministers for errors and omissions. But it should be restricted to the carelessness and irresponsibility of the concerned minister. For eight years, this young lady was crucified by her political rivals. Had they taken a little bit of time and gone through the releases issued by the Government of India, they would not have dared to throw mud at Smrithi. (The writer is special corre-

spondent with The Pioneer; *views are personal)*

any other universities in India who have committed suicide. Rajini Anand, an engineering college student in Kerala had jumped to death in 2004 following the callous approach of the ruling Congress-led Government in the State towards her plea for financial assistance to pay college fees. Sometime last year, a CPI(M) member of Rajya Sabha asked the Government of India to

University of Hyderabad or

furnish the number of Harijan students who had committed suicide in the country since 2014. The MP's innuendo was that no Harijan students had committed suicide in the country before the swearing-in of Modi as Prime Minister

DECCAN CHRONICLE | SATURDAY | 11 MAY 2024 | COIMBATORE





Ray of justice seen in 'poll' bail for Kejriwal

rvind Keiriwal is a free man till the end of the Lok Sabha polls on June 1. In granting him interim bail for campaigning, the Supreme Court has upheld the right of the Delhi chief minister and head of the Aam Aadmi Party to take part in the election campaign and vote. Justice has been rendered to an extent, but it is not a blanket order since many others, including his former deputy CM Manish Sisodia, remain in jail in the same "liquor-gate" case.

The money laundering case linked to a scrapped Delhi liquor policy registered against him remains and he will return to Tihar Jail on June 2. The implications of the verdict, delivered by a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, are far-reaching. It could be argued that the release of a star campaigner could influence the polling.

The conditional bail order sets a sort of precedent in cases involving the PMLA Act which by its very nature of being draconian could be misused by those in authority to muzzle political opponents. Of course, the merits of the case are yet to be examined in detail before a verdict is pronounced on whether members of the Delhi Cabinet were conspirators in a liquor policy scam for the benefit of their political party.

The orders served in similar cases, some linked to the same Delhi liquor policy change and another significant one in the arrest of the former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren — who, incidentally, is still in jail with his right to campaign not having brought him equivalent relief — have been mixed, though one of the judges has been a constant in many of the benches that dealt with the cases against other politicians regarding the granting of regular bail.

Considering the current circumstances when the country is in the middle of parliamentary elections, the Kejriwal case assumes great significance. On the one hand is the charge that the ruling party has been prone to using Central investiga-tive agencies to put many opponents in jail, especially by using the PMLA with its stringent conditions devolving upon the accused to prove their innocence.

On the other hand, Mr Kejriwal had not set a very good example in ducking multiple summonses from Central agencies over nine months that his ultimate arrest came much closer to the polls and thus brought this angle of it infringing the democratic right of an individual. No court is likely to be as sympathetic if a common man was to ignore summons in this manner.

The ED delaying Mr Kejriwal's arrest after registering an ECIR in August 2022, as pointed out by the court, the ED refusing to accept lawyers' offer to present all documents called for and Mr Kejriwal ducking summons on the grounds that the charges were politically motivated, had led to an impasse until his arrest on March 21. What the bail order has done is to level the electoral playing field that had been skewed by arrests and the tendency of the investigating agencies to make the process itself the punishment more than bringing graft cases registered against prominent politicians to a conclusion.

Whatever be the denouement, it is now established that political priorities have a way of trumping everything else in India, even if the court insists that this interim bail will not set a precedent. And yet there is a ray of justice to be seen in Mr Kejriwal being given time off to seek votes for his party and the national alliance it

Some good tips on Indians' diet

or some time now most people, empowered by bits and pieces of knowledge H gleaned thanks to the Internet revolution, have known what a healthy diet is and that Indians in general have hardly made moves to get closer to that ideal and that Indians in general have hardly made moves to get closer to that ideal. The medical council and the national nutrition institute, in their latest guidelines based on research also on the latest dietary trends in India, have simply reiterated the importance of a healthy diet.

It is up to people to heed the advice after studying the details of the recommendations, take measures to cut sugar intake and oils and eat fat only in moderation and avoid ultra-processed foods that contain a huge amount of chemicals and preservatives. All that must be done while undertaking proper physical exercise in combination with a more active lifestyle to avoid the non-communicable diseases that burden more than half the 1.4 crore Indians because of their unhealthy diet patterns.

There is a huge amount of good advice among the 17 dietary recommendations, many of which we may have all known already but still struggled to adapt and follow from sheer force of habit or due to economic circumstances or existing medical conditions. It is never too late to switch to a healthier diet pattern that may help fend or stave off altogether lifestyle diseases like hypertension, obesity and diabetes that haunt Indians to such levels as to label the country the world's diabetes capital, etc.

The battle against malnutrition may have been won to a certain extent but undernutrition is prevalent in Indians and only a change in diet patterns paying greater attention to nutrient intake might help retrieve the situation. their content beyond

against taking protein supplements because of healthy proteins might sound jarring to younger generations, many of whom are inveterate gymnasium enthusiasts. Maybe, greater attention to the information on labels would help them find the right source of proteins.



Vaccines and trust: Need for nuanced conversation



n a polarised and election-mode India. spreading paranoia over rare side effects of Zeneca/Covishield vaccine, willingly or unwittingly, can lead to a permanent tear in public trust in vaccines. Soon after Anglo-Swedish drugmaker acknowledged in a British court that its Covid-19 vaccine can, "in very rare cases, cause TTS", there has been utter panic among sections of the Indian public. TTS, or

Thrombosis Thrombocytopenia Syn drome, causes people to have blood clots and a low blood platelet count.

ment by the World Health Organisation had noted: "Based on latest available data, the risk of TTS with Vaxzervria and Covishield vaccines appears to be very low. Data from the UK suggest the risk is approximate ly four cases per million case 50 000 who receive the vaccine. while the rate is estimated to be approximately one per 100,000 in the European Union. Countries assessing the risk of TTS following the Covid-19 vaccination should perform a benefit-risk analysis that considers local epidemiology (including incidence and mortality from Covid-19 disease), age groups targeted for vaccination and the availability of alternative vaccines. The statement, following a review by WHO's Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety, flagged the possibility of "a geographic variation in the risk of these rare adverse events" and urged evaluation of potential cases of TTS in all countries. At the time of writing, AstraZeneca has begun worldwide withdrawal of its Covid-19 vaccine. The pharma major says the vaccine was being removed from markets for commercial reasons; it was no longer being manufactured or supplied,

having been superseded by updated vaccines that tackle new variants.

and the Oxford-AstraZeneca Astra vaccine, manufactured and marketed by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), is troublingly at the centre of a fierce political AstraZeneca

the Opposition. with hv

Back in April 2021, a state-

conversation. In India, it is election time

> side effect". They may happen within a few days or a few weeks of taking the vaccine. but not several years after the vaccination.

What has contributed to row between the ruling Bharatiya Janata party and the mess is the insufficient emphasis on possible rare Scientists must investigate the side effects of all vacadverse effects during earlier awareness campaigns cines, rare or not. Questions must be asked about when the priority was to get eligible every person Covishield or any other vacvaccinated.

As Dr Anant Bhan, a researcher on global health and bioethics, puts it: "Every cine or drug in public interest. But how it is done, and whom is critical. Sweeping generalisations vaccine, including the long can do immense damage. In established and used oral India, nearly one out of every four children still miss polio vaccine, has some risk. But serious adverse effects out on essential vaccines. are rare and the benefits of Fear of vaccines is the last vaccines, whether old or new ones, far outweigh the risks How did we get to this The hysteria in the social media over the recent disclo-India's effort to vaccinate sure by AstraZeneca (about rare adverse effects of their its vast population against Covid vaccine, used

effects, like lowering blood counts or harming the heart, liver, and kidneys, or even increasing the risk of severe infections. Despite these risks, we still use chemotherapy because the benefits are clear. Similarly, in treatment for heart attacks, thrombolytic drugs can be life-saving, but they also carry the risk of causing bleeding in the brain, which can be fatal. Yet, we still administer them because the benefits outweigh the risks. So, it is not fair to blame the vaccine for these adverse events and blow them out of proportion. Yes, there have been cases of myocarditis, especially in younger people, but at the time, we did not fully understand the extent of the risk. However, it is worth noting that the antivaccine movement might do more harm than good by spreading fear and panic. If people become too scared to get vaccinated, it could have serious consequences for public health," says Dr S.P. Kalantari, professor of medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sevagram, Sciences. Maharashtra.

Which brings me to trust: the bedrock of immunisation programmes.

Trust remains vital in the age of polycrisis. uncertainty and shifting truths. How as

LETTERS **POLICE EXCESSES**

Police excesses over the arrestees and prisoners in jail after or before trial are uniformly rude, crude and extra constitutional throughout the world and the Indian Police, particularly the TN Police, cannot be any exception. The recent blood chilling incidents that took place in police custody testify to this truth. The undesirable and extra constitutional happenings are due to the fact that the policemen are constrained to do many acts in violation of the prescribed codes and rules to please the party in power, especially the CM who normally handles the Home portfolio. It is quite natural that most of them misuse and abuse the Policemen to serve their own personal, political and party interests by choking any voice of even a mild dissent of the critics and opposition parties.

> Kongunaattan Coimbatore

in the age of polvcrisis. uncertainty and shifting truths. There is a real need for nuance, openness and transparency in the vaccine

Trust remains vital

The very thought that a significant proportion of premature deaths can be averted by following a healthy lifestyle should wake the general population to something that is being said for the good health of the nation.

In the end, you are what you eat, and the old maxim should suffice as a reminder that there is a better way to eat so that we may live better. More fruits and nuts, more nutritious combos, less sugar, less carbs and less red meat is the way to go and to stick to this is a challenge people must accept if they wish to live longer and, more importantly, healthier.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER

R. MOHAN Resident Editor

Restdent Editor DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at: Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254750, 222547451

Coimbatore: No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256 Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040)

27805256

27803250. Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285 Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 276702 (2005) 27672 (2005) 2765224

5284/2555287, Fax (0866) 2555234

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618 Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904

Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore.
Phone: (0861) 2348581/82, Telefax (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: H. No. 1-21-12/1, Cheralabhutkur Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186
Phone : 9121181123

was widely lauded critiques about overall management of the pandemic notwithstanding. But the vaccination campaign, like so many other campaigns in recent years, pivoted around Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Until recently, Covid-19 vaccination certificates had the Prime Minister's photo. Mr Modi's photo was removed from CoWIN certificates after an Election Commission directive. "Vote for Modi as he got us Covid-19 vaccines", said a BJP leader last month. Now, several politicians opposed to Mr Modi have latched on to AstraZeneca's statement about rare side effects in a British court; all too predictably, BJP sympathisers see a grand conspiracy about AstraZeneca admitting to side effects in its Covishield vaccine during the ongoing election season. What is being muted in all the noisy paranoia about blood clots and heart attacks in relation to Covishield are

thing that one wants.

messy state?

Covishield in India) is unfortunate"

Dr Bhan points out there was always a large active online community of "anti-vaxxers" globally. Now there is a risk of the recent developments feeding local discourses over vaccines negatively. "Disclosure about risks of clotting (TTS) are not new findings. These were not hidden. They have been known and written about in medical journals since 2021. The problem is that in an election season the whole issue about known adverse effects as discussed in the context of a UK court case has got politicised. And there is a danger of sections of the public thinking that vaccines mean risk. This is dangerous," says Dr Bhan. Health advocates are stressing that it is crucial to remember that the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks. "To put it into perspective, let us consider cancer treatment. Some cancer three key words — a "rare drugs can have serious side

one communicates messages about vaccines is the key to building trust. There is a real need for a nuanced conversation, openness, and

transparency in the vaccine conversation. "Health policy messaging must convey that vaccines have significant benefits and acknowledge the rare risks. This calls for responsible behaviour on the part of everyone and there is an urgent need to build trust in the system. A person being vaccinated must believe that the health system will come to her/his aid if anything were to go wrong, even if that probability is rare. We cannot whitewash concern whenever and wherever it arises," says Dr Bhan.

The system cannot be

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee @gmail.com.

opaque.

LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIP

I endorse the opinion of Chhattisgarh High Court that live-in- relationship is a stigma imported from the west ("Livein is imported, stigma in India", May 9). "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", said Rudyard Kipling. A Hindu marriage is a sacrament, not a contract. The 'Saptapati' (Seven steps) in Hindu marriage refers to the seven promises of marriage that the bride and groom should take with each step. When the bridegroom ties the sacred thread (mangalsutra) around the bride's neck, the priest chants the Vedic mantra 'mangalyam tantunanena' that solidifies the conjugal relationship. The apex court expressly states that a Hindu marriage is not complete unless accompanied by appropriate ceremonies and rituals like Saptapati. The Chhattisgarh High Court rightly The observes that live-in-relationship affords a convenient escape when things fail to work between partners!

Kangayam R. Narasimhan Chennai

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com



The Indian diaspora and fissures within: Why do Sunak & Co target UK refugees?

"O come with old Bachchoo and leave the rest Though Khayyam and Rumi are still the best He who tries and tries they say never dies — So Bachchoo attempts poetic conquest..." — From Aesop's Goal, by Bachchoo

K. SUDHAKAR

Printer & Publishe

here is no escaping the fact: I am part of what some characterise as the "Indian diaspora". I haven't decided whether being a member of it

is a historical triumph or something to be ashamed of. I suppose, to settle my trembling heart on the question, I should examine the evidence for one or the other — for being proud or ashamed of being a "diasporic" individual. The question doesn't keep me awake all night, but some events, recent encounters, media shows and even a recent academ-ically researched book, bring me to wonder.

It's Edward T.G. Anderson's Hindu Nationalism in the Indian Diaspora. He begins the book with a history of the formation of what can be loosely labelled the Indian "diaspora". This is not the belated account of people like the Pakistani workers in the mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s; or myself, who came as a student to Britain in the mid-1960s and for various reasons remained (do read my autobiography Fragments Against My Ruin, which says why I stayed. Stop advertising your rubbish – Ed).

Anderson's account takes into consideration the movements of labour under the British Raj - the indentures to the Caribbean islands in the nine-

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teenth century, the migration of Indians to South Africa, etc. The diaspora is not just recent history, though Anderson's account concerns itself in great detail with the genesis of the Hindu and Hindutva ideology and organisations which arose through the inspiration of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Anderson's detailed and profound analysis is subtitled "Transactional Politics and British Multi-culturalism". Undoubtedly, the Hindutva ideology as perpetrated by the RSS and VHP have some impact on the worship and beliefs of the Hindu communities in the UK. The public impact of these is nothing more than the presence of predominantly Gujarati hordes at London's Wembley Stadium when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited and presided there.

The only "political" impact that this particular tenet of philosophy had was perhaps a riot of Hindu-Muslim dissent which lasted a few days in Leicester with agitators from each community invading the residential districts of the other and shouting slogans. Big deal?

The "diasporic" record, in recent times, is so much more interesting. Let's count the "diaspora" as people from the subcontinent. Muslims welcome in the term.

These have made their mark in the culture, commerce and politics of the UK to which I'm concentrating my contentions — not that I can't see that Leo Varadkar in Ireland and Kamala Harris in the United States have made their mark.

The world knows that Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, among others, have had a profound impact on world literature — not to mention the diasporic master of international insight, the Nobel laureate Vidia Naipaul.

Vidia seems to have an ambivalent position as one of us — as an Indian diasporic. He was a Trinidadian by origin, a descendant of Indian indentured labour and, in Anderson's definition, a distinct diasporic. He wrote an early book of discovery through an exploration of India called An Area of Darkness, which was denounced, almost universally, by Indian critics.

But then, when in his next book and in several historically truthful works he wrote about the cruelty of the Muslim regimes of India against the Hindu population, he was adopted by the Hindutva brigade as one of their spokespersons.

He was actually, trust me, who knew him intimately and personally, no such thing.

And so, gentle reader, apart from these triumphs of diasporic achievement, I have, after reading Edward's meticulously examined book, contemplated sadly, disappointedly, writing something about the truly negative contribution of us diasporic members to countries, to culture, to history and even to truth.

I mean targeting very prominent people like Hedgie Soongone (yes, my name for Rishi Sunak), the unelected by people or party, "Prime Minister of the

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UK"; Cruella Cowardperson (satirical name for Suella Fernandes Braverman) and Ugly "Priti" Patel... and yes, some others.

These — the named three — are the diasporic Indian children of immigrants who fled Africa and were given shelter in the UK and British citizenship. What have all three dedicatedly done to further their Conservative political careers?

Gentle reader, "Priti", promoted to the rank of home secretary, formulated a policy to send people fleeing from prejudice, oppression and even genocide and seeking asylum in Britain, to Rwanda - a country now designated as a great, safe place after its enocidal history between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes.

Ugly's family had fled Africa — Idi Amin, racial dis-crimination... geddit? So did the families of Cruella and Hedgie, both of whom have, in political office as successive home secretaries of the UK and as PM, sucked up to the same policy. Yes, very many of this trio's Tory colleagues think their policy is a disaster. It is.

My humble diasporic opinion — or question — is why do the descendants of families who fled Africa want to exile desperate refugees to be forcibly sent there?

Thirty pieces of silver? Nah!

Pandering to supposed crowd prejudice? Most likely. But that's not decidedly, uniformly, ambivalent Britain. Watch this space!











Editorial

P.D.T. Achary

is former Secretary

General, Lok Sabha



Voting for relief <u>Interim bail for Delhi CM reverses</u> damage to level playing field in polls

n granting interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Supreme Court of India has reversed a development that upset the level playing field for the ongoing general election. When Mr. Kejriwal was arrested in March for his alleged involvement in corruption in the formulation of a liquor policy for Delhi, it might not have seemed an obvious setback to federalism and democracy. But the arrest of a serving Chief Minister and a key figure in the Opposition, when the election process was already on, sent shock waves among regional parties. And, as he remained behind bars, it stoked fears that States run by parties other than those in power at the Centre could easily be undermined by getting central agencies to arrest Chief Ministers on charges that may or may not be based on evidence. In Mr. Kejriwal's case, the Court is right in both citing the general election as a good enough reason to grant him interim bail until June 1, when the last phase of polling will be held, and in rejecting the Centre's argument that it would amount to favourable treatment to politicians. As the Court has pointed out, interim release orders relate to the "peculiarities associated with the person in question and surrounding circumstances". The absence of a notable leader from the campaign arena, especially when he is yet to be convicted, will be a factor that will cast a doubt on the free and fair nature of the election.

The Court has made his bail conditional on his keeping away from the Delhi Secretariat and the CM's office. And he is to abide by his statement that he would not sign any official file, unless required to do so to get the Lieutenant General's approval for something. That Mr. Kejriwal did not respond to several summonses from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) does not show him in a good light. But, at the same time, it cannot be forgotten that be it the CBI's corruption charge, or the ED's money-laundering charge, the case against him is based on a belated statement made by suspects who had turned approvers and obtained pardon on the promise of testifying against him. The probative value of these statements will be tested during trial. Another factor to be noted is that there are statutory restrictions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act on seeking bail, resulting in many questioning the validity of their arrest, as Mr. Kejriwal has done, rather than file for bail. If only courts applied the basic principle of granting bail to those who are unlikely to flee from justice, with appropriate conditions to neutralise their likely influence over witnesses and to safeguard evidence, orders granting bail would not evoke political reactions and doubts whether the political class is being unduly favoured.

Folds and faults Free use of AlphaFold 3 must extend to scrutiny of its inner mechanisms

The fraying of the model code of conduct

he model code of conduct has, once again, attracted national attention because of its egregious violation by senior politicians during the election campaign for the 18th Lok Sabha. Political parties are duty bound to obey the code as it was framed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the basis of a consensus among all political parties in order to have a peaceful, orderly and civilised election. However, as elections in India are a no holds barred war, this consensus often breaks down with party leaders losing no opportunity to hit their opponents below the belt. Of late, elections are a free for all. Distortions, blatant falsehoods, mischievous misinterpretations, slanging matches – all are par for the course.

The Constitution mandates the ECI to conduct elections in a free and fair manner. In fact, free and fair elections are a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Article 324 confers on the Election Commission, plenary powers to enable it to ensure a free and fair election. In Election Commission of India vs State of Tamil Nadu and Others (1993), the Supreme Court of India restates the role and powers of the Commission in the following words: "The ECI is a high constitutional authority charged with the function and the duty of ensuring free and fair elections and of the purity of the electoral process. It has all the incidental and ancillary powers to effectuate the constitutional objective and purpose. The plenitude of the Commission's powers corresponds to the high constitutional functions it has to discharge."

Key provisions

The model code of conduct was framed by the Commission to ensure that the elections are free and fair and the electoral process remains pure. Also, a level playing field is a necessary condition to ensure that elections are free and fair. The key provisions of the code are: no party or candidate shall indulge in any activity which may aggravate existing differences or create communal hatred or cause tension between different castes, communities - religious or linguistic; criticism of other political parties shall be confined to their policies and programs. No unverified allegations or distortions against other parties shall be allowed; there shall be no appeal to cast or communal feelings for securing votes; no party or its candidate shall indulge in corrupt practices or commit offences under the election law.

Needless to say that violation of these directions are serious infractions of the code, making it impossible to hold free and fair elections and maintain the purity of the electoral process. So, it is the duty of the ECI to quickly examine those violations and take suitable action It is the duty of the Election Commission of India to quickly examine violations and take action so that the purity of the electoral process is maintained against the violators so that the purity of the electoral process is maintained. Here a question arises as to what action the Commission can take in such cases.

On deterrent action

It is common knowledge that the model code of conduct is not legally enforceable. So, it is not possible to seek any relief from the court for violation of the code. The only way open to the aggrieved party is to complain to the Commission and seek its intervention. It must be noted here that neither The Representation of the People Act nor The Conduct of Election Rules makes any provision for the model code of conduct. However, the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order brought out by the ECI in 1968 makes a provision to deal with the violation of the Model Code of Conduct. The Symbols order was issued in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324. Paragraph 16A of the Symbols order says that in case of violation of the model code of conduct or other direction or orders of the Commission, it can suspend the recognition of a party, or, in an extreme case, even withdraw its recognition. Suspension or withdrawal of recognition of a party will deprive it of the symbol reserved for it. This will pose enormous problems to a recognised party as it will not be able to use its reserved symbol in the election. So, the ECI has the power to act decisively against the violators of the model code of conduct. We have seen the ECI taking violators off the election campaign for 24 to 48 hours. It can also take the violator off the campaign in the elections no matter how high he or she is in the party. Such actions by the ECI will definitely act as a deterrent and send the right message to the political parties.

However, experience shows that after the late T.N. Seshan, the ECI has never acted so decisively as he used to do. T.N. Seshan struck terror in the minds of politicians. Elections in India today are a do-or-die battle and the only aim here is to defeat the enemy. Political adversaries are treated as enemies and the goal is to exterminate them. Elections have long ceased to be the civilised democratic exercise they are meant to be, where each player scrupulously adheres to be norms set by law. Now, every effort is made to stir the basest passions in men. At one time there existed a consensus among politicians that nothing should be done to exacerbate the divisions in the society especially on the basis of religion.

We should not forget that religion in India is a potent tool which can be effectively used to divide society. The founding fathers of the Constitution wisely chose secularism and democracy as the warp and woof of the Constitution. They believed that only secularism can hold this country of immense diversities together. The Representation of People Act 1951, has made any appeal in the name of any religion a corrupt practice which will invalidate an election. Thus, religion is kept out of the electoral battle by the statute. But it is brought back and installed at the centre of this battlefield by politicians. The nation wants the ECI to address this issue with full seriousness.

A violation of oath

The issue of senior members of the Council of Ministers making communally charged speeches during the election campaign has not been dealt with sternly by the ECI or the courts. Speeches of such persons during the election campaign, which have extremely toxic references to the followers of a particular religion or community or caste and which can promote hatred in a section of voters, flagrantly violate the oath they have taken as Ministers. A Minister, through the oath he takes, gives a solemn assurance to the people of the country that he will do right to all manner of people without favour or ill will. By speaking directly or indirectly against a section of the society, they demonstrate their inherent bias and ill will against them which is a violation of oath. The Constitution or the election law does not prescribe any punishment for violating the oath by Ministers. Section 125 of the Representation of People Act 1951, provides for a three-year sentence as maximum punishment for promoting feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of citizens on the ground of religion. Members of the Council of Ministers of the Union as well as the States are holding high constitutional office and are oath bound to do right to all without ill will towards anyone. Therefore, any utterances on their part to the contrary need to be seriously dealt with. The apex court can give a standing direction to the ECI to initiate criminal proceedings under Section 125 of the Representation of People Act 1951 whenever such occasion arises and also take the violators off the campaign till the ongoing elections are over.

The top court has always laid stress on maintaining the purity of an election. It says: "what is meant by purity of elections? According to us, it means that the elections should not only be free from corrupt practices but also free from evil practices" (*A. Neelalohithadasan Nadar vs George Mascrene*). Promoting hatred between two sections of people on the ground of religion , cast or community is an evil practice. The Constitution puts a lot of powers in the hands of the ECI. These powers are meant to be exercised when the need arises.

Freshwater quest, the likely new gold hunt

ne would never imagine that huge volumes of freshwater exist under the saline ocean. In the 1960s, says a media report, the U.S. Geological Survey drilled boreholes off the New Jersey coast and



future generations.

The law of the sea Although UNCLOS arrays most of the internationally accepted law on the subject empowered under UNCLOS to administer and control the activities in the Area. Consequently, exploration of all minerals from the Area is required to be in accordance with the rules, regulations and procedures laid down by the Authority. If state parties to UNCLOS are regulated by the Authority, who regulates state parties to the Geneva Conventions, especially in activities concerning mining and exploratory activities in the "Area"?

roteins are long chains of amino-acid residues that fold into specific shapes. Properly folded proteins function normally whereas misfolded ones can lead to debilitating diseases. Since these chains are quite long, a given protein can actually fold into one of a very large number of shapes – yet it makes a beeline for a specific shape while avoiding all the others. How and why this happens constitute an important mystery in structural biology called the protein-folding problem. In 2018, five decades after it was mooted, a Google subsidiary named Deep-Mind developed a purpose-built AI tool to predict the shapes into which different proteins could fold, called AlphaFold. The upgraded AlphaFold 2 followed two years later. Many scientists and technologists acknowledge that these two deeplearning systems have transformed human awareness of protein structures, a feat the machines demonstrated in the biennial Critical Assessment of Protein Structure Prediction contest. Recently, DeepMind launched AlphaFold 3, which can reportedly predict the shapes with nearly 80% accuracy as well as model DNA, RNA, ligands, and modifications to them. As with the first two AlphaFolds, no. 3 is great for being able to elucidate the folded proteins' structures in seconds rather than the years humans have required with advanced microscopic techniques.

Not surprisingly, the excitement that followed the release of AlphaFold 3 has been unable to escape the hype and overblown expectations that dogged the launches of its predecessors. These machines can predict protein structures with relatively high accuracy but they cannot say why they are folded that way; this is still the task of human scientists. How the AlphaFolds will catalyse drug discovery is also unclear. Many drugs fail to make it to the market from the laboratory because medical researchers are unable to anticipate all the interactions between the drugs' various components and various parts of the body. The protein-folding problem is important to crack but it will not magically improve drugs' chances in human clinical trials. It is a step in that direction. Finally, the free use of AlphaFold 3 is limited while its inner mechanisms are unavailable for public exploration or scrutiny, so far. While the motivation to innovate of DeepMind is laudable, the cutting-edge value AlphaFold 3 presents to health care means the company should explore alternative revenue models in which the system is not trapped behind paywalls or exorbitant prices - a fate that has already befallen scientific papers and medicines born of publicly funded research. Recall that the AlphaFolds' training data itself includes protein structures first elucidated by such research.

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unexpectedly struck freshwater. Similarly, with time, a team of scientists from Vietnam and even in other countries have discovered underwater sources of fresh water. For example, a river under the sea was discovered at the bottom of the Black Sea. This river appears to be over a 100 feet deep and has a flow rate of about four miles per hour; about 22,000 cubic meters of water passes through this particular channel. It would count among one of the largest rivers in the world when compared to land-based rivers, say media links. This makes one thing certain: there is scientific evidence of rivers under the sea.

Statistics show that the total volume of water on earth is estimated at 1.386 billion km³, where 97.5% is salt water and 2.5% freshwater. Out of this freshwater, only 0.3% is in liquid form on the surface, which means that the rest of the freshwater is underground, including on or under the ocean bed.

Considering that freshwater is a depleting resource, countries will begin exploring for and exploiting freshwater from above or under their ocean bed, within their maritime zones. Eventually, countries will expand exploration beyond their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), into what is commonly known as the "Area", which is covered under Part XI of the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention, 1982 (UNCLOS). The "Area" under UNCLOS is defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction and is referred to as the common heritage of mankind. This means that it is available for everyone's use and benefit, keeping in mind the Archana Reddy

is Advocate, LLM International Shipping Law-IMO-International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI), Malta

India can take the lead in shaping non-controversial legislative text that addresses the gaps in the laws of the sea, especially in exploratory activities that concern freshwater extraction customary international law continues to remain an important source of the law of the sea. While UNCLOS is known as a single comprehensive text covering the constitution and the governance of the oceans, it is interesting to know that the Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, the Convention on the High Seas, the Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources of the High Seas and the Convention on the Continental Shelf (Geneva Conventions on the Law of the Sea, 1958) cover most of the issues as UNCLOS and these Geneva conventions are mostly platformed over customary international law.

To complicate matters further, Article 311 of UNCLOS states that this Convention shall prevail as between states parties, over the Geneva Conventions on the Law of the Sea, 1958. Hence, not only is UNCLOS not applicable to these non-signatory states but also these countries do not recognise the doctrine of Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nm) or the "Area" (beyond 200 nm). The least of the surprise is that the United States is a signatory to the Geneva Conventions 1958 and not UNCLOS.

Exploration and exploitation of the "Area" under UNCLOS is limited to the term "resources", which is defined as all solid, liquid or gaseous mineral resources in situ in the Area at or beneath the seabed, including polymetallic nodules – and resources when recovered from the Area are referred to as "minerals". If this be the case, does the definition of the term "minerals" cover "freshwater"? The International Seabed Authority (referred to as the Authority) is

A zone of exploration

As evident from current events, the next wars are expected to be fought over water and expansion. Given that in the years to come freshwater will become a very scarce and an expensive commodity, the Area will qualify as a potential zone for freshwater exploration and extraction. Just as oil wells are explored and capped for future use, fresh water wells may be identified and capped for future use. In the lacuna of specific legislation and terminologies governing and controlling the advancement of resource beyond national jurisdiction (such as fresh water) integrated with multiple legislations governing the law of the sea, the "Area" will once again attract controversy.

