



## Telangana Today

FOR LOCAL TO GLOBAL NEWS

### Bulldozer justice must stop

**B**ulldozer justice has become a buzzword in many States where homes and properties are being targeted selectively for demolitions citing the alleged criminal cases or encroachments as the reasons. Such capricious actions are legally untenable and morally disturbing. The trend started with the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh where bulldozers have become a symbol of a ruthless administration and has spread to other States as well including Telangana where the Congress government has been on a demolition drive, threatening to render hundreds of families homeless, in the name of clearing encroachments on the Musi riverbed. It is time to call their bluff. The Supreme Court has done just that. Reprimanding the governments for adopting an arbitrary and high-handed approach, the court has clearly said that the state has no power to punish a person without following due process. It has laid down pan-India guidelines for using the demolition machine. Henceforth, no illegal structure can be razed without issuing a show cause notice to the individuals concerned and giving them 15 days to respond. In short, the due process has to be followed, even if the case involves an accused. The apex court has rightly pointed out that going by the series of bulldozer actions in several States one has to presume that the motive for such a demolition is not to raze an illegal structure but to punish an accused person without a trial in a court of law. This is a dangerous trend that demonstrates that governments are freely indulging in unlawful actions.

The SC's fierce defence of the basic principles of natural justice is welcome. The ruling is based on the primacy of the rule of law, separation of powers, the presumption of innocence of the accused, and the illegality of collective punishment. These are also the elements of natural justice. While the court's guidelines are expected to ensure that overzealous officials are taken to task for exceeding their brief, the real challenge is whether the Executive follows the guidelines in letter and spirit. The past judgements and guidelines in the matters of hate speech and cow vigilantism have not been implemented by governments and law enforcement agencies. In recent years, demolition drives have been conducted in the wake of communal violence in States such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi. This has left no room for doubt that the authorities roused themselves from slumber just to teach a lesson to persons suspected of involvement in disturbances. The key is to raze illegal structures in a time-bound and legal manner, irrespective of which community members are on the wrong side of the law. The court has, in recent years, also spoken against hate speech and murders by vigilante groups in the name of cow protection.

The real challenge is whether the Supreme Court guidelines on bulldozers are followed in letter and spirit

# 06

# VIEWPOINT

HYDERABAD, Saturday, November 16, 2024



**AL GORE**  
Former US Vice President

“It's unfortunate that fossil fuel industry and petrostates have seized control of COP process to an unhealthy degree. Burning fossil fuels is single biggest health threat facing humanity



**C RANGARAJAN**  
Former Reserve Bank Governor

Govts should increase healthcare spending... However, in India's social expenditure system, more resources are allocated to education than to health, which may not be the ideal approach



**RAFAEL NADAL**  
Spanish professional tennis player

In this life, everything has a beginning and an end. It is the appropriate time to put an end to a career that has been long and much more successful than I could have ever imagined”

## Through the Other eyes

**Joe Sacco highlights how the mainstream media has always been one-sided, on the side of Israel**



**RAJITHA VENUGOPAL** **MANNAV JAISINGHANI**

**S**ince last October, there has been a growing resurgence and demand for Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. Known as the pioneer of Comics Journalism, Sacco reports conflicts through the medium of comics. He draws himself into the story (literally and figuratively), positions himself as the observer-reporter-narrator, and portrays how subjectivity and perspective are inevitable in reporting, especially while reporting a conflict. He critiques the idea of neutral, objective reporting, arguing that that objectivity entails conforming to the power structures and telling their version of the story. What does it mean when a book written over two decades ago is gaining popularity now? What is the significance of reading Sacco's *Palestine* today?

#### Comics for reporting

Although Comics Journalism has the word comics, *Palestine* is not for easy or light reading. Like other Graphic novels, this text demands close reading, going back and forth between the details on the page and outside the text, where critical thinking is required to make full sense of the text. In an old interview, Sacco explains why comics for reporting: Comics offers “an easy entrée into a complicated subject,” it is a “subversive kind of medium”, “the subversive thing is that you can pack a lot of things into a comic book, at least as much as in a documentary film” to make hard, indigestible matters and events accessible. In a recent interview, he explains why he chose to write about Palestine: “I began to see how deeply wronged the Palestinians were historically and how badly misrepresented they were” and thus he wanted to highlight the everyday details of life under occupation.

In the history of Graphic novels, *Maus* (1991) by Art Spiegelman, which details graphic accounts of the Holocaust and intergenerational trauma, is



acclaimed as one of the most important milestones. Around that time, Sacco was working on *Palestine*, published two years later, detailing the persecution perpetrated by the same community that was persecuted in the Holocaust, like a painful irony of history.

To understand the advantage of this medium of narration for a topic as complex, multilayered, dynamic as the Israel-Palestine conflict, one can compare it with texts such as *The Question of Palestine* by Edward Said, *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians* by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pepe, *On Palestine* by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pepe, and *The Fateful Triangle* by Noam Chomsky. While these are important texts, they might interest an academic scholar more. What Sacco brings to the table is the accessibility of the issue to common readers through visual-verbal media and careful detailing.

#### Blurring the Boundaries

Sacco's work is different from other journalistic and historical, scholarly accounts for many reasons. It blurs the boundaries between genres such as journalistic reporting, historical documentation, memoir, travelogue and graphic essay, along with a commentary on historiography through media representations. It is interspersed with per-

sonal observations, highlighting Sacco's positionality as a Westerner, consumed in mainstream news media, his subjectivity, perspective, opinions, emotions and prejudices. It makes no pretence of objectivity (generally held as the hallmark of “good” journalism). He uses internal monologue as an effective technique, with humour, irony and satire to mark his impressions and observations, accompanied by unconventional drawings of peoples and situations.

He uses his drawings and captions to pack several historical references in minimal visual and verbal depictions leaving the reader to connect the dots. For instance, the first chapter is replete with references such as Camp David Accords, Anwar Sadat, Begin, Suez Canal Crisis, the years 1956, '67, '73, Klinghoffer's killing, 1972 Munich attack on athletes, and the Lod airport

The massive re-issues of *Palestine* after October 7, 2023, prove a key point: mistrust towards global media and that, to understand complex issues, we need diverse perspectives

massacre, with a satirical commentary on American media coverage. Through these references, he sets the stage for what he seeks to investigate in the rest of the book.

He critiques the idea of the promised land, which drives the logic of occupation, war, and absolute denial of human rights and justice. With his use of contrasts and perspective, he exposes the eviction done to give a false impression of a “Land without people” and the absurdity of homecoming by occupation. In another panel, he draws an Israeli soldier basking in a checkpoint overlooking Gaza and uses the caption “Welcome to Marlboro Country”, drawing the reference to the genocidal annihilation of the native American population and cultures in the progress and expansion of the American nation.

In the last chapter, he meets two Israeli women, with whom he has a conversation. This chapter functions as a contrast to chapter 1 where he uncovers and calls out the misrepresentations in media and public perception, and emphatically takes a stand. The chapter is aptly titled “Through the Other eyes”, highlighting how the mainstream media has almost always been one-sided, on the side of Israel.

#### Black and White

While he debunks the notion of objectivity in journalism, as he exposes the biases parading as objective reporting, he is also conscious of his subjective position. The problem with media representation is mediation itself, as it works like a double-edged sword. It is in this respect that he is most conscious of his positionality of being a Westerner, an English speaker, who has to rely on a translator/interpreter in his interaction with the people. This self-awareness of the author and self-reflexivity of the narration compels the question, “Can we make full sense of the text or the issue in black and white?”

An important factor in this storytelling is scale. The prevalent narratives around Israel's occupation of Palestine depend on both-side-ism fuelled by popular media. Joe Sacco takes the scale into his own hands, contextualising years of Palestinian suffering by providing a perspective almost impossible to find on a global scale. The massive re-issues of *Palestine* after October 7, 2023, underscore a key point: mistrust towards global news outlets highlights that only through diverse perspectives can one have a nuanced understanding. An article in *The Guardian* called him “one of the world's leading exponents of the graphic novel form”. Joe Sacco placed his research in a crystal-clear communicative medium, making his subject matter more accessible yet impactful.

(Dr Rajitha Venugopal teaches Literary and Cultural Studies at FLAME University. Mannav Jaisinghani is a former student of Literary and Cultural Studies at the university)

### Letters to the Editor

#### UN reforms

Even as the demand for United Nations reforms particularly regarding the composition of the UNSC and India's quest for a permanent seat is gaining traction, it is unfortunate that it has not made much headway. The current structure of the UNSC does not adequately represent the world's most populous nations even though Africa collectively should have a permanent membership in the UN body. One hopes with increasing international backing, India's bid for a permanent UNSC seat comes to fruition.

**KR SRINIVASAN,**  
Secunderabad

#### Inflation

Once again, the inflationary spike is a result of high food inflation, especially in vegetables and edible oils. The non-food non-fuel core inflation number, while it continues to inch up, is still below its historical average, once gold is taken out. Core inflation is generally taken as a better measure of whether an economy is overheated. India's inflation managers have been fighting a long battle against wildly fluctuating food prices without a suitable tool to do so. Extreme weather events caused by the climate crisis have made this fight even more difficult. A mercantilist and policy-wise unconventional White House may further complicate the matter.

**N SADHASIVA REDDY,**  
Washington

### Cartoon Today



### India in the hotspot

■ Asia Times

#### Indo-Pacific too vast for a region

The idea of an important geopolitical space called the “Indo-Pacific” has become integral to the grand strategizing of countries inside and outside this vast geographical area. The term is not new, however.

■ Khaleej Times

#### Apparel ind gaining from disruptions

Foreign buyers are thinking about shifting 10 percent to 15 percent of their orders to India due to disruptive environment in other major garments exporting countries such as Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka, officials said.

■ Los Angeles Times

#### Her film floors audiences worldwide

Indian filmmaker Payal Kapadia remembers seeing Wong Kar-wai's “Chungking Express” as a teenager and adoring its dreamlike vibe of romantic longing so much that she wanted to hop on the next flight to Hong Kong.

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## Power play

The Maharashtra Assembly elections have become a dynamic battleground where political ambitions, alliances, and rivalries intersect in complex ways. The contest between the Mahayuti alliance ~ comprising chief minister Eknath Shinde's breakaway Shiv Sena, the BJP and the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party ~ and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), a coalition of the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and the NCP faction loyal to Mr Sharad Pawar, promises a unique political drama. With six parties navigating intra-and inter-coalition tensions, the outcome may set the stage for future power dynamics in Maharashtra. At the heart of the Mahayuti, the BJP's ambition to reclaim the chief minister's position adds friction. Mr Shinde has defied expectations, proving a capable administrator. The BJP has fielded candidates in over 140 seats and has no intention of playing second fiddle again. It sees this election as an opportunity to gain enough seats to command Maharashtra's leadership, potentially at the expense of its regional partners. In this struggle, the BJP aims to secure at least a 60 per cent strike rate, which would give it a commanding position, leaving no room for its allies to make a substantial claim to power. Mr Ajit Pawar, leader of the NCP faction allied with the Mahayuti, is navigating his own challenges. Known for his tough demeanour, Mr Pawar has made efforts to soften his public image. He has staked a bold claim to political credit, particularly with schemes targeted at women, but his position remains vulnerable. While he has held on to 57 seats within the Mahayuti, he is seen as an "ideological misfit" by some alliance members and is far from guaranteed a central role should the Mahayuti come to power. Across the aisle, the MVA alliance is dealing with its own challenges.

The Congress, historically a major player in Maharashtra, has ceded several winnable seats to allies, leaving analysts questioning whether it has compromised too much in an attempt to preserve unity. The Shiv Sena (UBT) under Mr Uddhav Thackeray remains determined to make gains, hoping to replicate its past success and possibly take a shot at the chief minister's seat. For NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar these elections represent a critical step in securing a future for his daughter, Supriya Sule, who many see as his heir apparent. In this context, the alliance dynamics are shifting constantly. Mahayuti constituents may privately hope for underwhelming performances from their own partners to retain control, while MVA members face internal competition to avoid dominance by any single constituent. Mr Sharad Pawar's influence adds another layer of intrigue: he may be open to new alliances if doing so strengthens his faction and weakens his nephew, Mr Ajit Pawar's rival NCP faction within Mahayuti. The Maharashtra elections highlight the fragile nature of coalition politics and the thin line between alliance and rivalry. Each leader is manoeuvring to emerge with leverage. The electorate, of course, must hope that the winner/s will meet their expectations.

## Bridging the Divide

In an era of heightened political polarisation, Wednesday's meeting between the incoming and outgoing US presidents signals a return to civility. This gesture, regardless of party affiliations, reflects a critical aspect of American democracy ~ the peaceful transition of power. Despite years of public tension and stark policy differences, both leaders showed a willingness to uphold this cornerstone of governance, which is especially meaningful when democratic principles are strained globally. While the leaders have vastly different worldviews, their exchange on foreign policy highlights the complexities any administration must navigate. President-elect Donald Trump's ambition to swiftly end the Russia-Ukraine conflict contrasts sharply with President Joe Biden's strategic emphasis on supporting Ukraine to prevent further destabilisation in Europe. Mr Biden's perspective is rooted in a belief that sustained support for Ukraine helps keep America safe by fostering a stable Europe that minimises the likelihood of future US involvement in conflict. Mr Trump's yet-undefined approach to peace demonstrates his commitment to reducing America's overseas military entanglements, a stance he has long championed. Similarly, their discussion on West Asia underscores differing perspectives on stability in this historically volatile region. While Mr Biden has pursued policies aimed at cautious engagement and regional partnerships, Mr Trump's approach remains less clear, though his past positions suggest he may seek quicker resolutions or negotiations. This reflects a recurring challenge in American foreign policy: balancing rapid, visible results with the long-term, often slower objectives of stability and regional security.

Beyond policy, this meeting brings focus to the often-overlooked complexities of the transition itself. Transitions are intricate processes governed by legislation that mandates mutual cooperation between outgoing and incoming teams. The meeting, lasting around two hours, highlighted Mr Biden's willingness to facilitate the transition, a gesture not extended by Mr Trump in 2020. Historically, peaceful transitions symbolise democracy's resilience, embodying the principle that government is an institution. In many parts of the world, such practices are far from guaranteed, with elections often resulting in violence, prolonged disputes, or even military intervention. This orderly transfer serves as a global example and an important reminder that American democracy, despite its flaws, holds foundational practices worthy of respect and emulation. However, this moment also calls for reflection on the broader implications of transitions marked by intense polarisation. In a democratic system where leaders shift every few years, there's an inherent need for continuity and respect across administrations, ensuring that national and international commitments are preserved without being entirely remade. When leaders put aside their differences for the larger goal of national stability, they foster confidence not only among citizens but also among allies and adversaries. Ultimately, this meeting provides a rare glimpse into the possibility of bipartisan civility. While political leaders may disagree on policy, their commitment to preserving a smooth transition is a powerful reminder of democracy's strength in unity. A willingness to set differences aside, even momentarily, offers hope for a future in which collaboration serves as the foundation for progress.

# Targeting Migrants

Trump's language is as always, political, and provocative, when he promises that he would, 'send elite squads of ICE, Border Patrol, and federal law enforcement officers to hunt down, arrest, and deport every last illegal alien gang member until there is not a single one left in this country.' Factors like financial costs, operationalizing intent, or even implications on the economy are not on the table for now, for it is only bravado that seemingly suffices for Trump's limited purpose



Illegal immigration is a much-banded topic in democracies, for it is very easy to invoke politically and ignite emotions, but complex to handle meaningfully.

While failure to check illegal immigration is a failure of the State and its agencies, the rhetoric against it is almost invariably partisan, racial, or communal. In democracies, the State rarely ever acknowledges its own failings and prefers blaming the 'opposition' for wrong policies.

The fact is that no political party in the world can constitutionally or legally encourage illegal immigration ~ the difference, if any, is in the means of handling the issue and the rhetoric that accompanies it.

There are always two distinct undercurrents around the issue of illegal immigrants ~ the first is of the State to protect its citizens from the pernicious impact of illegal immigrants, and the second of a humanitarian angle.

Instead of focusing on plugging gaps, investing in and ensuring proper enforcement of laws governing illegal immigration ~ the narrative usually regresses into fear mongering, xenophobia and reckless solutions that hardly do anything to curb illegal immigration, but instead poison, polarise and weaponise the environment.

If the issue of Rohingyas inflamed emotions in India, the issue of migrants from conflict-ridden Middle Eastern countries or economically strapped African countries, grips Europe. Even immigrants from war-torn Ukraine are swamping other European countries.

Now, there is the latest militaristic plan to deport up to 15-20 million allegedly illegal immigrants (number not backed by any authority) by US President-elect, Donald Trump that has raised eyebrows.

Even though both Democrats and Republicans are actually on the same page as far as blocking illegal immigration into the US is

concerned ~ it was Trump who upped the ante by talking about "invasion" of illegal immigrants and promising drastic solutions like, "have no problem using the military, per se".

Trump, keeping with his style of conspiracy theories, has stuck to the line that South American countries are deliberately sending prisoners or "fighting age" Chinese are embedding themselves in America! As always, there is no data to back these accusations.

Trump also conveniently keeps quiet about his own record during his earlier term (2016-2020) when the noise was solely about the 'wall', or a ban on migrants from certain 'Islamic countries'.

But what the polarising noise surrounding his ineffectual 'travel ban' and the 'wall' did was to give the impression of a more decisive leader who is more effective in checking illegal immigrants than the Democrats.

However, the fact is that illegal immigration numbers during his term hardly bears out his claims. His unsubstantiated (and successful) tirade continued with insisting that a Kamala Harris Presidency would, "allow more than 100 million illegal aliens into our country" and that the "Democrats are the party of open borders, socialism, and crime, whether you like it or not".

Finally, as illegal immigrants emerged as the biggest concern staring at the American electorate, it was the sound and fury of Trump's promises that won the day against a Harris who only spoke about practicalities like bolstering border security apparatus.

Trump also blocked what could have been the first bipartisan deal on illegal immigration in 20 years. Trump's 'muscular' spiel

triumphed over Harris's policy-led and enforcement approach, and now the world waits for Trump to act on his words.

So how practical is Trump's solution? Simply put, it is easier said than done. Trump has been invoking the obscure Alien Enemies Act, a 1798 law passed as part of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

His own touch is reflective in calling his plan "Operation Aurora" after the city which he had falsely portrayed as under siege from immigrant criminals.

But it has clearly cut ice with the wary masses who have fallen for its disruptive appeal, without truly understanding how the dynamics could work.

Trump's constant referencing of the Eisenhower-era 'Operation Wetback' (ethnic slur about Mexicans who crossed by swimming the Rio Grande) may be imprudent, as it is suggestive of militaristic means which will fail the test of legality, constitutional spirit and morality.

Secondly, Mexico may not be accommodative of such an approach, and lastly because the physical 'push-back' if at all cannot be done for countries without land borders with the United States.

But Trump will keep up the war drums and rail and rant in order to show his commitment to the cause ~ thereby, polarising and weaponising the societal environment to such an extent that vigilante justice could break out as frustrations mount.

Truth is always the casualty in such theatrical times, as hard data shows that the Joe Biden Presidency deported far more illegal immigrants in 2023 than Trump did in any of his four years of Presidency.

But now the expected resist-



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Honouring tribal heroes

SIR, This refers to the report, "Tribal heritage goes global, thanks to PM's Modi" (15 November).

The nation is commemorating the year-long 150th birth anniversary of "Dharti Aaba" Bhagwan Birsa Munda which commenced on his birthday, today.

Due to his contributions and sacrifice for tribals, Birsa Munda is fondly called "Dharti Aaba" (God on Earth), a symbol of respect and reverence towards him by the trib-

al community.

The Modi Government has taken many steps to make the people aware of the glorious contribution of tribal heroes.

Museums are being built in various parts of the country in their memory. Among them is a museum of Bhagwan Birsa Munda in Ranchi which has become a site of pilgrimage.

A museum named 'Janjatiya Darpan' has also been developed

in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

In the last 10 years, a large number of talented people from the tribal communities have been honoured with Padma awards to recognise their contributions.

The Union Government recently, on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, introduced a programme 'the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan' for the holistic development of over 63,000 tribal-dominated villages.



## KEEP CHILDREN SAFE

SIR, This refers to the editorial 'Safety online'. Social media platforms are a dangerous jungle for the young where predators roam in search of prey and Australia has done the right thing by proposing a ban on children less than 16 from accessing social media platforms.

Instead of being a place to exchange views and form friendships, these platforms have become threats and trolling plays havoc with the psychology of the students.

Cyber bullying and body shaming are common, making children emotional wrecks and sometimes suicidal in an increasingly isolated society where there is hardly any supervision of children and young adults.

At another level, the use of social platforms provides a huge amount of data which can then be used to target the children and their weakness. Crooks know exactly which buttons to press in order to get the desired result.

Enough girls are exploited in India by friends on social media to make us wary of the pitfalls of trusting virtual friends blindly. However, enforcing the ban would be difficult.

The ability of children to get past barriers should not be underestimated. Still children must first learn to navigate the real world before stepping into the virtual one.

Yours, etc., Anthony Henriques, Mumbai, 12 November.

It is heartening to note that due to the efforts of the government, people have now become well acquainted with the stories of tribal freedom fighters.

This will not only bring tribals and non-tribals closer but also promote unity in diversity in India.

Yours, etc., Manoj Parashar, Ghaziabad, 15 November.

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ASIAN VOICES

## Trump's victory and South Asia

The US has just concluded our generation's most eagerly watched presidential elections. Donald J Trump has won the White House resoundingly, and in addition, the Republican Party, also known as the Grand Old Party, has now wrested control of the Senate and has a comfortable majority in Congress.

Simply put, Trump and the GOP now have complete control of the executive and legislative branches of the government, which will embolden the new Trump administration to pursue policies with determination. The world is closely watching how the Trump administration will usher in a new foreign policy paradigm that revolves around Trump's "America First" philosophy.

Foreign policy mandarins across the globe have mixed feelings about Trump's victory: Allies in Europe are gripped with anxiety, whereas in South Asia, there is a sense that since the rhetoric of Trump's election campaign focused on combating China, Asia is on the cusp of witnessing unprecedented American engagement.

It is in this context of American outreach in Asia that South Asia will play a pivotal role in shaping outcomes of a constantly evolving new world order. Nepal must remain steadfast in keeping up with developments of the great power games whilst constantly safeguarding and pursuing its interests independently.

The heart of the US's contention with China revolves around two critical issues: Trade and technology. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated to the world

## THE KATHMANDU POST

how global trade supply chains depended on supply lines in China. With the resurgence of the America First policy, the Trump administration is determined to impose new trade tariffs of up to 60 per cent on Chinese exports.

While the supposed new tariffs are likely to come into play in the second half of 2025, there is palpable fear that new trade tariffs could bring in disruptions to global trade as costs are likely to increase in the coming days.

The Trump administration is determined to create new jobs to revitalise the economy by incentivising manufacturing in the country. Whilst Trump's plan to re-establish the US as a manufacturing hub is seen as a patriotic move, could higher labour costs in a developed country contribute towards lower production costs?

The US's trade conflict with China presents other developing nations in Asia with a unique opportunity to attract investments in the manufacturing industry.

Although it is outlandish to suggest China will be entirely substituted as a manufacturing hub, the emergence of new manufacturing opportunities in the global south presents the US with the opportunity to fuel economic growth essential for the sustenance of democracy. South Asia gives the US a unique avenue for enhanced collaboration.

With a democratic polity spread across most of South Asia's landmass, job creation and energy production are the key elements for stability in the region. The Indo-Gangetic delta is among the most populous regions in the world and possesses the human capital to fuel economic growth across South Asia.

Although the Civilian Nuclear Deal between India and the US is a milestone agreement for the use of clean nuclear energy to generate electricity in India, the nuclear plants in India only contribute 3.11 percent of the total electricity generated in India. For India to meet the energy requirements to set up a large-scale industrial base, access to high-quality uninterrupted energy will be critical for industrialisation in India and across South Asia.



OCCASIONAL NOTE

PRESIDENT Coolidge was the favourite, and his victory in the American Presidential elections is according to precedent. Mr. Roosevelt also attained his first term as President through the accident of being elected to the ordinarily insignificant post of Vice- President, and then being called upon by the death of his chief to go to the White House. Had it not been for the Oil Scandal there could have been no doubt of Mr. Coolidge's success. This might have ruined his chances were it not for the fortunate fact that the Democratic party was also involved. As far as foreign policy goes, the situation seems to be that the United States approves of the idea of the League of Nations but thinks that Mr. Wilson and the Democrats were for committing the country too deeply to entanglement in European affairs. It prefers to take the initiative itself, after the manner of President Harding and Mr. Hughes at the Washington Conference.

NEWS ITEMS

INSURANCE ACT

SCOPE OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)  
For a long time the Government of India has been considering the amendment of the Insurance Act. In fact a draft was prepared last year, but the Government decided not to proceed with it until the Board of Trade Committee that was meeting at Home had issued its report and enabled the Government here to become aware of the expert conclusions.  
The present Act is confined to life insurance companies. Since its enactment insurance work has immensely developed, and insurance activities now extend to various fields. The Act has, therefore, to be widened to embrace various new enterprises in this line. It may provide for legitimate control, but care will be taken lest State control in any way takes the form of interference in its development.

TATA STEEL COMPANY QUESTION OF FURTHER CAPITAL

ACCORDING to a local newspaper, the question of further capital for the Tata Iron and Steel Company was discussed at a meeting of the principal second preference shareholders of the company held yesterday.  
A committee, consisting of Sir Ibrahim Rahimtullah, Sir Hormusji Aden-wala, Messrs. Ardeshir Wadia, Ferozeshah Dalal, Shapurji Guzdar and some members of the Board of Directors, was appointed to examine the present financial position of the company with a view to ascertaining whether any further capital was necessary, and, if so, to devise means, for raising the money.

STUDY OF INDIAN MIND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGIST IN DELHI

DR. R. M. CRAMER, of New York, and Dr. E. A. Ross, Professor of Sociology in the University of Winsconsin, arrived here last evening and expects to stay for about a week.  
The main object of their visit is to study contemporary Indian mind by inquiries and interviews with representative men in all parts of India. This is a method which Professor Ross followed in his visits to various parts of the world resulting in such books as the "Changing Chinese," "The South of Panama," "Russia in Upheaval," and the "Social Revolution in Mexico."  
They reached Bombay about two weeks ago and since then have conferred with a number of prominent Indians.

EFFIGY OF CASTE DEMON

BURNT BY SYMPATHIZERS OF VAIKOM "JATHA"

THE Vaikom Jatha was cordially received at Mavalikara, Kayanakulam and other stations. A feature of the Jatha's march was the burning of an effigy of the caste demon jointly by caste and non-caste Hindus.  
Public meetings were held at Vaikom, Kottavam and several other places in the State, and resolutions were passed urging that Her Highness the Maharani Regent should be requested to throw open the Vaikom temple roads and similar roads all over the State to all classes without any distinction whatsoever.

'Himachal in reverse gear'

Himachal Pradesh BJP president Rajeev Bindal had been the health minister in the party-led government from 2007 to 2012. He was elected as the Speaker of the legislative assembly for two years before being appointed as the party state unit chief for the first time in 2020. The five-time MLA talks to Bhawani Negi of The Statesman on how the Congress dispensation is not doing enough to improve the financial condition of the hill state. Bindal (69) also accuses the ruling Congress of bringing a bad name to the state.

**Q. Himachal Pradesh is in a bad financial shape, with the Congress and the BJP blaming each other for the mounting debt. Where does the buck stop?**

**A.** The incumbent Congress government is just a "time pass" government, resorting to blame games and diverting public attention. This is the worst performing government in the history of the state.

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, cabinet ministers and many of the Congress MLAs were well versed with the financial condition of the state. Despite all this, they came up with guarantees to come to power. They have only worsened the financial condition of the state.

Ignoring the public interest, the chief minister is busy appointing his 'friends' to various posts, including parliamentary secretaries, chairmen and vice-chairmen of various corporations and boards.

In 2017, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, it

inherited a debt of Rs 50,000 crore, and Rs 11,000 crore liability. When the party made an exit in 2022, the state's debt was Rs 70,000 crore and Rs 9,000 crore liabilities.

Our party took a loan of Rs 20,000 crore in five years, and spent the money on the development of the state and even undertook several welfare schemes, including Sahara Yojna, Himcare, social pension for elderly and others. In the last two years, the Sukhu government has already taken loans of Rs 30,000 crore, but there has been no development. Comparison is there for all to see.

**Q. The Congress government will soon be completing two years of its tenure. How do you rate its performance?**

**A.** It has been a disastrous government with no achievement to boast about. The government is running in reverse gear. More than 1,000 institutions opened by the previous BJP government have been closed. Public schemes like Himcare and Jan Manch programmes have been stopped with political intent.

Of late, the state government has gained expertise in making U-turns on its decisions after facing public outrage. Notifications are issued on back dates for damage control.

**Q. Chief Minister Sukhu talks of making Himachal self-reliant by 2027. Your comments.**

**A.** Sukhu is making tall claims and is a far cry from what it promised to come to power. Accountability to the people and the state is what the

government is trying to duck. The Sukhu government came to power with an agenda in the name of guarantees, which it has miserably failed to deliver.

The government stands exposed for their false guarantees, it also brought Himachal Pradesh in a bad light.

On the contrary, it is working against the guarantees made to the people. This government has proved to be the most ineffective. Taxes have been imposed on water, electricity, diesel, and stamp duty. It has not spared anything to levy taxes, thus breaking the back of the common man.

**Q. Sukhu and other Congress leaders blame the Centre for lack of funds.**

**A.** These are politically motivated statements. Whatever development is going on in the state, it is thanks to the aid of the Centre. One of the state ministers even took to social media to acknowledge the central assistance, while the chief minister himself meets Union ministers and pleads for more assistance, which itself is contradictory.

If the Centre stops the assistance, the progress and development of Himachal will come to a standstill... the Congress won't be able to run the government even for five days.

The Congress government has wasted two years and will waste another three years. The people of the state will support the BJP as the party has taken care of the interest of the public as a viable alternative to ensure progress and stability.



Rivals once, brought together by China

AKIHIRO OKADA

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba inaugurated his Cabinet last month, and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump will be inaugurated in January next year.