Given that a large international community is diligently working towards Sustainable Development Goals and activities beyond national jurisdictions, arriving at an amicable non-controversial legislative text, addressing various lacunae in the laws of the sea, especially exploratory activities concerning freshwater from the Area, ought to be the next logical milestone. In this, India can take the lead role. This would be an area which would truly benefit mankind, rather than spending gallons of money, looking for water and proposing plans for human settlement on Mars and the moon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Interim bail granted I write this letter as Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, and a former Union Minister for Law and Justice. The Supreme Court's order granting interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal balances the sanctity of the fundamental right to personal liberty and freedom of expression in the election season with the necessity to observe the legal due process in a criminal investigation. In as much as the Court's order facilitates

campaigning by Mr. Kejriwal and casting of his vote in the Lok Sabha elections, the order subserves the democratic cause in furtherance of the basic structure of the Constitution. At the same time, the order clearly suggests that interim bail to Mr. Kejriwal is upon its own facts and will not serve as a precedent nor be seen as a discriminatory concession to politicians consistent with the constitutional mandate of non-discrimination and equality under law.

The Court order reaffirms the legal principles for the grant of interim bail to those in custody, and is a fine balancing act in furtherance of the democratic fundamentals. **Ashwani Kumar,** New Delhi

The top court has proved, yet again, that justice is very much alive and kicking in our country. We can now expect the wounded tiger using all his might to see that the NDA has a difficult time. One hopes that Mr. Kejriwal makes the best use

of this god-sent opportunity. **Tharcius S. Fernando,** Chennai

> Mr. Kejriwal can now move to the campaign trail with new energy. It seems democracy in India is being guarded by the top court that is thwarting the machinations of an autocratic entity. **M.C. Vijay Shankar,** Chennai

Debt and China China's debt trap diplomacy is focused on nations that

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are either strategically located or rich in resources such as cobalt, oil or Lithium. China's signature foreign policy, the Belt and Road Initiative and its maritime version, is to connect Chinese ports on the South China Sea to seaports in the Indian Ocean, West Asia, and the Horn of Africa. These networks clearly benefit China through an increase in commerce, and when debts cannot be repaid, they renegotiate by conceding valuable and strategic national assets. It is true that no nation invests or lends enormous amounts in another country for altruistic reasons. China insists on sovereign guarantees for loans by the host governments. Sri Lanka has become a cautionary tale on the kind of problems Chinese projects can cause (Datapoint, Opinion page, May 9). **H.N. Ramakrishna,**

Bengaluru

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name.

A ND-NDE

GROUND ZERO



JD(S) MLA H.D. Revanna being arrested and brought to the SIT office in Bengaluru. SUDHAKARA JAIN

Power play, politics, and perversion

Days before Hassan district went to the polls, videos and photos allegedly showing MP Prajwal Revanna sexually abusing women have circulated in Karnataka, sparking outrage. While political parties have been attacking one another over the issue, Prajwal, who is seeking re-election, has gone abroad. K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj and Sathish G.T. report on the incident that has left the State and the country shaken, and the investigation

> Trigger warning: The following article contains references to rape and abuse. Please avoid reading if you are triggered by these themes.



n the morning of April 22, a resident across of Hassan in south Karnataka was walking along the tracks of the district stadium, about 190 km from making use Bengaluru, when he noticed a pen drive placed of these on a pedestal. He ignored it at first, but then cuwomen as riosity got the better of him. He picked up the pen drive and gave it to a friend, he said. pawns in That was not the only pen drive in the staditheir own um. Others said they noticed 8-10 pen drives in game. different areas of the same stadium. Walkers in ROOPA Maharaja's Park in the heart of Hassan said they HASSAN had also spotted pen drives on the benches. Activist and poe As the day went by, it became clear that it was based in Hassar raining pen drives in Hassan. When people downloaded the content, they found sexually explicit video clips, photos, and screenshots of video calls. Soon, this went viral. The women in the photos and videos were clearly visible, but the man was not. However, he could be seen partially in the screenshots of the video calls he made to the women. The man is allegedly Prajwal Revanna, the Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)] Member of Parliament from Hassan and the grandson of former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda. He is the candidate of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The Hassan Lok Sabha constituency was scheduled to go to the polls in the second phase, four days later, on April 26. There were at least two clips in which the women could be seen resisting the man's advances and pleading with him even as he raped them while recording the act. One of them was later allegedly abducted by Prajwal's father H.D. Revanna, who is a former Minister, and MLA of Holenarsipur, the home town of the Gowda clan. The police estimate that there are close to 100 women in these videos. The women, both young and old, single and married, come from different backgrounds: they are house-helps, party workers, professionals, and government officials. Some of them were familiar to the people of Hassan as they had been actively involved in political events and as officials. Nobody had complained to the police until the videos went viral. Two survivors lodged complaints with the police. Sources in the police say the MP sexually abused women who approached him for personal, professional, or constituency work. One of the victims said that he coerced her while threatening to harm her family members. He recorded videos of the sexual act and blackmailed her, she said. Police say he used the official residence of Deve Gowda, a Rajya Sabha MP, for these acts.

People political parties are

ferred to during his press conferences. Devaraje, who had unsuccessfully contested from Holenarasipur against H.D. Revanna in 2023, is known for his scathing attacks against the Revanna family. He had said, "I have videos and photos related to Prajwal Revanna. The content expose the true character of the JD(S) leader. I am not in a position to release them to the media as Prajwal Revanna has got a stay order from the court restraining the media from broadcasting the videos and photos." Devaraie told the media a couple of

He claimed that Prajwal's family forced him to sell his land to a businessman in Bengaluru.

Prajwal flees

Hassan went to the polls on April 26. Prajwal cast his vote in Paduvalahippe in Holenarsipur taluk. That was the last time he was seen in public. The next day, he flew to Germany from Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru, at 2 a.m. using his diplomatic passport. He was suspended by the JD(S).

Prajwal's flight led to more anger. Following a letter by the Karnataka State Commission for Women seeking a probe into the alleged instances of sexual abuse, the State government formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT). Bijay Kumar Singh, a 1996 batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, who is Additional Director General of Police, Criminal Investigation Department, is heading the SIT. He successfully cracked the murders of rationalists Gauri Lankesh and M.M. Kalburgi. The team that is nearly all-women includes two women IPS officers, Suman D. Pennekar and Seema Latkar.

The SIT was referred a First Information Report (FIR) registered on April 28 at Holenarsipura. A former house help of the Revannas, who does not feature in the clips, alleged sexual harassment by Revanna and Prajwal. It then expanded the probe to include Revanna as well.

The SIT has since then registered three ne

to strip, and harass me. He has sexually assaulted me multiple times in these years and blackmailed me saying he will make the video public," she said in her complaint.

In many of the videos they have accessed, the man's face is not visible, say SIT officials. They believe this gave the perpetrator confidence that he would not be caught. However, SIT officials are confident of using forensics and establishing the man's identity in the video.

The second complaint pertains to a former house help in the Revannas' Holenarsipura household. She is about 60. She is seen in a video clip pleading with the man to spare her. In the video, she says she served food to the man's father and grandfather and begs that he leave her alone. But the man, whose face is not visible, forces himself on her.

The woman had gone missing since. On May 1, her 20-year-old son walked into K.R. Nagar Police Station in Mysuru claiming that his mother was forcibly taken away by a man called Satish Babu at Revanna's behest to prevent her from testifying against Prajwal. He said Satish had claimed that his mother was in danger of being arrested and took her away. He realised that his mother had been abducted after he discovered the video clip. This led to an FIR against Revanna for abduction.

On May 4, the SIT rescued the woman. She was allegedly held captive at a farmhouse belonging to the former personal secretary to Revanna in Hunsur, Mysuru. Minutes after Revanna's anticipatory bail plea was turned down by the Special Court for Elected Representatives, Bengaluru, the SIT team arrested him from the house of his father. Out of deference for the former Prime Minister who is in his 90s, the SIT officials say they waited at the door for half an hour for Revanna to emerge. Revanna has now been remanded to judicial custody. The total number of arrests in the abduction case is now six.

The politics

The incident has led to protests in many pockets of Karnataka. Interpol has issued a Blue Corner Notice against Prajwal. This notice is part of Interpol's colour-coded notices which enable countries to "share alerts and requests for information (on wanted persons/crimes) worldwide".

Meanwhile, speculations are rife that Prajwal is unlikely to return home before June 4, when the results of the elections will be declared. "Prajwal's case has become a national issue and the INDIA bloc parties are trying to embarrass the BJP with it. If Prajwal returns now, he will dominate the news cycle for at least a week. So, it is unlikely he will return in a hurry," says a leader.

Former Rajya Sabha member H.K. Javare Gowda says he was shocked when he learned about



He said he would make this video public if I told anyone. He said he was not visible in the video, while I was. He said I had to have sex with him whenever he called me. He has sexually assaulted me multiple times in the last few years and blackmailed me.

SURVIVOR IN HER POLICE COMPLAINT

the issue a few days ago. "I was a blind follower of Deve Gowda once, but not now. I pity him. I want him to talk about the issue " he says. Deve Gowda



The episode sparked massive protests in Karnataka and led to mudslinging among the political parties. The agitators demanded a probe into the case and the immediate arrest of the accused.

A warning

YK

By the evening of April 22, the people realised that these were the videos that a local BJP leader and lawyer, G. Devaraje Gowda, had often retimes earlier this year.

Soon, a letter written by Devaraje Gowda to the BJP State president in December 2023 surfaced. In it, Devaraje had claimed that he had a pen drive containing 2,976 explicit clips of Prajwal and advised the State president not to field him as the NDA candidate. He also said a copy of the pen drive had been sent to leaders of the Congress, the ruling party in Karnataka.

Though JD(S) workers have blamed the Congress, there has been a buzz in political circles that BJP workers played a major role in circulating the videos.

Devaraje has now alleged that the Congress circulated the content and claimed that Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar spoke to him about the issue. However, Karthik Gowda, a former driver of Prajwal, who has released a video message from an undisclosed location, claimed that he downloaded the videos from Prajwal's phone, transferred them to his own phone, and handed them over to Devaraje, who leaked them. Karthik Gowda has often said that he fell out with Prajwal's family over a land issue.



Members of the National Students' Union of India, the student wing of the Congress, hold a poster of JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna during a protest in Bengaluru. PTI

FIRs: two booking Prajwal for rape, based on the complaints of two victims, and one booking Revanna for abducting one of the women in an alleged bid to prevent her from testifying against Prajwal. She was eventually rescued by the SIT.

"Though we have been able to identify many victims from the videos doing the rounds, the challenge has been to convince them to lodge complaints," says a senior SIT official.

When the videos went viral, the women did not know what to do, according to their friends. Initially, a couple of them approached senior police officers, complaining that some unknown people had been circulating images morphed with their photographs. When the police insisted that they file a formal complaint, they did not.

A few of the survivors have either left town or remained incommunicado. "They just want to be far from everyone," says a person who interacted with a couple of them.

Another friend of one of the survivors says, "It is the State government's responsibility to provide them with counselling."

The State government has announced that the survivors who come forward to complain will be given financial assistance and security cover. The SIT has roped in nearly 10 professional women counsellors who have provided the survivors support. "Most of the women are scared to complain. Moreover, in many cases their families may not know that their videos are being circulated. We need to counsel their families as well," a senior official says.

A resident of Holenarasipur says, "The Revanna family is feudal and ran the 'Republic of Hassan' with great impunity. Now it has come out in the open that the women who approached them seeking help were abused."

"The women were mostly from Hassan. This indicates the impunity Prajwal seemed to enjoy in Hassan," a political worker says.

Tales of horror

Two survivors have recounted their ordeal to the police. Based on their complaints, Prajwal has been booked for rape in two cases.

A political worker of the JD(S), 44, alleged that Prajwal raped her at his official residence in Hassan when she had gone to meet him in 2021 seeking seats for some women students in a hostel. She said he threatened to kill her and her husband if she did not cooperate. She also alleged that Prajwal took out his mobile phone and recorded the act. "He said he would make this video public if I told anyone. He said he was not visible in the video, while I was. He said I had to have sex with him whenever he called me. Later too, he used to make video calls to me asking me

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has not made a public appearance since the news broke and has remained silent.

The JD(S), the BJP, and Congress have been busy in a mudslinging match over the issue of how the video clips came into the public domain, so much so that this debate is threatening to mask the alleged abuse of the women.

JD(S) State president and Prajwal's uncle H.D. Kumaraswamy, who initially sought to distance himself and his father Deve Gowda from the controversy, is now accusing Shivakumar of distributing "25,000 pendrives" "to evidently influence elections in Hassan". He has also told Shivakumar that this was "not the way to become a leader of the Vokkaligas". He has alleged that the SIT is biased and has demanded, along with the BJP, a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

At the same time, JD(S) workers have held multiple protests across the State claiming to fight for the survivors and against Shivakumar. There are posters in Bengaluru condemning Shivakumar for "misusing" the explicit clips for his politics. In various instances, Kumaraswamy has expressed doubt over the veracity of the clips, while also saying he is "not defending" Prajwal.

Countering the JD(S) charge, many Vokkaliga Ministers and leaders of the Congress have accused Kumaraswamy and BJP of "attempting to cover-up of the sex abuse" by diverting the attention from ensuring justice to the survivors to the alleged role of leaders involved in the distribution of pen drives.

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, also a Vokkaliga leader, attacked Kumaraswamy for "trying to use the community as a shield to cover up henious crimes and, in the process, dragging the community into the biggest sex abuse scandal in the world".

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has maintained that the SIT is "impartial" and has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport immediately, so that the MP is forced to return to India. Prajwal's passport has not been cancelled yet. Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have hit back saving law and order is a State issue.

Activists are angry about the political turn the case has taken. "People across political parties are making use of these women as pawns in their own game," says Roopa Hassan, an activist and poet based in Hassan.

For now, everyone is waiting for the Lok Sabha election results, especially in Hassan, and Prajwal's return. But this alleged sex abuse case will likely cast a shadow on Karnataka's politics for years to come. Meanwhile, the victims are scared, stigmatised, and are battling patriarchy.

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SATURDAY - MAY 11, 2024

Prudent move

RBI's proposal for tighter infra lending norms welcome

he Reserve Bank of India's draft guidelines on project financing have created a ripple of anxiety among lenders and infrastructure players, with many of the industry groups approaching the regulator to relax the rules. The bone of contention is the proposal that lenders should make a general provision of 5 per cent of the outstanding loans in all existing as well as fresh project loans. Lenders are of the opinion that this will reduce the funds available for giving credit and will increase the cost of project financing.



While the provisioning by lenders could go up a little, the central bank's move seems to be guided by prudence. The higher provisioning is a pre-emptive action which will prevent risks from building-up in bank balance sheets. The cautious stance adopted by the central bank is influenced by past lending mishaps, notably during 2004 to 2008, when large loans given to infrastructure projects turned into bad loans, severely impairing bank balance sheets. Financing large infrastructure projects continues to be a risky proposition given their long duration and the numerous uncertainties which can derail the execution. RBI's latest Financial Stability Report notes that GNPA for infrastructure, excluding electricity, was at an elevated level of 4.9 per cent as of September 2023. GNPA in the construction sector was higher, at 8.7 per cent. Corporates could be waiting for political uncertainty around the general elections to end before embarking on capital expenditure. The central bank is right in tightening the rules for project lending at this juncture, so that the future growth in private capital investment is smooth.

The fears among lenders regarding the capex cycle getting impeded by these rules are largely unfounded. Once demand improves, private sector will come forward to make investments, regardless of the small jump in finance cost. With the interest rates set to trend lower in the coming months, finance cost will move down anyway. Also, the central bank is not asking banks to increase the provisioning from the current 0.4 per cent to 5 per cent immediately. The provisioning has to increase gradually by 1.5 per cent every year, to reach 5 per cent by March 2027. That said, the central bank should take the feedback from industry and other stakeholders regarding the 5 per cent limit and calibrate



RICHA MISHRA

n May 2014, when Piyush Goyal took over as Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Ministries of Power, Coal and New & Renewable Energy, he had said that one of his major priorities is to de-bottleneck the system and ensure fast delivery.

But as luck would have it, soon after he assumed office he found himself dealing with Northern grid failure, which was mainly due to poor infrastructure — weak transmission network.

Since then, successive power ministers have continued with the reform process in the power sector. Measures have been taken to correct the situation and average availability of power has increased to 22.5 hours in rural areas and to 23.8 hours in urban areas, according to government data.

AT&C losses in power sector have come down due to reforms in revamped distribution sector scheme to help distribution utilities (Discoms) improve their operational efficiencies and financial sustainability.

One of the key contributors to the Modi-led NDA getting a second term was promises of rural electrification and subsequently the promise of electricity in every household.

According to the Power Ministry, in the 10-year NDA reign, from a power deficient situation we are now in a power self-sufficient state, thanks to the substantial generation capacity added. Substantial transmission capacity has also been added, it said.

Earlier this year, RK Singh, Minister of Power and New & Renewable Energy, had said that the power sector in India rewards its customers, adding that the government was racing to add electricity capacity to meet the growing demand.

Singh had further said that "we are the only country to have brought in general network access..." Singh had also claimed that he has tried to insulate the system and to curb the practice of making electricity a part of political parties' freebies.

But critics would say that is easier said than done. During election time, promises are made across sectors.

LAST MILE ISSUES

The challenge that remains for any government in this sector is the last mile connectivity — that is to ensure a healthy sub transmission and distribution network which can flow power from producer to distributor to the consumer with ease.

According to Power Ministry statement of January 2024, during 2023, 14,390 ckm of transmission lines, 61,591 MVA of transformation capacity and 4,290 MW Inter-regional Transfer

Unfinished tasks in power reforms

The power situation has improved in the last decade. But there is a tangle with respect to distribution, transmission issues

Capacity have been added.

In the last nine years, with the addition of 1,87,849 ckm (64.48 per cent increase), the transmission network of 4,79,185 ckm has evolved as the largest national synchronous grid in the world. The total inter-regional capacity to transfer power from one region to another has been enhanced to 1,16,540 MW (224.17 per cent increase) from 35,950 MW in the last nine years.

But herein lies the challenge. India has huge ambitions in energy transition and plans to have 500 GW of non-fossil based electricity installed capacity by 2030.

RENEWABLE PLANS

The Ministry of Power had constituted a high level committee under the Chairperson, Central Electricity Authority with representatives from Solar Energy Corporation of India, Central Transmission Utility of India Ltd, Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd, Grid-India, National Institute of Solar Energy, and National Institute of

Despite the impressive milestones achieved in generation and transmission, last mile connectivity remains a challenge Wind Energy for planning the transmission system required for having 500 GW of non-fossil fuel based installed capacity by 2030.

The Committee prepared a detailed Plan titled 'Transmission System for Integration of over 500 GW RE Capacity by 2030'.

The Plan has identified major upcoming non-fossil-based generation centres in the country, which include potential RE Zones in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra, RE park in Ladakh etc. and based on these potential generation centres, transmission systems have been planned.

The transmission plan also includes transmission system required for evacuation of 10 GW off-shore wind located in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. The plan provides broad transmission system requirement for having about 537 GW of Renewable Energy capacity by the year 2030.

However, the challenge is evacuation of renewable energy — transmission availability. The location of the sub-station to lift the power makes a difference for small players in the sector to succeed. Ideally, sub-station should be located within 5-10 km.

However, the actual location may substantially vary from the projected location. Since the IPP is responsible to connect transmission lines till the substation, the cost of laying transmission lines increases if the sub-station is located from the acquired land.

The development of transmission infrastructure — challenges persist with the dominant role of PSU — holding 60-70 per cent market share, which deter private players due to mismatched return requirements, according to the industry.

Connectivity - Access to grid continues to be a challenge. Many States have not invested in upgrading their grids. Despite the Centre's initiative for a unified national grid, varied State regulations and infrastructure deficiencies persist, hampering the seamless flow of renewable energy.

Streamlining processes and investing in grid upgrades are essential to facilitate timely project commissioning and maximise renewable energy utilisation.

And above all, availability of land and potential litigation issues are also major hurdles. In case of remote locations, the transmission infrastructure required to move power generated to consuming centres also increases costs for the IPP.

All these plus high transmission and distribution losses, which are more due to political factors, end up burning a hole in the consumer's pocket. These make all reform efforts seem half baked. For any government to fully succeed in this sector some harsh decisions need to be taken.

Better prospects ahead for IoT start-ups

it lower if required. Similarly, the timeline for making the provision can also be extended, if considered necessary.

The tighter regulations could turn out to be a boon if it makes borrowers look for alternate project financing avenues. The longer tenure of project finance results in asset-liability mismatch in banks since their deposits are typically of shorter duration. Shifting borrowers to the NaBFID (National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development), which finances loans for longer duration is a good option. Allowing infrastructure companies to tap the bond market with long duration bonds is another option which can be encouraged.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



A manufacturing rebound and pressure to decarbonise factories and buildings may widen IoT start-ups' clientele

Bharti Krishnan

he Internet of Things (IoT) revolution, now a decade old in India, promised to digitise factories and buildings, aiming to reduce their maintenance and energy costs. These expenses typically make up to 30 per cent of operational costs, making technology-driven scalable solutions for cost reduction a significant opportunity. Over the past decade, numerous

start-ups such as Ecolibrium Energy, Faclon Labs, Minion Labs, 75F, Zenatix Solutions, and Nebeskie Labs have utilised IoT and data analytics to offer asset maintenance and energy cost reduction solutions. However, very few have scaled up with revenues exceeding even ₹50 crore. Consequently, there's a scarcity of venture-backed companies in this sector.

Yet, shifting industry dynamics, including a rebound in the manufacturing sector and mounting pressure to decarbonise factories and buildings, may provide IoT start-ups with fresh momentum for growth.

Industrial automation, commonly known as Industry 4.0, encompasses start-ups offering asset management solutions for commercial real estate buildings and factories by digitizing machinery and systems. They connect existing machinery with sensors to collect operational data on machinery, energy consumption, air and water quality, and other critical aspects.

This data is then analysed to provide insights on energy consumption and machinery health, enabling facility managers to take timely action. This approach is typically offered through the Software as a Service (SaaS) model, with start-ups being paid a portion of the savings accrued by clients.

However, these young companies have found it difficult to find the right customer segment. Industry 4.0 solutions are typically targeted at large commercial buildings and energy-intensive industries, who need a wide variety of solutions apart from energy efficiency, and hence prefer to either work with automation majors such as Schneider Electric, Honeywell, or with consulting companies. On the other hand, mid-sized companies are not keen to incur upfront expenses in sensors.

Despite these challenges, several factors indicate potential avenues for growth. For example, with reducing emissions becoming crucial, there's a separate budget for energy savings, especially for large real estate companies pursuing green certifications. Additionally, there's a surge in smart



IOT. The future of industry/ISTOCKPHOTO

manufacturing, with aggregators such as Zetworks and Karkhana.io outsourcing manufacturing to mid-size SMEs, potentially making digitalization more cost-efficient.

Start-ups are also working on reducing the upfront investment required by their clients in sensors and innovating on the business models. For example, Bangalore-based Clairco is proposing to manufacture its own sensors and offer energy efficiency as a service, thus eliminating the need for clients to make any investments in sensors.

Similarly, Hyderabad-based Zodhya went back to the drawing board to reduce the fixed investment needed to install its AI-based plug-in that optimizes energy efficiency.

Additionally, automation companies and facility management companies are

<u>R Narayanan</u>

by high fares.

Air turbulence

Navi Mumba

the existential to the aspirational.

Indian airline industry is facing

turbulence and Air India is not an

exception to this. Airlines are facing

several challenges and flyers are hit

Though the turbulence seems to be

Express, the flight cancellations and

the persistent HR challenges within

the Indian aviation sector remain.

Jayanthy Subramaniam

over for now for the Air India

partnering with start-ups to leverage their expertise and explore new markets. For example, 75F has raised investment from Siemens AG, and Zenatix Solutions has been acquired by Schneider Electric.

Recently, Panasonic India also started Panasonic Ignition, an accelerator program to identify start-ups that offer energy management solutions in commercial spaces. Similarly, facility management firm JLL runs Idea Labs, a program to identify and nurture start-ups who offer building management solutions.

Investors are taking note too. Recently, Pavestone VC invested in the Series A round of LivNSense, which offers IoT-based solutions to reduce GHG emissions of global companies in "hard-to-abate" sectors like cement and asphalts, metals, mining, heavy engineering, and Petro-chemical manufacturing industries.

Also, Accel Partners recently picked Industry 5.0 as a theme for its latest batch of Accel Atoms, a programme to nurture and fund early stage start-ups.

As such, there is reason for optimism for Indian IoT start-ups. Let us hope that this time, we see the emergence of a few large companies.

The writer is founder of FineTrain, a boutique investment bank for climate start-ups.

• LETTERS TO EDITOR Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

'Uniform' policy

This refers to the article "The value of workplace uniforms" (May 10). The effect of uniforms on productivity, teamwork, and sense of belonging depends on the organisational culture and the top management leadership style because uniforms are enablers, not drivers.

If the organisation emphasises egalitarian culture, then wearing the same uniform by all employees will foster team cohesiveness. A bone of contention arises about who bears the cost — the company or the workforce. It becomes a critical factor in large entities. If supplied free, withdrawal of the same may be difficult. A final decision should be taken by weighing all parameters including the need for them in matters of safety and functionality. YG Chouksey Pune

Rural demand woes

The focus was on the rural economy during the sixties. Early Five year Plans were highly rural oriented, till urban might usurped central resources for itself. Rural infrastructure that could have sustained income levels throughout the year was put on the back burner for years. The result, relentless mass migration of rural labour to urban work hubs.

The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23 is revealing. The rural average monthly consumption spending per person was ₹3,773 against ₹6,459 for the urban.

The real income of farm families is the real indicator of agri growth. There has to be avenues for non-farm income in villages to even out seasonal earnings. The rural sector deserves to be raised from

•••

Tax compliance

Apropos the article on the subject, despite the substantial hike in IT collections in 2023-24, there is no doubt that there are huge disparities in the income levels. Certainly, increased compliance by collection of data from various sources and the information flowing through GST has helped in higher reporting of income. Also, with buoyant stock market, increase in capital gains may also have contributed to the IT mop up, since long- term capital gains and dividend are also taxed.

Kasiraman Ramachandran

Chennai

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Why India's elections matter for growth



PRANJUL BHANDARI

arly indications from the ongoing general election signal that it looks like a "normal election", a term political scientists use when there's no major shift in public opinion. Voter turnout in the first three phases of voting has been lower than the 2019 elections, likely reflecting no burning issue at play.

But we argue that this election is far from normal for India's economic future. In fact, the reforms that may follow could help determine India's medium-term growth and economic aspirations. So what reforms are we talking about?

Let's take a step back. Several important reforms, some of which have been in the works for well over a decade, have been implemented over the last decade. These include the introduction of a nationwide goods and services tax (GST). and the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act that better protects homebuyers. A new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has been implemented, while the digital public infrastructure has become more sophisticated. There has also been an increase in welfare schemes

The challenge is to keep pedalling hard to ensure many more economic reforms are completed over the next few years. Another challenge is to rationalise the welfare schemes (especially those for food and fertiliser) to make sure they are

sustainable. We divide up reforms the government may implement into three

buckets — easy, moderate and difficult. The "easy" bucket is largely a continuation of some recent policies, but would continue to demand smooth implementation. They include the government's push on infrastructure spending, including incentivising state governments to spend more on capex. The bucket also contains the continued effort to bring in investments, projectby-project, into innovative sectors like electronics, semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), green hydrogen and data centres. It includes developing more use cases for digital public infrastructure. for instance, the online market called the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) that helps small retailers. And it includes the continued push for macro stability - bringing down the fiscal deficit to sustainable levels, and



Between hard rock & an election



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

s Sikkim awaits the Assembly election results (voting was on April 19 and the votes will be counted on June 2, not June 4, along with the rest of the country, according to the Election Commission's latest decision), four significant events that took place in 2023 will shape the state's future trajectory.

First, in February 2023. footballer Bhaichung Bhutia merged his Hamro Sikkim Party with the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF). In tandem, SDF chief and fiveterm Sikkim chief minister km from the India-China bor-Pawan Chamling announced that 2024 would be his last election, made Mr Bhutia vice-president of the SDF, and offered him nomination enter the country to particito an Assembly constituency. Mr Bhutia's efforts to become e success so far. He was the Trinamool Congress candi- 2021. Reports based on govdate for mayor of Siliguri, an ernment sources stating that election he lost. He also lost concrete bunkers were being the Darjeeling Lok Sabha con- constructed on the Chinese stituency in 2014 to the side of the Naku La area in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). north Sikkim to facilitate In 2018, he launched the quick troop deployment have Hamro Sikkim Party in a bid not been refuted by India. to return to his home state.

was mocked by Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang Golay, who advised him to stick to football instead of attempting to toss dallo khursani (tiny red chillies grown in Sikkim and considered the hottest in the world) in politics. Second, Sikkim saw its

worst flash flood in recent history when in October a glacial lake flooded the Teesta river and the downstream

Teesta III hydroelectric dam. For a tiny state like Sikkim it was a catastrophe: More than 20 Army jawans and significant quantities of weaponry and ordnance vanished in the deluge. More than 100 bodies were recovered and over 60,000 people were affected. Corruption in compensation

became a major political issue and figured in the Assembly election. Third, the Dalai Lama paid

a three-day visit to Sikkim in December, the first in 13 years. The Paljor stadium, where he addressed followers, is just 50 der at Nathu La His visit followed China's refusal to allow three Indian wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh to pate in the 19th Asian Games. The last violent clash between a politician have met with lit- troops on the India-China the Old Pension Scheme for highest rates of suicide in

Mr Bhutia's electoral record Sikkimese erupted at the Sikkim is attempting to announcement that the adopt entirely organic Sikkim-origin hard rock/ methods of farming. But effects of climate change are heavy metal band called "Girish And The Chronicles" evident Whoever comes to shared the stage for the first power, livelihood issues in an time ever with the internaera of threats from climate tionally famed rock group change will continue to be a challenge. Sikkim's model of "Guns and Roses" at Abu Dhabi in June 2023. "Totally development is different stoked and really don't have from that of other states. the words to express what we Sikkim has said "no" to 13 are feeling right now, but one hydel projects because they thing's for sure, we are so proud to represent Sikkim

and India today," the group said on X. Girish Pradhan and his brother Yogesh, guitarist Suraz Sun, and drummer Nagen Mongranti all belong to Sikkim. Rolling Stone magazine says Pradhan is one of the most sought-after vocalists in the hard rock and heavy metal circles today. All the events above will

likely have an impact on the to own land and get stateresult for the 32-member Assembly poll. The SDF, which ruled Sikkim for 25 years from 1994 to 2019, lost to the Prem Singh Tamangled SKM in the last Assembly elections. June 2 will decide whether Mr Bhutia's presence will make a difference to the SDF's fortunes. The at any time. government current announced, days before the model code of conduct kicked in, that it will revert to

could have threatened the state's ecosphere. The alternative model of development "back to nature". But it also needs jobs. Ahead of this election, the alliance between the BJP and the SKM had broken down. One reason is the fear that like Article 370, Article 371F might also be changed. Because of this constitutional protection, the Sikkimese have the right government jobs. They are

also exempt from paying income tax. make new You can friends. But you cannot change geography. Sikkim is acutely conscious that it could become collateral damage in India-China hostilities

But the most important is the aspiration and ambition of the young in Sikkim. The state has among the

dia: 375 per 100.000 people

reducing inflation to its target level.