Japan and the U.S. became allies after World War II, yet they also engaged in trade friction, which could be called war in the economic field, in the 1980s. Today, the U.S. economy is showing overwhelming strength, while Japan's stagnation is remarkable. How will the new Japanese and U.S. administrations build a cooperative economic relationship going forward?

Michael Crichton, best known as the author of "Jurassic Park," a story about dinosaurs resurrected by biotechnology, also published a mystery novel called "Rising Sun" in 1992, based on Japan-U.S. economic friction.

In the novel, a Japanese company called Nakamoto is holding a party to celebrate the completion of a skyscraper in Los Angeles when the body of a white female model is found inside the building. The story follows an American detective, who is an expert on Japan, as he closes in on the culprit and includes explanations of Japanese culture at various points.

The book opens with a Japanese motto, "Business is war," and concludes with the symbolic words of Akio Morita, a cofounder of Sony: "If you don't want Japan to buy it, don't sell it."

After World War II, the Japanese economy grew to the extent that it was seen as a threat to the United States. Reflecting Americans' feelings toward Japan at the time, the book contains frequent instances of discriminatory expressions toward the Japanese. When a film based on the novel was released, Asian groups expressed concern, saying that the movie portrayed all Japanese people as being black-hearted and lacking in emotion.

When you read this mystery novel now, what catches your eye are the many episodes that show the overwhelming strength of the Japanese economy.

Consider this passage: "We've lost too many basic industries to Japan — steel and shipbuilding in the sixties, television and computer chips in the seventies, machine tools in the eighties. One day somebody wakes up and realizes these industries are vital for American defense. We've lost the ability to make components essential to our national security. We're entirely dependent on Japan to supply them."

Referring to a certain sophisticated image-recognition software, one character laments: "Oh, it's not for sale here. The most advanced Japanese video equipment isn't available in this country. They keep us three to five years behind."

In the afterword, Crichton wrote: "Sooner or later, the United States must come to grips with the fact that Japan has become the leading industrial nation in the world. The Japanese have the longest lifespan. They have the highest employment, the highest literacy, the smallest gap between rich and poor. Their manufactured products have the highest quality. They have the best food. The fact is that a country the size of Montana, with half our population, will soon have an economy equal to ours."

The author also sounded a warning to the United States itself. "The Japanese are not our saviors. They are our competitors. We should not forget that."

However, Crichton's prediction was wrong.

In 1995, Japan accounted for about 18 per cent of the world's gross domestic product. Japan's GDP was about 70 per cent the size of the U.S. GDP, and its per capita GDP was about 50 per cent higher.

But in 2024, the United States is estimated to account for around 27 per

cent of the world's GDP, while Japan's share is around 4 per cent. Japan has fallen from second place to fourth.

In 1989, eight Japanese companies appeared in the top 10 places in the world market capitalization rankings, with NTT first followed by Japanese banks. The highest-ranking U.S. company was IBM, in sixth place.

Now, that same top 10 list is dominated by U.S. companies, including Microsoft, Apple, Nvidia and Alphabet (Google's parent company). No Japanese companies appear.

There are many reasons for "the lost three decades" of the Japanese economy. One of the main reasons is that the strengths of the Japanese economy at the time turned into weaknesses.

The strength of Japan's manufacturing industry was its diligent workforce and the close collaboration among those in manufacturing, design and technology, which resulted in high-quality products with few faults.

However, as digitization progressed, the source of added value shifted from tangible to intangible assets, and Japanese manufacturing companies lost their strength. In the winner-take-all digital era, innovation and dynamism came to determine the winners and losers in business.

On that point, here's another passage from the novel: "They kaizen 'em. A process of deliberate, patient, continual refinements. Each year the products get a little better, a little smaller, a little cheaper. Americans don't think that way. Americans are always looking for the quantum leap, the big advance forward. Americans try to hit a home run — to knock it out of the park — and then sit back. The Japanese just hit singles all day long, and never sit back."

At the time Crichton wrote it, this passage did explain why the Japanese economy continued to win, and the American economy continued to



decline. But now, it is different. The baseball analogy now shows why the United States has recovered to the point of boasting overwhelming strength, and Japan has fallen behind.

The Japanese economy is now shifting from rivalry with the United States to cooperation, as both countries aim to counter a rising China. It is changing into a new economic alliance. IBM's full technical cooperation with Rapidus, a semiconductor firm led by the Japanese government that aims at domestic production of advanced semiconductors, symbolizes this.

Nippon Steel Corp.'s planned acquisition of United States Steel Corp. provoked a reaction reminiscent of the trade friction in the 1980s and became a political issue - but that's not what the pending deal is about. The essence of the matter is that a Japan-U.S. steel alliance could counter the Chinese steel industry, which continues to overproduce.

In the novel, a Japanese businessman struts around Los Angeles as if he owns the place.

Today's real-life scene is different. One Japanese man, Shohei Ohtani, is hitting home run after home run on a Los Angeles baseball

field as a new symbol of the Japan-U.S. relationship.

The relationship between Japan and the United States has experienced many significant changes over time.

After the new Trump administration starts, it will be necessary for the Japanese government to rethink its strategy for building relations. It has been pointed out that Trump appears to hold views on Japan from the 1980s, when trade friction between Japan and the United States was intense.

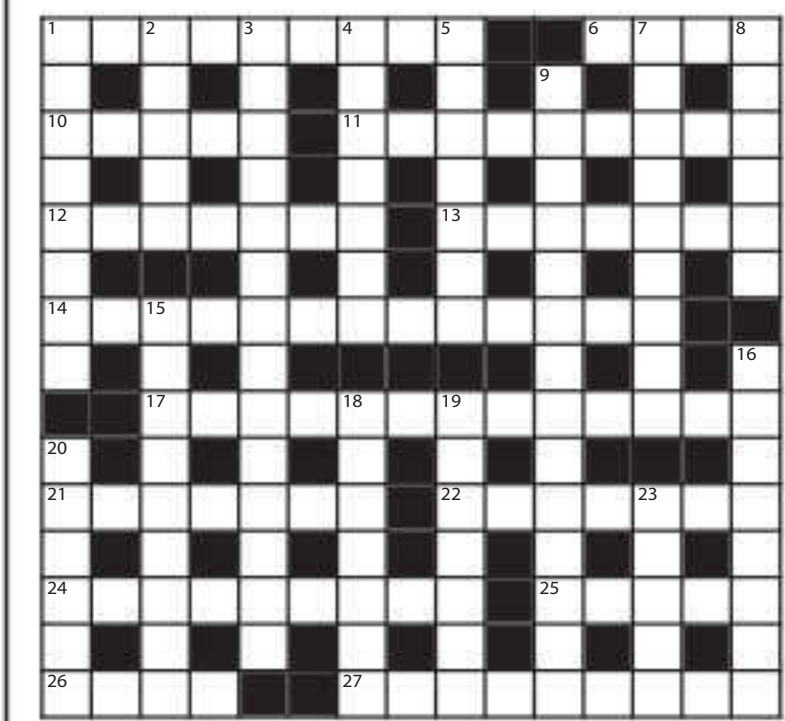
Trump may impose tariffs on imports from other countries, including Japan, to protect domestic industries and promote the "America First" policy, which could negatively impact the Japanese economy. Trump has publicly stated that he will prevent Nippon Steel from acquiring U.S. Steel.

There may be more difficult times ahead. The relationship between Japan and the United States has overcome many rough patches and strengthened over time; this alliance, having gone through such experiences, will be able to find a good path forward. That is the hope.

The Japan News/ANN.

CROSSWORD

NO-292962



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

JAHAB SOLICITOR  
NMBNCO  
INTERFACE KURT  
SEITAPB  
JIMIHENDRIX LEI  
OEAEESTAT  
POSTBAG ESTATES  
LOU OEA  
TILL JIMMORRISON  
NIEPBCD  
STAR TOOTHCOMB  
HSIIIO  
WINEHOUSE CLUB  
CYNTS

ACROSS

- 1 Famous Greek champion to scatter us (9)
- 6 Two ducks circling southern lake in city (4)
- 10 Shaving scratches for singer Stevie? (5)
- 11 Lover soon having despicable person over (9)
- 12 Actor seen in Split twice? (3,4)

- 13 About to happen where shoppers may be seen (2,5)
- 14 Disobedient aboard sinking boat, men worried about commotion (13)
- 17 In which bars have swingers who score? (5,8)
- 21 Sleep rough around street — want these for a pound? (7)
- 22 Game drawn with one-time master of suspense? (7)

- 24 Sort of roll, A-E etc? (9)
- 25 Coppers finding 48th vice president (5)
- 26 Rice wine gives benefit (4)
- 27 Departs city area in subtle desert transport (9)

DOWN

- 1 Bar to hold protest led by worker (8)
- 2 Right to step up and go over again (5)

- 3 Do combustible characters differ about a rattle? (14)
- 4 Less weighty article right outside tavern (7)
- 5 His law changed one language (7)
- 7 Appear so excited about nothing in TV drama (4,5)
- 8/20 Poor love nobody has fed meal (2,4,6)
- 9 Old capital has loyal citizens in for exercise

- (14) As it were, use a needle cryptically? (2,2,5)
- 16 Playwright Peter, knowing about Anne, close to her (8)
- 18 Certain result to invest Republican — and Democrat! (7)
- 19 Drama involving the Liberal Left in Oscars? (7)
- 20 See 8
- 23 Unexpected gift from German writer given answer (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



# Right to breathe

As Delhi air turns toxic, Delhiites face severe health risks; the capital needs long-term solutions, not knee-jerk reactions

Delhi's air quality has plummeted to hazardous levels, with the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) soaring to a staggering 428, marking the worst pollution levels in the country. As a result, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has announced the enforcement of stringent Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)-3 restrictions starting at 8 AM on Friday. On Thursday, the 24-hour AQI for the city reached 428, signaling a "severe" air quality category, which poses serious health risks to the population, especially children, the elderly and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions. The current AQI level of 428 puts Delhi in the "Severe" category, indicating that the air is dangerously polluted and immediate action is required to prevent further deterioration of public health. In response to the deteriorating air quality, the CAQM has imposed the following GRAP-3 restrictions to mitigate the pollution levels: All non-essential construction and demolition activities in Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR) are suspended to prevent dust and particulate matter from exacerbating the pollution. Vehicles that do not meet the latest emission norms are banned from the roads. Specifically, petrol vehicles that do not comply with BS-III (Bharat Stage III) standards and diesel vehicles that fall under BS-IV norms are prohibited from operating within Delhi and parts of NCR. These measures are expected to significantly reduce the amount of pollutants being emitted into the air, especially from construction sites and older vehicles, which are major contributors to air pollution. The current spike in pollution levels to a combination of factors. The calm winds and a sharp drop in temperature have trapped pollutants in the air, preventing them from dispersing. The weather conditions have created a 'smog blanket' over the city, intensifying the effects of vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and the burning of crop stubble in neighbouring states. The Supreme Court of India has taken note of the deteriorating air quality and has scheduled a hearing on November 18 to discuss further enforcement measures. The court has emphasised that every citizen has the fundamental right to breathe clean air, as protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Delhi's pollution crisis has now drawn significant national and international attention. While the immediate focus is on enforcing short-term measures like the GRAP-3 restrictions, experts argue that lasting solutions require systemic changes, including stricter emissions standards, better waste management, and a push for cleaner public transportation options. As the city continues to grapple with the toxic smog, Delhi residents are urged to stay indoors as much as possible, avoid strenuous outdoor activities, and wear N95 masks to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the air pollution. In the coming days, it is hoped that both weather conditions and Govt interventions will bring some relief, but the long-term health of the city's residents depends on sustained efforts to curb the sources of pollution.



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Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga river at a ghat on the occasion of 'Kartik Purnima' festival, in Varanasi

# US-Iran tensions: War clouds over West Asia

With regional stability hanging in the balance, the world watches anxiously as West Asia braces for the potential fallout of escalating hostilities

On July 3, 1988, the US Navy's USS Vincennes, in an act of brazen military overreach, shot down Iran Air Flight 655, a civilian airliner carrying 290 passengers, over the Persian Gulf. The Navy's justification—that this was an "unintentional error"—betrays the harsh reality: this was not a mistake, but rather an emblematic instance of Western indifference to the lives of those deemed expendable.

The Navy mistook a commercial flight for an enemy fighter jet, launching two surface-to-air missiles and killing all aboard. Yet, the US response was not to acknowledge a moral failing, but to double down on its denial, offering neither a genuine apology nor reparations to the victims' families. This tragedy was a grim reminder of the West's long-standing practice of dehumanising the peoples of West Asia in its relentless pursuit of geopolitical dominance. For the Iranian people, it was not merely a military blunder; it was a stark dismissal of their humanity, reinforcing the deeply entrenched belief in Western circles that the lives of those beyond its borders are, at best, collateral damage in the pursuit of power.

The echoes of this tragedy persist today, amplified by the volatile relationship between the US and Iran. Just days after Donald Trump's re-election, the US government claimed to have uncovered a plot by Iran to assassinate the president. Iran vehemently rejected these allegations, with Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi dismissing them as a "third-rate comedy" and accusing the US of fabricating a narrative to justify further aggression. Araqchi's derision-mocking the absurdity of an assassin "sitting in Iran and talking online to the FBI"—renewed the deep mistrust that defines the US-Iran relationship. Now that Trump has secured a second term and will become the 47th President of the USA, it is clear that his foreign policy, especially towards Iran, could become far more aggressive, with disastrous consequences. His planned appointments of hawkish figures



— such as Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defence, Steven C Witkoff as Special Envoy on West Asia Affairs and Mike Huckabee as Ambassador to Israel — suggest that peace in the West Asia is more distant than ever. These choices reflect a growing alignment with Israel's interests, further inflaming tensions and laying the groundwork for a catastrophic conflict—one that could see a war against Iran as the ultimate culmination of decades of Western intervention.

This looming disaster cannot be divorced from the historical legacy of Western interference in West Asia. Iran's relationship with the West has been shaped by centuries of betrayal and manipulation. A defining moment in this fraught history was the CIA-backed coup of 1953, which ousted Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he sought to nationalise Iran's oil industry. This act, orchestrated by Western powers, reinstated the Shah's brutal regime, sowing the seeds for the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This history of intervention, driven by oil and geopolitics, instilled a deep sense of betrayal in the Iranian consciousness—a sentiment that still defines Iran's foreign policy today. Divided along sectarian lines and often opportunistic in their foreign policy, Iran's



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neighbours have repeatedly failed to put regional unity ahead of external pressures. Yet, the geopolitical manipulations that have shaped this region's history are part of a broader pattern: the West's refusal to recognise the sovereignty of nations it deems strategically irrelevant. The Iranian people have grown ever more resolute in their refusal to capitulate to external demands. This isolation, initially born of necessity, has also transformed into a profound existential struggle. In response, Iran has sought alliances with nations like China and Russia and forged relationships with non-state actors in the region. These alliances—born not of ideology, but of pragmatic necessity—have allowed Iran to exert regional influence, shifting the balance of power in ways the West never anticipated. In his first term, Trump used a two-pronged strategy to weaken Iran: connecting other Arab nations in favour of Israel through the Abraham Accords, a treaty engineered by his Jewish-origin son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and secondly, targeting key personalities who enabled Iran's influence in the region while funding efforts by Iranians living abroad working against Iran. In his second term, which could be more refined and sharpened by the experiences he earned in the last eight years—both in office and out-

side the White House—his actions could become far more unpredictable. Consequently, the potential for war against Iran is no longer a distant fear; it is a rapidly approaching reality. It would affirm the West's view that the lives of Iranians, like those across the Global South, are expendable in pursuit of geopolitical dominance, making this a war of choice, not necessity, with existential stakes for Iran. In this context, the responsibility to avoid war does not lie solely with the U.S. or Iran, but with all the nations of the region, including those of the Arab world. Despite their differing beliefs, histories, and alliances, it is incumbent upon Arab nations to take a united stand against the spectre of war. The voices of Arab leaders, particularly those who have long been caught in the geopolitical crossfire of the US-Iran conflict, must rise in defence of regional peace and stability. Divisions must be set aside in favour of collective action that prioritises the preservation of life and sovereignty over ideological differences. The world, and particularly the nations of West Asia, must strive to find a path of diplomacy and dialogue, to avoid yet another destructive war that will further tear apart the very fabric of the region.