The "moderate" bucket contains harder and somewhat more controversial reforms, which may require not just good implementation, but also the spending of political capital to bring together wide ranging stakeholders. For instance, raising funding for the third tier, or the municipality level of the government, implementing a new direct tax code, and rationalising import tariffs. It also includes continued improvements to the GST regime, the IBC, the health of power distribution companies, and the country's statistical and data systems.

The "hard" bucket comprises the most controversial reforms, requiring a lot more political capital in order to get them done. These reforms may also be the most accretive for growth over the medium term as they address bottlenecks that large parts of the economy face. These include farm, labour and land reforms.

Chamkila, Canada & dangers ahead

Even in the weeks leading up to Chamkila's assassination, there were massacres every other day. To airbrush all of this is sheer intellectual cowardice, if not a crime

n the middle of a raging general election, now in the electoral equivalent of its slog over, why should one be talking about a mere OTT movie? Even if it is Imtiaz Ali's critically acclaimed Amar Singh Chamkila (Netflix).

It is set in Punjab in early 1988, when terrorists ruled, and ends on March 8 with the assassination of Amar Singh Chamkila, the phenomenally popular superstar of rural Punjab.

We do not write movie reviews here. This film, however, forces us to connect with a reality we prefer to forget. And those who prefer forgetting inconvenient realities are destined to live through them again. Three things as we go forward:

• The film is deeply and immorally flawed, as are almost all Indian films set in contemporary history, in being totally devoid of context. It has scattered mentions of ongoing terrorism in the Punjab of 1988, but mostly skirts it. • While I will elaborate on

the context in subsequent paragraphs, this assassination took place exactly two months before Operation SHEKHAR GUPTA Black Thunder in the Golden Temple complex.

May 10 is the 36th anniversary of the operation, after which terrorists/radicals haven't been able to return to this most hallowed of Sikh shrines

• Third, and most important. Canada has just arrested three "Indian citizens" (all Punjabis, likely Sikhs) for the alleged assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. A concerted and somehow well-supported effort has been on, centred in Canada but also with links mostly to other countries in the Ang to reignite the same fires and burn Punjab again. This was given further legitimacy last week with both the Prime Minister of Canada and its leader of the Opposition attending a Sikh religious event where separatist and offensive slogans were shouted, and incendiary pictures and posters were displayed. For clarity, between 1981 and 1993, during the phase of terror, a few of its leaders did

some of which have proven difficult to get done in the past, as well as the rationalisation of food and fertiliser subsidies. Furthermore, they also include improvements to the judiciary and bureaucracy.

The choice the government makes will be a key determinant of the economic growth India achieves over the medium term.

Let's explain.

A small and fast-growing part of the economy, which we call "new India" and which comprises high-tech sectors, makes up 15 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). It has been growing in the double-digits (10-15 per cent yearon-year) over the last few years. This has been instrumental in pushing India's post-pandemic GDP growth to beyond pre-pandemic levels.

On the other hand, "old India", which makes up the remaining 85 per cent of GDP, comprising agriculture and smallscale firms, has been growing at a tepid clip of about 5 per cent. It employs 95 per cent of India's labour force.

If "new India" continues to rise, we

think overall GDP growth would average 6.5 per cent over the next decade (versus 6 per cent pre-pandemic). But if "old India" rises alongside, not only would a majority of the jobs needed be created. but the country would also grow at a clip of 7.5-8 per cent over the next decade.

Another way to appreciate this is through the lens of reforms. If the government focuses on easy-to-moderate reforms, we believe certain sectors will benefit, and medium-term growth could average 6.5 per cent. But if it ventures into the moderate-to-hard reforms, which benefit a large part of the economy, including farming and small firms, growth could be 7.5-8 per cent.

In short, difficult reforms are central to India achieving its true potential.

The good news is that we generally get an indication of which reforms are likely in the first year of the government's new term. Watch closely.

The writer is chief India and Indonesia economist at Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation

amongst themselves. Now, this is spilling over into India. The killing of singer Sidhu Moosewala, for example.

The Moosewala assassination caught India's imagination because he had become a pan-national star. Amar Singh Chamkila in 1988 — a Dalit whose original name was Dhani Ram, and was just 28 when he was killed — was a very local star. He was working-class, his lyrics so rustic that many weren't particularly aware of the phenomenon. The film suggests he was killed because "somebody" thought his lyrics were obscene, warned him to desist, and when he didn't because his audiences wanted the "real" stuff – he was killed. As simple as that. Or, for the filmmaker, as simplistic as that. That's where the context is missed. And context missed so deliberately and conveniently in a film set in a critical juncture of our history, in my book, isn't creative freedom. It borders on the criminal. The film doesn't suggest he was killed by militants. It doesn't even mention the "t' word. His lyrics, raw as they were with much double entendre, weren't the worst you'd hear in all of rural Punjab then, or now. Chamkila's fame had greatly disconcerted competitors, mostly upper caste. Did somebody put out a contract on him? We still do not know

However, if he was killed for obscenity why was the much-loved progressive poet Pash (original name Avtar Singh Sandhu) assassinated just two weeks after Chamkila. His poetry had words of equality, a little bit of egalitarian revolution. His most famous composition was Sabh ton khatarnak huna hai sajniyan da mar jana (the most dangerous thing for you is when you let your dreams die). Somebody would kill him for that?

He was a former Naxalite, had spent time in jail and had just travelled overseas to rouse the Punjabi diaspora's conscience against violence in his state. Overseas, he also joined a group called Anti-47. That "47" came from the AK-47 rifle, then freely supplied by the Pakistanis, which killed at least 25,000 in Punjab in that decade-plus. Who killed him if not those who ruled with the "47"?

I can give you an entire list of mass killings in those weeks. There were almost 500 massacred in the two months leading up to Chamkila's assassination and after. Even in the weeks leading up to Chamkila's assassination, there were massacres every other day. To airbrush all of this is sheer intellectual cowardice, if not a crime. And you know what just as smug Bollywood filmmaker would like us to believe that what Punjab and the Sikhs - endured in 1988 was just some bad crime, Trudeau's Canadians now see the Sikh diaspora gangs in their countries, who've all slipped through their immigration filters, though the same lens. There lie multiple dangers in times to come.



Canada while their leaders are lodged in jail. For example, Lawrence Bishnoi in Gujarat's Sabarmati jail. Punjab mafias, popular culture (mostly music), drug and gun-running, and illegal immigration are a deadly mix and most of their sustenance comes from the lax — I'd rather not say complicit — Canadian system.

It is for Canadians to ask how come they are importing from Indian Punjab the kind of jobless flotsam like these three, and others running matias in their country. We know that in our Punjab, there is an extensive illegal immigration racket - popularly called "kabootarbaazi" (literally pigeon-flying).

escape to Canada and the UK but found zero political support and mostly gravitated to Pakistan. Today, the separatist leadership exists only - or mostly - in Canada, and it has the fullest political support.

The other difference is, unlike in the 1980s, there is no support for such a campaign in Punjab. This is a positive. The negative, however, is how strongly this purely offshore campaign has become enmeshed in the domestic vote bank politics of Canada. There is protection for the vilest subversive activity under the garb of free speech.

The Canadians believe that the three alleged assassins of Nijjar were working at the behest of Indian "agencies". At the same time, what we know is that the three arrived

in Canada on student visas and have apparently never attended a day of school or college. They are uncluttered hired mafia hitmen. They've also been named for three more murders where no "Indian agency connection" is alleged. Assassinations and coun-

terstrikes are now common-

place in Canada. Some of the

well-known armed mafias in

India are also operating

through these groups in

border at Sikkim took place in Fourth, ecstatic young

state government employees The new government will have the financial responsibility of implementing this decision. There is also the hot Limbu and Tamang communities that the current govhas not yet implemented.

nearly triple the Indian average. Seven out of 10 teenagers in Sikkim abuse pharmaceutical drugs. One person in potato of reservations for the every family is involved in substance abuse. All these issues have featured in the ernment has promised but election campaign. All that remains now is the result.

How are the visas arranged, though? Is the visa clearance system of a G7 and Five Eyes member state so porous that so many of these "students" keep getting in? Or is it the need for more voters for a particular party? Canada is importing India's mafias. Mostly, they fight

By special arrangement with The Print

Beyond hawks and doves

EYE CULTURE

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

hen Sikh pilgrims from India were visiting Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan to celebrate Baisakhi recently, Marvam Nawaz Sharif-chief minister of Pakistan's Punjab provincejoined them for a meal in the langar hall of the gurudwara. On this occasion, she made a public statement about opening doors of friendship between neighbours. Recalling her ancestral roots in Jatti Umra, a village near Amritsar in Indian Puniab, and her father Nawaz Sharif's commitment to cross-border dialogue, she made a strong emotional appeal.

News reports indicate that her uncle Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, has been approached by business leaders to initiate trade talks with India. Malik Ahmad Khan, the Speaker of Punjab Provincial Assembly, too has called for the resumption of trade. This is a positive development, given the breakdown of diplomatic ties between the two countries after the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that guaranteed a special status to Jammu & Kashmir.

While India is currently busy with elections, one hopes that the incoming government will respond to these friendly overtures. We cannot remain in a hostile relationship forever. The desire to move forward and craft a harmonious future is being expressed in India as well.

Ajay Bisaria's book Anger Management: The Troubled Diplomatic Relationship Between India and Pakistan (2024), published by Aleph Book Company, is a case in point. In August 2019. Mr Bisaria—India's former High Commissioner to Pakistan-was asked to leave Islamabad after the abrogation of

Article 370. Though Mr Bisaria's exit happened on an unpleasant note, he wonders if the borders of the future would be more open and welcoming.

He was born in Srinagar, and his mother was in Lahore during the Ouit India movement of 1942; so, his tenure was of personal significance too. He argues that both countries need to focus on bringing "prosperity to two billion inhabitants of a common South Asian homeland".

MrBisaria hopes for a day "when the confidence of Kashmiris would be restored, when soldiers would not be required to guard every nook, when the borders could be opened up once again without the fear of terrorists and bloodshed". In order to make this dream come true, he calls upon younger generations of South Asians to "reject the flawed choices of the past". The humility to admit that mistakes have been made is gracious, as is the wish to rectify them.

The simplistic classification of people as either hawks or doves in the realm of international relations deprives us of appreciating the capacity of human beings to alter their positions over time. Besides this, the assumption that people who occupy official positions are necessarily opposed to people-to-people contact and grassroots peace activism is also quite unhelpful.

ASDulat, former head of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and Asad Durrani, former director-general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) shocked many in both countries when their book, The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace, co-authored with journalist Aditya Sinha, was published by HarperCollins India in 2020.

It was unusual to witness spymasters from two countries with a long history of conflict engage in a mature and respectful dialogue on everything from Kashmir to Balochistan, and from cross-border terrorism to surgical strikes. They have a new book out with the same publisher.

Titled Covert: The Psychology of Peace (2024), this one is co-authored with psychiatrist and social scientist Neil Krishan Aggarwal. What makes it unique is that it digs into the childhood memories, family histories and career trajectories of these spymasters to understand how they became votaries for peace in this volatile region that has seen too much conflict and violence.

Dr Aggarwal belongs to a post-Partition family. He grew up hearing about life in Lahore and Rawalpindi prior to 1947. His interest in studying "the intergenerational transmission of trauma" is rooted in his own background.

In the new book, Mr Dulat, who was born in Sialkot before the Partition, notes that the peace lobby in India has weakened after the tenure of Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister. He remarks, "Generals talking to each other is a great idea because nobody understands the cost of war more than a soldier does." This is not a new idea but it needs to be pursued with much greater vigour. After all, India's former naval chief, Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas, who passed away in March 2024, was an active member of the Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy as well as the India Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace.

While Messrs Dulat and Durrani advocate for peace, they have no delusions about the time it might take. Mr Durrani says, "The peace process is not going to be clinched in one go-we need patience, perseverance; it's a give and take." The road might be long but let's start walking.

The reviewer is an independent journalist and educator based in Mumbai

Soon, a Japanese Empress?

imperial family upon marrying a commoner.

But Emperor Naruhito, 64, has only three possible male heirs — his brother. Crown Prince Fumihito, 58, his nephew Prince Hisahito, 17. and his uncle Prince Hitachi, 88. The emperor and Empress Masako have only one daughter, the 22-year-old Princess Aiko.

In 2021, a government panel tasked with studying ways to ensure stable imperial succession shelved a decision on whether to make women, or matrilineal members, eligible to ascend the throne. Representatives of parties from across the political spectrum are now expected to convene a meeting in early May to address the issue. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan appears show that the majority of the to be inching toward chang-Japanese public approves of ing the law to expand the expanding the right to rule to imperial family and head off women, given that the impea succession crisis in the world's oldest monarchy.

Traditionalist hard-liners had previously resisted change. But the party now finds two proposals, first suggested in 2021, as "reasonable" and "do-able". One possible suggestion would permit female members of the imperial family to retain their royal status after they marry instead of becoming commoners, thus maintaining their ability to produce a male heir to the throne. The second suggestion that female royals leave the is to reinstate branches of the imperial family in nearly 41 Japanese ad agency Dentsu

family that were lopped off years, the whole debate was placed on the back burner.

As things stand today, the

shortly after Japan's surrender at the end of World War II, as the occupation authorities sought to dramatically reduce the influence of the emperor. Adopting those branches back into the imperial family would give it a far larger pool of descendants of the emperor and a far greater likelihood of a male heir.

For the record, Japan has had eight reigning empresses from a patrilineal line, with the last occupying the throne in the 18th century. However, there has never been a single emperor from a matrilineal line among the 126 emperors in history. The law prohibiting female emperors, interestingly, dates back only to the Meiji period in 1889, when Japan had reopened to the West and modelled its new government on Prussia, which had banned emperors

of female descent. In 2005, the modern ban on female succession looked likely to be scrapped under then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. But, while the debate was actually underway in the Diet (Japan's parliament), the news broke that Prince Akishino Fumihito Naruhito's younger brother and his wife Princess Kiko were expecting another child. The reform discussions ground to a halt. And when Prince Hisahito was born, the first new male member of the

Crown Prince is first in the line of succession. His son, Hisahito (18) is next. It looks highly unlikely that Princess Aiko, the daughter of the current emperor, would get to upstage the current line-up of successors and ascend The Chrysanthemum Throne as Empress. Half of the respondents who supported the idea of a reigning empress in the aforementioned survey stated that gender differences were not important concerning the top role. Meanwhile, the most common reason for disapproving of the idea, cited by 45 per cent of those against the concept, was the belief that male succession was culturally more appropriate. Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe, some say, is to blame for wasting opportunities to secure the imperial family's future during his eight years in office. Abe reportedly refused to acknowledge the urgency of the issue. Post-Akihito's abdication, he firmly stated that no legal changes would be needed for another 40 years, given that Naruhito has two male heirs. declaring that a "divine wind" would blow when the time came for action.

For now, it is surely advantage Hisahito.

The writer is former JV partner of



YES, BUT... SANDEEP GOYAL

total of 90 per cent of respondents in a recent Kyodo News poll said they would support the idea of a reigning Empress of Japan. A big change from past years. The results of the survey,

conducted in March and April

ahead of the fifth anniversary

of Emperor Naruhito's ascen-

sion to the throne, clearly

rial succession is currently

limited to men from the pater-

nal line. Japan's imperial

family has been struggling

with a shrinking number of

male heirs, and that is what

has ignited a national debate.

of respondents said they felt

a "sense of crisis" regarding

the stability of imperial suc-

cession. The 1947 Imperial

House Law limits heirs to a

male, with an emperor on his

father's side, and stipulates

In the survey, 72 per cent



Hindustan Times

{ OUR TAKE }

Election relief for Kejriwal

Bail for Delhi chief minister may boost the Opposition's general elections campaign

ince Justice VR Krishna Iyer's comment to the effect in 1977, the considered view is that bail is the rule and jail is the exception. So, it is welcome that the Supreme Court (SC) has given interim bail to Delhi chief minister (CM) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi excise policy case. The bail terms set by the Court include a bar on the CM from visiting the office of the chief minister and the Delhi Secretariat, signing official files "unless it is required and necessary for obtaining clearance/approval of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi", making comments with regard to his role in the case, and interacting with witnesses and/or those who have access to official files connected with the case.

But the immediate import of this decision will be felt in electioneering: Three phases of polling are over while four more are left. The polling process has been completed in 283 of the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies but polling in the AAP strongholds of Delhi (seven seats) and Punjab (13 seats) is slated for May 25 and June 1, respectively. That gives Kejriwal enough time to hit the streets, energise party cadres, and spice up the contest, even beyond seats that the AAP is contesting. Whether the electorate will be impressed by the entry of the AAP's political face and chief campaigner is anybody's guess. However, the bail does restore some kind of a level-playing field for the Opposition which has claimed that the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) decision to arrest the Delhi CM (on March 21) after the Election Commission of India announced the poll schedule was politically motivated. Given the "prodigious importance" of the general elections - to quote the SC — it is fair that a senior politician has been allowed to campaign: Kejriwal has to surrender before the Court on June 2, the day after the polling process is completed.

The excise policy has been mired in politics since the ED made the first arrests in 2022. Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia has been in prison since February 2023; senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh and senior Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader K Kavitha were also arrested in this case. Singh, in fact, has been leading the AAP campaign since his bail in early April. I he AAP has held that the case is politically motivated and foisted on it by the Centre to check the former's growth as a political party. This is also the premise for Kejriwal refusing to respond to the ED's summons for questioning, the party has argued. In the SC, ED opposed Kejriwal's bail arguing that the right to campaign in an election is not a fundamental right, or even a legal one. It also raised the concern that bail for Kejriwal would set a precedent that could incentivise criminals to join politics and turn campaigners to stay out of prison. It is indeed debatable whether the right to campaign can be set as a basis for bail. However, as the Court said. Keiriwal is not a habitual offender or a threat to society but an elected representative of the people, the head of a mainstream party. It is understandable that the Court did not want Kejriwal to carry out his responsibilities as CM of Delhi. Propriety demands that a person in high office steps down if a court has deemed it fit to order him (or her) to judicial custody. He or she needs to fight the case, whatever its merits may be, in the court and follow due process. However, it is unjust to deny bail to an accused, especially those with no prior criminal record.

States hold the key to unlocking Mandate 2024

The BJP banks on Brand Modi whereas Opposition hopes to gain from confusion among BJP voters restive about new alliances, import of leaders

{ THIRD EYE } Barkha Dutt

> e like (Narendra) Modi at the Centre, he is doing an excel-lent job for India. But what happened to Uddhav Thackeray

was also wrong, we feel bad for him," said a shopkeeper to me in the bustling bazaars of Thane, in Maharashtra. A prestigious seat – chief minister Eknath Shinde is a legislator from here — Thane parliamentary constitu-ency captures all the paradoxes which have made Maharashtra a state that has defied and challenged pollsters and pundits.

Thane is also the seat that saw a spirited battle between allies of the Shiv Sena (Shinde) and the BJP over who should be the candidate. At a *shakha* bustling with supporters of Shinde, Popatji, his *"langotiya yaar"* (as he identified himself; the closest translation would be childhood friend) told me scornfully: "BJP has no place here, this is a Sena seat and it will come to us. Else you may as well disband the Shiv Sena." He was right, the seat did go to them, but not without BJP corporators loyal to the BJP aspirant in the area publicly protesting

The splits in the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Shiv Sena have created a unique set of regional and local factors that the BJP may not have had to contend with otherwise in a Lok Sabha election. Along with Karnataka, Bihar and Rajasthan, what happens in Maharashtra could well determine the final numbers of Election 2024. Alongside Odisha,

the eight states I would watch very carefully. In my last column, I shared my notes from my travels through India's southern states. My election road trip — the Dhabas of Democracy — is slowly weaving its way from Kanyaku-mari to Kashmir and in the last fortnight, l

Assam, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. These are

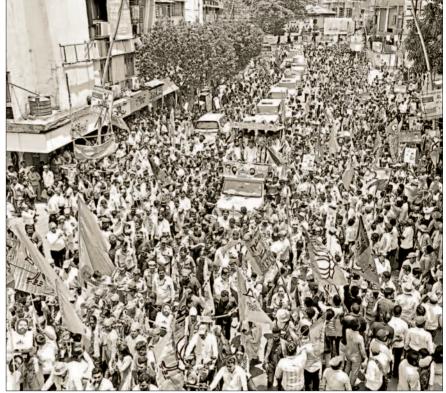
have traversed the length and breadth of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. That Maharashtra also had the lowest turnout of states in the third phase of elections

speaks to its fragmented politics and the con-flict and confusion among voters. The BJP believes that the Modi factor will iron over all cracks and fault lines. The Opposition hopes that a certain localisation of the election has already kicked in. The Modi factor remains the dominant political brand. But it may joust with the sympathy factor in Maharashtra,

where two major parties have been splintered. In the Maharashtra battlefield, even flags and party symbols are difficult to separate and distinguish. At least three of the parties use saffron. I had to sometimes go closer to a rally or a "*rath*" to ascertain which candidate from which group was driving past. Now, think about the voter's predicament.

The other factor to look out for is the consequences of importing "outsiders". Some estimates suggest that nearly 28% of candidates in the BJP list are those who were with other par-

THE SPLITS IN THE NCP AND SHIV SENA HAVE CREATED A UNIQUE SET OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL FACTORS THAT THE BJP MAY NOT HAVE HAD TO CONTEND WITH **OTHERWISE IN A LOK** SABHA ELECTION



In the Maharashtra battlefield, even flags and party symbols are difficult to separate and distinguish. At least three of the parties use saffron

across MP.

ties before 2014. As the dominant political force, the BJP will invariably be a magnet for other ambitions. However, for an ideologically driven cadre this does create a certain dissonance. Former chief minister (CM) Ashok Chavan, for instance, a Congress crossover to the BJP is facing a tough fight. In particular, workers on the ground who lashed out at Chavan for his alleged role in the Adarsh housing scam or at Ajit Pawar for his role in the irrigation scam, now have to sing a different tune. How this unfolds remains critical for both the BJP and Opposition's fate.

There is also a certain disquiet - not among BJP voters, but within a section of party workers - over the perceived marginalisation of strong state satraps. In Gujarat, hardly anyone could name the CM. But it did not matter. At street corners and upmarket cafes, it was Modi all the way. But in Madhya Pradesh, those affiliated with the BJP seemed distinctly upset over the party's decision not to make Shivraj Chouhan the CM. "Mamaji ke saath jo hua, bahut galat hua," said one young man to me, otherwise a passionate Modi voter. "Unko wapis lana chahiye." This was a refrain I heard

Finally, in my last column I argued that the Ram Mandir was not an electoral issue in the southern states. In Madhya Pradesh, like in Gujarat, and even in some pockets of Maha-rashtra, I saw saffron Ram Mandir flags prom-inently dotting city and village landscapes. There was a much more visible sentiment for the temple in these states. But not one voter I met brought up the mandir on their own as an

election issue. Mukesh, who runs a paratha stall in Bhopal, one that also displayed mandir flags outside of its shack, said to me: "Ram Mandir mudda to ho gaya, ab khatam ho gaya" (the temple is an issue now done and past us). Again, he also believed that "there is no one in the Opposition who can compete with Brand Modi." But he wanted PM Modi to speak about jobs and employment above other issues

It is from these writings on the wall that the final script for 2024 might be prepared.

> Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author The views expressed are personal

martyrdoms of Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gob-ind Singh, Bhagat Singh, Udham Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, among others. The contributions of the Gadri Baabe wrote a new chapter in the journey of Indian Independence. More recently, this fighting spirit of the Punjabis for what they deem to be the right causes was on display during the protests against the farm laws.

the rich progressive and fighting Agai spirit of Punjabiyat, İmtiaz Ali falls prey to the temptation of sensationalism in portraying Chamkila as a tharkila (libidinous) and sexila (a coinage likely denoting sexual appeal) hero who stands on his principles. The film attempts to glorify Chamkila as a musical revolutionary, but it glosses over his shortcomings and bluntly ignores the voices of those women who might have been marginalised or harmed by his actions. Punjabi culture is a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse threads, including voices that challenge conventional norms and stereotypes. By homogenising and simplifying Punjabi culture, Amar Singh Chamkila overlooks the complexity inherent in any society. In contrast to the actual Punjabiyat, it focuses on one misogynistic outlier named Chamkila. As with any artistic endeavour, Amar Singh Chamkila is subject to interpretation and critique, and its portrayal of gender dynamics needs to be examined within the broader context of artistic expressions, societal attitudes, factual accuracy, and broad-based generalisation.

The idea of Amar Singh Chamkila and Punjabiyat

Gagan

Deep

Sharma

▼ inema can create heroes/villains out of cate balance between artistic expression, factual accura

PUNJABI PHILOSOPHY, HERITAGE AND CULTURE DRAW IMMENSELY FROM THE POETIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL **RICHNESS OF GURU NANAK** AND OTHER SIKH GURUS AND TAKES PRIDE IN THE

to the level of universally adored or reviled figures. The medium has been extensively used for creating icons out of real-

world personalities, and broadening their appeal beyond their own geographical contexts. Movies including Schindler's List, The Social Network, Darkest Hour, Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, Dangal, MS Dhoni: The Untold Story, Mary Kom, Pad Man, among others, are examples of biopics that celebrate the success of great personalities, while also drawing inspiration from their life-journeys

Amar Singh Chamkila is an addition to the repository of biopics that presents a king-size account of the legendary Punjabi singer's journey. It enriches director Imtiaz Ali's brand, not just through its impressive depiction but also its striking presentation and direction. Being a biopic of a singer and songwriter, the movie benefits immensely from AR Rahman's involvement in it. Rahman's rich understanding of music has helped him recreate the magic of Chamkila's singing. The icing on the cake is the acting of the lead actors.

The film has the potential to elevate Chamkila to the status of a cultural icon for Puniabiyat (Punjabi culture), and therein lies the problem with the film. The biggest challenge while creating biopics is to maintain the deli-

matter what Chamkila sang or performed, it is not Punjabi culture - it never was, and therefore, it cannot be generalised as such. While

the Khalistan movement was raging in the 1980s, Chamkila was enjoying unprecedented popularity in Punjab. His voice had the precision of a music engineer, someone who could discern the audience's ideal vocalist and bring him to life. Ribaldry was the key ingredient of his lyrics. He thought it to be the tool for connecting with the masses, especially from the underprivileged strata. He mocked the sanctity of familial and social relations by diluting the harmonious connection between

a person and her/his brother/sister-in-law. between a father-in-law and his daughter-inlaw, and featured extra-marital affairs of the father of one person with the mother of someone else in his songs. This surely was not the norm in Punjabi singing, then, now or before.

To reinforce the argument, it is important to consider Chamkila's contemporaries. The list includes the legendary Gurdas Maan, Kuldeep Manak, Surinder Shinda, Didar Sandhu, Mohammad Sadiq, Lal Chand Yamla Jatt, Asa Singh Mastana, Surinder Kaur, Narinder Biba, K Deep, Jagmohan Kaur, among others. Their lyrics stood far apart from those of Chamkila. While most of his contemporaries celebrated

EXPRESSIONS OF BULLEH SHAH, AMONG OTHERS

the richness in Punjabi folklore (for instance, Chhalla, Jugni, Mirza, Heer, and other similar folk sung by most of the above, and special emphasis on Kaliyan by Kaliyan da Badshah Kuldeep Manak), Chamkila was busy building a homogeneity of narratives around men's right to have "sex" outside their marriage. In doing so, he was consciously objectifying the women.

Chamkila was certainly within his rights to portray gender dynamics in the manner he deemed fit as well as present a regressive view of women in the society. But his overt attempts to normalise gender inequity through his portraval of women as objects in music and imagery, as well as his casual sexism in character interactions, is problematic.

Punjabi philosophy, heritage and culture draw immensely from the poetic and philosophical richness of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus, and takes pride in the expressions of Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Shah Hussain, Amrita Pritam, Mohan Singh, and Surjit Patar, among others. Celebrating Punjabiyat, which is based on the teachings of the Gurus, Puran Singh, an academician, wrote, "Punjab vassda Guraan de naam te" (Punjab lives in the name of the Gurus). This is evident in the lives and

Gagan Deep Sharma is professor, University School of Management Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi and a Punjabi poet and recipient of the 2014 Yuva Puraskar by the Sahitva Akademi The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare

Women voters lead the fight against misogyny

prestigious constituency in the Capital is offering voters a curious choice: A first-time woman candidate versus a man once accused by his wife of physical violence.

It's infuriating. Do political parties think so little of women that a man accused by his wife of domestic violence is still considered a suitable candidate? To be sure, an accusation is not a conviction. That is the logic Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman used to explain why the BJP gave the Kaiserganj ticket to Karan Bhushan Singh, the son of former Wrestling Federation of India

president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh against whom a Delhi court has ruled there is "sufficient material" to frame charges of sexual harassment.

In Karnataka, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is scrambling to contain the fallout of charges of mass rape against a leader of alliance partner Janata Dal (Secular), Prajwal Revanna. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had personally campaigned for Revanna, has raised questions about the timing of the leak. Certainly, there are other valid questions such as what is being done to protect the identity of the 400 or so women

in the videos. But the primary question remains: If Prajwal Revanna's reported sexual perversions were known (his driver says he alerted the Karnataka BJP leadership), how on earth did he even get the ticket? Sexual assault rumours have also dogged the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and its strongman. Sheikh Shahiahan in Sandeshkhali. who's being investigated by the CBI. The TMC claims that the charges are cooked up and a "conspiracy"

In no election has the woman voter mattered as much. Women have breached the gender gap in voter turnout and also exercised greater agency. In 2019, 81% said women had voted for their preferred candidate.

Unlike the United States, where gender issues, in particular abortion, are the big ticket and a highly polarising issue, in India, "women's empowerment" is the song every party sings. "India stands in contrast to the emerging global trends on gender," said Akshi Chawla, curator of WomenLead, which tracks the progress of women in politics globally. "In several countries, gender and women's rights are becoming polarising

political issues. In India, nearly all parties want to target and attract women's votes,' she added.

Yet all the sops in the world cannot mask the misogyny at the core of most major political parties. In the third phase of the ongoing general elections, parties collectively fielded just 123 women, among a total of 1,352 contestants. That's less than the 172 candidates who have serious criminal charges against them -38 with cases related to crimes against women, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms.

The exclusion of women is one part of the problem. The other is the inclusion and patronage of men accused of serious gender crimes, including rape. It tells us both of the desperation to win at all costs and the moral vacuum that these charges aren't considered serious enough to merit being booted out.

There can be only one answer by women. Make your annoyance known at the voting booth. Demand better because we deserve better.

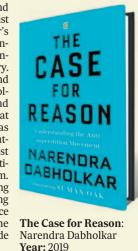
> Namita Bhandare writes on gender The views expressed are personal

{ EDITOR'S PICK }

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

A GUIDE TO THE RATIONALIST MOVEMENT

On Friday, a Pune court convicted two persons and acquitted three in the murder of rationalist-activist and author Narendra A Dabholkar. Dabholkar's murder and the subsequent killings of Govind Pansare, MM Kalburgi, and Gauri Lankesh were a concerted attack on rationalist activism in the country. Whom does the movement threaten so much, and why? Dabholkar's The Case for Reason (a two-volume series), originally published in Marathi, and translated to English by Suman Oak, who taught at the SNDT Women's University in Mumbai, has some answers. In the first volume, Dabholkar outlines the theoretical foundations of the rationalist movement and documents its fight against superstition, pseudo-science, obscurantism, and revivalism. The second volume dissects faith and its continuing hold on populations. Against the backdrop of rising revivalism across communities and pseudo-science clouding scientific temperament even among the educated, Dabholkar's book is an important guide to the rationalist moorings of modernity



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WORDLY WISE THE PRINCIPLE OF GIVE AND TAKE IS THE PRINCIPLE OF DIPLOMACY — GIVE ONE AND TAKE TEN. - MARK TWAIN

The Indian **EXPRESS**

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

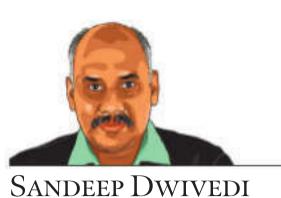
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RIGHT TO CAMPAIGN

SC's grant of bail to Arvind Kejriwal is welcome. It affirms that due process, level playing field, lie at election's core

HE ARREST BY the Enforcement Directorate of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on March 21 - less than a month before voting began for the ongoing general elections - cast a shadow over the largest democratic exercise in the world. It sparked apprehensions about a powerful executive settling scores with its political opponents through investigative agencies under its control in a way that narrows and skews the playing field. On Friday, May 10 - roughly halfway into the election -- the Supreme Court took an important step towards undoing the damage and restoring the impression of fair play. The apex court has granted Kejriwal interim bail until June 1, when voting ends. Of course, the Court could have gone further, and it is regrettable that it didn't – the bail is conditional and limited, he must return to custody on June 2.

Kejriwal was the latest in a slew of prominent leaders – AAP ministers Satyendar Jain and Sanjay Singh, former Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and BRS leader K Kavitha -to be arrested in the Delhi excise policy case. The leaders have been accused and charged under the stringent Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Court has made it clear that the grant of bail is not a comment on the guilt or innocence of the accused. At the same time, it has done well to reject the ED's claims – made in an affidavit a day before the SC was to give its judgment - that granting interim bail to the Delhi CM to campaign would create two classes of citizens, and privilege politicians over others. A farmer or businessman, the agency argued, would not get the benefit in similar circumstances, and that the "right to campaign in an election" does not exist. These arguments rightly cut little ice with the court, which pointed out that the context in this case is the general election, "the visa viva to a democracy". And that given that Kejriwal is an elected chief minister and the leader of a national party, a "more holistic and libertarian view is justified". In essence, the Court recognised that an elected official is not just an individual but the people's representative and that participation in the campaign is an inextricable and essential part of a fair election. The ED's affidavit framed an overreach: It is certainly not for the agency to lecture on democracy and rights. The Court did well to snub its attempt to do so and assert its jurisdiction over grant of bail. The Court's order is significant beyond the current moment. For those playing the game, an electoral victory is often the final end of the democratic process. However, for the democratic system, the rules of the game matter as much, and more. On June 4, there will be winners and losers, but what will endure is the deference by both to that process, which is free and fair and seen to be so too. The SC's grant of bail to Kejriwal upholds its primacy and underlines its credibility, regardless of who wins and who loses.



TWO SEASONED FORMER international cricketers and commentators of repute – former South African captain Graeme Smith and New Zealand all-rounder Scott Styris – didn't sound too happy with what they were seeing. Lucknow Super Giants captain KL Rahul, still in his sweat-soaked jersey, stood fidgeting with his helmet strap, nervously listening to his highly-agitated team owner Sanjiv Goenka.

LSG had just suffered a 10-wicket loss to SunRisers Hyderabad, a result that could cost them a play-off place and Goenka didn't seem to be extending his polite commiserations to his captain, one of world cricket's brightest stars and someone earmarked as a potential leader by BCCI.

Goenka, the billionaire chairman of RPSG Group, who paid a record Rs 7,090 crores to own the IPL franchise, kept waving his hands wildly. Rahul, meanwhile, would make a feeble attempt to reply, but would get cut off. He gave up, dropped his head and stared at the helmet in his hands.

These were disturbing frames. Smith, on air, said that such conversations should be held behind closed doors and not in a stadium with multiple cameras. Styris said Rahul had done well to keep his cool. These are not lily-

IPL owners need to stay in it. They must understand they can't undermine the stars who get fans to stadiums

The owner's corner

ical angry Delhi fan when Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson seemed to be questioning the umpire about a contentious catch on the boundary line towards the end of a thrilling game at Kotla. Once again, it didn't look right. DC's social media team would later put out a video of Jindal shaking hands with Samson, congratulating him on his selection for the World T20 team. The damage control done afterwards was too little, too late.

IPL owners need to understand that they can't undermine the stars who get fans to the stadium and give them the rare opportunity to sneak into the stadium-sized spotlight, with the world's eyes on them. They own teams, not team members.

The owners might be captains of industry and corporate giants but in the sporting arena, especially for the fans, they are extras with a few lines. For years, cricketers have been the icons of this nation; they can't be pushed around in full public view in a stadium full of their fans.

It is the IPL's obnoxious auction process that gives owners a false sense of proprietary rights over the players. For most, cricket is one of their many corporate acquisitions and part of their business diversification strategy. That's why an IPL team gets treated like a

commercial unit with cricketers as employ-

ees on their payrolls. But sport isn't governed

by rules taught in business schools and it is

not an investment that gives regular annual

dividends. And a captain can't be treated like

stand this "first rule". In this season of infringe-

ments and infighting, they too have breached

an important protocol. They too took the play-

ers-turned-commentators, many of them

stalwarts of the game, for granted. Last week,

Star Sports faced allegations of playing former

players and a current star against each other.

Ironically, this too happened live on television.

Once again, it was a case of a cricketing great

critical of Virat Kohli's low strike rate against

spinners. This perturbed Kohli who ques-

tioned the credentials of the now-retired leg-

It all started with commentators being

The IPL broadcasters too need to under-

a fumbling floor manager.

being sold down the river.

ends of cricket commenting on his game. "I am not quite sure if you've been in that situation yourself to sit and speak about the game from a box. I don't really think it's the same thing," Kohli said.

Kohli's caustic comments were gold for Star Sports, which kept playing them on loop. They seemed to be missing the crucial point that Kohli was being critical of their own commentators. Gavaskar, not one to miss a chance, vented his angst at Stars Sports in a preview show before the Kohli game. Ironically, it was live on Star Sports: "Star Sports needs to understand they've shown it enough times. Everybody got the message. I'll be very disappointed if Star Sports shows it once more. That'll be questioning all of us commentators, not just these two (Matthew Hayden and Gavaskar), those in the box, those earlier on. You're questioning their knowledge, their expertise," he said.

T20 cricket aspires to go global by breaking into the American pro-sports market, and has already been included in the Olympics. But with such lofty ambitions, it cannot possibly continue with these petty, amateurish antics undermining its biggest cricketers, and relaying the catfights of its flagship event around the world.

FLIP FLOP FLIP

Export bans and arbitrary restrictions imposed in response to food inflation hurt both producers and consumers in long term

ORPORATES WANT STABILITY and predictability in government policy. Farmers and agri entrepreneurs also desire it, but are denied the same. The double standards were seen in the May 2022 decision to ban all wheat exports, days after a Union minister spoke of India being ready to feed the world and sending trade delegations to explore new markets for the cereal. More recently, onion exports were, first, in November 2023, not allowed at a floor price below \$800 per tonne and, a month later, stopped altogether. Earlier this month, days before Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra's main onion-growing belt, the ban was removed. But the shipments are now subject to both a minimum export price of \$550 per tonne plus a 40 per cent duty. Imagine if corporates were to be put through such policy flip-flops. Forget improving the investment climate or ease of doing business, these amount to government-created uncertainty.

The government's defence of export curbs – extended to non-basmati rice, sugar and even de-oiled rice bran, a livestock feed ingredient — is that they are aimed at controlling food inflation and protecting consumers. This argument, however, ignores the interests of producers, who are mostly farmers with limited lobbying power, except during election time. A Rs 5/kg increase in onion prices may stretch the monthly budget of an average household consuming 5-6 kg by Rs 25-30. But for a grower harvesting 10 tonnes of the bulb per acre, a Rs 5/kg price reduction translates into a revenue loss of Rs 50,000. What is an inflation problem for the consumer is a livelihood issue for the farmer. The latter also does not have the flexibility to switch crops like the former can, by buying less of one and more of another item.

India's agricultural exports, as an analysis in this newspaper has shown, fell to \$48.8 billion in 2023-24 from the record \$53.2 billion of the previous fiscal. Much of this decline has been a fallout of the export bans and restrictions imposed in response to food inflation and domestic shortfall concerns. The country needs a new export-import policy balancing the interests of consumers and producers as well as the short- and long-term imperatives of the farm sector. Controls, even where necessary, should be temporary and rulesbased, taking the form of tariffs as opposed to outright bans or quantitative restrictions. The government can also create a buffer stock of all essential commodities to enable market intervention and curb excess price volatility. Ultimately, it needs to realise that building export markets takes time and effort, while undoing that requires just a stroke of the pen. Also, nothing hurts consumers more in the long term than hurting producers.

livered experts, they have seen the world.

Within hours, a million fingers would type their outrage and angst on social media. Coaches ticking off the team on the field of play, rivals carrying their fights beyond the boundary line, from the Little Leagues to IPL - these were within tolerable limits. But a non-cricketer owner lecturing an Indian cricketing star was a transgression worthy of a send-off.

Cricket isn't used to such visuals. But the ongoing edition of the world's fastest growing sports league has seen new lows. Conventions have been flouted and decorum has been ditched. Some lines have been crossed and others have been blurred.

Days before Goenka got his primary school principal behaviour to the cricket field, another high-profile owner was targeted by fans for his stadium behaviour. Delhi Capitals' co-owner Parth Jindal played the stereotyp-

owners a false sense of proprietary rights over the players. For most, cricket is one of their many corporate acquisitions and part of their business diversification strategy. That's why an IPL team gets treated like a commercial unit with cricketers as employees on their payrolls. But sport isn't governed by rules taught in business schools and it is not an investment that gives regular annual dividends. And a captain can't be treated like a fumbling floor manager.

It is the IPL's obnoxious

auction process that gives

BLURRING THE LINE

'Baby Reindeer' forces us to ask if an abuser can be a victim

Adya Goyal

IF YOU'VE WATCHED the Netflix series Baby Reindeer, chances are, the words "sent from my iPhone" haunt you. The seven-part autofiction thriller-drama tells the story of Donny Dunn, a bartender trying to make it as a comedian, and his chance encounter with a lonely woman, Martha Scott (Jessica Gunning), that turns into an obsession – for her. Through the course of the show, she stalks him, showing up at his place of work, disrupting his gig, attacking his partner, and threatening his parents. She sends him hundreds of hours worth of voice messages and a total of 41,000 emails. Yet, she is not the most disturbing part of Dunn's life.

As we later learn, a younger Dunn was previously assaulted by an older writer, Darrien (whose real identity remains unknown). It is a dark, twisted narrative that depicts, accurately, survivor guilt and blame. But what it doesn't necessarily do, is allow us to feel sorry for the victim – at least, not entirely.

British comedian Richard Gadd, playing

tating details of these comedians' lives. While Gadsby's special focuses on her experiences of discrimination as a queer person; Gadd describes his sexual assault. However, through Baby Reindeer, Gadd really did end up controlling his own narrative.

Many works of art, be it films, books or paintings, are the result of survivors and victims making sense of their trauma through another medium. For instance, Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi – who was raped by her famous painter father's friend Agostino Tassi – explores her trauma through paintings that are far more visceral depictions of scenes from the Bible and other mythologies than their usual representation (for instance, Judith Beheading Holofernes, now at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence). French writer Vanessa Springora's 2021 Consent: A Memoir details how she was groomed from the ages of 14 to 16 years by writer Gabriel Matzneff when he was more than three times her age. Director Jennifer Fox's The Tale (2018) is her way of reck-

T20 has enough on-field drama, it doesn't need storylines suited for reality TV playing on the sidelines. The popcorn is sold to spectators in the bleachers, it's not meant to be munched on by cackling broadcasters, sabotaging their own commentators who may be critical of a cricketing metric like strike rate.

At just 17, IPL is a juvenile compared to the far more evolved and grander sporting leagues around the world, where global sports stars play for far richer owners. Cricket in India can take cues from football in Europe and basketball in the US. There, owners respect the sanctity of the team dugout and have the patience to delay difficult conversations to a time when the cameras aren't on them. With time, IPL will evolve, but a pushback from players can send the owners back to their corner for good.

sandeep.dwivedi@expressindia.com

decisions by the protagonist. The story with Martha begins similarly. She recognises the "deer in the headlights' within him instantly (as Gadd himself admits) and goes on to exploit it. The power dynamic in that relationship operated not within the gendered framework of him as "man" and her as "woman". Rather, it was dictated by his traumatic assault by a 50-yearold writer who promised him fame but instead, left him vulnerable to a seemingly gentle, middle-aged woman. In a 2019 interview with *The Guardian*,

Gadd said, "It would be unfair to say she was an awful person and I was a victim... That didn't feel true." To The Independent, he said, "I can't emphasise enough how much of a victim she is in all this." He sincerely believes her to be a subject of the "system".

themselves in his "confusion" over his sexual

identity, anxiety, need for validation and

worst of all, in his seeking out Darrien. As the

audience, one can't help but flinch over these

APE FOR OIL

Malaysia is hoping to rid palm oil of unsustainability tag through 'orangutan diplomacy'. There is an irony here

NIMALS CAN MAKE for great PR. Just as once upon a time, a dog, horse or ermine in a royal portrait could communicate a monarch's qualities (fidelity, power and purity, respectively), in the modern era, animals are used by nations to signal commitment to certain values. For decades, China used the giant panda to make diplomatic overtures and thaw cooler-than-ideal relations with other nations. Now, inspired by the success of China's "panda diplomacy" - few, after all, can resist the cuddly black-and-white bear – Malaysia's commodities minister Johari Abdul Ghani has said that orangutans will be gifted to trade partners who buy the country's palm oil. This, he believes, could be a way for Malaysia to distance itself from accusations of unsustainability made against palm oil plantations.

History, however, shows that even the most exotic or beautiful of animals can't make up for everything. Last year, for example, amid diplomatic tensions between the US and China over a range of issues, reports began circulating of pandas in American zoos being in poor health, leading to a high-octane campaign in China for the return of Ya Ya the panda from Memphis Zoo. Further back in history is the example of Soliman the elephant, given as a wedding gift by King John III of Portugal to Archduke Maximilian of Austria in 1551. The pachyderm's arrival in Vienna reportedly led to a strain in the latter's marriage as not only did Soliman steal the spotlight during the royal couple's honeymoon, the Archduke himself paid more attention to the latest addition in his menagerie than to his new bride.

The only one of the great apes in Asia, the orangutan is an endangered species that is found only in the tropical forests of Borneo (Malaysia and Indonesia) and Sumatra (Indonesia). For Malaysia, facing pressure from environmental groups due to the deforestation caused by expanding palm oil plantations, its diplomatic gift may be laden with far more irony than intended.

Dunn, is the writer of the show and the survivor. His play by the same name debuted at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2019 and later moved to the Bush Theatre in London for a five-week run. Similar to the approach taken by Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby in her Netflix special Nanette, while performing, be it on stage or on camera, Gadd is both the art and the artist. Both comedians, who have suffered abuse and/or hate, turn their trauma into art.

Instead of laughter, audiences at both shows were privy to some of the most devas-

Darrien. The story with Martha begins similarly. She recognises the 'deer in the headlights' within him instantly (as Gadd himself admits) and goes on to exploit it. The power dynamic in that relationship operated not within the gendered framework of him as 'man' and her as 'woman'.

The repercussions of this

his 'confusion' over his

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sexual identity, anxiety, need

for validation and worst of

oning with her sexual abuse by her running coach and two-time Olympic medallist Ted Nash when she was 13.

In all the examples above, there is a clear "victim" and a clear "perpetrator" – as is in the case of Gadd's harrowing assault by Darrien. But even as Gadd unflinchingly portrays Darrien's abuse, there is a marked sense of hesitation in labelling Martha as his "abuser". And by simultaneously narrating two stories, Gadd complicates the binary between the "perpetrator" and the "survivor".

The repercussions of this abuse manifest

And herein lies the survivor's dilemma a Stockholm syndrome of sorts, where the victim begins to not only understand the actions or the motives of the abuser but is also able to sympathise with them. Societal pressures force victims to make up their minds one way or another – but as Gadd showed us, it is not as black-and-white for those who have suffered severe trauma. There can be no "rational" response to an experience that was unconscionable to begin with.

adya.goyal@expressindia.com



MAY 11, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

SIKH LEADER SHOT

FORMER AKAL TAKHT chief Giani Pratap Singh was assassinated at Amritsar, two violent Nihangs were killed and another two were captured near Abohar in Ferozepur district as authorities claimed success in nabbing two more alleged terrorists besides recovering arms and ammunition. Giani Pratap Singh, who held the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs in the '60s, was shot dead by three young boys who were regular visitors to his home.

USSR'S PEACE PLEDGE

SOVIET PRESIDENT KONSTANTIN Chernenko

pledged not to use nuclear weapons against countries which have renounced the production and acquisition of such weapons and do not have them on their territory. At a dinner hosted in honour of the visiting King of Spain, Juan Carlos, Chernenko expressed the Soviet Union's conviction that observance of peaceful relations between nuclear powers and a firm commitment to giving up the first strike option would help strengthen peace.

NATIONAL FILM AWARDS

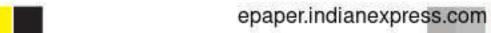
THE NATIONAL FILM scene has now been made truly national with the selection of Adi Shankaracharya – the first-ever feature film

in Sanskrit – as the best feature film of 1983 by the 31st National Film Festival jury. Om Puri has been adjudged best actor for Ardh Satya. Actress Shabana Azmi has bagged the best actress award for the second time for Khandar.

INDIA-US TALKS

WHILE NO DRAMATIC developments are expected during US Vice President George Bush's visit, his talks with PM Indira Gandhi will be wide-ranging, covering bilateral relations and issues of regional and global concern. The Prime Minister is certain to raise several issues concerning Washington's policies in South Asia, particularly regarding Pakistan.









THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2024

13 The Ideas Page

A hollowed out protest

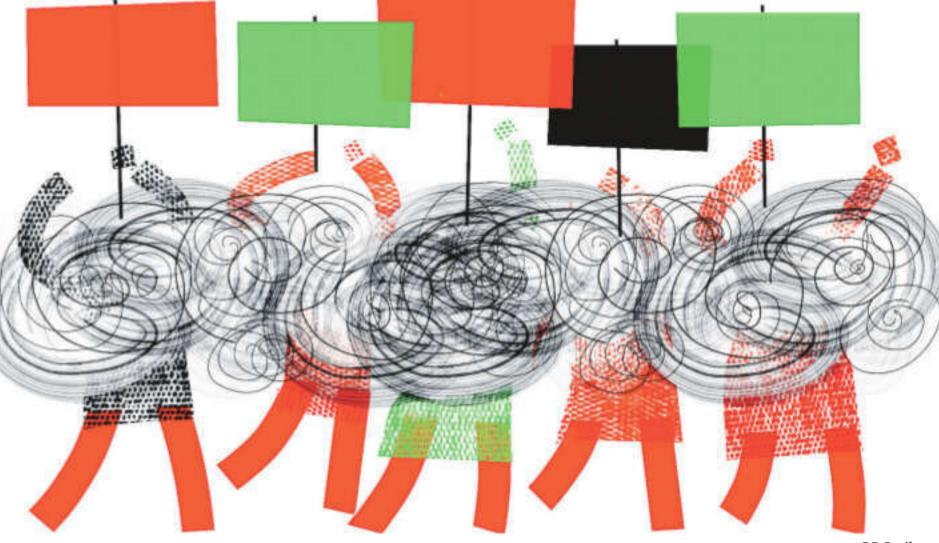
Galgotias students' unawareness speaks of a system that peddles buzzwords, discourages them from speaking up against power



Sanjay Srivastava

A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY in Uttar Pradesh has attracted what seems like unwelcome publicity across traditional and social media. A group of students from Galgotias University in Greater Noida was recently interviewed at a protest march. They carried posters and chanted slogans that criticised past and future policies of the Congress party. The party's election manifesto was a particular target, with students displaying placards that claimed that Congress would seek votes through false promises and redistribute wealth. These reflect recent comments by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was more specific in his comments that, were the Congress to be elected to power, wealth would move from one religious community to another. Students also carried posters with hammer and sickle images that decried "urban naxals".

The point of the media outrage over the event was that, when asked by a TV news reporter about the issues that the students



Technological Advancements".

There is also information about the different ranking systems in which the university has excelled. It is "Top 50 in India in Innovation", "Amongst #91 in India (Management Category)", "Top 3rd...for Filling Maximum Patents" and "By NIRF Ranking 2023". The logo of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, is included among others that are displayed. The manner in which the advertisement seeks to counter any adverse publicity regarding the bleak level of its students' public awareness of current affairs and their actual interest in it is notable. It does this through a series of technocratic slogans or banners that, upon further inquiry, may be just as empty of content as the ones raised by the protestors. Bannerism is an important aspect of what now passes as a method of imparting learning skills as well as avenue for acquiring "advanced thinking". The most critical task of those who administer education is to reflect on combining education's long-term goals of producing inquiring minds with the concurrent need for producing employable graduates. Bannerism, on the other hand, substitutes this for a series of techno-jargons whose key effects are to make educational administrators look "smart" and produce unemployable graduates. Bannerism lies at the heart of the lack of knowledge displayed by the student protestors. It is something that is part of an unfolding educational strategy employed by many educational institutions. There is a second aspect to bannerism that relates to the administrative sleight of hand where "critical thought" is reduced to a form of aesthetic activity. Here, the banners and slogans might be about "openness" and "spirit of inquiry". However, this form of bannerism translates these ideas as an inclination towards the ability to make different lifestyle choices. One might like butter chicken but should not be close-minded towards trying out a ham and pineapple pizza. Consider, for example, the statement by, Sanjeev Bikhchandani, one of the founders of Ashoka University, an institution whose reputation is built upon its "liberal arts" focus.

C R Sasikumar

In the wake of a controversy where one of Ashoka's faculty published a paper that suggested electoral manipulation by the BJP, Bhikchandani spoke against faculty and staff protests that sought to foreground the im-

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Mr Trump's reelection is the kind of nightmare scenario any responsible politician would go to great lengths to prevent. But there have to be limits. The only thing worse than playing Machiavelli for a good cause is playing Machiavelli for a good cause *and losing*." – **THE WASHINGTON POST**

At ease with diversity

PMEAC report on population indicates that all communities are close to a healthy growth mark, unlike demographic patterns elsewhere



EVA VLAARDINGERBROEK, A young conservative political activist from the Netherlands, has become famous after YouTube decided to pull down a video of her speech at a recent Conservative Political Action Conference in Budapest. YouTube described the video as "hate speech". In the speech, that secured more than 50 million views on Twitter, Eva asserted, supported by data, that Europeans are becoming a minority in Europe. The Great Replacement Theory is no longer just a theory, she argued, "but a reality". "Let's take Amsterdam, the capital. It currently consists of 56 per cent migrants, The Hague has 58 per cent migrants and Rotterdam has almost 60 per cent migrants. Of course, most of these immigrants come from non-Christian, Non-Western African and Middle Eastern countries. The Dutch population is already outnumbered in the majority of our cities", Vlaardingerbroek states. She adds that London has 54 per cent migrants and Brussels has 70 per cent migrants. Vlaardingerbroek's reference to the socalled "Great Replacement Theory" is interesting. First talked about in the late 19th century, it argued that Jews and some Western elites were conspiring to replace white Americans and Europeans with people of non-European descent, particularly Asians and Africans. In France, Renaud Camus formally codified this theory through a book in 2011 Le Grand Remplacement. Surveys show that around 60 per cent of the French believed some aspects of this theory while not less than a third of Americans and Europeans also do so. A recent study by three members of the PM-Economic Advisory Council in India, Shamika Ravi, Abraham Jose and Apurv Mishra, "Share of Religious Minorities – A Cross-Country Analysis," confirms this trend about the radically changing demographics of the OECD countries. Drawing data points from 1950 to 2015, a three-generation period of 65 years, this study concludes that of the 35 out of the 38 OECD countries or the "developed world" it analysed, 30 countries have witnessed a steep decline in the share of the majority religious denomination – Roman Catholics in this case. The study covers 167 countries – by far the most exhaustive, although basic – and finds that the average reduction of majority populations globally during the period was 22 per cent. However, it also shows that the decline was much steeper in the OECD countries where the average decline of the majority religious population was at 29 per cent. Data about Africa too is revealing. Animism or native religion was the dominant religion in 24 countries in Africa in 1950. By 2015, it was no longer a majority in any of these.

keeping with the global trends of declining majority, India too has witnessed a reduction in the share of the majority religious denomination by 7.81 per cent," it states. The authors hypothesise that the increase in the population of minorities could be a "good proxy" for arriving at the conclusion that they were "flourishing" in the given country. In India's context, a 7.81 per cent increase in the populations of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists (Parsis and Jains saw a decline) indicated that contrary to the propaganda, especially in the Western media, the minorities enjoy relative comfort in the country.

The authors end the report by stating that "contrary to the noise in several quarters, careful analysis of the data shows that minorities are not just protected but indeed thriving in India. This is particularly remarkable given the wider context within the South Asian neighbourhood where the share of the majority religious denomination has increased and minority populations have shrunk alarmingly across countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Afghanistan. India's performance suggests that there is a conducive environment to foster diversity in society. It is not possible to promote better life outcomes for the disadvantaged sections of society without providing a nurturing environment and societal support through a bottom-up approach" Data is a double-edged weapon. It can often be deceptive too. One could see that in the media and social media debates following the publication of the study in India Rather than understanding the purpose of the study to negate the propaganda about the status of minorities in India, the debate largely shifted to the growing numbers of the minorities and dangers to the majority community thereof. A comprehensive study about the growing minority population in India, "Religious Demography of India", was published by JK Bajaj, M D Srinivas and A P Joshi in 2003. Going down to the district level, that nearexhaustive study warned of the unbalanced growth of minority populations in the country. It triggered a widespread debate along similar lines at that time too. However, new data also reveals that population growth rates in India are gradually coming closer to the healthy growth mark. Total Fertility Rate (TFR) data (number of births a woman gives in her lifetime), a credible indicator to project population growth, shows that in India, against the preferred TFR of 2.19, the national average is hovering around 2. It is a decline from 2.2 in 2015 and 3.4 in 1991. This decline, according to the National Family Health Survey data, is across all religious groups. Between 1991 and 2015, this decline for Hindus was from 3.3 to 2.1, while that of Muslims was from 4.4 to 2.6. Today, the figures for Hindus and Muslims have further declined to 1.9 and 2.4 respectively. If the trend continues, India is expected to see healthy population patterns in the coming decades. PMEAC's conclusions in a way indicate the same thing that minorities enjoy all benefits and lead a comfortable life in India, while demographic changes in the whole world continue to be a matter of concern.

claimed to be concerned about (including inheritance tax, "urban naxals" and the Congress manifesto), the protestors seemed largely clueless. They provided confused answers about what it is they were protesting about and it seemed unlikely that anyone present had actually seen the Congress manifesto, let alone read it. It was, as if, they had been handed some banners and told to look appropriately agitated. Unfortunately for them, however, they encountered an alert news reporter who decided to ask some (not very difficult) questions.

Public anger over the protestors' lack of knowledge about matters of public and private interest about which they were ostensibly protesting is entirely justified. However, this is not an episode that is necessarily about the end of critical thinking and public awareness at one particular institution whose students were found to be particularly ill-informed. The lack of meaningful engagement with (and knowledge of) critical issues that shape public and private life and affect it is part of some broader trends. And, it affects many different kinds off educational contexts, both "elite" and those where students might be first generation university goers whose primary aim is to secure gainful employment rather seek a "broadening" of horizons of thought.