(The writer is a journalist and author; Views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

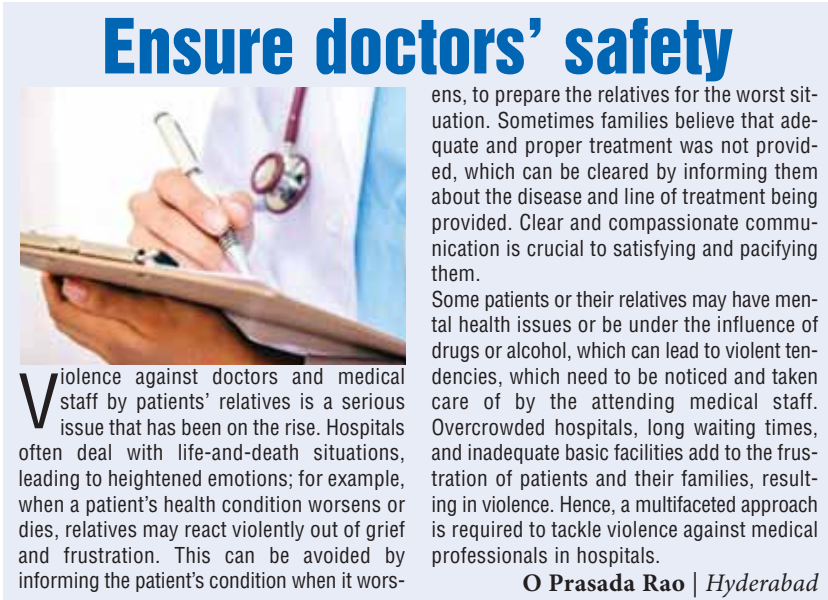
### SIMPLIFY TAX SYSTEM

Madam — The article on simplifying tax structures presents an acceptable argument (14-11-24). The successive governments seem to be under utter confusion and all the changes are found to be further complicating the tax structure rather than making it simple to understand and comply with. GST is further a complicated one in every aspect. The government is not clear even in a matter like what is to be taxed. Essentials are taxed; condoms and bangles are exempted. Falling sick is taxed. Medicines, diagnostic devices and insurance premiums are taxed as if falling sick is a matter of comfort and luxury. Even in the case of direct tax, the government's sense of vengeance over the salaried section is clearly displayed. This section is earning money to spend and save. Both are good and help build a better economy of the country. But they are made to pay not less than 30 per cent as income tax besides GST on every spending. Besides forgoing a huge part of salary, they have to manage the hardships caused by untamed inflation also. There is no answer on the relevance of toll collections. A road is laid and its expenses are met with one year of toll collection. But collections are carried on for decades and they are never closed. It is this confusion in the mind of the government that drives earners to seek ways and means to avoid tax and accumulate black money. It is high time for the government to overhaul the entire tax system and make it people-friendly.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

### STOP ILLEGAL DEMOLITIONS

Madam— The Supreme Court intervened that no government is allowed to rule with a bulldozer, by blazing the houses of the miscreants and culprits like this. The Supreme Court guidelines pace respect to the dreams of the home of every single individual, despite



## Ensure doctors' safety

Violence against doctors and medical staff by patients' relatives is a serious issue that has been on the rise. Hospitals often deal with life-and-death situations, leading to heightened emotions; for example, when a patient's health condition worsens or dies, relatives may react violently out of grief and frustration. This can be avoided by informing the patient's condition when it wors-

ens, to prepare the relatives for the worst situation. Sometimes families believe that adequate and proper treatment was not provided, which can be cleared by informing them about the disease and line of treatment being provided. Clear and compassionate communication is crucial to satisfying and pacifying them. Some patients or their relatives may have mental health issues or be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which can lead to violent tendencies, which need to be noticed and taken care of by the attending medical staff. Overcrowded hospitals, long waiting times, and inadequate basic facilities add to the frustration of patients and their families, resulting in violence. Hence, a multifaceted approach is required to tackle violence against medical professionals in hospitals.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

that he was the been charged culprit under some legal allegations. So far, the UP government has been popularising itself with the Bulldozer Raaj. The use of bulldozers to demolish the house of the culprits, to give them a lesson, is turning into the way of governance in Uttar Pradesh. The demolishing of the houses and illegal land encroachment must be followed by a legal procedure of waving official legal notice at least 15 days prior and with full opportunity to appeal by the affected party. The move by the apex court will add more transparency to the justice mechanism, and this intervention by the judiciary will assist the innocent to save the sweet home from the red tape bureaucrats and political leaders, who many times hurt the innocent to show their political status and power.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

### POLLUTION FROM WASTE

Madam — Instead of resolving environmental problems, Delhi's ambition to convert garbage into energy is creating

health risks. The factory is releasing harmful smoke and ash into the surrounding neighborhoods, despite its goal of reducing landfill waste through rubbish incineration. Significant pollution has resulted, exposing locals to dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals like lead, cadmium, manganese, and arsenic—up to 19 times higher than what the EPA recommends. Cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, as well as developmental hazards for children, are among the health effects. The absence of crucial safety measures at the plant is criticised by experts. Respiratory problems are common among the locals, and ash contamination has reached neighboring residences, schools, and parks. The intended "green" solution might make Delhi's pollution problem worse if regulatory action is not taken.

Divyansh Pal | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# Wooden pallets: Turning timber into treasure

Circular economy practices are changing the future of wooden pallets, from innovative recycling methods to tech-driven solutions

Wooden pallets are indispensable in modern logistics, widely used to support the transportation and storage of goods across various industries, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), pharmaceuticals, automotive, chemicals and more. These durable platforms are designed to handle heavy loads and protect products during shipping, simplifying the process of storage and handling. The demand for wooden pallets is immense, with countries like India requiring an estimated 207.8 million units. With such extensive use, an important question arises: what happens to these pallets when they reach the end of their lifecycle? By giving new life to old pallets, industries can reduce waste, conserve resources, and promote economic growth while protecting the environment. There are numerous innovative ways to repurpose and recycle wooden pallets, which contribute to building a more sustainable and efficient supply chain.

Repair and Refurbishment:



One of the most effective ways to enhance sustainability in the wooden pallet industry is through repair and refurbishment. While pallets generally have a lifespan of 12 to 18 months, many can be used longer with regular maintenance. Instead of discarding damaged pallets, companies can inspect and repair them by replacing broken slats and restoring their structural integrity. This process helps conserve raw materials and lowers the carbon footprint associated with manufacturing new pallets. Adopting repair programmes also reduces the demand for fresh timber, which helps prevent deforestation and minimises waste.

Repurposing, Upcycling, and Recycling

When wooden pallets are no longer fit for their primary purpose, they can still serve a wide range of functions through repurposing, upcycling, or recycling. Repurposing transforms discarded pallets into furniture, decor, or art, extending their lifespan and keeping them out of landfills. This also supports local economies by providing artisans with reclaimed wood to create unique, eco-friendly products. When repurposing or upcycling are no longer options, recycling can turn pallets into products like particleboard or mulch, which conserves resources and reduces the need for new timber. Together, these strategies help minimise waste and lower environmental impact, encouraging responsible use of resources.

**Sustainable Sourcing as a Foundation for Circularity** To fully align with circular economy principles, the wood used in pallet manufacturing should be sustainably sourced. Certification programs, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), play a

crucial role in ensuring responsible forest management. These certifications verify that forests are managed sustainably, protecting biodiversity, preventing illegal logging, and minimising environmental impact.

**The Role of Technology in Enhancing Circularity** Technology is increasingly central to the transformation of wooden pallets, with advancements like the Internet of Things and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) improving pallet management. These technologies allow pallets to be embedded with sensors, which enable real-time tracking of location, condition, and usage. This visibility optimises inventory management and reduces losses. By tracking pallets through their entire lifecycle, businesses can maximise reuse, ensuring that pallets are returned, repaired, and repurposed efficiently. Such technology-driven strategies extend the lifespan of pallets, ensuring they remain in the supply chain as long as possible.

(The wrier is CEO & MD at Jay Wood Industry; views are personal)



JAY DEEPAK SHAH



FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE AND FALL OF EGO

True success lies not in fame or power but in humility and understanding one's purpose of life




RAVI VALLURI

A challenging task or an idea normally releases endorphins, which stimulate the human mind to think out of the box, and when endowed with such an attitude, we scale high altitudes and reach the summit. But there is a flip side. We become attached to the product or the activity flow; consequently, the mind gets entrapped by the adulation. A vivacious model with gravitas, known for scorching the ramp, was chosen for a cinematic role. She executed the role with aplomb and was soon nominated for several awards and managed to win some of them, including the Best New Face award.

The actress was bestowed with several honours and in the process bagged prestigious roles. It was indeed a heady feeling. She was feted at various parties and became a celebrity overnight. However, there was no end to her avarice as her mind and body craved more attention. The “I, Me” syndrome dominated her mind and she spent hours before the mirror, taking selfies, adoring her ravishing beauty and success. At her peril, she ignored the alarm bells, the death knell knocking at her door. She got hooked on alcohol, money, drugs and sex. The talented artiste lost her equanimity, equipoise and equilibrium in a state of feverishness and in the process attracted opprobrium.

The meteoric rise of the artiste was short-lived and her obnoxious behaviour was not acceptable to the industry she was soon stripped of meaty roles and sure enough, lost power and fame. Tragedy struck



in a cruel form as her life was snuffed out at a tender age when she succumbed after a car crash in an inebriated state. Who was to be blamed for this irrational behaviour? False egos play havoc on human minds when the power of discrimination gets obfuscated in the razzmatazz and dazzle of “doership”. The breed of such people extends among politicians, entrepreneurs and seekers as they are entrapped by doership and cannot let go and remain humble.

They focus on certain immediate outcomes and in the bargain, lose the plot and larger picture. In the political sphere too, parties become dependent on the success and megalomania of an individual and lose their core strengths of inner democracy and grassroots contact. The spiritual world is not spared either. Seekers, to begin with, tread the path with great courage and conviction and have immense faith in the Master and the path. They unflinchingly participate in sadhana, seva, Satsang, meditation and other activities of the organisation. The Master (Guru) in his magnanimity encourages all his followers. Some progress on the path and others fall aside as the rigour and regimen of spirituality are arduous and crammed with disturbances before the seeker obtains peace of mind. Soon the feverish mind of the seeker feels proximity to the Master and in the process, rubs fellow seekers the wrong way. Some seekers ‘like’ these photographs on Facebook to ingratiate themselves with those purportedly “close”, in anticipation that it could act as a passport to have a glimpse of the Guru. A true spiritual leader or Master cautions the faithful not to be trapped in the quagmire of Guru Mandal. “Under the influence of false ego, one thinks himself to be the doer of activities, while all the activities are carried out by nature as a natural process,” expounds Lord Krishna to Arjuna. A genuine seeker should realise that we are infinitesimal in this vast universe. Our acts and deeds, if truly positive and humble, will automatically draw us closer to the Guru and the Laws of the Universe.

*(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)*

# Bangladesh: A nation’s press under pressure



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

## Attacks on media houses and journalists continue notwithstanding the interim Govt’s claim that it is committed to upholding media freedom

The media’s independence is under severe attack in Bangladesh under the interim government headed by chief advisor Muhammad Yunus. The attack is two-pronged. One of these is directed against media houses and journalists perceived to have been supporters of the Awami League and the government when Sheikh Hasina headed both. The second targets non-aligned media establishments, editors and journalists, including those known for standing up to the Awami League government’s repressive media regime. The objective is to pressure them into toeing the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government.

Coming to media houses, eight channels were attacked on August 5, 2024, itself, when Sheikh Hasina left for India. Among them was Ekattor TV’s office in Baridhara, Dhaka, which was vandalised and burnt down; also attacked on the same day in Dhaka were the premises of Samay TV, and ATN Bangla. On August 19, an armed mob attacked and severely damaged the establishment of East West Media group, which runs Kaler Kantha (Voice of the times) Bangladesh Pratidin (Bangladesh daily), both Bengali-language newspapers, Daily Sun, an English-language daily, News24BD, a television news channel, Radio Capital, a radio station, and Banglanews24, an online Bengali daily. The mob assaulted journalists, injured a woman journalist and harassed women employees.

As for journalists, according to Reporters Without Borders, a globally-respected international NGO headquartered in Paris, “baseless accusations of killing protesters have been brought against nearly 140 journalists. Twenty-five have been charged with “crimes against humanity. Many of them have gone into hiding because they fear being arrested and jailed.”

A number of journalists have been arrested and jailed. Their ranks include Shakil Ahmed, former head of news at television channel Ekattor TV, and Farzana Rupa, its former chief correspondent, who were arrested from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, on August 21, 2024, when they were about to board a Turkish Airlines flight to Paris via Istanbul, along with their daughter. The two of them remain in prison, as do Mozammel Haque Babu, chief executive officer of Ekattor TV and Shyamal Datta, editor of Bhorer Kagaz (Paper at Dawn) who were arrested on September 15. In a letter emailed recently to Muhammad Yunus, Jodie Ginsburg, chief executive officer of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a respected NGO promoting press freedom and defending the rights of journalists worldwide, urged him to ensure, among other things, respect for the “procedural rights of four incarcerated pro-Awami League journalists: Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Mozammel Babu and Shyamal Dutta, including their right to a free trial.”

The arrests are hardly surprising. According to a report in the Dhaka Tribune dated September 19, 2024, the ADSM leader, Nahid Islam who, besides his other hats, is advisor in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, thundered at a press conference on the previous day that the “instigators” of the July-August massacre



“[of protesters] would be brought to justice no matter whether they identified themselves as journalists, writers and artists. Doubtless, the interim government was to decide as to who were to be brought to justice.

Just two examples would show how utterly arbitrary and vindictive such decisions have been. The one is the continued incarceration of Shahriar Kabir, an internationally-respected human rights activist, champion of secular humanism, advocate of the bringing war criminals of 1971 to justice, author and journalist. The second is the arrest, on November 6, 2024, of the noted television actor, Shomi Kaiser, daughter of Shahidullah and Panna Kaiser. Shahidullah, a noted writer and journalist, disappeared after being abducted by Pakistani army personnel and their collaborators from the ranks of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and allied organisations like al-Badr, al-Shams and Razakars. His brother, Zaheer Raihan, also disappeared while looking for him. Panna Kaiser was an Awami League Member of Parliament (1996-2001) who worked in the area of youth welfare. Apart from arrests on false charges, the cancellation of accreditation cards, which has reached a total of 167 at the time of writing, is being used as a weapon against journalists. Such cards are important for identifying oneself as a journalist, and securing entry into restricted areas, government offices and meetings. Referring to the matter, Celia Mercier, Head of South Asia Office of Reporters Without Borders,

another globally-respected NGO whose mission is to act for freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism, and defend those who embody these ideals, has said, “The decision to rescind the accreditation cards of journalists considered close to the previous government is politically-motivated and punitive, and has the effect of intimidating the press. It encourages self-censorship and threatens the very existence of opposition media. This decision by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry [of Bangladesh] is incomprehensible, coming just a week after it took a positive step by establishing a mechanism for reporting cases of harassment against journalists. We urge the ministry to return to this more constructive path by establishing a regulated procedure for issuing and rescinding press cards, by ensuring that cases of harassment are examined impartially, and by putting a final stop to political reprisals against media professionals.”

As for pressures on independent media establishments, editors and journalists, the aim is to make them toe the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the ADSM, and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government. The weapons are threats and harangues. At a meeting to discuss “Role of Media in Creating Fascist Narrative: A Review,” Mahmudur Rahman, editor of Amar Desh (My Country) criticized two national newspapers, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, for their coverage and com-

mentary on Sheikh Mujib and Sheikh Hasina, suggesting that these outlets are paving the way for fascism by creating contrasting narratives. He further said that the media had fostered hatred towards Islam, misrepresented societal divisions, and perpetuated a narrative of eternal gratitude towards India for its role in Bangladesh’s liberation. Significantly, Mahmudur Rahman said this in the presence of Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus’ press secretary, Shafiqul Alam. Events like this have been creating a climate in which channels and publications, including the two of Bangladesh’s leading paper which Rahman criticised, are sought to be put under compulsion to conform to the kind of reportage and comment the interim government expects of them.

All this makes a mockery of the interim government’s assertions that it is for the freedom of the press and its moves like the setting up of a commission for hearing allegations of harassment by journalists. An editorial in The Daily Star, dated November 7, 2024, delivered a damning indictment of the situation and the interim government’s role when it said, “In our pursuit of a fair, anti-discriminatory Bangladesh, few values are as vital as press freedom. We are, therefore, concerned by the persistent intimidation, harassment, and censorship faced by journalists, which shows how the media landscape remains fraught with obstacles.”

*(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer; the views expressed are personal)*

# Punjab by-elections: A Stage for dynastic politics, defections and defamatory rhetoric

## In the run-up to the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024, political leaders seem to have sidestepped pro-people issues

Elections are usually a good opportunity for political leaders to make public statements and seek public feedback on their pro-people works and policies. But the scene in the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024 eludes the expectation.

Along with other states in India, there are by-elections in four Assembly constituencies of Punjab for which voting is to be held on November 20, 2024. In the absence of any public-interest manifestos, political parties rely on the ‘candidate-winnability’ supporting political apostasy and dynastic politics. Most political leaders in the campaign are relying on defamatory garrulous speeches and irresponsible false claims. The trust deficit of the people in politi-



SUKHDEV SINGH

cal parties and the confidence deficit in their leaders is so high that the oldest and traditionally strongest political party of the state, Shiromani Akali Dal, has preferred to not contest the elections. A conglomeration of its disgruntled leaders, the Akali Dal Reform Movement, is also out of the election contest. The contest is triangular among the ruling party in the state- Aam Aadmi Party, the ruling party

in the centre- Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress. In one constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a cousin of the Akali Dal chief and has been a minister in the Akali and the Congress governments. He has apostatised three political tastes before joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate left the Akali Dal shortly before the current by-elections.

The Congress party candidate is the wife of the Congress State party president and a 2024-elected Member of Parliament. In another constituency, the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is the son of a 2024-elected Member of Parliament from the same party; the MP had defected



from the Congress just before the 2024 parliamentary elections to contest and win as an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, while the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has defected Shrimoni Akali Dal; he has been a minister in the SAD government.

In the third constituency, the Congress party candidate is the wife of its party MP and a former Deputy Chief Minister. In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a former Akali MLA and the son of a Punjab Assembly speaker in the SAD government. In the fourth constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has been a former senior Vice –President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and a Congress MLA before deserting the Congress to join

the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is said to be a favourite of an MP and a former minister, ignoring its former district chief who is contesting as a rebel.

The four vacancies arose because the MLAs in all four contested and won parliamentary elections held in June 2024. In three of the four, the

contesting candidates are the immediate family members of the 2024-elected MPs. As the family members of the MPs, they are assumed to be the ‘winning’ candidates because their mentors have already proved it by winning the Assembly and then parliamentary elections sequentially.

The question arises whether the political parties do not have any other members from any other section of society who can be ‘winning’ candidates or if some leaders have turned electoral politics into a family monopoly aka ‘nepotism’, in which there is no room for other party workers, however sincere and hard-working they may be.

The current situation is so ridiculous that these leaders

and the political parties criticize each other for dynastic politics, nepotism and party defection. Still, when the opportunity arises, they play the game and present their spouses, children and relatives as the only ‘winning’ candidates and strengthen political dynasticism justifying it in various ways.

Claiming himself the next Chief Minister of the state during his campaign for the BJP candidate, a Government of India Minister compared the peasant leaders in protest’ with ‘Talibans’ and threatened action against them after the elections. Not only his threat is defamatory and against the spirit of a democracy, but also an unbecoming rambling coercing votes for the candidate of his party.

Addressing an election meeting in favour of an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, its supreme dubs the sitting Congress MP as “corrupt Randhawa” inviting defamatory threat from him. Further he charges him with ‘dynastic politics’ ignoring the similar practice by AAP in another constituency where he has campaigned for the candidate on the same day.

Thus the Punjab 2024 By-elections are riddled with defection, dynasticism, defamatory rhetoric, irresponsible rambling, bringing with it a sense of deterioration in democracy which both the people and political parties must address.

*(The writer is retired professor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; views are personal)*



DECCAN Chronicle

16 NOVEMBER 2024

Trump’s key govt choices show desire for disruption

Nearly 200 years ago, New York senator William L. Marcy defended President Andrew Jackson's appointment of Martin Van Buren as minister to Britain with the words — “To the victor belongs the spoils of the enemy.” It appears the old principle is not dead yet as US President-elect Donald Trump has named a dozen personalities to be in his team, many of them so unconventional in their thinking that alarm bells are ringing already.

Having promised to carry out the largest ever deportation process, give even more tax breaks to the corporates and the wealthy and punish his political opponents for their various acts in getting him convicted as a felon, the incoming President is ready to seize all avenues possible to reshape his nation in his “America First” paradigm.

Having achieved the trifecta of the White House and control of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the grand old party will have many Trump acolytes on board to carry out their agenda and it remains to be seen how the Democrats can meaningfully oppose any outlandish measures. Joe Biden too had the trifecta when he came to power in 2020, but his government had to contend with Covid-19 first before attempting to reshape the economy.

Among the 12 appointments that Trump has made so far (subject to Senate approval), he has an anti-vaxxer as health secretary, a Russia admirer as director of national intelligence and an attorney-general who resigned his House seat in a hurry so as to pre-empt a report by the ethics committee about a sex trafficking probe that the justice department ran against him and who called for the FBI and the justice department to be abolished because they investigated Trump.

A war veteran more famous for his pro-Trump stance as news anchor is the defence secretary tasked with running the world’s most powerful armed forces and a border hawk to run his anti-immigration operations completes the picture of a palpably transparent agenda of seizing control with his Republican Party mirroring his call of “Make America Great Again” along with a top court dominated by conservative judges.

Not to forget the appointments of billionaire friend and benefactor Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to a department of government efficiency to cut federal spending and, presumably, a whole load of staff as the X owner may have got accustomed to after buying out Twitter (now X). The cocktail of ideas and men with such an agenda has, naturally enough, given the rest of the world the jitters.

It is understandable if Trump had absolute loyalty to him as a criterion for selection to high-profile government posts, but it is the basic desire for disruption that is seen as a red rag with every government and global company trying to hazard a guess about the future. If a hard line on China with high tariffs is a given, India might be one country that could sense an opportunity. But even genuinely skilled persons could face obstacles to getting US visas to work in the world’s largest economy.

The worst may be feared about where “Trumponomics” is going to lead in terms of inflation and inequitable growth, but there must be room for optimism if deregulation leads to economic progress in the United States with a trickle-down effect helping its bigger trading partners like Mexico, Europe and India too. Trepidation among illegal immigrants, anxiety in many places, most of all China, and a bit of optimism stemming from Trump’s promised role as a peacemaker in this war-ravaged world makes for a melange of feelings ahead of January 20, 2025.

Can we have 21-year-old MLAs?

Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy has called for lowering the minimum age criteria for contesting Assembly elections from the current 25 years to 21 years to ensure that political representatives reflect the country’s young demographic.

According to Articles 84 and 174 of the Constitution, the minimum age for members of the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies is 25 years, and for members of the Rajya Sabha and state legislative councils it is 30 years. The minimum age to become a member of panchayati raj institutions at village, block and district level is 21 years.

The Telangana CM argued that if an 18-year-old can be allowed to vote and if a 21-year old can become an administrator by clearing the civil services examination, why can we not allow a 21-year-old person to join the democratic process by contesting elections?

A similar view was expressed last August by the parliamentary standing committee on law and personnel by recommending the lowering of the age limit for contesting elections for the state Assembly and the Lok Sabha to 18 years.

The proposal sounds good considering that 50 per cent of India’s population is less than 25 years old and 65 per cent of its population is less than 35. Therefore, lowering the age limit is a fair and plausible idea. However, it invites some basic questions.

Though the minimum age to contest Assembly elections is 25, only six per cent of the current Telangana Assembly members are aged between 25 and 40. More than half of the members fall in the bracket of 56 and 70 years. Unless and until political parties give a chance to younger members to contest elections, an attempt to lower the age — despite being a progressive idea — would merely be an academic exercise.


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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



Online scams are proliferating... Be careful, or you could lose money

“The Plane tree leaves now carpet the earth  
In autumn in London the pavements are lush  
With the palm-shaped debris, yellow and dry  
Till the coming of winter, heralding the birth  
In spring of new leaves, I now wonder why  
I’ve never remarked on Plane trees in bloom  
But comment on their largesse now their leaves fall,  
As the feet of the passers nudge them aside —  
So many — how will the councils assume  
To gather as garbage this autumnal pride?”

— From The Bells of Bellpuri, by Bachchoo

I am constantly warned, through emails and posts on WhatsApp, against scams. Only yesterday I was offered malware to protect against malware. Like the perpetual liar confessing “Everything I say is a lie”?

And no, gentle reader, I didn’t send my bank details to the Nigerian Lottery which wanted to deposit my winnings on a ticket bought for me by an anonymous admirer.

But alas, I have stumbled, fallen through gullibility. Not once, but twice.

Chump’s election forced me to postpone this confession but now here it is: Some weeks ago, the plastic handle of my steam-iron broke. I instinctively tried Superglue. No luck!

As most of my friends do, and I inductively follow, I seek answers to banal questions from Google. I once asked it why the *bhaktas* (Parsi sweet biscuits) I cook don’t swell up like puris, when those cooked by my grandma and mum did spectacularly. I got a reasonable answer, even to that! So, I asked Googs if some plastics are resistant to superglue and he/she/it/they (one has to be so careful these days!) said “yes” and gave me chemical details which I dare not bore you with.

I ventured further and troubled Googy again, asking the oracle if there were any glues which would stick recalcitrant plastics and answer came there in a flood. Googlitra suggested several tubes of stuff that would do the trick.

I selected the second cheapest as I was offered a large range of prices.

The vendor of this stuff is called Ozerty, and the price advertised was £4.49. I trustingly filled in my particulars — email, debit card details, address, etc. I chose “Free Delivery” when given the option and pressed the buttons to complete the sale.

It said it would be delivered in a couple of days. Great.

A day or so later I had occasion to look up my telephone banking account details and the charge against the Ozerty glue was £18.44. What??? I emailed Ozerty to ask why I had been charged the extra 14 or so pounds. A female operative replied

saying that I had incurred an “eco-charge” as my order was for less than £20 and Ozerty is charging this extra eco-charge to protect the environment for deliveries of small orders.

I was informed in the same email that there was a notice to tell me that an eco-charge would be added. I didn’t notice this as it appeared in a non-descriptive way which no buyer would notice. It didn’t say what the charge would be and didn’t ask for the customer’s consent. I’ve demanded my money back. An email reply said they couldn’t send me the money until I received and returned the product.

It doesn’t end there!!!! I looked at my phone banking account ten days after I had placed the first order. I’d not ordered anything after that first £4.44 glue.

The account now shows that Ozerty has used my debit card to charge me £29.99 for absolutely nothing. I ordered nothing or communicated with Ozerty about any of their products. Was this outright fraud? I lodged a complaint through email demanding my money back and saying I’ll inform my bank of an unauthorised charge.

Ozerty replied saying they’d signed me up as a “subscriber” and listed the benefits and discounts I’d get when I bought other products. I don’t want their products or their discounts or their subscription which I never asked for!

Perhaps they mean well with the eco-charge and will use the extra £14 to bribe China to stop using fossil fuels? And perhaps they’ll make me an unsubscrber and return my money?

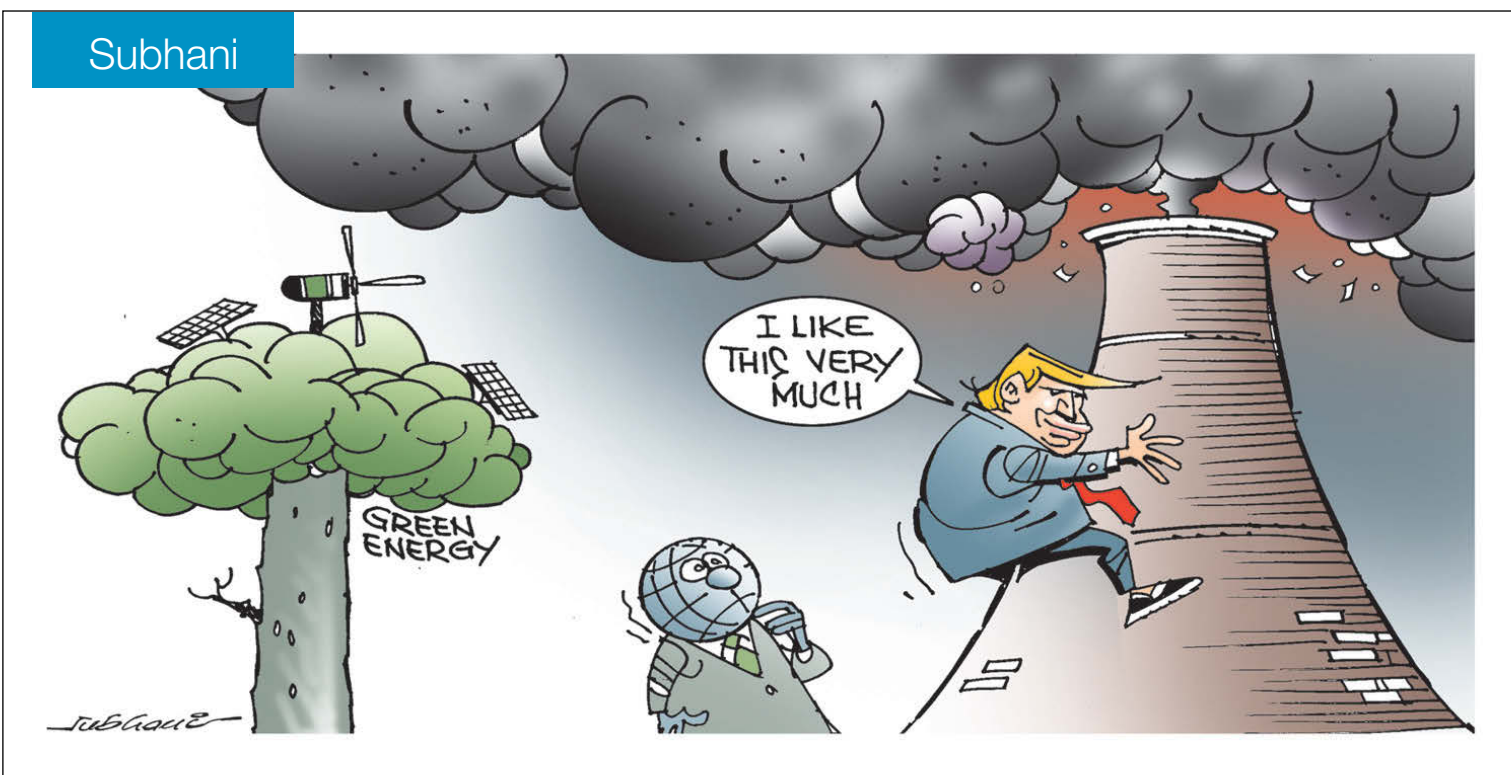
And so, gentle reader, to my other, earlier gullibility. It’s a different sort of story. Very briefly, experiencing some hearing loss perhaps two years ago an ad popped up on my computer saying it could definitely tackle loss of hearing and offered me a video to see how.