It is important to note that a few days after the apparent public relations disaster, Galgotias University published full-page newspaper advertisements outlining its achievements and special character as an educational institution. The centrepiece of the advertisement was a photo of students staring at computer screens inside a wellscrubbed "laboratory" and the tagline "Galgotia's Active Learning Ecosystem". The surrounding text consists of phrases such as "Living Teach Less Learn More Pedagogy", "Cultivating Job Creators over Job Seekers", "Highly Experiential" and "Embraces

Bannerism is an important aspect of what now passes as a method of imparting learning skills as well as avenue for acquiring "advanced thinking". The most critical task of those who administer education is to reflect on combining education's long-term goals of producing inquiring minds with the concurrent need for producing employable graduates. Bannerism, on the other hand, substitutes this for a series of techno-jargons whose key effects are to make educational administrators look "smart" and produce unemployable graduates. Bannerism lies at the heart of the lack of knowledge displayed by the student protestors. It is something that is part of an unfolding educational strategy employed by many educational institutions.

portance of scholarly autonomy and independent research. "Ashoka," he noted "is merely a liberal arts and sciences university. It values openness and a spirit of inquiry. It must guard against becoming an ideological ghetto and therefore not very open."

The statements by Bhikchandani are also a form of bannerism, one that lies at a different spectrum than that in the context of Galgotias University but shares something with it. This form of bannerism consists in being vocal about "fundamental" human values and simultaneously suggesting that "openness and a spirit of inquiry" do not mean a questioning of structures of power or exploring processes of change. Rather, it is about an "openness" of style and a "spirit of inquiry" that is disassociated from inquiring about why is it that things are the way they are and, instead, simply concerned with describing the world as consisting of many different things. It is an aesthetic mode of liberalism, one where everything has a purpose and where we should primarily delight in recognising this "wonderful" diversity of the world. Speaking up against existing structures of power - in order to think of a more equitable world, for example – are not part of this tradition of "openness" and "spirit of inquiry".

It is these forms of bannersim that might explain the ways in which those we might expect to have a nuanced understanding of social and political life — "university people" — deal with issues of public importance. There are ways in which, at the current time, those who oversee different kinds of universities — the "technological" and the "arts and humanities" focussed — might subscribe to a very similar way of thinking about the world, one produced through bannerism.

The writer is British Academy Global Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS University of London

It is in this background that the study looks at the data sets available about India too. "In

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS



His own light

Rashid Khan's music was a healing and illuminating force

TO DRAW IN YOUTH TATA MUST RETHINK

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CLASSICAL INDIAN MUSIC has lost one of its greats. Ustad Rashid Khan (1968-2024), of the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana, was only 55 when he was snatched away from us on January 9 this year, succumbing to prostate cancer. He had at least 20 years of singing ahead of him. His passing reminds me of the premature loss of genius Carnatic instrumentalist Mandolin Srinivas at 47; of the great G N Balasubramaniam; and, earlier, of Amir Khan, Nikhil Banerjee, and D V Paluskar.

Rashid burst on the scene after an apprenticeship in Kolkata. His gurus were his maternal uncle, Ustad Nisar Hussain Khan, and Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan of the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana, founded by Ustad Inayat Hussain Khan, his great grandfather. As in the manner of all great artistes, Rashid achieved a style which was his own quite early on.

Our sense of loss is compounded by what might have been — for classical Indian musicians are at their peak in their 50s and 60s; and some perform, with vigour, well into their 70s and 80s. I valorise listening to musicians in their later years: There is no substitute for the depth accruing from the rich and varied experiences of life which impacts your art.

I first heard Rashid Khan in the late 1980s in Kolkata. I was in the city to perform at Kala Mandir, and he was featured elsewhere. I made it a point to travel across the city to listen to him, a young singer holding out a rare promise. His rise was meteoric. In an age when trite music goes "viral" and, for the most part, the cult of the impermanent permeates our lives — Rashid was heard quizzing a journalist: "*Yeh going* viral *kya hota hai*? (What does this 'going viral' mean)?" Again: In climes in which the hideously lightweight and fleeting is prized, the grandeur, depth, and mellifluousness of Rashid's music was both a benchmark and a beacon.

In classical dance and music, and in multiple art forms, there are no shortcuts to diligent and regular study. Once you have been through the rigours of intensive training, the music and dance simply flow, even as you continue learning — and, indeed, must. Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra taught me Odissi for 12 consecutive years, but I stayed with him for 30 years, always learning, training, and being enriched; as well as performing with him across the world.

Rashid's voice was one of his most prized natural assets — it was sonorous, vigorous, and deep, yet memorably pleasing and silken. In its timbre, it sounds very much like another favourite singer of mine, Ustad Amir Khan. The popular lexicon of Hindustani music will likely categorise this as *dard* (a yearning, where pleasure and pain are conflated) — it is similar to what the great pianist Dinu Lipati possessed: Critics called it *el duende* or the holy spirit. *Dard* to my mind, also symbolises the simultaneous holding of — in your voice, music, and art — the delight, mystery, and angst of existence. In absorbing art, as one critic noted: "We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves."

Rashid's music does precisely that for us: It is transformative and expansive. His *aalap* and *vilambit khayal* showed him up as the master he was. When you listen to him sing Bageshri, or Bhimpalasi, the shared ecstasy ultimately leads to a heightened sense of being. All great art effortlessly effects such a transformation.

Today, some musicians use music to divide, and disrupt — through the artifices of vociferation, and feeble impertinences. Rashid Khan's music was — as all great music is — a healing, cohesive, and illuminating force. In a memorable *jugalbandi* in Bengaluru, Rashid sang the popular Kannada song by the seer Vyasaraya (1450-1539) *Krishna nee begane baro* — urging the child Krishna to swiftly appear — in the *raga* Kalyani/Yaman Kalyan. As I listened to Rashid, I thought, the infant Krishna would have crawled right up to him, owing to the lilting richness and the genuine affection in his voice.

Where is the Christian or the Hindu versus the Muslim here? Why is there a need to debate in which century, and from which creed, Hindustani music originated? Bharata's *Natyashastra* — a treatise on dance, the arts, and theatre, devotes an entire chapter to classical Indian music, and dates back to the 2nd century BCE. Where is the sense in being territorial when the very

language of music is universal and transcends barriers? Why can we not let music grant to all — rich or poor, young or old, Parsi, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or Jewish — the aquamarine sky of the soul? Empedeocles wrote about how happy the person is who has gained the wealth of divine thought. Even happier are those whose intrinsic natures have allowed them the bliss of merging into the immeasurable beyond, through music.

The *raga* Bageshri, a midnight *raga*, is a favourite of mine (it was the late great Kishori Amonkar's favourite too, as she told me decades ago). When you listen to Rashid sing Bageshri, you have scant need for much else: His melodies rise to address all of creation. Rashid always sang in perfect sur, never once deviating from the rigours of exacting pitch.

Music is illumination — Astraya purusham swayam jyotirbhavati: In this state, the person herself becomes the light; and she is also svena jyotisha prasvapithi, that is: revealing herself by her own lustre. (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.iii.9.) Rashid Khan was his own light, and his music was our light too.

The writer was appointed Distinguished Fellow at Carnegie Mellon University in 1990. She is a global adviser on public policy, communication and international relations and an Odissi and Bharatanatyam artiste and choreographer THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Parties to blame, need to do more' (IE, May 10). Young voters find it difficult to relate to political leaders whose average age is above 50. Students live with the perception that politics is a bad word and is best kept at arm's length as a profession. Many young citizens who sign up as voters end up not voting. Therefore, it is important for political parties not only to motivate young persons to register but also to cast their votes. This needs to be a year-long process instead of picking up steam before poll season. **SS Paul**, Nadia

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Parties to blame, need to do more' (IE, May 10). The youth are the future of our nation. Why then are young people disengaged from politics? The answer lies in contemporary political parties' relentless pursuit of power, which sidelines genuine concerns. Dissent is often silenced, attacks on Opposition only deepen the issues. The youth prioritise job security, nation-building, and trust in science over divisive politics and religious agendas. Their focus is on national development and societal unity. It's imperative for politicians to recognise these shifts, as ignoring them risks eroding the very fabric of our nation. Ajay Corriea, Vasai

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Turbulence in the air' (IE, May 10). The strike by Air India Express employees has thrown the airfare itineraries out of gear. The Tata group of companies are of repute and have an established and respected work culture. But the current developments run counter to their stature. Safeguarding the interests of human capital is paramount for any business group to make mergers seamless. These moves are invariably counter-productive. **Deepak Singhal,** *Noida*

HOLISTIC LEARNING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The good doctors' (IE, May 8). While the idea proposed by the UGC to grant both four-year bachelor's degree holders and master's degree holders access to doctoral research opportunities is appreciable, efficacy of the entry-test, UGC-NET is questionable. Former NCERT director Krishna Kumar once called this test "notorious" and emphasised its heavy reliance on rote memorisation. In light of this, it becomes imperative for universities and UGC to reconsider their approach to admissions, ensuring that they prioritise holistic evaluation methods that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and diverse perspectives.

Mohsin Ilahi, Nasirabad





16 FILLING THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, MATTIL 2024 THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2024

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Dabholkar murder case: Recall of twists and turns over a decade

SUSHANT KULKARNI& **CHANDAN HAYGUNDE** PUNE, MAY10

MORE THAN a decade after rationalist Narendra Dabholkar's murder, a special court in Pune convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment his two assailants, Sachin Andure and Sharad Kalaskar. The court, however, acquitted Virendrasinh Tawade, Sanjeev Punalekar and Vikram Bhave due to lack of evidence.

"On one level we are satisfied that the two assailants have been convicted... But the questions about the masterminds and overarching conspiracy behind the murder remain unanswered," Dr Hamid, Dabholar's son, told reporters outside the court complex.

Dabholkar's 2013 murder was followed by those of communist leader Govind Pansare, Kannada scholar M M Kalburgi

(both in 2015), and Bengaluru-based journalist Gauri Lankesh (2017). Over the years, investigating agencies examining these cases have pointed to similarities between them, and the possibility of common perpetrators.

Anti-superstition crusader

Dabholkar, a doctor by profession, revitalised Maharashtra's anti-superstition movement in the late 1980s by founding the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS). He took on tantriks and godmen, who he believed exploited the public by promising miracles and promoting unscientific thinking. He was also the long-time editor of Sadhana, a socialist Marathi weekly, and active in anti-caste movements in the state.

On August 13, 2013, Dabholkar, 67, was shot dead by two men while on a morning walk in Pune. Days later, the Maharashtra government cleared the long-pending Anti-Superstition

and Black Magic Ordinance, which went on to become law in December 2013.

Early arrests, no breakthrough

Soon after the murder, Thane Police arrested alleged firearms dealer Manish Nagori and his aide Vikas Khandelwal in an unrelated case. They were later transferred to the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), and 40 illegal firearms were allegedly recovered. A ballistic examination of one of the firearms reportedly matched with markings on a cartridge seized at Dabholkar's murder spot.

This led Pune Police to arrest the duo who were produced in court on January 21, 2014. Nagori and Khandelwal claimed that ATS chief Rakesh Maria offered them Rs 25 lakh for confessing to Dabholkar's murder – a claim they later retracted. The duo were eventually released on bail, never to be chargesheeted in the case. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

found no prosecutable evidence against them.

CBI takes over investigation

The CBI took over the probe in June 2014, following a Bombay High Court order. Based on a statement by Kolhapur-based Hindutva activist Sanjay Sadvilkar, also a witness in the Pansare murder case, the agency arrested ENT surgeon Tawade on June 10, 2016. Tawade, linked to Goa-based rightwing outfit Sanatan Sanstha, had already been arrested by the Maharashtra Police in the Pansare case.

The CBI accused Tawade of masterminding the conspiracy to kill Dabholkar, citing the "long standing enmity/ hatred" between MANS and Sanatan Sanstha as motive. In its 2016 chargesheet against Tawade, CBI said absconding Sanstha members Sarang Akolkar and Vinay Pawar had shot Dabholkar.

In August 2018, however, the agency arrested Sanstha activists Andure and Kalaskar

instead, and told the court it was they who had killed Dabholkar. Both men are also accused in the Pansare murder, and Kalaskar is an accused in the Gauri Lankesh murder as well.

In May 2019, CBI arrested Mumbai-based Sanatan Sanstha lawyer Punalekar and his aide Bhave, alleging that Punalkar had advised Kalaskar to destroy the firearms used in multiple murders – including those of Dabholkar and Lankesh. According to the CBI, following Punalekar's instructions, Kalaskar had dismantled four country-made pistols and thrown its parts into a creek near Thane on July 7 in 2018.

The CBI claimed to have recovered the weapons in March 2020. But a CBI investigation officer later told the trial court that efforts to recover the weapon used in Dabholkar's murder were unsuccessful.

Question of larger conspiracy A UAPA special court framed charges against Tawade, Punalkar, Bhave, Andure, and Kalaskar on September 15, 2021.

Tawade, Andure, Kalaskar, and Bhave were charged under Section 302 (murder) read with Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC, Section 16 of the UAPA (punishment for terrotist act), and provisions of the Arms Act Punalekar was charged under Section 201 IPC (causing disappearance of evidence). They pleaded not guilty.

Members of Dabholkar's family have claimed that higher-ups in Sanatan Sanstha (above Tawade) were involved in the murders of Dabholkar and the others, but their role was ignored in the investigation.

During the trial, however, CBI investigation officer S R Singh disputed this, saying that the agency had recorded Sanatan Sanstha founder Dr Jayant Athawale's statement in February 2016, and found nothing incriminating. The Sanstha has denied any role in the murders.

EXPLAINED LAW

CHARGES ARE FRAMED AGAINST BRIJ BHUSHAN: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A TRIAL judge in Delhi framed charges against BIP MP and former Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh under Sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 354A (sexual harassment) of the Indian Penal Code on Friday. Singh has been accused of sexual harassment by several women wrestlers.

"offences against women". Section 354 states that whoever assaults or uses criminal force against a woman "intending to outrage or knowing it to be likely that he will thereby outrage her modesty" shall be punished with a term of imprisonment between 1 and 5 years and/or a fine.

EXPLAINED POLITICS Turnouts, delays, Form 17C

ECI has rejected allegations that the declaration of final voter turnouts have been unfairly delayed. Why are data on voting percentage revised after the polling date? Some key questions answered

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DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Framing of charges

After police register an FIR and conduct an investigation, they file a chargesheet in the trial court detailing the offences allegedly committed and the evidence collected during the investigation. Police filed a 1,500-page chargesheet on June 15 last year, charging Brij Bhushan with Sections 354, 354A, and 354D (stalking).

The Rouse Avenue court that framed charges under IPC Sections 354 and 354A, noted that it has found sufficient material to frame charges for the offence of criminal intimidation in the allegations of two of the complainants.

The framing of charges means the trial judge has found a prima facie case against the accused, based on the material in the chargesheet. This is not a determination of whether the accused has committed the alleged offences — it is only an acknowledgment that sufficient grounds exist to proceed with the trial.

After the trial judge frames the charges, if the accused pleads innocent, the next step is the summoning of witnesses for cross-examination by the defence lawyer(s). After witnesses are examined, both sides present their arguments. Upon completion of arguments, the judge may reserve judgment. If the judge decides to convict the accused, the court will also pronounce the sentence.

Sections of Penal Code

Sections 354 and 354A, along with Sections 354 B-D are often classified as

The phrase "outrage her modesty" is not defined in the IPC. However, the Supreme Court in State of Punjab v. Major Singh (1996) held that "...the essence of a woman's modesty is her sex. The modesty of an adult female is writ large on her body. Young or old, intelligent or imbecile, awake or sleeping, the woman possesses a modesty capable of being outraged."

Section 354A deals with sexual harassment, which is defined as follows: first, "physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures"; second, "a demand or request for sexual favours"; third, "showing pornography against the will of a woman": fourth. "making sexually coloured remarks".

The first, second, and third acts are treated more severely, and carry a punishment of up to 3 years in prison and a fine. The fourth act can be punished with a term of up to 1 year and a fine.

The trial judge has also seen fit to frame charges of criminal intimidation against Brij Bhushan, which is defined in Section 503 of the IPC. It states that anyone who threatens another person with an "injury to his person, reputation or property" with the intention to "cause alarm to that person, or to cause that person to do any act which he is not legally bound to do, or to omit to do any act which that person is legally entitled to do", is guilty of criminal intimidation.

Section 506 lays down the punishment for criminal intimidation: up to 2 years' imprisonment, which can extend to 7 years if the person threatens to cause death, grievous hurt, destruction of property by fire, "impute unchastity to a woman", or commit an offence punishable with death, life imprisonment, or up to 7 years' imprisonment.

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हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium	Mukherjee Nagar	16 May 3 PM
रडमिशन आरंभ	21 May 11:30 AM	Rarol Bagh	16 May 6 PM

THE ELECTION Commission of India (ECI) on Monday strongly refuted allegations by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge – made in a letter to INDIA allies on May 6 – that the "delay" in the release of final voter turnouts indicated an "attempt to doctor the final results".

Kharge had asked why the first-phase turnout increased by 5.5 percentage points and the second-phase turnout by 5.74 percentage points between the close of polling and April 30, when the final voting figures for both these phases were released.

What were the initial and final turnout figures in the first two phases of polling?

In an official release issued at 7.55 pm on April 19, the ECI said turnout in the constituencies where votes were cast in the first phase was "over 60% at 7pm". The release said the final figure was likely to be higher after reports came in from polling stations where voting continued beyond the scheduled cut-off of 6 pm to allow voters who had already entered the stations to vote.

A day later, most reports, including those in The Indian Express, said turnout was 65.5%, attributing it to senior officials in the ECI.

On April 26, when votes were cast in the second phase, the ECI press release, issued at 9 pm, put the turnout at 60.96% at 7 pm. News organisations subsequently reported a more-or-less final figure of 66.71%, based on unofficial confirmation from senior ECI officers.

On April 30, the ECI released the final figures for both phases through an official release, which put the phase 1 turnout at 66.14% and the phase 2 turnout at 66.71%.

After voting in the third phase on May 7, the ECI first released an estimated turnout of 61.45% at 8 pm, and then revised it some time before midnight to 64.4% for 11.40 pm. The day after, this turnout figure was updated to 67.33%.

In its first press release on May 7 evening, the ECI said it would release the final turnout data by May 11.

Why is there a difference between initial and final voter turnout numbers?

According to the ECI, the initial number is a preliminary estimate, which changes. ECI officials say the higher final figure does not mean that votes were cast even after polls closed – it could be simply due to the fact that the Returning Officers (ROs) sent in the



Opposition INDIA leaders outside the Election Commission of India's offices at Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

updated data late.

According to the ECI officials, even the data released on April 30 is not final — that figure will be known only after postal ballots are counted on the day of counting (June 4) and added to the turnout.

On both April 19 and April 26,

state- and constituency-wise turnouts were available in real time on the ECI's Voter Turnout mobile application. This app — which was launched by the ECI after the second phase of polling in 2019 – carries this disclaimer: "This is an approximate trend, as data from some Polling Stations (PS) takes time and this trend does not include data of postal ballot voting. Final data for each PS is shared in Form 17C with all Polling Agents."

Form 17C is made available to all candidates through their polling agents at the close of polling. Form 17C includes the total numbers of electors and voters at the seat. This information is not available on the Voter Turnout app. (More on Form 17C below)

Were the official turnout figures released 11 days and 4 days after phases 1 and 2 of the voting respectively unusually delayed?

No, says the ECI. In its response to Kharge, the ECI provided details of the release of official turnout data for the 2019 Lok Sabha election and state Assembly elections over the past few years. This data, it said, "would testify there is no unusual delay than what is required to collect data from large number of polling stations". The data provided by the ECI showed a 1-3 percentage point increase in the turnouts in the 5-7 days it took to release the phase-wise turnouts in 2019.

ECI officials say it takes time to verify and collate the data, particularly from remote polling stations. In some cases, polling parties have to make it back from these remote locations to the district headquarters, where they have a stable Internet connection to transmit the data.

In its letter to Kharge, the ECI said that after the polling parties arrive, documents are scrutinised by the Returning Officers in the presence of candidates and observers. The RO then completes data entry, and publishes the data on the Voter Turnout app.

"This process takes P+1 (polling day plus 1) or P+2 (polling day plus 2) days depending on constituencies and arrival schedule of polling parties due to geographical and weather conditions. This data may further get updated for any constituency where repoll is being conducted, on conclusion of repoll and arrival of parties which is normally on P+4 days," it said.

And what is Form 17C? To whom is it issued. and when?

As per the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, there are two forms that have data on

The former is a register of voters, in which polling officials record the details of every voter who comes into the booth and signs the register. The latter is the account of the votes recorded.

the number of electors and voters – Forms

17A and 17C.

Form 17C is issued to the polling agents of candidates at the close of polling.

It has the identification numbers of the EVMs used in the polling station; the total number of electors assigned to the polling station; the total number of voters as entered in the register for voters (Form 17A); the number of voters who decided not to record their votes after signing the register; the number of voters who were not allowed to vote; and the total number of test votes to be deducted, and total number of votes recorded per EVM.

Part-II of the same form carries the results of the counting, which are entered on counting day.

The data in Form 17C are considered final and lie at the heart of any Election Petition that may be filed challenging the result. In a statement issued on April 30, the ECI said the "actual data of Form 17C shall prevail which is already shared with candidates".

Apart from being the record that is to be used in a possible legal challenge, the data in Form 17C are also used by candidates to verify the results on counting day. The number of electors and those who cast their votes as recorded in Form 17C can be matched with the EVM count.

Why is there a demand to make the Form 17C data public?

Activists have sought to make a case for full transparency. Also, they say, even if Form 17C is made available to the candidates agents, given the large numbers of polling stations at each constituency, difficulties of coordination, and shortage of resources many candidates find it impossible to collate all the figures for the constituency as a whole.

The ECI has said that it is not "legally bound to publish any voter turnout data at aggregate level". It has sought to allay concerns by reiterating that the provision of Form 17C is a statutory requirement, and no candidate or party has alleged that they have not received the form at the close of polling.

Also, on the day of counting, the counting supervisor must certify in Part-II of the form that there is no discrepancy in the votes counted and the votes recorded in Part-I on polling day. This is countersigned by all candidates or their representatives, and discrepancies, if any, can be challenged, the ECI says.



Israel, Saudi Arabia, and churn in the Middle East: the view from India

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SHUBHAJIT ROY

THE UNITED STATES is trying to forge a mutual defence treaty with Saudi Arabia, and help Israel in its conflicts with Hamas and Iran, such that "Israel and Saudi Arabia are trading places", columnist Thomas Friedman wrote in The New York Times last week.

According to the article, the Saudi-US deal will pivot on the specific ways in which the US will control the civilian nuclear energy programme that the kingdom will get; the precise – whether explicit or less formal – nature of the mutual defence pact; and on Saudi Arabia's commitment to not move from US dollars to the Chinese yuan in pricing oil. However, for the deal to go through, it is critical that Saudi normalises relations with

Israel, Friedman wrote, And "that will happen only if Israel...get[s] out of Gaza, freeze[s] the building of settlements in the West Bank and embark[s] on a three- to five-year 'pathway' to establish a Palestinian state in the occupied territories."

For US President Joe Biden, heading into a difficult re-election battle in November, this scenario could bring significant benefits. Also, a successful conclusion of the US-Saudi mutual defence treaty would signal that America is back in play in the Middle East, where Beijing announced its increasing strategic clout by brokering a peace deal between Rivadh and Tehran in March 2023.

India and Saudi Arabia

For India, a US-Saudi Arabia pact and peace between Israel and Iran and Israel and Hamas could mean an opportunity to better harness the region's potential.

Especially over the past decade, India has sought to build its relationship with Saudi Arabia, where the young Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has been driving a range of radical reforms to put his country in better sync with the 21st

century world.

India-Saudi trade was valued at \$52.76 billion in 2022-23. India is the second largest trade partner for Saudi, while Saudi is India's fourth largest trade partner. Energy cooperation is at the heart of the relationship; Saudi Arabia was India's third largest crude and petroleum products sourcing destination in 2022-23.

Major Saudi investment groups ARAMCO, SABIC, ZAMIL, E-holidays, and Al Batterjee Group have invested in India. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) **IN FACT** has put in approximately \$4.6 billion in Indian startups such as Delhivery, FirstCry, Grofers, Ola, OYO, Paytm, and PolicyBazaar.

The more than 2.4 million strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia is seen as a living bridge between the two countries, and the Indian diaspora is widely respected in the kingdom for their contributions.

India and Israel

India's ties with Israel have become steadily more visible and significant over

the past decade or so, centred mainly on defence and security, innovation, agriculture, and water.

Trade volumes have risen from around \$200 million in 1992 (consisting primarily of diamonds) to \$10.7 billion (excluding defence) in 2022-23, of which Indian exports were around \$8.4 billion. India is Israel's sec-

ond-largest trading partner in Asia, and the seventh largest globally.

Israel has been a major supplier of defence equipment, as well as of hightech communications systems that have helped meet some of India's security tech challenges. Israel is an important partner to India in the innovation ecosystem – smart irrigation systems being an example of cooperation in this field.

Potential and challenge

The strengthened bilateral strategic partnerships have allowed India to delink its domestic politics from its foreign policy and strategy in the region as a whole. After more than three decades of diplomatic work on its relationships in the Middle East, New

Delhi had begun to reap some benefits.

In July 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated virtually in the first leaders' summit under the I2U2 framework along with Israel's then Prime Minister Yair Lapid, UAE's President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and President Biden.

And in September 2023, the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor connectivity project was launched on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in New Delhi.

But the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks by Hamas in southern Israel, and the consequent retaliatory military response from Israel on Gaza have posed difficult challenges for India's diplomatic strategy. New Delhi will welcome a durable peace in the Middle East, with a stronger American presence in the region it considers its extended neighbourhood.

Netanyahu and MBS

Two of the most important leaders in the region, MBS and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, have undergone major reputational transformations in recent years. MBS, who was tarnished by his war in

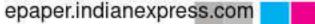
Yemen and alleged involvement in the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, appears to some commentators today as the great liberaliser after decades of hardline absolutist rule that had stifled Saudi society.

His sweeping reforms, including new rights for Saudi women, have given MBS a reputation that makes it easier for the leaders of many western democracies to do business with him.

On the other hand, Netanyahu has become, in the company of his far right allies, a hawk who appears to link the continuation of the war in Gaza to his own political survival. His intransigence has made the US steadily more impatient – and Biden said this week that he had told Netanyahu that he would halt weapons shipments if the Israeli military invaded Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip.

The warning has not had an impact on Netanyahu. Halting the war is key to Biden's re-election campaign. American university campuses are in turmoil, and polls suggest that young Democratic voters are upset with the US's support for the war.







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INDIA FIRST

Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar

When we look at an issue, we look at it from the point of view of Indian national interest. And if that Indian national interest means taking pressure, offending other countries or pushing back, we are prepared to do it

Don't hang before trial

Wrongdoings must be probed and action taken, but loose allegations against businessmen are totally unwarranted

USTAFEW months before his landslide victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a townhall meeting that he did not believe in the culture of criticising Indian industry. A few months before that, he said he was not scared to be seen with industrialists as his conscience was clear and that they too had contributed to the development of the country. In that context, it was a surprise that in a campaign speech this week, the PM chose to name two of the country's biggest business houses and wondered whether the Congress party has suddenly become silent on its constant criticism of the duo in exchange for "truckloads of black money". He asked Rahul Gandhi and his party to declare how much they have received from Adani and Ambani.

By making the bribery accusation, Modi may be seeking some political brownie points by turning the tables on Gandhi. But the question is should the country's PM make such serious, specific allegations against two industry groups without submitting any evidence? If there is evidence, a democracy demands that it be made public and appropriate action taken. In any case, the ruling party hasn't shied away from using investigative agencies to probe what it calls rampant corruption among opposition parties. So the truckloads of money that have allegedly reached the Congress office should have been stopped and made public long ago.

The Congress and Gandhi, in particular, have of course been totally irresponsible in their incessant allegations against the PM for being hand in glove with the industrialist duo. The point is simple: whatever be the suspicion, nobody has the right to throw mud at anybody without substantiation. It was in fact quite shameful that a Congress spokesperson boasted the other day that Gandhi has spoken 103 times about Adani and 30 times about Ambani between April 3 and May 8, as if that was a trophy to be displayed. There have been several allegations against the industri-

HERE HAS BEEN some concern expressed on the declining savings of households in India. While the data available is up to FY23, the disturbing trend is the sharp fall in the ratio of net financial assets to GDP to a five-year low. Prima facie, it appears the situation may not have been reversed in FY24. What exactly are the issues here?

There are two aspects to the growth in net financial assets of households as individuals are both savers and borrowers.As savers they are the dominant contributor to national savings. The latter has picked up pace in the last couple of years. There is a growing belief that living on leverage is no longer a taboo. In fact, it is a preferred choice to move up the spending ladder and has been beneficial for the consumer goods segment.

The graphic gives information on the ratios of net financial assets, financial assets, and financial liabilities of households to GDP in the last five years. Net financial assets are defined as financial assets minus financial liabilities.

There are two concerns here. The first is on the ratio of financial assets to

SMALLER POCKETS

NO MAJOR WORRY FOR ECONOMY SO LONG AS SAVINGS ARE ADEQUATE TO FINANCE INVESTMENT

Shrinking savings

of savings. Real consumption

increased by just around 5% in these five years and slowed down further to 3% in FY24. Further, given that inflation has been high at 6.2% in FY21, and 5.5% and 6.7% in the subsequent years, there was a tendency for the households to pay higher prices for a limited basket of goods. This led to compromises on savings. Further, the pent-up demand for consumption also contributed to a dip in savings.

Also, interest rates in banking were low leading to near-negative real interest rates which could have been a deterrent while market-savvy people had moved to the stock market. But the fact that savings have gone down is serious and has to be reversed.

On the liabilities side, there has been a sharp increase in FY23 from



MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, Bank of Baroda Views are personal

> higher borrowings mainly from banks and non-banking finance companies. In fact, the financial system has been pushing retail loans at a time when corporate demand for funds was weak due to low investment. This began around 2015 when asset quality review was undertaken as corporate non-performing assets had gone up sharply. Banks directed their efforts to the retail side where the probability of delinquency was low in a market typified by a growing aspirational class.

> Three segments have witnessed a sharp increase over the last five years. The first is home loans, where the government has given a boost in the affordable segment. The second is auto loans, which have picked up momentum as the demand for automobiles (cars and two-wheelers) has increased.

which has grown at a quick pace and is used for consumption purposes, drawing the regulator's attention. Last year, the capital requirements were enhanced for these loans. There has also been an increase in the use of credit cards, although not very significant in terms of share in total credit.

There is a strong argument that if households are borrowing to buy a house or car, there is an increase in investment, too, as it is linked to a fixed asset that is good for the economy. Unsecured loans, along with credit cards, have been considered to be financing options for consumption and need to be kept in check.