I fell for it. The video had a qualified doctor saying he was going deaf and told us how he suffered from it and led to his determination to find a cure. He did.

His life suddenly blossomed, from the closed hearing bud to the full flowering of sound. There followed the syrupy testimony of several people who swore by the cure.

OK, I fell for it and bought the pills, took the six-week course of them and noticed — a deterioration in my hearing. Conned.

Since then, I’ve noticed several ads and videos of precisely the same sort for loss of vision, arthritis — anything that age incurably brings. The videos follow the same pattern: the inventive doctors who suffer then find the natural cure, get witnesses who have been cured to testify, attack Big Pharma as their enemy and then sell their — snake oil? *Caveat emptor!*



Tu Cheez Badi Hai Musk Musk... Trump on a roll



Shobhaa’s Take

Hallelujah! Civility has staged an unexpected comeback on the sullied stage of American politics as the bombastic bluff-master, President-elect Donald Trump, shook hands with President Joe Biden at a cordial White House one-on-one meeting at the Oval Office, adhering to a tradition he himself had crudely shunned when he lost the race to Mr Biden four years ago. The two men participated like mature adults, in a ritual that has emotional significance for American citizens — a peaceful transfer of power. There they were behaving themselves in front of the fireplace and making nice! Wow! Given the slanging matches they have indulged in during the nasty campaign (perhaps, the nastiest in the history of democracy), with Mr Trump referring to his opponent as “Crooked Joe” and Mr Biden insisting that Mr Trump should be “locked up”.

Significantly, Melania Trump was conspicuously absent, breaking away from the standard practice of the two wives chit-chatting politely over tea, leaving the men to sort out the problems of the universe. Mr Trump was stumped. But never one to miss out on a comeback, he responded to Mr Biden’s welcome by saying: “Politics is tough... in many cases it is not a nice world, but it is a nice world today.” Hurrah! A chastened, new improved Donald Trump? Who knows? The world is holding its breath wondering what the Mad Man will do next. The answer is quite simple — nothing! He will present a brand-new version of himself, shrewdly throwing his critics off balance. Remember, there is a method in his madness.

He has won an overwhelming victory by playing to the galleries. He spoke their language. Mirrored their thoughts. Effortlessly mowed down the opposition with his bulldozer, bully boy tactics. His stupendous win was based on a single premise — no outsiders! Throw them out — keep immigrants away! His supporters roared and cheered — this was music to their ears. Imagine the irony of it all — America was created by immigrants, for immigrants. His own wife is an immigrant. And hello!!! Mr Trump’s biggest trump card happens to be an immigrant too! First Buddy Elon Musk is effectively going to be running the show, and that is scaring the hell out of global leaders. Elon Musk is the most powerful man on earth right now and it is Mr Musk who will be calling the shots. Megalomaniac Trump himself sounded like a love-struck fan boy of the tech tycoon when he gushed: “A star is born — Elon! He is a special guy. He’s a super genius...” And wait for this — “That’s why I love you Elon”. When was the last time Melania heard such a gushing declaration of love from her besotted-by-Musk husband?

The dodgy-sounding DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency, if you please) seems to have been created by Mr Trump especially for Elon Musk. With Mr Musk in the hot seat, radical “reforms” are likely to be introduced, starting with slashing federal spending by \$2 trillion. Countless heads are likely to roll, while the Musk-Trump (in that order, please) combo goes ahead aggressively, to implement ambitious “reforms”. Meanwhile, Mr Musk is laughing all the way to the bank, with Tesla

**The dodgy-sounding DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency, if you please) seems to have been created by Mr Trump especially for Elon Musk. With Mr Musk in the hot seat, radical ‘reforms’ are likely to be introduced**

shares riding up by 15 per cent, smoothly adding \$25 billion to Mr Musk’s kitty. Oh... the media has been taken care of by Mr Musk, who boasted to his followers via his mouthpiece, X: “You are the media now.”

This may be the most terrifying threat issued so far. The American media has egg all over its face right now, especially the smug, self-styled intellectuals who had staged a savage war against Mr Trump, only to eat crow when all their predictions turned out to be totally wrong. So many of the high-profile late night talk show hosts and stand-up comics who’d gone after Mr Trump night after night had no place to hide after his thumping victory which included winning the popular vote. Yes, a convicted felon, with multiple charges against him, managed to win over the vast majority of his countrymen, who didn’t give a damn about his terrible track record or reputation. The big-ticket celebrities who publicly ridiculed Mr Trump and trashed him ruthlessly, also destroyed the myth about star power winning votes. From Oprah Winfrey to Taylor Swift with their combined media domination, they still didn’t manage to dent Mr Trump’s march to the White House. The only celebrity endorsement that mattered in the end was Elon Musk’s. Mr Musk will function as the de facto V-P in the Trump administration, which will leave J.D. Vance gnashing his teeth. No matter, us parochial *desis* look forward to seeing the lovely Usha Chilukuri as she negotiates the shark-infested waters of politics,

with her “meat and potatoes” guy. The one who was “heart sick” for her and knew the way to win her over — by cooking a vegetarian Indian meal for Usha’s mother. That leaves us with the “other” *desi* — Vivek Ramaswamy — and Mr Trump’s controversial “Manhattan Project”, which will propel the Musk-Ramaswamy machine into overdrive at DOGE. India is already sensitised to the gravity of the situation vis a vis our experience with lateral entry. The 250th anniversary of America’s Independence falls on July 4, 2026 — Mr Trump’s deadline for the DOGE, and the two billionaires in charge of it. Leaders across the world are nervously monitoring the project, given its association with the original — a top-secret US project to beat Nazi Germany in the atomic bomb race.

Meanwhile, joining Mr Trump’s spy universe as Director of National Intelligence is “Russian asset” Tulsi Gabbard, a former Congresswoman and the first Hindu member of the House of Representatives who identifies herself as a Gaudiya Vaishnavite. The plot thickens!

Kamala Harris displayed her best side in defeat! What a shame she didn’t reveal her most positive character traits while she staged her 107-day campaign, and disappointed staunch admirers with her lack of depth and that awful “hyena laugh”. Her tearful, heartfelt speech conceding defeat was dignified and poignant: “My heart is full today...”, she said, her voice breaking. “The light of America’s promise will always burn bright... and my service to the nation will continue.” Well said, Kamala! If only she had tapped into this approach, perhaps she would have made a small difference. Very small. Because Only Trump could claim the throne with our line from *Sholay*: “*Mere pass Musk hai...*”

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS PROBE NEEDED

A thorough probe is necessary into the incident involving the son of a patient assaulting a doctor at the state-run hospital in Guindy. While violence is no solution to any problem, we must find out whether there is an element of truth in the man’s contention that his mother was receiving inadequate treatment. History has it that instances of assault on doctors at government hospitals have stemmed mainly from the cavalier attitude of the authorities. Patients’ complaints fall on deaf ears, and the officials wake up only when things reach a point of no return. How many times has the Dy CM/Health Minister visited a government hospital to address a poor patient’s problem? A doctor’s life is important - so is that of a patient.

P.G. Menon  
Chennai

EXCELLENT ACTOR

The legacy of veteran actor Delhi Ganesh should be treated as a boon to the existing film personalities in understanding his motto of acting in movies. His expressions in the film Raghavendra, during the climax, are heart-warming. The guard of honour by Army personnel during his funeral stands as a testimony to his unblemished career and the fond memories about him will always be green in the days to come.

PS Rajagopalan  
Chennai

DECENCY AND DRESS

Delicacy and good taste ought to be the norm. Garments worn must reveal refinement and culture, not a garish wardrobe, which betrays boorishness. Fashions come and go as the idiom “the swing of the fashion” implies. Rigid views and straight lace attitudes bring out only intolerance and narrow-mindedness of any group. Self-righteousness would be expedient and unworkable. Sartorial elegance consists in being understood and refined, no candidate to turn up for an interview in tops and jeans. Nor visit a beach result clad in a low suit. To my knowledge, a candidate reported to a police service interview in the then trendy bush shirt popularised by US President Harry S.Truman. The IG refused to see him. This young hopeful (Mr Suryanarayanan) lost the post. The apparel proclaims the man; rich, not gaudy.

P.R. Krishna Narayanan  
Chennai

Mail your letters to [chennaidesk@deccanmail.com](mailto:chennaidesk@deccanmail.com)





## Identity card

Politics over tribal and religious identities are at core of Jharkhand polls

With campaigning for the Jharkhand election in its final leg, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the ruling INDIA bloc led by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), are locked in a debate on the State's Adivasi identity. The BJP's sharp focus has been on the rhetoric of "Bangladeshi infiltration", which it is linking not only to the State's demographic changes but also to crimes against tribal women, land alienation, and what some Adivasi communities perceive as a gradual dilution of their indigenous cultural practices. The party accuses the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance of encouraging "infiltrators" to bolster the alliance's voter base. This campaign has been running alongside the BJP's efforts to stress the importance of unity among SC, ST and OBC groups using the messaging of "*ek hai to safe hai* (safe when united)", suggesting that the BJP's campaign is targeted at having a coalition with more place for Adivasis alongside the party's existing base of non-Adivasi Hindu voters. Amidst the blitz of campaign speeches by the BJP's star campaigners, the ruling alliance's campaign led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren and his wife Kalpana Soren, has squarely put the onus of checking alleged "infiltrators" on the Centre, without explicitly negating the claim of the BJP. The INDIA campaign also tries to drive home the point that as Jharkhand has no international borders, the onus of checking alleged infiltrators should be on the Union, where the BJP is in power.

Another central theme in the INDIA bloc's campaign strategy has been the promise of implementing land registries as they had been surveyed in 1932 for the purpose of determining domicile. But the JMM and its allies are careful here too, as Jharkhand has had a history of settlement with migration from neighbouring States in waves ever since. Some senior BJP leaders have suggested a National Register of Citizens in the State, though the party does not mention this in its manifesto. The BJP is talking up charges of corruption that sent leaders such as Mr. Soren and the Congress's Alamgir Alam to jail. The JMM has been questioning the announcement of the election in the State a month before the term of the current Assembly ends, calling it as a BJP ploy to disrupt the welfare schemes of the Soren government. While the BJP is going all out to attack the popularity of these schemes by questioning their implementation at the fag end of the alliance government's term, its manifesto has tried to outdo the JMM's in terms of sops being promised for the youth, women and farmers in the State.

## A resounding victory

The JVP now can unify Sri Lanka with a progressive economic agenda

It is an unambiguous and resounding mandate for the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP), a coalition that includes civil society groups and trade unions, in Sri Lanka's just-concluded parliamentary election. The election has demonstrated the NPP's growing appeal among all sections, who had in 2022, frustrated with economic hardships and the old political establishment, thrown out what they despised as a corrupt regime. Having elected JVP chief Anura Kumara Dissanayake as the country's President in September, the people have now provided the ruling alliance with a hard-to-get over two-thirds majority. The NPP, which has secured 141 seats, with around 6.87 million votes in 196 seats, bagged 18 more seats under the system of proportional representation, giving it 159 seats in total in the 225-member legislature. The NPP has accomplished what former President Mahinda Rajapaksa could not get in the 2010 poll after the LTTE's defeat.

The significance of the poll also lies in the extent and geographic span of the NPP's victory. It has been a remarkable show in Jaffna and Vanni in the Northern Province, that is home to Tamils and the stronghold of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi. Except for Batticaloa, the NPP emerged the top party in the east, with its sizeable population of Muslims, and in the Central Province's Nuwara Eliya district, with its majority hill-country Tamils. In its vote share, island-wide, the coalition outperformed Mr. Dissanayake, who touched the 50% mark only in four electoral districts in the September poll. The rise of the coalition, from three seats with 3.84% vote share in 2020, to a super majority now, is remarkable. The political calculations of Mr. Dissanayake, who called for a poll within days of assuming office, have paid off, as the Opposition did not put up a fight. Though Sajith Premadasa's Samagi Jana Balawegaya remains the principal Opposition party in Parliament, its vote share has dropped considerably. The parties backed by two former Presidents, Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mr. Rajapaksa, have performed miserably. While voters have spared Mr. Dissanayake the compulsion of seeking allies to pursue his reform agenda, he should still consult all sections. His promises at the time of the presidential poll, such as the abolition of executive presidency, a new Constitution, and the repeal of oppressive laws, cannot be fulfilled merely with support in the legislature. The big takeaway from the November 14 poll is that the country has voted for decisive change that it sought from the time of the citizen's uprising in 2022. Mr. Dissanayake, at the commencement of his innings, described the unity of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and all Sri Lankans as the bedrock of the new beginning. He can now build on this unity.

The M.A.O. College, established by Sir Syed in 1877, as also its outgrowth, the Aligarh Muslim University has been the finest constructive manifestation of Muslim educational and cultural activity after 1857. The Supreme Court of India in *S. Azeez Basha* (1967), without even giving the university an opportunity of being heard, had declared it to be an institution that was neither established nor administered by Muslims. The seven-judge Bench judgment in the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) case (2024) is in tune with the series of liberal and progressive decisions on minority rights by the top court in the last 75 years with the only aberration being *Azeez Basha* (1967), now comprehensively overruled. But to say that the judgment is a 4:3 one may not be correct as on certain points one finds unanimity on the Bench. Even though dissenting judges such as in the 1967 judgment attached much importance to the statutory provisions of the Aligarh Muslim University Act, they were of the view that merely looking at the incorporating statute is not the appropriate test to determine the minority character of a university.

### Dissent was not really dissent

The AMU judgment 2024 is unique where dissents were not really dissents in the broad interpretation of Article 30 of the Constitution – in terms of it extending protection to universities, pre-constitutional-era institutions, and non-waiver of fundamental rights. Interestingly, Justice Dipankar Datta himself admitted that he was in a minority within minority as despite his substantial agreement with 'thoughts and conclusions' with the two dissenting judges, his views too differed with theirs. Accordingly, on the issue of the validity of the 1981 reference to seven judges, the judgment is 4:3. But on the validity of the 2019 reference, the judgment is 6:1. Therefore, the former Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud-led bench had a valid reference to answer. One may not have any quarrel with Justice Dutta's appreciation of pre-Independence-era judges including CJI K.N. Wanchoo, who was an ICS officer, but the Constitution cannot remain a living and transformative document if earlier judgments of a positivist era are not overruled. The Supreme Court is not bound by its earlier judgments. Its jurisprudence improved when it overruled formalistic interpretations of 'procedure established by law' of A.K. Gopalan (1950) in *Maneka Gandhi* (1978). Similarly, *K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017) , saw the eight-judge Bench judgment in *M.P. Sharma* (1954) being overruled to declare the right to privacy as a fundamental right. There is a long list of such overruled decisions.

Even on the indicia to determine minority character, there was broad agreement among the seven judges, including Justice Datta, that broader criterion is to be preferred with a flexible framework and a holistic approach. There is



Faizan Mustafa

A constitutional law expert. He also served as Dean, Faculty of Law and Registrar of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)

In the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) case, the test that the claim of minority character must rest on an exclusive or near exclusive communal character of the institution is not a good sign

unanimity in the judgments that minorities must prove 'intent to administer'. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed that the 'right to administer is the consequence of establishment. To do otherwise, would amount to converting a consequence to a pre-condition'. He was simply following the ratio of *Basha* (1967); that if a minority has established an institution, it would get the consequential right to administer.

Judicial discipline has been rightly given prominence by the dissenting judges. But then, in deciding the contours of administration, how can they go beyond the 11-judge Bench judgment in *T.M.A. Pai Foundation* (2002) that limited it to selection of students, fixation of fee, choosing of governing bodies and right to discipline employees? The nine-judge Bench in *Xaviers* (1974) explicitly observed that 'under the guise of exclusive right of management, minorities cannot decline to follow the general pattern. In *Kerala Education Bill* (1958), the Court had held that the dominant word in Article 30 is 'choice'. *Xaviers* (1974) reiterated this choice, both in establishment as well as administration.

### Focus on the incorporating Act

Dissenting judges attached much importance to the incorporating Act. But then, Justice M.H. Beg in *Xaviers* (1974) was categorical that "If the object of an enactment is to compel a minority Institution, even indirectly, to give up the exercise of its fundamental rights, the provisions which have this effect will be void or inoperative against the minority Institution". Similarly, the CJI was right that mere acknowledgment of the founder's name in itself in the statute cannot be the determining factor. In fact, if the 'overriding governmental control' test of dissenting judges is applied on their own examples of institutions, it would become clear that in comparison to AMU, they have much tighter governmental control, including the power to dissolve such minority universities. India's courts have been permitting governmental regulations to maintain efficiency and standards and not as a yardstick to determine minority character. Greater governmental control is basically allowed in the interests of non-minorities who receive education in such minority institutions and those who are affected by the administrative decisions of minority management.

Surprisingly, Justice Datta, who alone held both the references as *non est* or invalid, in an unprecedented manner, not only answered the reference but also decided the matter himself by applying the indicia given by the majority as well as minority judges leaving nothing for the three judges' Bench. This was also after observing in paragraph 13 that "it is foregone conclusion that history would be rewritten and declaration of Aligarh Muslim University by this court as a minority educational institution is only a matter of time". If he himself was correct in applying the indicia and reached a definite conclusion, why

was he so sure that a three-judge Bench would reach a different finding? A reference Bench generally avoids pre-judging the outcome of a matter by the regular Bench.

The dissenting judges also emphasised the test of minority dominance to such an extent that a minority university cannot get minority character just because being a university, it accepted its governance structure being similar to that of other universities. The test that the claim of minority character must rest on exclusive or near exclusive communal character of the institution is not a good sign. Universities are different from religious institutions and the expectation of liberal institutions of secular education to indulge in ghettoisation is contrary to the vision of Article 30.

### Where there was erring

Justice Dutta's view that ₹30 lakh was not raised for establishing the AMU is factually incorrect. There is a letter dated August 9, 1912 from Harcourt Butler, Member of the Governor-General in the Council, making this a condition precedent for the incorporation of the university. Justice Datta has overlooked some crucial clauses of the dissolution provision which retained the continuity with the M.A.O. College. The AMU inherited all debts, liabilities, privileges and rights of M.A.O. College. Since Justice Datta himself has accepted M.A.O. College as a minority institution, in terms of Section 4, the AMU automatically inherited its character.

Where the majority went wrong was on the question of the minority surrendering its right to administer because the apex court in *Basheshar Nath* (1959) had held that a waiver of fundamental rights is constitutionally impermissible. Dissenting judge Justice S.C. Sharma himself ruled out the possibility of such surrender. In the context of Article 30, Justices Y.V. Chandrachud and K.K. Mathew were of the opinion, in *Xaviers* (1974), that these rights cannot either be 'bartered or surrendered'.

In no other case on Article 30 has the Supreme Court done this kind of minute scrutiny as in the AMU cases – in 1968 and 2024. The former CJI has rightly held that a minority institution too can be an 'institution of national importance' because minorities are an integral part of the nation and may establish great institutions. Sir Anthony Patrick MacDonnell, Lt. Governor of the North West Province and Oudh in 1896, rightly predicted the future character of M.A.O. College when he said, "It is not too much to hope that this College will grow into the Mahomedan University of the future; that this place will become the Cardova of the East, and that in these clusters Mahomedan genius will discover, and under the protection of the British Crown, work out that social, religious and political regeneration, of which neither Stamboul, nor Mecca, afford a prospect." The AMU has lived up to this expectation.

# India needs a globally recognised public policy school

Why is it that the world's largest democracy has yet to produce a world-class public policy institution? The United States and Europe boast of institutions such as the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard Kennedy School) and the London School of Economics which train leaders who shape not only national but global governance. Yet, India, with its complex democratic structure and urgent developmental challenges, sends its finest to be trained abroad. This is not for lack of policy schools – India has many – but it has to do with the structure of India's political and institutional landscape.

### The executive has the reins

Public policy institutions thrive only when they influence power and decision-making. However, in India, there are limited access points for public policy commentators, academics, and civil society groups to influence policy. This is because much of the decision-making power is vested in the executive and operationalised primarily through the political elite, government officials and bureaucrats rather than through a deliberative legislative process. The oversight role of the legislature over the executive too is limited, leading to a fundamentally different policy ecosystem than in other major democracies.

In the U.S., Congress' power to craft legislation independently of the executive creates space for a thriving policy ecosystem based on analysis, debate, and expertise, with each public representative providing a possible entry point into the deliberative process. This decentralised process sustains a vibrant ecosystem of policy schools, think tanks, and advocacy groups, that can secure funding and find paying clients because their analysis and expertise can meaningfully influence lawmaking.

But in India, the centralisation of power within the executive – and of party leadership within political parties – diminishes the influence of these groups unless they have access to top leadership and are aligned with their political



Ruchi Gupta

Executive Director of the Future of India Foundation

The structure of India's political and institutional landscape is why there is no such school till now

priorities. The weak formalisation of the Indian state further creates a disconnect between politics and policy, relegating policy discourse to a downstream role rather than making it constituent of the larger political platform. Consequently policy professionals lack the top-tier influence of other countries.

### The power factor and where the wind blows

Further, influence on decision-making is closely tied to who is in power. The executive's ability to realign the public sphere when power changes hands is more extreme in India than in more institutionalised democracies. This creates fragility in public life, where those central to decision-making can find themselves sidelined when regimes change. In more institutionalised democracies, think tanks, media and civil society groups can maintain relative influence regardless of who is in power, which helps stabilise the policy ecosystem.

These factors are unique to India among other large democracies and demand a different approach to policy education. To create a top-tier public policy school in India, we must design an institution suited to our political reality – where power is informal, personalised, and heavily dependent on executive control. Such an institution must serve dual purposes: first, equipping students with both traditional policy expertise and an understanding of India's unique power dynamics; and second, facilitating a more stable policy ecosystem.

Unlike western policy schools that focus on formal institutions and assume straightforward paths to influence, an Indian institution must teach students to navigate a complex web of informal networks, regional power structures, and social dynamics. The curriculum must go beyond traditional policy education to map how power actually works – through relationships, caste hierarchies, regional elites, and grassroots movements. Students need to learn not just policy theory but also how to be effective in a system where power is opaque and unevenly

distributed, where idealism must meet pragmatism and the ability to adapt to local conditions to create real change.

Most importantly, to truly train development leaders who want to do good for their country, the school must select for, and cultivate, empathy for the people of our country. Too often, empathy for the lived reality of people's lives is overlooked and leads to top-down diktats that can wreak havoc in people's lives.

### The need for space

Finally, the current situation where political legitimacy and influence are tied too closely to the executive leads to sycophancy, opportunism and instability. A school focused on nation-building must thus facilitate a broad institutional space in which legitimacy and influence would be based on the depth and the quality of public interventions instead of proximity to power. At its deep end, this would require a series of structural reforms in our politics and governance, but a foundation could be built through diverse partnerships and the identification of nation-builders across the political spectrum and sectors. Such a network cutting across politics, bureaucracy, civil society, academia, think tanks, and media would provide depth as well as opportunities for influence and collaboration across all regimes.

By creating this non-partisan, yet politically aware, space, the institution could nurture development professionals who maintain relevance despite regime changes. This would create more stable channels for policy input, improving the quality of public debate and governance in India.

It is this dual role that would allow the school and its graduates to influence power instead of operating at lower levels. Such an institution would set an example for other developing nations and gain global prominence by demonstrating that effective policy education must arise from local realities rather than mirror western models

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### An assuring verdict

The Supreme Court of India's verdict delegitimising the barbaric practice of bulldozing homes in an arbitrary manner will hopefully also demolish the king-sized egos and the bulldozer mindsets of not

only arrogant rulers but also the bureaucrats involved in the execution of such orders.

The verdict will go a long way in restoring the faith of the public in the rule of law, especially among religious minority groups who seem

to be the worst hit.

**M. Jameel Ahmed,**  
Mysuru

### Safety and medical staff

As a member of the medical profession, one cannot reiterate the need for ensuring the safety of

medical staff. All people, and this includes the media, need to condemn all forms of heinous crimes without giving space for excuses such as 'fit of rage', 'mental agony' or 'extreme passion'.  
**Dr. B. Sadananda Naik,**  
Moodbidri, Karnataka

### Drug menace

It is distressing to read and hear/watch reports everyday about the arrest of people with narcotics. The problem seems to be growing day after day. The punishment being awarded is inadequate for such slow

poisoning. There needs to be stringent punishment for such evil. State governments and courts of law need to end a menace that is destroying people and the younger generation.  
**S. Thayappan,**  
Chennai



# GROUND ZERO



A six-month-old elephant calf, part of the herd of 13 that lost 10 members in October, being treated at the Rama Elephant Camp of the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. A.M. FARUQUI

## A jumbo crisis in Madhya Pradesh

Ten elephants died at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve between October 29 and 31. Lab reports found that they had eaten large quantities of fungus-infected Kodo millet, which had caused acute toxicity. **Mehul Malpani** reports on the tragic incident in a State that is struggling to deal with its increasing jumbo population

It was business as usual at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh on the morning of October 29. All the officers were headed to the BTR headquarters at Umaria for a review meeting. Some had already gone home for Diwali, while some were to leave in the next two days.

Arpit Mairal, the forest range officer of Pataur range, was running late for the meeting. On his way, at around 11 a.m., he got a call from the beat guard of Salkhaniya village, who told him that a herd of 13 wild elephants was behaving strangely.

“The guards and the beat officer had spotted the elephants some 200 metres away. They told me that four of them were lying on the ground and not moving, while some were sitting or standing in unusual positions,” says Mairal. Elephants do not usually lie down or sit for long as they find it difficult to get back on their feet.

Mairal immediately drove for an hour and a half to the spot on the border of the Pataur and Khitauli core ranges near Salkhaniya. He and some guards found 10 elephants lying on the forest floor in a radius of 100-150 m.

Mairal called the Bandhavgarh Deputy Director, Prakash Kumar Verma. He asked Verma to cancel the meeting and rush to the spot with all the rangers and sub-divisional officers (SDOs).

“Four elephants were dead. Six were barely moving – they were flapping their ears or moving their tails slowly,” he recalls, as he prepares a detailed report sought by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Mairal says Verma despatched all the officials to the spot and stayed back at the headquarters to call veterinarians from other national parks and from Umaria. BTR’s lone wildlife vet, Dr. Nitin Gupta, who was on his way to Jabalpur for personal reasons, rushed back to the reserve.

By 5 p.m., there were 150-200 guards, rangers, senior officials, and private and government vets, apart from a few heavy machines, tractors, and medical equipment at the spot. When it became dark, the two halogen lights installed for treatment proved insufficient. The officials positioned 10-12 cars in a half circle and used the vehicle lights. They also made small trenches and lit a fire to keep away other wild elephants.

For the next 36 hours, the spot turned into a makeshift hospital. However, despite their best efforts, four elephants died on October 30 and the remaining two passed away the next day. A post-mortem was conducted at the same spot and the pachyderms were buried nearby. During the burial, other elephants turned up, stood at a distance, trumpeted, and flapped their ears.

### A crop that can kill

The death of the 10 elephants – nine female and one male – brought the BTR into the national limelight. Multiple teams of Central and State agencies visited the reserve for investigation. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav sent a three-member high-level team to Bandhavgarh. The State government suspended the Chief Conservator of Forests and Field Director as well as an SDO for negligence. Earlier this week, the Central government sent the Director General of Forests and Special Secretary in the Environment Ministry to Bhopal to report on the incident and the measures taken on elephant management. The post-mortem report stated that the ele-



After the elephant deaths, the forest officials ploughed many fields where Kodo had been grown.

**RAJPAL SINGH GOND**  
Farmer

phants died after eating Kodo millet. Forensic examinations confirmed this. A toxicology report from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research’s Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Bareilly, said that a high concentration of cyclopiazonic acid was detected in multiple organs of each elephant and that the animals might have consumed a large quantity of Kodo plant/grains. A report from the School of Wildlife Forensic And Health (SWFH), Jabalpur, found acute toxicity in the vital organs of the animals. The BTR management also sent samples of Kodo crop and seeds to the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics, Hyderabad, which found extremely high contents of cyclopiazonic acid in the crop samples, a source says.

Meanwhile, test results from the State Forensic Science Laboratory, Sagar, ruled out poisoning from pesticide, insecticide, or any other chemical. Allegations that the jumbos were killed by poachers were also found to be baseless.

On November 12, the National Green Tribunal issued notices to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; the Wildlife Institute of India; IVRI, Bareilly; the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya Pradesh; and the Umaria Collector into the deaths of the animals and the connection with Kodo.