There are two divergent views here. While borrowing for consuming isn't normally looked upon as prudent even for the government, it is considered risky for households who may not necessarily have the financial strength to service the same. However, if one looks at developed countries, growth in the '80s and '90s was accelerated due to consumerism that was supported by leverage. Hence shopping for groceries and paying by credit cards does add to aggregate demand, and has strong backward linkages with the relevant industries and can spur investment. Therefore, consumption with leverage is not really a bad thing within limits. It can be argued that leveragebased consumption has increased the financial liabilities of households and led to also savings being lowered over time. As long as the savings are adequate to finance investment, there would be no major problem for the economy. However, once investment picks up and is not backed up by domestic savings, there would be greater dependence on foreign capital. This finally gets reflected also in the macroeconomic concept of current account deficit, which is the difference between the two and has a different set of challenges.

alists concerned, and a probe is on by the market regulator against the Adanis, but allegations alone shouldn't give anybody a licence to accuse them of bribing their way into the corridors of power.

Of course, this is nothing new. That business and industry share a symbiotic relationship with politics is an open secret, creating the conditions for corruption and cronyism. In fact, the year 1968 was a turning point in the history of election finance in India when Indira Gandhi outlawed corporate donations to political parties, but did not move towards state funding as a substitute, as is true of most continental democracies. In India, judicial systems are slow and political influence and connections remain critical for such basics as land acquisition, water connections, licences and permits. A recent example of crony capitalism was the list of electoral bond buyers. Most of the money donated through the bond scheme came from 17 companies after they faced—either directly or through their subsidiaries-investigations for tax evasion, fraud or other corporate malfeasance. Several companies donated amounts far in excess of their annual profit or revenue. And the beneficiaries were almost all important political parties—both national and regional. But the point remains that this trend of loose allegations against businesses must end. In 2015, Modi asked a group of businessmen: "Why has your appetite for risk-taking diminished?" Part of the answer lies in the allegations made by the PM himself and the Congress leader.

Microsoft's hedge against OpenAl makes perfect sense

WHEN MICROSOFT CORP. invested more than \$10 billion for a chunk of OpenAI, scientists inside its storied research division were rankled about being shoved aside for a newer player from outside the company. Microsoft Research was more than 30 years old and stuffed with esteemed scientists who'd won Turing Awards and Fields Medals, and here was chief executive officer Satya Nadella last summer berating them for falling behind Alphabet Inc.'s Google on AI research. But Nadella wasn't switching his focus from one research team to another. He was doing what he does best: branching out.

It appears that Nadella was already working on a strategic hedge against OpenAI, building its own large language model technology. Microsoft chief technology officer Kevin Scott confirmed in a LinkedIn post that the company was working on an AI model called MAI-1, which, according to an earlier report in The Information, would be large enough to "compete" with OpenAI.

That same fear of missing out is what fuelled Microsoft's first investment in OpenAI in the first place. In June of 2019, Scott warned Nadella about the advancements OpenAI was making, according to emails released from the US Justice



Department's antitrust investigation into Google. Scott admitted to being highly dismissive of the company's work at first, before realising both Google and OpenAI could now process human language in ways that "we couldn't easily replicate". As he looked closer at the gap between Microsoft and the frontrunners,"I got very, very worried", Scott added.

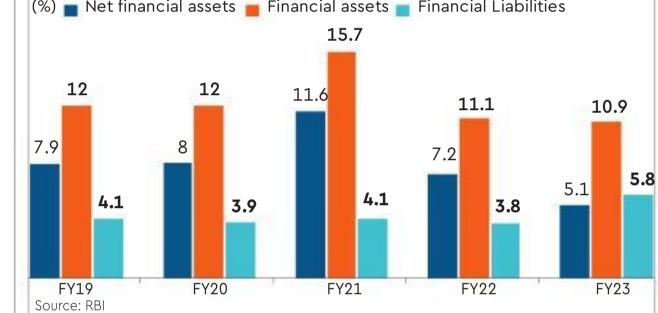
Nadella then looped in Microsoft's chief financial officer, Amy Hood, to the email chain. "[This is] why I want to do this," he said, referring to what would become Microsoft's initial \$1 billion investment in OpenAI the following month. But while some CEOs might have let their new partner forge the company's strategic path, Nadella didn't. His radical drive to diversify Microsoft's business in the last 10 years reflects that approach to curbing the company's reliance on a single dominant product like its Windows operating system. When he saw declines in PC shipments on the horizon in 2014, Nadella pushed Microsoft into the cloud business, eventually grabbing more than 20% of the global cloud-computing market. That same safeguarding strategy could also help if OpenAI pulls the rug out from under Microsoft again. Last year's dramatic firing and return of OpenAI CEO Sam Altman may have led Microsoft to getting an observer seat on its more corporate-friendly board, but the AI firm's unusual structure still makes it a ticking time bomb for Nadella. It remains "an entirely independent company" governed by its nonprofit board, according to OpenAI's website. That board decides if and when OpenAI has finally built human-level "artificial general intelligence", or AGI, to which Microsoft isn't entitled. "AGI is explicitly carved out of all commercial and IP licensing agreements," the company says. At the drop of a hat, OpenAI's board could decide to stop sharing its technology with Microsoft in much the same way it decided to fire Altman. That puts Nadella in a precarious position — and makes his efforts to build powerful AI internally all the more reasonable. The success of that effort is another matter. Microsoft's internal AI teams have baggage to work through: the humiliation of falling behind Google, the rebukes from Nadella, and the historic gaffes with projects like Tay, the chatbot that spouted racist, abusive messages. Mustafa Suleyman, a co-founder of Google DeepMind, is the new face of Microsoft's AI efforts. Former colleagues call him a charismatic Pied Piper for engineers. That bodes well for making Nadella's Plan B to work — if it's ever really needed.

GDP, which is coming down; and the second is the sharp spike in the ratio of financial liabilities. A combination of the two raises a red flag. FY21 can be taken to be an aberration as this was the Covid year, which saw a fall in economic activity and avoidance of any kind of consumption leading to significant increase in savings. Hence the ratio of financial assets crossed 15%. The ratio of financial liabilities did not come down but inched up marginally with home loans providing the traction.

What can be a worry is that the ratio of financial assets has come down from 12% in FY19 to 10.9% in FY23, which means people are saving less. This can be attributed mainly to the fact that households were spending more on consumption and at the cost

3.8% of GDP to 5.8%. This is a result of The third part is unsecured loans,

RATIO OF HOUSEHOLD ASSETS/LIABILITIES TO GDP (%) 💼 Net financial assets 💼 Financial assets 💼 Financial Liabilities



The election-devaluation cycle



JEFFREY FRANKEL

Professor of capital formation and growth, Harvard University, and research associate, US National Bureau of Economic Research

Devaluations are so unpopular that a political leader is almost twice as likely to lose office in the six months following one as in normal times

THE PROPOSITION THAT major currency devaluations are more likely to come immediately after, rather than before, an election is being tested anew. In the biggest voting year in history, the implications could be far-reaching.

Economists will recall the Nobel laureate economist William D Nordhaus's influential 1975 paper "The Political Business Cycle." According to Nordhaus, in the year leading up to an election, governments are more inclined to pursue fiscal and monetary expansion. The idea is that accelerating output and employment growth will boost the incumbent's popularity before the election, with the bill-in terms of debt troubles and inflation—coming due only after the vote.

But Nordhaus's seminal paper also predicted a political foreign-exchange cycle. Emerging-market and developing economies, Nordhaus suggested, might seek to prop up the value of their currencies before an election, even if it means spending down their foreignexchange reserves, only to undergo a devaluation soon after. The theory of the election-devaluation cycle was more fully developed in a series of papers by Ernesto Stein and co-authors. Devaluation might be pursued intentionally, with the incoming government blaming the consequences—including inflation and, often, economic contraction -on its predecessor. (Devaluations are so unpopular that a political leader is almost twice as likely to lose office in the six months following one as in normal times.) Or it might be forced on the country, in the form of a balance-of-payments crisis.

Recent events appear to support this claim. Consider Nigeria's February 2023 presidential election. The incumbent, who was term-limited, had long used foreignexchange intervention, capital controls, and multiple exchange rates to avoid devaluing the naira. But Nigeria's new president, Bola Tinabu, oversaw a 49% devaluation on June 14, 2023, just two weeks after his inauguration. (This was not enough to restore equilibrium in the bal-

ance of payments, and the naira has since plummeted further.) Turkey offers

another example. Before the May 2023 elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan famously instructed the central bank to keep interest rates low in order to

Two days after his inauguration, Milei devalued the peso by more than half. He has also slashed government spending (for example, on energy subsidies), thereby rapidly achieving a budget surplus, and introduced sweeping pro-business reforms. Though inflation remains very high, the central bank's foreign-exchange reserves stopped falling after the devaluation-an outcome that is consistent with Nordhaus's theory.

A fourth example is Egypt. President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's control over state institu-**Elections do not always** tions and neutralisation bring devaluations. of any serious political **Neither India (elections** challenger would have underway) nor Mexico been enough to assure his re-election in last (vote in June) seems to December's election. be in need of major Nonetheless, Sisi's govexchange-rate ernment postponed unpleasant economic adjustment measures until after the vote, even though the economy had been in crisis for some time. The widely expected devaluation of the Egyptian pound (by 45%)—part of an International Monetary Fund program that also included the usual unpopular demands for monetary and fiscal discipline—came on March 6. Finally, in Indonesia, the rupiah has been depreciating ever since February's contentious presidential election. It neared an all-time low earlier in April. President-elect Prabowo Subiantowho won the election thanks to the backing of his popular but term-limited

predecessor, Joko Widodo-has not even been inaugurated yet. It is almost as if the departing government is attempting to do Subianto a favour by getting the devaluation out of the way.

Of course, elections do not always bring devaluations. Neither India, where elections are now underway, nor Mexico, which will hold a vote in June, seems to be in need of major exchange-rate adjustment. But the election-devaluation cycle could play out in, say, Bolivia, which is under considerable balance-ofpayments pressure, with dwindling international reserves, as it approaches its 2025 presidential election.

One could also imagine this cycle taking hold in Venezuela, where the economy is in shambles, owing to long-term mismanagement, and the currency (the bolivar) is chronically overvalued. But just as the government effectively prohibits political challengers-no major opposition candidates are being allowed to run in this July's presidential election – it essentially outlaws foreign-exchange purchases. As a result, it might be a long time before equilibrium is restored to the foreign-exchange market.s Spending foreign-exchange reserves is not the only way to fend off a currency devaluation; capital controls or multiple exchange rates can also be employed. But while such measures can enable governments to delay difficult reforms, the pressure to adjust to macroeconomic fundamentals is unavoidable. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2024. www.project-syndicate.org

boost growth and to intervene to support the

lira, attracting considerable ridicule for his insistence that the populist policy would reduce soaring inflation. After the vote, the lira was immediately devalued, and it continued to depreciate throughout the year.

Then there is Argentina, which surprised the world by electing Javier Milei in its presidential election last November. Often described as a far-right libertarian, Milei–who does not represent an established political party-campaigned on a promise to reduce the government's role in the economy and abolish the central bank's ability to print money.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kejriwal's bail

By releasing Arvind Kejriwal, the supremo of the Aam Aadmi Party and chief minister of Delhi, on bail and allowing him to participate in electioneering, the Supreme Court has proved yet again that justice is very much alive and kicking in our country. We can now expect Kejriwal to use all his might in the hope that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) bloc finds its Waterloo in many

states. While most of the election pundits have predicted that the NDA will not be able to notch up 400+ seats in this election, Kejriwal's release will make the task more challenging for the NDA. One hopes Kejriwal makes the best use of the opportunity, aligns with the other opposition parties, is ready for some sacrifice and helps defeat the NDA as a formidable member of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance. -Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Boosting consumption

Since India is already the fifthlargest economy, one need not worry about boosting rural consumption. Rural India has utilised the opportunities offered by the pandemic. Initiatives such as Skill India and Lakhpati Didi have empowered the rural population. Occasional shutdown of schools during the pandemic couldn't prevent the students from

improving their literacy levels, courtesy of the Digital India initiative. We are already reaping the benefits of demographic dividend. At a time when streethawkers/vendors are turning into entrepreneurs, thanks to the Mudra loans, one needn't worry about low demand, price inflation or stagnant net income growth in rural India. -Girish Lalwani, Delhi

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EDITORIAL SATURDAY]].05.2024 **CHENNAI**



In the present era of devalued dreams and mocked hopes, we need to confront immoral power with moral power

Elizabeth Martinez

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

- Ramnath Goenka

KEEP AN EYE ON DEBT AMID SLOWING HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS

HE net financial savings of Indian households hit a fiveyear low of ₹14.2 lakh crore in 2022-23 from ₹17.1 lakh crore in 2021-22, says the latest official data. This was the third year in a row that the segment saw a decline. According to early estimates, it's likely that 2023-24, too, followed the trend. House savings peaked in 2020-21 at ₹23.3 lakh crore, but have been going south since. Broadly, the metric includes financial savings (currency, bank deposits, mutual funds, insurance, equities), savings in physical assets (houses, cars) and savings in the form of gold and silver. As Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran reasoned, a dip in financial savings does not necessarily imply a slowdown in gross savings, but reflects a shift in the savings portfolio from conventional products like deposits to physical assets like real estate.

It's true physical assets rose in 2022-23, but the growth largely came via borrowings. As a result, household financial liabilities shot up to ₹15.6 lakh crore—the highest since 2011-12. Liabilities include housing, auto, personal and other loans. Disbursements to households by financial companies in 2022-23 saw a massive 73 percent growth to touch ₹3.33 lakh crore. RBI data showed despite steep rise in liabilities, they remained at only 5.8 percent of GDP during 2022-23. But worried over the surge in personal loans, in November 2023 the RBI raised provisioning requirement for unsecured loans, including personal loans. Analysts expect the banking regulator's tightening measures to slow personal loan outgoes in the coming years.

Household savings account for over 60 percent of total domestic savings and finance about 40 percent of domestic investment. Therefore, a steady decline stretching beyond three years should deepen the government's worries. Post-pandemic, private consumption growth has been much slower than the GDP growth rate. Lower consumption can translate to higher savings, like it did during the pandemic year of 2021; but that is not happening. The government is taking comfort in the fact that the decline in household financial savings is not accompanied by a reduction in banking assets and credit, which could lead to adverse financial market conditions. That said, the authorities must monitor financial flows and intervene from time to time to ensure that household debt remains under control, while rising unsecured loans do not intensify into a credit market crisis.

N February 25, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, first secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and chairman of the council of ministers, delivered his famous "secret speech" to the 20th Congress of the party. For the previous few decades, the Soviet Union had been dominated by one man, Josef Stalin. Starting as a humble adherent of

Marxist-Leninist principles and a devoted follower of Lenin, Stalin gradually established a regime of acute repression while at the same time establishing a cult of personality all of his own.

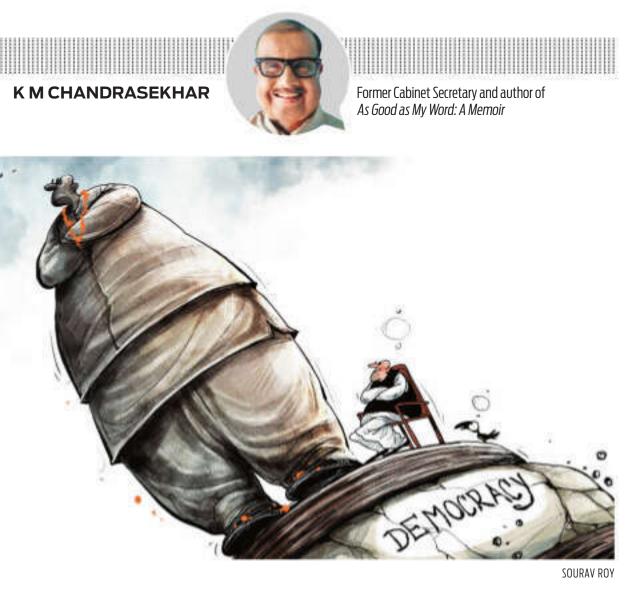
He assured his omnipresence in many different ways. Factories, mines, cities, schools, sanatoriums, and various awards bore his name. Millions of his portraits and statues were set up in public spaces nationwide. Fine arts, sculpture, literature, poetry, music and films of that period displayed adoration for Stalin, later called Staliniana. The state-controlled media endlessly churned out the image of Stalin as the undisputed, muchloved leader of the Soviet Union. Individual and collective letters of gratitude from workers poured in in millions.

As he grew in power and used it mercilessly, flattery and worship of the leader became the order of the day. Lavrentiy Beria, chief of the Soviet secret police, published a book dedicated to Stalin with the words: "To my dear, adored master, to the Great Stalin." Another of Stalin's close associates, Lazar Kaganovich, toasted Stalin as the 'steel founder of our socialist construction' who had led the 'socialist furnace without accidents and slow-downs' and 'smelted steel of a higher and unprecedented category'. It was mandatory from 1935 onwards to speak of Stalin only in the most glowing terms; sycophantic speeches were given even by his opponents. Referring to Stalin as 'the great leader', 'father of the people', 'the wise helmsman', 'the genius of our ep- been confined to Stalin. In the 1980s, Rooch' and 'the titan of the world revolution' became common. Over time, the cult developed overtones of religious ritualism. Stalin appeared in pictures and statues in poses reminiscent of Christ and Christian saints. At home, people turned his picture the other way when they wanted to speak freely to one another. His 'spiritual' dominance was everywhere, not least in the vast organised events where masses gathered together to catch a glimpse of the supreme leader and pay obeisance to him. By the 1930s, icons associating Stalin with Christ were standard in public life. People would similarly pray and

In different epochs, leaders have created cultish followings with the help of state apparatus and sycophants. As the Emergency showed, democracies are not immune to such upheavals

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

WHAT HISTORY **TEACHES US ABOUT** PERSONALITY CULTS



cross themselves before Stalin's picture. Such utter subservience has not manian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was called the giant of the Carpathians, the source of our light, the treasure of wisdom and charisma, the great architect, the celestial body and the new morning star by public figures. In Zaire in 1975, Mobutu Sese Seko was hailed as a new prophet and messiah. Franco's sycophants compared him to Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, El Cid, Charles V and most of the kings of the Golden Age of Spain, calling him a military genius, the sun and the father of peace. In Syria in the 1990s, President Hafiz al-Assad was praised as the country's premier pharmacist, as well as the

country's premier teacher, doctor and lawyer, among other things.

Indeed, a personality cult can be developed in any country by any leader with a combination of massive self-projection, praise from self-serving sycophants and repression by the instruments of governance-in short, a cocktail of fear and intense publicity. Under such circumstances, lies can become truths and citizens, deluded by the fantasy created by the dictator and his lieutenants, and the overwhelming fear created by his guards and bureaucrats, can sing the same tune. Speaking about Stalin, psychologist Kurt Lewin said the leader's cult was "not just a ruling device" but "generated by the psyche of a man whose vanity was unsatiable [sic]", the

outcome of a "deep-seated psychological urge". Erich Fromm wrote of Stalin as a mental and physical sadist who wanted to have "absolute and unrestricted control" over human beings and desired to become a god over others.

This is precisely what Khrushchev said in his secret speech. He talked of how "the practice of mass repression through the government apparatus was born, first against the enemies of Leninism-Trotskyites, Zinovievites, Bukharinites, long since politically defeated by the party—and subsequently also against many honest Communists, against those party cadres who had borne the heavy load of the Civil War and the first and most difficult years of industrialisation and collectivisation, who had fought actively against the Trotskyites and the rightists for the Leninist party line"

He said, "Stalin, on the other hand, used extreme methods and mass repressions at a time when the Revolution was already victorious, when the Soviet state was strengthened, when the exploiting classes were already liquidated, and socialist relations were rooted solidly in all phases of the national economy when our Party was politically consolidated and had strengthened itself both numerically and ideologically." He reminded the party that Lenin had warned the Soviet Congress of Stalin's instability. Khrushchev's words were received with warm applause, and the Soviet Union turned back to the ways of Lenin.

Democracy is not a sufficient bulwark against the emergence of leaders with dictatorial tendencies. We have seen during the Emergency how the instruments of democracy could be warped and twisted. Democracy lives on the fairness and neutrality of institutions. The same formula for the aggrandisement of authority can also be used in democracies. If the leader chooses to magnify his image at the cost of the exchequer and with the help of a few sycophants around him, if he captures institutions and bends them to his will, if he uses his regulatory and investigative agencies to crush those opposed to him, if he creates discord within society to consolidate his power, a democratic country too can be ruled autocratically. A great deal depends on the leader's choices. In the words of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, "When the state acquires all powers, both political and economic, the result is a decline of *dharma*."

REDRESS STAFF PLAINTS, AVOID FLIGHT DISORDER

NDIAN aviation witnessed serious disruptions this week when budget carrier Air India Express cancelled over 170 flights over three days. The cancellations, which followed a large section of its employees going on sick leave en masse, left thousands of passengers stranded and airfares soaring. The crisis has been resolved for now, with the crew returning to duty after the airline agreed to look into their concerns and withdrew the termination letters issued to 25 striking employees. But the harrowing experience of fliers, many of whom had their flights cancelled at the last minute, cannot be overlooked.

While the episode demonstrated how professionalism—an essential in the services sector—is in short supply among the aviation workforce, the Tata Group-owned airline, which operates around 380 daily flights, cannot walk away from the responsibility as it knew about the brewing trouble. The Air India Express Employees Union had written to the top group management in April, seeking redress of their grievances that included "mismanagement", reduction in payments due to new HR policies, and lack of equality in employee treatment. In April first week, another Tata Group airline Vistara had to cancel over 150 flights and delay others after pilots went on mass sick leave over salary disputes. Some trouble is expected as the Tata Group is restructuring its airline business-merging Vistara with Air India to create a bigger full-service carrier, and AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with Air India Express to form a bigger budget carrier. The mergers have been met with resistance from employees who are apprehensive of possible salary cuts and changes in working conditions.

While these disruptions obviously point to the challenges involved in mergers of such a scale, the group must ensure the least disruption in services in the interest of protecting its renowned credibility. It can take lessons from the 2007 merger of Air India and Indian Airlines, where the HR issues took years to resolve. Bringing about pay parity and integrating people from different organisational cultures are not easy to achieve, but staff resentment needs to be dealt with cautiously and quickly. Authorities, including the aviation ministry, must intervene to avoid major disruptions in flight services and ensure that the affected passengers are adequately compensated.

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

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

All's fair

Ref: When other sticks fail to stir the pot (May 10). The author has totally thrown to the winds the acche din provided by the BJP with more than 4 crore pucca houses and free foodgrains to 80 crore people from the lower strata of society. Instead, he is harping on narratives used by the BJP in the elections. He must realise that everything is fair in love, war and elections. S K Ramesh, Ballari

Clean chit

The author states that Narendra Modi was associated with the anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. Has he forgotten that Modi was given a clean chit by none other than the Supreme Court? He talks of decency now. Where was his decency when Congress leaders abused Modi and doubted our armed forces? Jaikishan N, Kengeri

Unethical campaign

The PM's recent scathing attacks on Muslims, using derogatory comments to gain votes, are unfortunate. It's unacceptable for a PM to continuously stigmatise a religious community by referring to them as infiltrators. Vilifying the opposition as a Muslim-favoured party is another way of gaining political advantage that is not ethical. Shihab Puttur, Mangaluru

Recurring problem

The recent tragedy at Shri Sudharsan fireworks unit in Sivakasi, resulting in 10 deaths and numerous injuries, demands immediate action. Recurring accidents underscore the need for stricter regulations to halt firecracker production, safeguarding lives and the environment. Instead of providing monetary compensation after each incident, the government must prioritise prevention by halting this hazardous activity. V Parameswari, Tiruchirappalli

FROM CAMPUS TO CAPITOL: PROTESTS ROCK U.S. POLITICS

RADUATION season is beginning in the US, a lively period when gowns are donned, mortarboards and parties are thrown, and students celebrate stepping out into the world. This year, though, a number of campus events are being cancelled due student protests against Israeli military action in Gaza. Some convocations have been disrupted by pro-Palestinian protests.

When public morality needs a course correction, students often step in while politicians cling to geopolitical investments. The Biden administration has the leverage to avert or downscale Israeli defence operations against civilians, but it has chosen not to. Inaction protecting an old ally has now alienated young people.

After October 2023, when Hamas attacks started the current cycle of violence, criticism of Israeli backlash was anathema in the US. American Jewish groups launched publicity campaigns equating opposition to Israeli action with anti-semitism. The Harvard University campus was circled everyday by a propeller plane trailing a banner that read: "Harvard hates Jews." Today, the same campus is the site of an Occupy-like movement favouring Palestine. Harvard Yard, the university's old core, is a tourist attraction for families from all over the world who want to place their kids. Today, it is sealed off in fear they would swell the numbers in the tented field. Surveillance choppers circle overhead. President Joe Biden seems to be alert to this change among youth. On Thursday, he said a full-scale attack on Rafah by the Israel Defense Forces would cancel US military aid to the country. That's saying a lot because the relationship between the two countries has been unconditional, not least because of the significant presence of Jewish professionals and entrepreneurs in the US economy, academia and arts. But this concession to domestic sentiment came after weeks in which it was open season on students' movement. It was accused of being disorganised. Actually, from California to New England, the movement is held together by a demand for universities to disinvest endowments and fees from Israeli interests, and for the government to stop financing military action with tax dollars. "Not a penny, not a dime" is the slogan heard most frequently on the streets, though "From the river to the sea" is quoted most frequently in the coverage. Ironically, the movement was also dis-

paraged for being too organised. All tents in student encampments look the same, people complain, which apparently suggests that organised interests, perhaps political parties, are backing the movement. This is no argument at all. In India, leaders from across the spectrum, from former finance minister Arun Jaitley to CPI(ML) Liberation general secretary Dipankar



The students on US campuses who are demanding divestment from Israeli interests are upending political calculations in an election year. Joe Biden might be facing a moment like the anti-war protests of the 1960s and the anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s-80s

Israeli campuses beyond the pale.

Research has become hugely collaborative and dozens of people from multiple countries may share credit for a single paper. In 2015, a paper closely estimating the mass of the Higgs boson had 5,154 authors, the current world record. But consider a very narrow field, like research on ribosomes using X-ray crystallography, for which Venki Ramakrishnan won a Nobel in 2009. Very few people work in this area, but nevertheless Ramakrishnan shared his prize with Ada Yonath, an Israeli. It is absurd to imagine Israel can be excluded from current research without reducing its scope.

Given such disincentives, disinvestment and blackballing would probably stop at just a couple of shots fired across the bows of Israel. But it will remain an election issue in the US. The 1968 presidential election provides a rough parallel. It was dominated by a difficult external issue—the persistence of Vietnam war, plus uneasiness about the domestic situation (hippies on the loose, Woodstock ahead). Richard Nixon won as he was able to associate his competitor, former Democrat vice president Hubert Humphrey, with all that was awry and promised to withdraw troops from Indochina. At the same time, Ronald Reagan became governor of California by promising to clean out Berkeley, whose campus was the epicentre of antiwar protests. Two years later, Ohio National Guards opened fire on student protesters at Kent State University; the deaths became a tipping point. A foreign affairs debacle followed, when Nixon and Kissinger ignored the 'Blood telegram' from Dhaka, which warned of an army-led genocide in East Pakistan and Bangladesh was born when Indian forces intervened in 1971. Today, the students' movement against Israel's militarism awaits such a tipping point, and sadly, the conservatives could be beneficiaries. That means Donald Trump, after the current Storminess has passed. (Views are personal) $(On X @ pratik_k)$



QUICK TAKE

LEND THEM YOUR EARS

MONG the many digital products the pandemic tsunami held aloft were audiobooks. People tuned in to hear inspi-\rational or sensational texts read aloud while they pottered around home doing chores. And like most lockdown legacies, the craze ebbed. India, though considered a prime market, barely caught on. The lack of well-voiced Indianlanguage books was rightly called a major deficiency. But there is another market the bookwallahs seem to be ignoring. Research shows that audiobooks can help neurodivergent children with comprehension and adults with insomnia. Why not go to sleep listening to one of the top-selling audiobooks in India—*A Book of Simple Living* by Ruskin Bond?

Bhattacharya are products of student politics backed by parties. It's normal.

The students' demand for divesting has its problems. The authorities would argue it is impossible to implement, unlike sanctions against a single product like Russian oil (and that didn't work either). Global finance is too deeply intermeshed for investors to identify and reject every Israel link. But disinvestment is effective. A decadeslong movement on US campuses to disinvest from South Africa, which came to a head in the 1980s, played a role in ending apartheid. It isn't just about money. In India this week, students at Ashoka University urged authorities to cut ties with Tel Aviv University. The sundering of institutional links accompanying divestment would put

Lowering standard

Pass marks for the SSLC board exam have been lowered to 25 percent from 35 percent this year in Karnataka. In spite of this, the share of students passing out remained at around 73 percent. Far from encouraging students, this will become a black mark on them. M R Raghunath, Bengaluru

Dividing treatment?

The Enforcement Directorate's argument that no one can be arrested if interim bail is granted to unscrupulous politicians is right. I wonder why the Supreme Court is not able to understand this. Instead, the court is trying to divide the rule of law between ordinary people and politicians. Jayakumar A V, email

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The Economic Times, New Delhi / Gurgaon, Saturday, 11 May 2024

Speedy Rise and Rise Of Quick Commerce

Data granularity of hyperlocal purchase habits

A couple of years ago, quick commerce was a cash-burning game. Today, 'instant' supply of groceries from dark stores in the neighbourhood is a runaway success. Goldman Sachs reckons Blinkit, which was acquired by Zomato, is now more valuable than the core food delivery business. Express delivery of groceries is growing at phenomenal rates in India, in contrast to the global experience, and is spreading out from the country's densely packed urban pockets to smaller towns. Online grocers such as Blinkit, Swiggy's Instamart and Zepto are estimated to have notched up gross merchandise value of \$2.8 bn last year, according to market intelligence firm Redseer, and are expected to grow 40-45% annually over the next three years.

Driving this explosive growth is the emergence of a new category of young buyers who are ditching the kirana experience. Offline, grocery retail is an unorganised business that can't match up to the analytics quick commerce firms deploy to keep their warehouses stocked and shop-



ping carts full. Online grocers have a serious advantage in inventory management and cost of fulfilment. Marketing is another area where they are skittling competition from kiranas. And, now, quick commerce is training its sights on a larger share of the overall ecommerce business, where it will ha-

ve to use its disruptive instant gratification capacity against the AI armour of the likes of Amazon and Flipkart.



Shivaji Dasgupta

n India, football was the original mass brand, while cricket was its sophisticated sibling. Over time, there has been a decisive role reversal and the reasons are rooted way beyond the playing fields. The recently released Amit Ravindernath Sharma-directed, Ajay Devgnstarring film, Maidaan — set in the 1950s-60s — is sufficient evidence for a generation oblivious to Indian football's successful past.

Coach Syed Abdul Rahim (Devgn) embarks on a Bharat darshan to scout talent from almost everywhere. Tulsidas Balaram is famously picked up from the streets of Secunderabad, and others from equally unexpected locales. Somewhere down the line, this results in India putting up a sterling show of football in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, and then winning the 1962 Jakarta Asian Games football gold.

Football also possessed deep-rooted community values, whether ethnic or corporate. Kolkata's East Bengal and Mohun Bagan ably represented the soft power to bridge the harsh anguish of Partition. Mafatlal, JCT, Dempo and their institutional peers treated their football teams as a potent CSR. Quite like seasonal festivities, tournaments acquired a lovable, relatable character. Durand in the pleasing Delhi winter, Cooperage Rovers with the Bombay film fraternity, Governor's Gold Cup in the refrigerated hills, and IFA Lea-



In the house of cricket, this is a different, exclusive ball game

How IPL Stole the Maidaan Cricket is to India what football is to the world – of mass appeal – while world football is the elite spectator sport here

rything to start changing. Just as the Hindenburg explosion in 1937 ended the airship vs aircraft debate once and for all, India shifted loyalties towards bat-and-ball. The ODI format was pop culture, unlike the classical Test match. Impatient Indians were tired of waiting with Nehruvian constraint, and limited-overs cricket was popcorn with club soda. India continued its winning habit, and while Javed Miandad's last-ball six in Sharjah on April 18, 1986, broke a nation's heart, it did mirror big-screen cinema with acceptable dollops of tragedy. Television, by now colour, played a catalytic role in distributing the magic. The early currents of liberalisation were already being fanned and national pride sought actionable nuances not just stereotypes of culture but markers of performance. Like Rakesh Sharma's space foray in 1984 and the Maruti 800 rolling out of the garage, cricket fitted the role brilliantly.

to easy accessibility in training. No longer were Indian teams staffed by middle-class engineers and graduates from cities.

Smart marketing completed the loop, brought to life splendidly by Lalit Modibirthed IPL. The prolific stream of newbies confirms this irreversible pattern.

But for every 'mass' action, there is an equal and opposite 'privileged' reaction. Football, thus, has made a comeback, through the elevated expressways of EPL, La Liga and Champions League — essentially through international football spectatorship. Urbane Indians quickly broke bread with quirky boroughs of London, and the North London derby started to seem so meaningful.

Cristiano Ronaldo became the abiding icon of savvy young Indian lads, an accessible bridge to the global socioeconomic potboiler we are finally privy to. A universal brotherhood, quite like the digital evolution, where regional identities are often superceded by the supranational convergence of possibilities. Football has become the Upper Ind-

ia story, in so many ways. Courtesy our demographic abundance, ISL also thrives in select parts, although as Plan B of a more enriched diet plan.

May is the business end for both cricket and football. EPL is climaxing with a neck-to-neck run by Man- chester City and Arsenal to the title line.

IPL has got in-It took one to the serious day - June 25, 1983 end of its buat Lord's for everything siness. with to start changing. Once the final on and for all. India shifted May 26. Whether Borussia loyalties towards Dortmund or bat-and-ball Real Madrid

will be champions of Europe will be decided on June 1-the same day the T20 World Cup starts in the US and West Indies. Football-wise again, the sleep-sucking Euro tournament starts on June 14. While most of football-watching India will be following the Euro, the intersection set of football and cricket spectators will be reduced significantly. T20 cricket is the preferred parantha of the vibrant mainstream who had onceflocked to the football maidaan. International football is the desired dessert of emerging exclusives, who earlier would have thronged the club houses of Brabourne or Chepauk, the equivalent of Wimbledon for our end of the Global North.



Adi Shankara, regarded as an avatar of Shiv, was born in Kaladi, Kerala. After assuring his mother that he would be by her side in her final hour; he went on a spiritual mission. Walking through thick forests, he reached Omkareshwar on the banks of the Narmada River and met his guru, Govind Bhagavadpada. The guru posed a question: 'Who are you?' Prostrating at his feet, Shankara said: 'I am not the body. Nor am I the mind. I am not the intellect nor am I the senses; I am the Self." Pleased by his answer, Guru Govind initiated Shankara into the order of sannyas. Later, Shankara expressed the transcended state he attained in 10 verses called 'Nirvana Satakam'. In Kashi, Shankara propounded

the philosophy of Advaita, which holds that there is one substratum of Reality behind the entire universe. What appears externally as dual, or many, is unreal. It is the Self within which reflects one Reality, Brahmn. The individual functions in connection with the mind, body and senses, which limits his supreme divine nature and obscures his vision. Realising one is not the body, mind or intellect and consciousness of the Self leads to spiritual fulfilment. Though Sankara was an embodiment of Jnana, the eternal wisdom, he also emphasised the importance of devotion. According to him, when the devotion matures, it leads to Jnana.

Quick commerce has an advantage in the granularity of data it collects about purchase habits in specific neighbourhoods that neither the kirana nor the larger ecommerceplayers can match. Improving data analytics will push the advantage further for them to stock lighter and sell quicker. Traditional ecommerce players flirted with quick commerce but gave up, leaving the field open to food delivery firms, which, in turn, are finding in express grocery delivery a quicker path to profit than their legacy business. Unlike dining out, having groceries delivered leads to no diminution of the user experience.

Disincentivise Crop Burning Effectively

GoI has directed the Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Rajasthan governments to exclude farmers who burn post-harvest stubble from MSP benefits starting this year. Citing a 2023 Supreme Court order recommending disincentives, it has asked the states to establish a mechanism to identify erring farmers and make a 'red entry' in farm records for all cases identified through a protocol that Isro has been asked to develop to map paddy farm burnt areas. Last year, 'red entry', which bars farmers from a range of state benefits, was only made in 2.6% of cases in Punjab.

Stubble burning is a major contributor to the region's poor air. Air pollution reduces life expectancy of north India's roughly half-a-billion residents by up to seven years, representing



one of the world's most significant health burdens from pollution. Of late, GoI has come up with several strategies: in-situ crop residue management through machines, more accessible procurement of machines, introduction of high-yield and shortduration paddy varieties, staggering of harvesting schedule, extensive use of bio-

decomposer by Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), and alternative usage of paddy straw. But they have failed mainly because of three reasons: stubble burning is still the quickest way to clear fields, slow implementation of GoI's plan, and perhaps weak state outreach to farmers.

gue and IFA Shield mirroring the desi version of today's English Premier League and FA Cup.

East Bengal's hilsa and Mohun Bagan's giant prawn were more than just gourmet mnemonics. They stood for an inclusive value system. Radio became an inspirational unifier, whether the commentator was Ajoy Basu or Novy Kapadia. In our limited world view, the national team was reasonably successful — finishing runners-up in the Merdeka tournament in Indonesia in 1959 and 1964, and winning the admittedly downsized Nehru Cup in India in 2007, 2009 and 2012.

But it took one day - June 25, 1983 at Lord's Cricket Ground for eve-

> T20 cricket is the preferred parantha of the vibrant mainstream. International football is the desired

Football. on the

other hand, was on a southerly spiral. The Fifa World Cup telecas ts, live since 1982, were shattering many myths. We were clearly playing a tier-2 game, emotions notwithstanding. To uplift domestic standards, we were importing Iranians and players from African countries, a prequel to current recruitment habits. Moreover, we were losing regularly to Asian peers like South Korea and Japan. The core football spectator was getting bored of yet another Third World also-ran calling card.

The Tendulkar era was unleashed and superheroes came on to the cricket pitch. Advertising, especially the Cola Wars, upgraded their mythology, and our collective imagination was captured. Frequent victories propelled our ever-increasing national selfconfidence, and assertive affluence led

Battle lines are already being drawn between terrestrial channels and digital suppliers, as our consumption patterns change across playgrounds. In the end, everybody will win, even as the Maidaan now belongs to IPL.

The writer is an autonomous brand consultant

hospitals, community centres and

dessert of emerging exclusives

Xurbian India, Bridging the Gaps



Geetanjali Kirloskar

India needs to develop a natural and durable bridge between urban and rural areas, which will also connect agriculture and industry, and improve economic productivity and quality of life. In its 2010 report, 'India's Urban Awakening: Building Inclusive Cities, Sustaining Economic Growth', McKinsey Global Institute estimates: ▶ By 2030, India's urban population will be 590 mn (39% of total population).

There will be 13 tier-1 cities (with more than 4 mn inhabitants each), accounting for 155 mn people (26% of total urban population). 55 tier-2 cities (1-4 mn) with 104 mn

productivity must grow from 50% of urban productivity today to at least 75%. Also, quality of life across urban and rural India must also transform. The bridge from today's developing India to tomorrow's developed India is in the economic growth and qualityof-life potential of India's 6,000 tier-3 and -4 cities — in its 'xurbia', the 'x' ingredient fuelling India's transformation to developed-country status. Xurbian towns would:

▶ Offer citizens quality economic opportunities, and educational, medical, cultural and entertainment facilities. Be within a 1-2 hr ride from tier-3 and 4 towns.

Be, at most, an hour away from a well-functioning tier-3 or -4 town that offers its children and youth excellent education, training, jobs and quality healthcare.

Have at least one modern manufacturing unit, knowledge services (ITeS, business services) and an R&D setup. Have a processing and packaging



Bridge towns of India

done in phases, focusing on a few states with carefully chosen tier-2 and -3 towns to maximise their cities' and rural community footprints.

The McKinsey report estimates that Indian cities must spend \$1.2 tn over the next two decades, equivalent to \$134 per capita annually. Since the study was published in 2010, we could add a 20% cost inflation to the estimates. Resources must be allocated to tier-3 and -4 towns, at least in proportion to the size of their populations, which

green spaces, primarily through a PPP, while attracting private investment in factories, service businesses and agriculture processing. The resultant prosperity level of the population will fund operating expenses through local taxes and attract good shopping and entertainment. If carried out, there is no reason to believe that India can't become the only developed country in the world with over 50% of its population rural. but well-connected to the modern, tech driven world through a network of urban towns and equally productive. Our cities are full of people who come from small towns and bring to these cities potential talent - whether in sports, arts or business-that newcomers to a city must work hard

makes them boom. However, talented in their initial years to discover the quality of life and the time to nurture their talent.

With the xurbian revolution, talent

Shankaracharya Jayanti falls on May 12



Thought Balloon

A man is flying in a hot air balloon and realises he is lost. He reduces height and spots another man down below. He lowers the balloon further and shouts, 'Excuse me, can you tell me where I am?" The man below says, 'Yes, you're in a hot air balloon, hovering 30 ft above this field. 'You must be an engineer,' says the balloonist. 'I am,' replies the man. 'How did you know?"

'Well,' says the balloonist 'Everything you have told me is technically correct, but it's no use to anyone. The man below says, 'You must be in management. 'I am,' replies the balloonist, 'but how did you know?' 'Well,' says the man, 'You don't know where you are, or where you're going, but you

Implementing the MSP disincentive will be challenging and politically touchy. The issue of fines and penal action against farmers was a key point raised in the 2020-21 farmers protest. But with data showing that both Haryana and Punjabare gearing up to increase their paddy production, it's essential this strategy is rolled out and implemented strictly, with states doing the heavy lifting.

people (17%), and 6,000 tier-3 and -4 towns(<1mn) with 331mn people (57%). According to projections for rural and urban productivity, by 2030, urban India will account for 70% of GDP. India targets to become a developed nation with a \$26 tn economy by 2047. Rural

unit that adds value to the agricultural produce of the rural communities it serves.

Have central green space, community centre and sports facilities. Creating and nurturing xurbias require meticulous planning. It can be

would mean \$820 bn allocated over 20 years, with each selected town getting a capex budget of \$160 per capita a year. So, a town with a population of 2 lakh would have an expenditure budget of \$32 mn a vear. This will be used to build schools,

will be even more widespread and more accessible to growth, leading to an economic and qualitative boom spread evenly across the country.

Kirloskar Systems

The writer is chairperson-MD,



As far as offering political action for money goes, America does it better

Not Beating About The Bush-Type, Don

Listen up, folks, who are going all 'OMG' upon hearing one VIP accusing two other VIPs of sending tempo-full of cash so that a third VIP can stop going on and on about the two VIPs being in league with the first. Frankly, all this supposition and rhetoric pertaining to a crony capitalism-politics nexus is tiddly winks compared to what the Don reportedly articulated in a hall full of people last month. The former American president, who may also be the next American president, according to The Washington Post, had openly proposed at a dinner at his home and club in Mar-a-Lago in Florida that if the top US oil executives gathered among the some 20 people in the room together gave him \$1 bn for his re-election campaign, as president he would tear up Joe Biden's tranche of environmental regulations and prevent any new ones. In other words, if the bosses of Chevron, Exxon and other slick oilwalas gather a kitty of a billion, they can drill and frack as much, and in any old way, they want. Instead of insinuations and nudge-nudge, wink-winks, Trump made a straightforward pitch that wasn't articulated at the back of tempo, but in the moderate openness of a private function. With the height of moral bars in politics seemingly everywhere lowered to somewhere down near the ankles, there is a perverse virtue in the Don's hyperfrank deals and appeals.

How to Make Every Rupee Count



Jyotsna Puri & Lawrence Haddad

The world is in the middle of an international aid squeeze. Official development assistance (ODA) to food systems reduced to \$44.3 bn in 2021 from \$48.7 bn three years ago. The financing gap for food systems is \$350 bn a year. As a result, international financial flows must do more with less.

This is why measuring the impact of each dollar of financing assistance and understanding what works and what doesn't are critical. All countries and institutions must commit to credible reporting on their impact. Multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international financial

be better at institutions (IFIs) are important in an measuring increasingly fragile global context. The impact. And it's share of earmarked ODA funding to only going to these organisations is increasing So, become more they have a special responsibility to get straightforward. AI and advanced impact and impact assessment right. However, these institutions need to data analytics do better. In climate, a recent synthesis mean measurereport from the Multilateral Organiment is easier, sation Performance Assessment Netand expense work (MOPAN) concludes that MDBs lower, using report on finance and intentions rathhigh-frequency data that has er than results. Bridgewater Initiative has highlighted MDBs and IFIs are too lower collection risk-averse and bureaucratic to procosts.

vide support to low-income/high-risk countries or alleviate food insecurity and malnutrition. This is a critical failure.

Most recently, the World Bank has shown leadership with its publicly available scorecard/outcome report. Yet, the scorecard doesn't quantify the cost of inaction had the World Bank not invested. With Ajay Banga at the helm and with the Bank's work on impact evaluation, it now needs to take the opportunity to revise its scorecard. That will also help MDBs and IFIs become far more serious about showing what is being achieved due to their investments, compared to their absence. Credibly assessing impact involves constructing counterfactuals to understand what would have happened without the investments, and undertaking contribution analyses to understand additionality where counterfactuals aren't possible.

Given the squeeze on finance and the relative ease of data collection and analysis, it is a no-brainer to insist we



Don't just read the menu

The International Fund for Agriculprocesses. However, we don't know tural Development (IFAD) has been ushow consequential these commiting this methodology on a representaments are. They either skip impact tive sample of investments, covering assessments or, if such assessments 15% of the portfolio, to determine its impact. Extrapolation across the portfolio of more than \$7 bn infers investments improve the economic mobility, agricultural productivity, market access and resilience of at least 44 mn people. The next task is an analysis of how long these impacts last, and examination of cost-effectiveness.

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and its partners have dev eloped a methodology to collect data on diet quality at low cost, allowing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of even their most complex programmatic investments. GAIN is also developing real-time methodologies to help measure contributions to food systems policy change where attribution is not always possible.

Public sector investments set the tone for private sector investments. For the private sector, more funding

> commitments should be going

ly in climate. Car

We must build

mpact evalua-

tions into the

sector.

into sustainable development initiatives, especialbon markets are being set up, and ESG has grabbed the attention of the commercial

are done, aren't publicly available. A good first step would be to work with international organisations in developing a methodology to map private sector resource flows to food systems and then map these on to impacts. The second step is to set up counterfactual-based methods to understand the impact of not investing. Some work is happening in this space-3Fs: financial security, freedom, fulfilment — but it needs to be scaled up. Development foundations and other public sector investors could do more

to incentivise and support public-private impact funds to have more impact Likewise, if more private investors demanded better impact metrics, it would incentivise the private sector to be more effective at generating more positive societal outcomes.

2024 is a year of elections, post-truth is more popular than ever. But the fate of the poorest must rest on truth. How much money is being disbursed and spent, on what, and what impact is it having are questions we must subject ourselves to. MDBs and IFIs have a special responsibility to ensure their resource machines generate impact, and are seen to do so. The next global goals can't assume impact; they must explicitly demand it.

Puri is associate VP, strategy and knowledge department, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and Haddad is executive director; GAIN

You're in the same position you were before we met, but now it's my fault.'

expect me to be able to help.

Bhel of Mystique

'Make me one with every thing,' says the guruji to the bhel puriwala. Then, after getting his bhel puri, the guru hands him a ₹100 note. He takes the money and attends to the next customer. Guruji looks puzzled and asks the vendor, 'Where's my change?' The bhel puriwala replies, 'Change comes from within.'

Chat Room

A Bridge From **Beijing to Europe**

Apropos the Edit, Adventures of Jinping in Europe' (May 9), Xi Jinping's visit to Europe is seen as an attempt to establish inroads into Europe while strengthening ties with pro-Russian east European countries that have received huge Chinese investments. As Beijing is rushing to promote its theory of a multipolar world where Europe is seen as an actor independent of the US, it's emphasising strengthening its strategic and economic interests to lift the economy and dilute the negative sentiment against its trade policies, while lobbying against EU's antisubsidy investigations in EV markets that may invite heavy tariffs on Chinese imports. The historic visit may see a divided European community that's still suspicious of Chinese intentions after the pandemic fallout, and its support to Moscow in the Ukraine conflict.

MILIND AVASARE

Mumbai

DNA of these

MORE THE NUMBERS JESS THE MEANING

THE TIMES OF INDIA SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2024



A thought for today

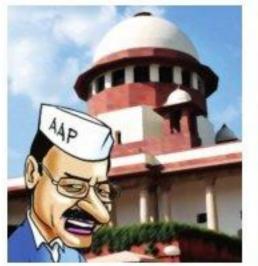
Voters must have faith in the electoral process for our democracy to succeed

BLANCHE LINCOLN

The Election Argument

SC does right to give Kejriwal interim bail

Chad indicated last week that it may give Arvind Kejriwal bail because of elections, and it followed through yesterday. AAP is a national party, in govt in Delhi, which votes on May 25, and in Punjab, which votes on June 1. Besides being the party chief, Kejriwal is also the chief minister of Delhi. In the past, of course, AAP campaigns in both Delhi and Punjab have been very much helmed by Kejriwal. While only time will tell how much his return to the campaign trail will affect voters, the uplift of party workers'



spirits is already evident.

The court order takes pains to clarify that this is not about "placing politicians in a benefic position compared to ordinary citizens". It notes that Lok Sabha elections provide the vis viva (kinetic energy) to a democracy. To ignore elections' prodigious importance in examining the grant of interim bail to an electorally significant figure, the court said, "would be iniquitous and wrong". What do precedents say? That

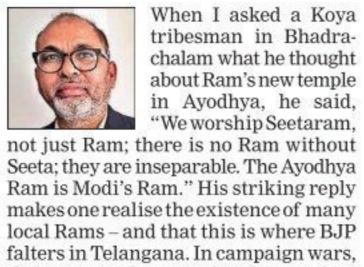
even when regular bail would not be justified, interim bail can be granted under compelling circumstances. That in Chandrababu Naidu's case too, SC has "deleted the condition restraining the respondent" from participating in the political process.

As part of its reasoning for interim bail, the court also cited the timing of Kejriwal's arrest in March this year, when the investigation has been pending since August 2022. These matters will resume in court after Kejriwal's bail period, which ends on June 1. But for now, the court has done right to put the interests of democracy over other issues.

Go Local, Or Telangana Won't Listen

In India's youngest state, local matters energise people, not national issues. BJP's giving a tough fight to BRS. But Congress seems more sure-footed

Bhangya Bhukya



Ram is Modi's Ram." His striking reply makes one realise the existence of many local Rams - and that this is where BJP falters in Telangana. In campaign wars, the party produces national narratives in the hope of mobilising voters en masse, but in the process it sidelines local issues that, for Telangana, hold the most appeal.

Faint voice of Centre | Telangana has a long history of political currents that flow against national trends. The last decade, with NDA govt at the Centre, has not been any different; its own issues outweighed any interest in Ayodhya or other national-level matters.

In independent India's first general election in 1952, when Nehru's Congress swept the country, Congress got only 4 out of 11 Lok Sabha seats in the region that has since become Telangana. In 1971, when Congress captured most Lok Sabha seats under Indira Gandhi's popular 'garibi hatao, desh bachao' slogan, Telangana Praja Samiti won 10 of the 13 parliamentary seats in today's Telangana. What mattered were not national issues or general slogans, but the struggle against Telangana's absorption into Andhra Pradesh.

was evident in last year's assembly election, when BRS lost favour for failing to deliver on the aspirations of the Telangana movement's regional recognition and social justice.

This year's election holds out new surprises again, as BJP gains ground in the state. In 2018 the



parliamentary constituencies with a 20% vote share. In 2023, it expanded its state assembly base to 8 constituencies, winning one seat in Hyderabad city and 7 in rural northern Telangana. BRS's debacle in last year's assembly election improved BJP's chances. As a

result, in most constituencies BRS is bracing against fierce competition from BJP.

election, it won

Not hearing caste | BJP is now banking on backward castes to expand its base in rural Telangana. But, caste has always been a marginal matter in the state's politics. Nor do voters respond to religious rhetoric. Like caste, religion never mobilised votes in Telangana, as there are neither theological nor economic tensions between Hindus and Muslims here.

Islam was promulgated by Sufi saints and there is no economic conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Most Muslims in Telangana are poor labourers and there is no labour market

> that they dominate, leaving little room for communal polarisation. Tellingly, the Hyderabad-based

Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM has a sizeable Hindu vote base.

Hearing social justice If BJP here has no well-defined platform, BRS has no distinct line of appeal to its voters. What BJP has is its old cadre who are manning its on-ground campaign. There is also the support of a significant north Indian IT crowd who have made Hyderabad their base. As for BRS, perception that it has 'informal arrangements' with BJP is

apparently taking a political toll. Following its disastrous performance in the assembly poll, some BRS seniors have joined BJP, leaving voters disoriented.

Congress meanwhile, has managed to fire up the state's first-ever debate on a party's manifesto. Its commentary on social justice is the talk of local political debates. The caste census, which would lead to raising the 50% limit on reservations and distribution of positions and welfare schemes in proportion to actual percentage of caste population, are the manifesto's highlights.

The state's Congress CM Revanth Reddy, known for his spectacular oratory, has been attacking BJP and successfully delivering the social justice narrative caste census offers the space to contextualise the manifesto in local community terms. By now, chai shop rumour has it that BJP intends to get rid of reservations, and rewrite the Constitution at large.

Speaking the language | Telangana's politics rests substantially on its powerful civil society, comprising Telugu cultural and literary classes. These were pivotal in turning the ballot in favour of Congress in last year's assembly election. They're now advocating in favour of Congress and a secular govt at the Centre. Despite its national ambitions, this narrative has ground purchase not only because it emphasises justice for Telangana, but also because it is delivered

Breach In Dahod

Sanctity of poll booth must remain inviolable

polling booth in Gujarat's Dahod LS constituency will today go through the election process again. Gujarat's LS polls concluded on May 7. But EC declared polling at the Parthampur polling station in Dahod as null and void after a brazen attempt to subvert the integrity of the process.

Subversion as performance | According to reports in TOI, Vijay Bhabhor, son of a local BJP member, has been taken into police custody after he vitiated the polling process at Parthampur.



He live-streamed his own act of casting votes on behalf of other voters. Given the gravity of the violation, EC has suspended five officials who were on duty at the booth.

Law's clear | EC cancelled May 7 polling at Parthampur by invoking the Representation of the People Act, which is the primary legislation governing the election process. It has provisions to deal with misconduct in polling stations, including charging offenders

with provisions that lead to imprisonment. There's no leeway for any voter or official to deviate.

Integrity of process It has been a fractious election campaign with politicians often crossing red lines. In the public eye, the touchstone of the integrity of the election will be a clean track record in polling booths. Therefore, the violations in the Parthampur incident need to be firmly dealt with. Live-streaming a brazen violation needs a commensurate response from EC. Process integrity should be inviolable.

Can You Handle The Truth?

It takes a lot of work to suss it out

66

study finds that"."There is about why Steve Jobs was so successclear academic evidence ful - because he was adopted, or that". "Research shows because of his company's unique

Talk regional | Between 2001 and 2014, during the second phase of the separate Telangana movement, local matters came into even higher relief. People voted overwhelmingly for Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS, formerly TRS), when it advanced the state's interests. They voted against it when its leadership turned away from these. This



in Telugu.

While BRS recovers from last year's fiasco, and Congress races to expand its number of LS seats from the three it won in 2019, BJP relies on strong, publicly visible candidates. The political triangle will show which party is best positioned to engage local passions in a state where people care most about their region, state and home.

The writer teaches history at University of Hyderabad

Telangana votes for its 17 Lok Sabha seats on May 13

Kohli, Gavaskar & What Social Media's Done To Cricket

That a star cricketer of today bristles at criticism from a cricket legend shows the toxic effect of X and Instagram based fandom on players

Anand Vasu



It is a sign of the times we live in that self-proclaimed cricket lovers on X and Instagram are not just asking who Sunil Gavaskar is, they're suggesting he has no *locus standi* to comment on Twenty20 cricket.

It is pointless trying to list Gavaskar's achievements as a player, the positions he has held in cricket since and a near lifetime spent as a broadcaster. Because those who choose to believe he does not have the credentials to comment are not going to change their minds. Why let facts get in the way of a robustly held opinion that powers trolling? Suffice it to say that what Gavaskar doesn't know about batting, in particular, and cricket, in general, is not worth knowing. How, then, has a country that prides itself as being a nation of cricket lovers, come to this pass?

Social media has played a major role not merely in allowing people to attack others anonymously, but also in organising online mobs who go after an individual or organisation in a coordinated attack that soon takes on a life of its own. But, most worrying, and powerful, is the culture of toxic individual fandom that is gripping Indian cricket. If you are a Virat Kohli fan, you must prove your loyalty by rubbishing Rohit Sharma. If Rohit is your man, then you must earn your chops by booing Hardik Pandya because he has been appointed captain of Mumbai Indians. On occasion, especially on the field, when crowds get ugly, various players have appealed for calm. Players have encouraged crowds to stop heckling a fellow Indian, or even international cricketer. But, online, this rarely happens.

The latest episode, the Kohli-Gavaskar one, was sparked when Kohli suggested that those who had not played 15 years of IPL should not be commenting on his strike rate. This is a strange position for an intelligent person to take. After all, those who report on wars have never been on the front lines, business correspondents aren't necessarily entrepreneurs or major investors and film critics generally don't have Oscar nominations behind them.

And, this is just civilians. Subject matter experts - and 99% of cricket commentators have played the game at the highest level - are also being called outside noise now.

Broadly speaking, when an Indian player refers to outside noise, he is talking about an opinion from anyone outside the team bubble. These players insist that they pay no attention to those voices and yet, as soon as there is criticism of their play or achievements, egos are swiftly bruised.

If you speak to most megastar players today, you will get the impression that their legions of followers, online and IRL (the term kids use for 'in real life' these days) exist purely to deify them. These faceless followers must boost

as a public figure he is occasionally going to cop some criticism? Perhaps he does, but he does not think he deserves it. But, Kohli, and other players such as him, would do well to realise it was not always so. On Kohli's Instagram page, where 268 million people follow him, everything is on sale from beard trimmers to suitcases. And now, when he wants to make a point to his flock, all he needs to do is post a photo or video.

Kohli will also do well to remember he was not born with 268 million people hanging on his every word. When he was coming through age-group cricket in Delhi, making runs in some dusty B-Ground somewhere, it was newspapers that told the world about his scores and occasionally added a photo. When Kohli was 18, and lost his father, only to return to the field and make a century against Karnataka in the Ranji Trophy, it was reporters from newspapers, websites and television channels that told the world about his heroic actions.

Cricketers are not forged in the gaping void that is social media. In life, countless people are doing a variety of jobs that come together to take an exceptio-

nal talent through a natural progression that ends in international stardom, adoration, fame and untold riches.

Lthat". These are meaningless phrases today, when you can rustle up a report to support almost any claim you want, even if it's deeply flawed or later debunked. May Contain Lies: How Stories, Statistics and Studies Exploit Our Biases - And What We Can Do About It by Alex Edmans, shows us how to be more discerning with evidence.

Even sources that we consider reliable, like govt reports, are written by biased humans. Newspapers cite blockbuster findings that go nowhere. Some kinds of catchy misinforma-

tion stick around, like the idea that any skill can be mastered with 10,000 hours of practice.

Checking facts only saves us from the first misstep, because we may interpret them erroneously. Someone can mislead us by hiding contradicting info, not gathering in the first place or invalid drawing conclusions from valid data.

Left to ourselves, we succumb to motivated reasoning. So

ask yourself: do I want this to be true? Then proceed mindfully. Another pitfall to avoid is black and white thinking: to think of stuff like carbs, or religion, or capitalism as good or bad, rather than with nuances. Nuance could mean marbling - seeing things as streaked with positive and negative elements.

A popular claim that gender diversity in corporate boards improved financial performance did not hold up to scrutiny - but it spread because many people want it to be true. Likewise, a viral study on the 'power pose' helping you ace interviews and speeches has been debunked, but barely anybody has noticed the retraction.

and inspirational values, and so on. These are examples of logic that are reverse-engineered from the fact of success. They're simply a storyline imposed on different dots.

Is a statement a fact, is a fact truly data, is that data genuinely evidence, and is that evidence proof? The book provides tips on sussing that out.

The scientific way is to find a hypothesis, gather representative test and control samples, test for statistical significance, and only then reach a conclusion. But most of us go with compelling stories instead, we're suckers for a good narrative. It's

hard for us to look

at a bunch of facts

without forcing an

arrow of relation-

ndfield SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS

ships among them. And even with all rigour, it's important to remember that evidence is not always proof because it may not be universal, context and setting can change the picture.

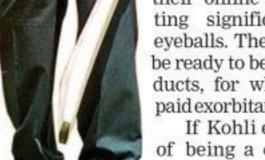
> A lot of data doesn't mean better data - it can be the result of data mining, there can be spurious correlations, the authors might have

cherry-picked their sample. Data is not evidence either: for all the assertions and studies about breastfeeding being superior to bottlefeeding, causation remains elusive. Sometimes, data is merely describing things: countries that begin with the letter U (the US, the UK) are wealthier than average, but we know that changing the country's name to a U name is not likely to boost its GDP.

The book provides a checklist to evaluate facts and claims. Like be wary of superlatives, or universal implications in any statement. Such statistical literacy and critical thinking have never been more important, given the deluge of

Calvin & Hobbes





their online numbers, generating significant traffic and eyeballs. These fans must also be ready to be sold various products, for which players are paid exorbitant sums of money.

If Kohli enjoys the perks of being a celebrity and a star, surely he realises that

FOR EXAMPLE, I'M SUPPOSED

HISTORY CHAPTER. IT LOOKS

IMPOSSIBLE, SO I BREAK

THE PROBLEM DOWN.

TO READ THIS ENTIRE



I ASK

MYSELF.

DO I EVEN

CARE?"

-

DELHIVERY

QATAR

In that sense, Gavaskar was only doing his job when he had his say on Kohli's strike rate. But, even setting that aside, Kohli and friends would do well to realise that they are not the first generation to play cricket for India. Without Gavaskar, and all the players who came before him, there would be no Kohli today. A little respect would not be out of place, even if gratitude is asking for too much.

Sacredspace



The Soul appears to be finite because of ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed the

Self which does not admit of any multiplicity truly reveals itself by itself: like the Sun when the clouds pass away.

Adi Shankaracharya

Demystifying The Science Of Bekhudi

STECH

Sumit Paul

emember the immortal number, 'Hum bekhudi mein tum ko L pukare chale gaye,' sung by Mohammad Rafi from the Hindi film 'Kala Pani'. No human emotion is confined to a specific belief system or idea. If turiya awastha, ultimate blissful existence, exists in oriental mysticism, bekhudi, a state of selfimmersion, exists in Islamic tasawwuf, adhyatm, spirituality. So, what is bekhudi, transcendental ecstasy?

Read Iqbal's 'Rumuz-e-Bekhudi' - The Secrets of Selflessness, and 'Asraar-e-Khudi'-The Secrets of the Self, translated from Persian by the British scholar of Arabic and Persian, A J Arberry, who clubbed both the volumes under the title 'Asraar-o-Rumuz'.

Allama Iqbal writes, "Bekhudi is an experience that cannot be described in

bekhudi to comprehend it in a holistic manner," as they say in Urdu: 'Vajood shagufta hota hai baad-e-bekhudi'existence blossoms after the state of self-immersion.

Bekhudi is contemplative bliss, a

meditative ecstasy when all search ends. The very enquiry into what is bekhudi will open the door to bekhudi. The enquiry doesn't lie outside of the mind, but within the movement of the mind itself. In pursuing that enquiry, what becomes

all-important is to understand the seeker himself and not what he seeks. What he seeks is

the projection of his own craving, of his own compulsions, desires. Then all searching ceases, which in itself is enormously significant. Then the mind is no longer grasping at something beyond

when seeking has entirely stopped, there is a movement of the mind that is neither outward nor inward.

YOU FOCUS

ON READING

THE FIRST

SECTION ?

Seeking does not come to an end by any act of will, or by a complex process of conclusions. To stop, seeking demands great understanding. The ending of search is the beginning of a still mind. And a still mind is like a Tabula Rasa, Latin for a

clean slate, anything can be written on it and can also be THE SPEAKING TREE expunged whenever one

wants to wipe it out, for,

only a clean mind has no

as well as contemplative. Otherwise, the

When the mind is absolutely free

mind is perpetually in turmoil.

of turmoil, bliss enters tip-toeing,

subsuming, and suffusing the whole

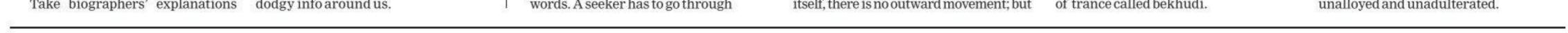
existence. One plunges into the ocean

ripples and is most receptive

Badayuni says, "Vajood uss maqaam pe aa pahuncha hai/ Nahin jahaan gham-o-khushi ka andaaza hai"-The existence has reached that point/ When pain and pleasure lose their significance. He simplified this idea in a famous one-liner in an immortal song, 'Aaj purani raahon se koi mujhe aawaaz nade', that has assumed the form of a proverb, 'Pahuncha hoon wahan nahin door jahan, bhagwan bhi meri nigahon se', film: Aadmi.

Urdu poet and lyricist Shakeel

Jalaluddin Rumi defines bekhudi in Ottoman Turkish mixed with Tazaki, "Azkaan et loi gin shaad mad fin/ Ba gal fee aan meen az' kin" - When the seeker and seeking are one/Mind finds its destination. That destination is bekhudi, when self is not lost but willingly abnegated by the seeker in preference to a state of pre-civilisational silence, when tranquillity existed



KNOW IT.

OPINION

The Tribune CHANDIGARH | SATURDAY | 11 MAY 2024

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Donkey flights

Jamaican case turns spotlight on the menace

ESS than five months after a Nicaragua-bound chartered plane, carrying mostly Indians, landed in Mumbai after running into trouble with the French authorities, a flight with 200-odd Indians on board was sent back to Dubai from Jamaica as immigration officials detected discrepancies in the passengers' documents. The group was reportedly transiting through the Caribbean country, with some of its travellers destined for Nicaragua 'in the hope of participating in a major housing development project'.

The Nicaragua angle has again turned the spotlight on the menace of donkey/dunki flights. Unscrupulous travel agents arrange such flights to Central American nations with the aim of facilitating passengers' illegal entry into the US. Nicaragua is popular among migrants apparently due to the ease of obtaining travel papers for the purpose. In January, the Gujarat Crime Investigation Department had said that the 66 passengers from the state on the chartered flight that was grounded at Vatry airport in France in December 2023 on the suspicion of human trafficking had agreed to pay Rs 60-80 lakh to agents to illegally migrate to the US. Some passengers had allegedly paid an advance of up to Rs 8 lakh. At that time, the Punjab Police had formed an SIT to probe the case as several passengers were from the northern state.

It is obvious that an international network of agents — hand in glove with officials at every stage — is helping illegal migrants move from one country to another. The desperate travellers are risking life and limb, besides their life savings, to reach their final destination. Close coordination between agencies of various countries is needed to bust the flourishing human trafficking racket. It is a cause for concern that many unauthorised agents continue to ply their trade despite the frequently reported cases of boat tragedies and grounded flights. The Indian authorities must get their act together as the repeated involvement of its nationals in such illicit activities is an embarrassment for the nation.

A parting shot by yours seditiously

Individual effort and integrity get burnished only against the backdrop of organisational action



LAKHIMPUR KHERI VIOLENCE: In a front-page editorial, The Tribune sought the minister's resignation.

Minister of State for Home, Ajay their departure. This trend of

per is a team effort. None of those god's gifts to journalism can get a decent day's work done without his or her colleagues. And then, no great journalism is possible without an enlightened ownership. Without it, one or two good news reports may slip through rarely, but a sustained attempt at quality journalism calls for public-spirited owners who are committed to the organisation and the reader. When I was a reporter, a legendary editor once killed one of my investigative reports, which could have hurt a former Prime Minister, simply because he got a phone call from the proprietor. At The Tribune, I never got such phone calls. In fact, when I look back at the hundreds of columns and editorials I have written, one instance stands out as a shining exemplar of The Tribune's traditions. At the height of the farmers' protest, a sports utility vehicle in the convoy of Union

higher consciousness, and that

the publication where it was all

done has suddenly sunk into an

irredeemable moral morass with

scorched-earth exits is disgust-

All the good work in a newspa-

ingly opportunistic.

Mishra, had mowed down four farmers - Lovepreet Singh, Nachhatar Singh, Daljeet Singh and Gurvinder Singh - and a journalist, Raman Kashyap.

The video clips that began circulating from Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri on October 5, 2021, made me numb with rage and repulsion. Something more than the usual had to be done. A newspaper's editorial is not its editor's personal opinion, but the organisation's point of view. Yet, I have never asked permission from the Tribune Trust to write an editorial, nor has it ever prescribed a political line. But that day, for the only one time, I sought the Trust President Shri NN Vohra's advice because I was going to write a front-page editorial. All he said was, "make it strong". And strong it was. The Tribune sought the minister's resignation, called him a goon in a minister's guise and said he deserved to be (locked up) in the police station. The only regret, in hindsight, is that I now think it should have been headlined "Yours seditiously", which was how I signed off.

Asthepandemic eased, the papermade a remarkable recovery. There was a 125 per cent growth from the pandemic's nadir.

Black Swan event - the Covid pandemic. Almost 70 per cent of The Tribune's circulation was wiped off. It was the only mainstream newspaper that was being produced from the newsroom and not from homes. The first-ever woman Chief News Editor of the paper, Nanki Hans, and her team toiled to bring out the paper. And as the pandemic eased, the paper made a remarkable recovery. There was a 125 per cent growth from the pandemic's nadir. That reminds me of R Madha-

Malhotra (I have heard that Vladimir Putin was impressed by I cannot forget my colleagues Sanjeev Bariana and Jupinderjit Singh, who restrengthened the brand, lifting it up from the depths of the ignominy of the front-page apology to the journalistic high of pursuing druglords and politicians. Every time an expose is planned or a column is written. I have a reader in my mind's eye. It could be a kinnow farmer who explains the misery of farming, an insider who sends across sensitive documents, or someone who reveals how the exquisite single-malt whiskey that Punjabis drink is actually 'made' in Ludhiana. I have given this ideal reader a real-life identity: Surinderjit Singh Sandhu of Amritsar, a retired bureaucrat. He praises me to the heavens one day but can also drop me into the water buffalo pond the day after. Dear Sandhu Sahib, I tried my best. Goodbye and thank you.

north Indian reader, who will not let this newspaper fail. After five years in deep financial woods, the organisation is in a recovery mode - again, only because of the Trust sagaciously running a tight ship. After nearly two decades, the paper launched new daily products in February this year - Delhi Tribune, Haryana Tribune and Himachal Tribune. Beyond sagacity is compassion; I witnessed the employers' generosity in its real sense when a terminally ill colleague, who could not attend office, was given a fresh contract.

The last five-six years saw this century-and-a-half-old institution make a digital mark with 2.2 million YouTube subscribers from nearly nothing and embrace change, bringing women into leadership roles in the newsroom and bureaus in Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Punjabi Tribune has turned the corner under the new woman Officiating Editor, Arvinder Pal Kaur. And now, The Tribune is getting its first ever woman Editor-in-Chief, the redoubtable veteran Jyoti her fluent Russian).

India's remittances

Record highlights opportunities, challenges

Y clocking over \$111 billion in inward remittances in 2022, India has firmly established itself as the world's largest recipient. This accomplishment not only underscores the crucial role of Indian migrant workers globally but also highlights the significance of remittances in sustaining economies. The International Organisation for Migration's World Migration Report 2024 lists India, Mexico, China, the Philippines and France as the top remittance recipient countries. India's steady ascent on this score reflects the enduring ties between the expatriates and their homeland.

While celebrating this achievement, it's imperative to recognise the challenges faced by migrants. The UN report highlights the risks of financial exploitation, excessive debt due to migration costs, xenophobia and workplace abuse that continue to plague migrant communities. In the Gulf Cooperation Council states, where a significant number of Indian migrants reside, violations of rights persist. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of migrant workers, especially low-skilled labourers and those in the informal sector. Loss of jobs, wage theft and a lack of social security have plunged many into deep insecurity and debt. The phenomenon of reverse internal migration signals a significant shift in labour dynamics, impacting industries reliant on migrant workers.

The report also reveals trends in international student mobility, with China and India emerging as key source countries. The changing landscape of migration necessitates concerted efforts to protect the rights and wellbeing of migrant people. Addressing issues such as labour exploitation and access to social protection, and ensuring safe and orderly migration pathways are imperative for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

Tribune. The

LAHORE, SUNDAY, MAY11, 1924

Prison reform in India

THE publication in the Press of a series of articles by Mahatma Gandhi under the heading 'My experiences in jail' has once more revived public interest in the all-absorbing subject of prison reform. It is a matter of common knowledge that jails in India are "hotbeds of vice and degradation and that the prisoners do not become any the better by living in them, every conceivable crime against morality being not only possible but committed almost with impunity". Possibly, public apathy towards those shut up behind the jails walls, is, also to some extent, responsible for the rotten system that prevails in Indian jails. "Perhaps all the world over," writes Mahatmaji, "the gaols are an institution most neglected by the public. The result is that there is little or no public check on their administration. It is only when a political prisoner of some fame finds himself within the walls of a prison that there is any public curiosity about the happenings there." This neglect on the part of the public in other countries may or may not affect the prisoners' lot seriously, but in India, where there are no effective means of lifting the veil from the administration of gaols, it has so far only resulted in making them "well- or illmanaged cattle farms". This does not, of course, in any way lighten the Government's responsibility in the matter, a responsibility that cannot be more aptly described than by quoting the words of Winston Churchill when he was Home Secretary in 1910. Churchill said:-- "The mood and temper of the public with regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of civilisation of a country."

So, when I proudly proclaim the paper's stand on burning politi-

calissues, it is illogical to suggest that the strong position that the group took on the farmers' agitation was mine alone and not that of my employers or colleagues. Every editor adds value to a newspaper, no doubt, but individual effort and integrity get burnished only against the backdrop of organisational action.

It was indeed a team effort that bore fruit after the crash that the newspaper suffered during that

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

be The Tribune's second-greatest editor after Kalinath Ray. During Nair's tenure, the paper grew by 300 per cent and became what it is today. It is indeed amusing to recall the strange coincidence that Nair and I belong to the same district in Kerala, where we did our schooling, moving on to Thiruvananthapuram for university and then to New Delhi for work. Coming back to the post-pandemic recovery, its credit goes entirely to the Tribune Trust, our team of journalists and non-jour-

nalists and, most importantly, the

van Nair, whom many old-timers

like Tarlochan Singh consider to

There can be no higher law in journalism than to tell the truth and shame the devil. - watter Lippmann

Anuanced approach towards sustainability

VVISWANATHAN

"

"OT just in India but the world over, the temptation of using something for free often leads to its misuse. Interestingly, the mere introduction of a nominal cost significantly influences individuals' perception and utilisation of resources, bringing in a sense of responsibility and driving a more careful and nuanced approach towards sustainability.

During my long stint in Muscat (Oman), whenever I went to shopping malls, I could spot shoppers' trolleys scattered haphazardly outside the premises. Some residents living in the vicinity of the malls even wheeled the trolleys to their homes after any purchase, disregarding warning signs posted by the mall authorities. Such practices led to a shortage of trolleys.

One shopping mall implemented a coin system on a trial basis. The trolleys were parked in designated bays, each secured with a simple latch mechanism connecting it to another trolley. To unlock a trolley, a 50-baisa coin (around Rs 10) had to be inserted. Upon returning the trolley to its designated spot, the coin would be dispensed, allowing customers to retrieve their deposit. This system, to a large extent, ensured the prompt return of trolleys to their rightful places.

The company I worked for reimbursed employees' residential electricity expenses without imposing any limit. One of the employees, residing in a 1BHK flat, consistently received power bills equivalent to Rs 5,000 each month. The company then decided to put an end to the policy and offered employees a flat allowance of around Rs 4,000 for electricity. If the employees incurred charges below this amount, they could pocket the savings. Surprisingly, in the following months, the same employee managed to reduce his electricity bill amount by 40 per cent. Earlier, the airconditioners in his residence would run even when he was in office as the bills were paid by the employer. With the introduction of a fixed allowance system, he suddenly became energy-conscious. Sustainability has become a pressing concern in today's world. During my daily walks on the terrace of my four-storey apartment building in Chennai, I often observe water overflowing from overhead tanks of nearby flats, sometimes for hours. This sight not only disrupts my walking routine but also upsets me. I wish the residents displayed their contact numbers prominently on the tanks so that I could alert them. Since underground bore water is not metered, people tend to be profligate about its consumption. It was heartening to read a news report about residents of an apartment complex in Chennai voluntarily installing meters for their borewell connections. Governments and organisations must nudge people not to waste the scarce resources. A nudge here and a prod there really matter a lot.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Act against Sikh separatists

Refer to 'India-Canada friction'; tensions between the two countries have been simmering since Canadian PM Justin Trudeau raised questions last September about the alleged involvement of the Indian government in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Since then, Indian intelligence agencies have come under global scrutiny. So far, Canada has failed to present any evidence to back its claim that India was behind the murder of the Khalistani terrorist But still, it is not wise for the BJP to brag about killing terrorists in their own home, as some countries may interpret it as a confession to the charge. Besides, it is concerning that Ottawa has shown disregard for New Delhi's repeated pleas to not allow Sikh separatists and anti-India elements to flourish on Canadian soil.

GREGORY FERNANDES, MUMBAI

India-Canada ties worsening

The Justin Trudeau-led government has apparently allowed Khalistan supporters to engage in anti-India activities on Canadian soil for quite some time now. The separatist elements there have been openly celebrating the assassination of former PM Indira Gandhi and chanting anti-India slogans at public events. Trudeau recently attended an event where pro-Khalistan slogans were raised. The Canadian PM must not defend this in the name of freedom of speech. The proximity between the Trudeau administration and Khalistani sympathisers does not

tional education into school curricula are vital steps towards fostering a healthier lifestyle. VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Raise health-conscious children

It is not shocking that India is facing a health crisis, with 56.4 per cent of the total disease burden attributed to unhealthy dietary practices. Citizens must wake up and try to avoid consuming fast food and packaged snacks, which might be easily available and affordable but have an adverse impact on the consumer's health. The government must come up with an initiative to deal with the crisis. Including nutritional programmes in school curricula will encourage children and teenagers to become health-conscious from an early age.

DEEPAK KUMAR, MUKERIAN

"

Accountability of manufacturers

Refer to the editorial 'Vaccine withdrawal'; pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca's recent admission about its Covid vaccine causing thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS) in some cases came as a shock to the world, and especially to India. After all, most eligible adults in our country had received this vaccine, which is known as Covishield. More than 175 crore do ses of Covishield were administered here without most people even knowing the risks associated with the jab. It is possible that the drug firm was already aware of the serious risk when the development of the vaccine was still under way. Now it remains to be seen if the manufacturers will be held accountable.

bode well for the India-Canada ties.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Change diet to tackle health crisis

Refer to the editorial 'India's dietary crisis'; there is an urgent need to boost the consumption of healthy food among people. It is true that packaged snacks have ushered in a culture of convenience. However, it is important to be mindful of the health implications of consuming such unhealthy items. Traditional Indian meals - green vegetables, fruits and homemade delicacies - are rich in nutrients. A change in diet is a must to tackle the health crisis. Besides, it is important for people to incorporate some physical activity into their lives to mitigate the health issues arising from harmful dietary habits. Promoting home-cooked meals and integrating nutri-

HARIDASAN RAJAN, KOZHIKODE (KERALA)

Relief for vax injuries crucial

Apropos of the editorial 'Vaccine withdrawal'; UK-based pharmaceutical major AstraZeneca's decision to withdraw its Covid-19 vaccine, which can cause TTS, is a step in the right direction. The demand for compensation for those who suffered serious adverse events and for the kin of those who died as a result of inoculation is valid. It will be a crucial move towards acknowledging and addressing the harm caused by the vaccine. It is imperative to prioritise the safety of patients and vaccine recipients and conduct a thorough probe to hold vaccine makers and regulatory bodies accountable.

AMARJEET MANN, UNA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com









India on the cusp of a new dawn in scientific research



ARUN KUMAR GROVER FORMER VICE CHANCELLOR, PANJAB UNIVERSITY

HE President of India gave her assent to the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Act days before Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav concluded on August 15, 2023. The Ministry of Science and Technology has stated that the challenge is to initiate changes so that research in all domains makes a tangible impact on society and quality as well as relevance are prioritised over quantity.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) recently approached the National Science Academy to solicit help in operationalisation of the ANRF Act and strengthening of research in universities and post-graduate colleges (run by states, the Centre and the private sector). A fortnight ago, about 40 scientists deliberated for two days in Bengaluru to identify the most pressing problems, suggest structural/strategic solutions and the role national academies can play in realising goals articulated by the Act. The detailed recommenthe-box suggestions, of the conclave would have reached the DST by now. The idea of engaging with a

national science academy goes back to the proposal for the creation of the National Research Council (NRC) after deliberations on 'Postwar Scientific Organisation of Research in India', held under the aegis of the National Institute of Sciences (the present-day INSA) in Calcutta on September 27-28, 1943. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) had come into being on September 26, 1942, with University of Punjab (Lahore) don Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar being its first Director-General. The founder of the first science academy in India, Meghnad Saha, had motivated Bhatnagar to influence the colonial government to invite Nobel laureate in physiology Archibald V Hill --- who was the Secretary of the Royal Society, London, and an independent member of the British Parliament from Cambridge City - to discuss the plans proposed by Indian scientists. Besides his preeminence in several domains after World War I, Hill was also serving as a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the War Cabinet. Saha was aware of Hill's attempt to involve scientists in India in the war effort from his correspondence with Max Born, who had briefly worked dations, many of them out-of- at the Indian Institute of Sci-



BEGINNING: The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research came into being in 1942, with University of Punjab (Lahore) don Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar being its first Director-General. PTI

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ence at the invitation of CV Raman during the days of anti-Semitism in Germany. Mathematician-turned-physiologist Hill had followed the developments in India ever since he had shared a flat with Lahore-born Sohan Lal Bhatia in Cambridge in 1911; Bhatia had been sent to study medicine by his father (Rai Bahadur Hira Lal Bhatia, a noted surgeon of Lahore). During WWI, Hill had led the 'Hill's Brigands' of young mathematicians to locate enemy planes from their sound using mathematical modelling, Bhatia had volunteered as a surgical dresser for the British Navy at that time. He completed his education in 1917, enrolled in the Indian Medical Service

Mahratta Light Infantry, where he won the Military Cross in September 1918. During his service in the military, Bhatia was appointed professor of physiology at Grant Medical College, Bombay, in 1920. Hill, who had shifted to study physiology in 1910, won the 1922 Nobel Prize. The duo remained in contact. When Hill arrived in India in November 1943, Bhatia had become Deputy Director General of IMS. academy goes back Hill had chosen to stay in to the proposal for

Bhatnagar's bungalow in New Delhi and his host took him around India for four months to meet other scientists. Hill submitted a report titled 'Scientific Research in India' in August 1944. He not

the NRC but also called for the strengthening of the CSIR, the establishment of its first five national laboratories and the expansion of support to Indian Agricultural the Research Institute. He advocated the deepening of the scientific basis of medical and technical education in universities, a reduction in the gap in salaries of civil servants and academicians, the institution of a fully paid overseas fellowship scheme for young persons, etc. The establishment of IITs and AIIMS-like institutions was also part of the recommendations made by Hill. He arranged for a delegation of Indian scientists to visit England and America to meet their counterparts and govemment functionaries in London. During an event on October 29, 1944, Hill had stated that "disaster lies ahead if India's industrial development and national welfare are not immediately attended to". Homi Bhabha, whose doctoral thesis supervisor RH Fowler was part of 'Hill's Brigands', had also consulted Hill while submitting his proposal in 1944 to the Tata Trust for the nucleation of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. It is no mere coincidence that the Tata-Birla plan for the industrialisation of India after the war, the Sargent Committee report for revamping school and higher

India Council for Technical Education and the constitution of the NR Sarkar Committee for setting up MIT-like institutions in India happened in quick succession.

Verghese Kurien, Brahm Prakash, Satish Dhawan, Har Gobind Khorana and Gurbaksh Singh had availed the overseas fellowship scheme and they returned to serve and build India after Independence. Hill's Cambridge colleague, Nobel Laureate PMS Blackett, became then PM Jawaharlal Nehru's adviser as the latter presided over the interim government before Independence.

Saha, who had persuaded then Congress president Subhas Chandra Bose to appoint Nehru as the chairperson of the party's National Planning Committee in 1938, agreed to become a member of the Planning Committee constituted by Nehru in 1948. Saha had successfully contested the election to the first Lok Sabha in 1952. Saha and Nehru unfortunately drifted apart later, but Saha's protégé DS Kothari continued to serve as the first Adviser to Defence Research to propel the agenda of selfreliance in the defence sector.

The National Technology Day (May 11) is a day to reiterate India's resolve to achieve vikas and atmanirbharta. The government has proposed to announce the new annual Rashtriya Vigyan Puruskars to replace the national research awards, which had been dis-

(IMS) and was attached to the

report for improving public only endorsed the creation of health, the creation of the All

continued two years ago.

Prioritise students' mental health over their exam results



SHARAD S CHAUHAN DGP & MD, PUNJAB POLICE HOUSING CORPORATION

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harrowing

words of an 18year-old in her suicide note-"Mummy, papa I can't do JEE. So, I suicide, I am loser. I am worst daughter. Sorry mummy papa. Yahi last option he" - reflect a stark reality. As school education and entrance exam results come out, we are inevitably approaching a familiar crisis of student distress, with suicide as its most devastating outcome.

Once again, eye-catching posters of academic centres boasting of unprecedented success will grab the attention of students and parents alike. Driven by the conviction that tuition is indispensable, these centres contribute to what an Asian Development Bank report terms the shadow education market. The coaching industry in India currently generates revenue of Rs 58,088 crore, as reported by the Infinium Global Research, a consultancy firm based in Pune. Projections indicate that the industry's growth will escalate significantly, reaching Rs 1,33,995 crore by 2028.

The academic choices of students are frequently overlooked, shifting from the earlimedicine-engineering er divide to a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and medicine). Parents' aspirations for the success of their children have given a boost to a system that has led to a proliferation of urban coaching centres. However, as emphasised by a report of the Joint Implementation Committee governing the IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology), this rush has created an imbalance. The report reveals that over 76 per cent of the students hail from urban areas, with few coming from state board-affiliated schools. The rise of shadow education creates divisions among students, hindering improvement in schooling as influential parents gravitate towards it. Consequently, at a societal level, it worsens social stratification.

It is not advisable for traditional schooling to prioritise or emulate private coaching institutes, as this would result in catering only to a select few students while neglecting the broader student population. Such an approach can further marginalise the average student. In India, STEM education is intensely competitive. For perspective, the prestigious IITs accept only one in 50 applicants, while Harvard admits one in 19 and Oxford one in six. Exams like the JEE and NEET are designed to be highly selec-



DIFFICULT: Exams like the JEE and NEET are designed to be highly selective, where losing even a single mark can drop a candidate thousands of ranks. PTI

tive, where losing even a single mark can drop a candidate thousands of ranks. Consequently, parents, often unwittingly, and coaching centres, with clear culpability, treat students as commodities - based on the financial resources that well-intentioned but misguided parents are willing to invest. The results could be devastating. High school student surveys in India reveal a disturbing prevalence of suicidal thoughts, ranging from 6 per cent to 22 per cent, according to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry. Our education and societal structures reinforce the idea that success is easily attainable through hard work, thus normalising the notion that young people should shoulder the blame for their perceived 'failures'.

Our education and societal structures reinforce the idea that success is easily attainable through hard work, thus normalisingthe blame young people get for their 'failures'

minutes in India, totalling over 34 suicides daily. Alarmingly, this grave crisis is often viewed as an individual issue, which absolves society of responsibility and overlooks systemic failures. In 2020, farmers made up 7 per cent of all suicides, highlighting an acknowledged agrarian crisis. Yet, even though students accounted for 8 per cent of suicides, society fails to recognise this as a sign of academic distress - a troubling oversight given that education is meant to prepare the next generation of nationbuilders. Another study in the journal YMER underscores a grim reality: 80 percent of students experience stress from

According to the NCRB

(National Crime Record

Bureau), in 2020, a student

committed suicide every 42

the pressure to meet parental expectations, while 55 percent cite parental imposition of choices as a significant stressor. These findings highlight a critical oversight in recognising the pivotal role of parents and counselling in addressing student mental health challenges.

education in India after World

War II, the Bhore Committee

The prevailing myth of the Indian family's unconditional support warrants scrutiny. As the fundamental social unit, the family influences the aspirations and ambitions of youth. The alarming increase in student suicides prompts us to reconsider the true nature of familial support and its potential role as a significant factor in this troubling trend.

The installation of springloaded fans that can't bear more than 40 kg of weight and 'anti-suicide nets' in Kotahostels highlights a disturbingly shallow response to student suicides that is callous and dehumanising. Not addressing the root causes of student distress is a societal failure.

Capitalising on the promise of a brighter future, coaching centres have risen to prominence within the education sector. Yet, these establishments are increasingly perceived as confinements for the hopeful youth who enrol, where their aspirations, spirits and ambitions are stifled.

Shadow education has become deeply entrenched. Policymakers must now explore methods of coexistence and seek symbiosis

rather than confrontation. Forming partnerships could be instrumental in advancing social justice. The Government of India's guidelines for regulating coaching centres in 2024 must be followed by states and rigorously enforced. Since the shadow education sector operates on a business model, it should be held accountable for corporate social responsibility, including subsidising fees for economically weaker students, girls and those from rural backgrounds.

Teachers and parents must acknowledge the abundance of professional opportunities. Our culture must prioritise student mental health over exam results and impart virtues like perseverance, determination and patience in addition to academic success. In a world that can be a gruelling test, every youngster requires a strong social support system. It is crucial to instil in them the notion that suicide is never a solution, especially when systems are paradoxically designed to reject rather than select. Establishing multidisciplinary helplines for students in distress could be a crucial starting point in addressing this pressing issue.

From Epicurus' belief in pursuing our deepest desires for happiness true to Rabindranath Tagore's dictum at Visva Bharati that no endeavour is devoid of value, urgent societal action is imperative to recognise, acknowledge and address this crisis.

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FORECAST

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Hisar	41	27
Sirsa	41	28
Dharamsala	28	19
Manali	23	07
Shimla	22	13
Srinagar	25	13
Jammu	35	26
Kargil	24	10
Leh	22	07
Dehradun	36	25
Mussoorie	22	16





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