Days after the 10 elephants died, a wild elephant killed two men and critically injured one. This led to concerns about a serious human-animal conflict in the region. Officials at BTR suspect, based on the description of the elephant and the location of the two deaths, that a male elephant, aged 10-12 years, captured after the killings, is from the same herd of 13. While another fully grown adult male remains untraced, a six-month-old calf of the herd was rescued in a distressed condition about a week later in Katni, about 80 km from the spot where the rest died. It is now at BTR’s Rama Elephant Camp.

### A perfect storm

Known as a ‘wild cereal’, Kodo has been grown in India for centuries, but was largely limited to forests and tribal regions. As it is high in protein and fibre, Kodo has now become popular among people with lifestyle diseases. Kodo, once sold

for about ₹40-50 per kilogramme in local farmers’ markets in Madhya Pradesh, is now priced at ₹90-120 per kg.

Bandhavgarh Deputy Director Verma says Kodo used to be grown on small patches of land. Now, farmers have started cultivating it on a large scale for commercial purposes.

The farm where the elephants ate Kodo belonged to Manoj Kumar from Salkhaniya. Verma says Kumar and two or three other farmers had grown Kodo in about 10 acres of land that was on the boundary of the core zone and the village.

Dr. A.B. Shrivastava, founder-director of SWFH, Jabalpur, who has been roped in to help at BTR, says symptoms of Kodo toxicity can be easily detected and treatment given for both animals and people. But in BTR, symptoms could not be detected and help provided in time because the animals were in the wild. They had eaten nearly 8 acres of Kodo, say officials.

Dr. Shrivastava highlights the need for a study on the health impacts of Kodo so that there is a designed treatment in place. “Right now, we only give treatment to animals based on the symptoms they display. Treatment includes fluid therapy with IV drips and other fluids to dilute Kodo, as well as multivitamins,” he says.

There is also limited research available on Kodo and more specifically, its relation with elephants. A 1983 research paper says, “Farmers believe that Kodo millet is poisonous after rain. It is known to produce unconsciousness or delirium with violent tremors of the voluntary muscles. There are reports that elephants have died from eating Kodo millet...”

A 2023 research paper titled ‘Potential Risk of Cyclopiazonic Acid Toxicity in Kodua Poisoning’, says, “Although millet is cultivated in dry and semi-arid regions, sometimes environmental conditions like spring and summer strike as being suitable for a certain kind of poisoning which leads to greater economic crop loss.” It adds that such conditions make millets more susceptible to fungal infections, especially from ergot fungi. The infection produces cyclopiazonic acid.

Dr. Shrivastava explains that such climatic conditions are rare, but are mostly seen in October when the sun is bright, the crop is ready for harvesting, and the region receives heavy rainfall. In the BTR case, high contents of fungus were also found in the harvested crop that was kept in bundles in the farm where the elephants ate.

### A struggle in the wild

The eastern forests of Madhya Pradesh have always had elephants as visitors. In November 2018, a batch of 41 elephants arrived at BTR from Chhattisgarh and stayed. Within a year, they bred two calves. Since then, three forests in Madhya Pradesh – BTR, the Sanjay Dubri National Park in Sidhi, and the Kanha National Park in Mandla – have received multiple batches of elephants, mainly from Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The estimated jumbo population is 150. Bandhavgarh alone is home to 65-70 elephants, Mairal says.

But the State does not have the resources to deal with this increasing population. Forest guards, tasked with tracking the movements of animals such as tigers and elephants, are not pro-



I think the 13 elephants were part of a larger herd of 32. When the others returned and saw the scenes during the post-mortem, they began to roar loudly.

**PUSHPENDRA DWIVEDI**  
Former honorary wildlife warden of Umaria

vided with tranquillisers or vehicles to protect themselves in case of an attack. Gyaan Singh, a forest guard, survived an attack by a tiger in 2014. “The animal left me alive simply because it wanted to. I had no way of saving myself,” he says.

Chhullu Singh, a fellow guard posted closest to the spot where the 10 elephants died, carries an axe and rides a bicycle. He says the door and the windows of their quarters were broken by an elephant three years ago. “I wrote to senior officials many times but nothing has happened,” he says.

Verma says the department started building elephant-proof trenches around these quarters last year but is yet to cover all of them.

The tragedies show various other lapses on the part of the BTR management and at the policy level. “We don’t have a training team to work with wild elephants, especially orphans, when we rescue them,” says Verma. “We don’t know how to rehabilitate them. We need special enclosures to keep elephants which come away from their herd. We also need them to treat elephants that get hurt.” These facilities are available in Chhattisgarh. Talks are on with the Madhya Pradesh government to work on these aspects, he says.

The State government is also sending officials to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which have large elephant populations. They are expected to gain exposure on best practices on elephant management. The first batch is leaving on Sunday.

The government plans to use satellite collars on one or two members of a herd to track movements. Verma says a proposal to use thermal imaging to locate the animals easily is also being discussed. Another official at BTR says this can also be used to alert villagers about the movements of elephants. If these measures work, the forest department can use trap cameras to identify individual elephants, Verma contends.

Officials also admit that one or two of the elephants could have been saved if another doctor had been available. Dr. Gupta, the only vet at Bandhavgarh, recalls the events of October 29-31 as being “extremely stressful”.

“I was running around giving instructions to all the other vets we had brought in. Local vets mostly deal with domestic animals and don’t have expertise in dealing with wild animals,” he says. “It is difficult to give an injection or a drip to an elephant as it keeps moving and could hurt people. In such cases, we have to sometimes give liquid medicines through the animal’s rectum.”

Dr. Gupta says there is no permanent facility at BTR to treat animals and that he always travels to the spot to do his job. The new Field Director, Anupam Sahay, says the forest department is considering providing an assistant to Dr. Gupta, who has been with BTR for about 15 years.

Madhya Pradesh Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest-Wildlife, L. Krishnamoorty, says there is no separate budget for elephants in the State. Two years ago, Project Elephant was merged with Project Tiger in Madhya Pradesh. “As part of this, we get funding from both the Central and State governments,” he says.

### ‘They were family’

Meanwhile, locals are concerned that the human-animal conflict could become worse. Nine WhatsApp groups, one for each range of BTR, have suddenly become active. The groups have village heads, members of Hathmi Mitra Dal (a designated group in each village to create awareness about elephants), local beat officers, rangers, and the Deputy Director as members. They receive messages every hour from people asking about elephant movements, and provide updates.

There is a tense silence in Salkhaniya village, about 1.5 km from the farm where elephants ate Kodo. Manoj Kumar’s house is locked.

A farmer, Rajpal Singh Gond, is one of the few who is willing to talk. “After the elephant deaths, the forest officials ploughed many fields where Kodo had been grown. Farmers were not even allowed to harvest and store the yield,” he says. “Nobody here will talk against the forest department as we have to rely on them for compensation in case of crop damage by animals.”

Sahay says Kodo had been cultivated in about 1,500 acres of land within the boundaries of BTR and more than half had been harvested. For the unharvested crop, farmers were given the option of handing over their yield to the forest department and getting compensated. Some agreed.

“Kodo in itself is not harmful, but at the moment we don’t have a way of identifying the fungal-infected crop. So, we considered all Kodo as harmful in the current circumstances,” he says.

Elsewhere, there is sorrow. Pushpendra Dwivedi, former honorary wildlife warden of Umaria, recalls the distress of other elephants during the post-mortem. “I think the 13 elephants were part of a larger herd of 32. They must have split up in search of food. When the others returned and saw the scenes during the post-mortem, they began to roar loudly. We had to use sirens and other noises to keep them away and continue the examination,” he says.

After the incident, patrolling teams have spotted smaller groups of elephants wandering in the forest. “We suspect that they are searching for their herd members. They generally end their search once they find evidence that their herd members are no more,” Mairal says.

Most officials say the three days were “traumatic and sad”. Brij Kishore Barman, a beat guard with Khitauli range, doubts if anyone celebrated Diwali. “You don’t celebrate festivals when someone in your family dies,” he says. “Here, we lost 10 of them.”



An elephant being treated by veterinarians. It died along with nine others. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Loans to learn

PM Vidyalaxmi scheme could do with tweaks

The PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme for higher education, announced earlier this month, tries to ensure that meritorious students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are not deprived of access to quality colleges. In relation to the existing guidelines on education loans, the scheme expands both the scope of concessions and subsidies (in the form of interest subvention and, significantly, loan counter-guarantees) and the number of ‘top ranking’ institutions to which these will apply.



The Vidyalaxmi scheme builds upon the existing norm of interest-free loans up to ₹4.5 lakh, by providing a 3 per cent subvention on loans up to ₹10 lakh for families with an annual income of less than ₹8 lakh. Loans up to ₹7.5 lakh will be guaranteed by the Centre. Therefore, the present norm of banks funding about 80 per cent of the education loan, while generally being flexible on collateral, is expected to continue at least for loans up to ₹10-12 lakh. This package has the potential to reduce the financial burden for poor and lower middle class households, provided the institutions identified keep their charges at reasonable levels. However, the Vidyalaxmi scheme, which is expected to benefit 22 lakh students annually, raises concerns on three counts: first, whether banks, fearing NPAs, will go slow on disbursement, notwithstanding the government’s guarantee; second, whether the problem of ‘brain drain’ can be dealt with by making some changes to the scheme; and finally, whether this sort of loan-based subsidy will yield better outcomes if channelled towards primary or secondary education.

The expansion of the list of eligible top-ranked institutions from about 260 to 860, certainly improves access, but there could be some apprehensions on whether the additional 600 colleges can secure students jobs that ensure loan repayment. These fears may translate into banks turning risk averse, reducing the loans as well as their exposure. At present, banks’ education loan NPAs are not threatening. The June 2024 Financial Stability Report pegs it at 3.6 per cent. Banks would like to keep it that way. This issue can be addressed by fine-tuning some of the incentives in favour of technical subjects. This may create better employment outcomes.

On ‘brain drain’, or students leaving the country, a few options could be explored. Making students sign a bond not to leave the country for a certain period is a common global practice, but it seems a tad unfair, and hard to enforce. Instead, those who opt to go abroad should be made to make good the loan subsidy and forego the benefit of the moratorium period. Finally, the efforts to create a more skilled workforce should begin at schools. The South East Asian ‘Tiger’ economies have reaped the benefits of high public investments in primary and secondary education. Investments at the base of the pyramid, with loan inducements for a range of skilling programmes at the secondary level, can create a workforce with diversified abilities.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICHA MISHRA

A question that immediately comes to mind is — what do the November 5 elections in the US signify for the India-US energy relations? Will Donald Trump’s return to the White House lead to a re-orientation in the bilateral relations between the two on the energy front.

Not really, if one goes by what policymakers in New Delhi have to say. “A lot has happened between Trump’s first stint and now,” said an official here.

According to Western media reports, Trump’s energy agenda may emphasise energy independence, economic growth, and expanded production of fossil fuels.

The US-India energy cooperation is technical, economic, and bilateral. The US is among the top five fossil fuel suppliers to India, a reason why New Delhi cannot be ignored by the Trump regime.

According to data available, hydrocarbon trade between the two countries has nearly doubled from 2018-19, touching \$13.6 billion during 2023-24. For the first two months of FY25 hydrocarbon trade is valued at \$2.43 billion.

In November 2009, the two countries launched the Partnership to Advance Clean Energy, to accelerate inclusive, low carbon growth by supporting research and deployment of clean energy technologies.

GREEN INITIATIVES

In 2021 the two revamped the US-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP) to advance the climate and clean energy goals of both countries following the US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership announced by President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which recognised the importance of accelerating climate action in the decisive decade ahead.

Under the SCEP, the two countries agreed to collaborate across five pillars: Power and Energy Efficiency; Renewable Energy; Responsible Oil and Gas; Sustainable Growth; Emerging Fuels.

In addition, the two were to continue to push innovation in civil nuclear power as a net-zero solution through different collaborative programmes including the long-standing Civil Nuclear Energy Working Group (CNEWG).

The two countries were also to engage the private sector and other stakeholders across the technical areas to help deploy clean technologies to accelerate a clean energy transition.

According to Peter J. Jarka-Sellers, Expert in US-India Energy Policy,



The Trump factor in Indo-US energy ties

The Trump administration will view India as a stable and important market for fossil fuel and LNG exports

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

“There is every indication that Trump’s fundamental orientation on energy and climate will be the same as during his first-term. He will seek to boost fossil fuel production, remove measures to decrease consumption, and completely reject climate mitigation as a policy imperative. He campaigned vocally on this and his campaign was backed by the fossil fuel industry.

“He will almost certainly move to undo all Biden-era regulations such as setting emissions limits on coal and gas power plants, fuel efficiency standards for cars (including promoting EVs), and regulations supporting clean energy industries like offshore wind where the federal government plays an especially important role,” he said, adding “These are some of the most high-profile examples.”

Trump, being a staunch advocate of fossil fuel, will try to undo Biden’s initiatives on clean energy. But the clean energy industry is now more mature and politically savvy

“Connected to boosting production and of greater relevance to other countries like India, he will look for new and expanded export markets for fossil fuels, such as LNG. The result will be that the energy transition slows and that shifts away from fossil fuels will be driven by market forces and state/local policy rather than national policy,” he said.

But a lot has changed since 2016-2020, he agrees. “The clean energy industry for one is larger/more mature, clean technologies are being deployed faster and at higher volumes, and that industry is by extension more politically and economically influential,” he said.

While it was easier for Trump to undo Obama’s executive actions, it may not be easy to undo Biden’s actions which were through legislations. Therefore, Trump may tread in a more structured manner.

THE RUSSIA ANGLE

Another aspect that one needs to watch out for is Trump’s stance on Russian oil. India’s stance on Russian oil has been clear. For India what mattered was commerce — availability of cheap oil.

According to Jarka-Sellers, “The future of sanctions on Russian oil is unclear though changes to the Biden-era

policy seem likely at some point. It’s hard to say when, if, and how US sanction policy vis-a-vis Russia will change and I think the future of sanctions on Russian oil is likely dependent on how Trump approaches the US-Russia relationship and the war in Ukraine more broadly.”

Trump does seem, however, to be less firmly committed to Ukraine’s war effort and the cause of its territorial integrity, he said, adding “Trump has suggested that he would make a deal with Russia to end the war at Ukraine’s expense and given the toll of sanctions on Russia, lifting those sanctions would be a very logical and, by extension likely, part of such a deal. Russia would likely make it a condition for a deal and if Trump goes ahead with such a deal, he would likely have to accept that condition.”

While Trump is clear on his stance towards clean energy projects, it is also evident that the American business works purely on commerce. But, an aspect which also has emerged between Trump’s first stint and now is that India cannot be ignored as it is a stable market for the fossil fuel industry.

India will need to sharpen its bargaining skills when doing business with the US.

Welcome to the US Dept of Government Efficiency

The Ministry’s lofty objective is to cut down red tape and save government money. But will it succeed?

Atanu Biswas

The Ministry of Magic can be found in the fictional universe of Harry Potter. Nonetheless, a nation may occasionally build intriguing ministries. For example, Japan created a Minister of Loneliness in 2021 to alleviate social isolation, while Venezuela introduced a new Ministry of Supreme Social Happiness in 2013.

Maybe it’s America’s turn now. For the Trump 2.0 administration, a new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has been created with the goal of cutting federal bureaucracy by around one-third. A “complete financial and performance audit of the entire federal government and making recommendations for drastic reforms” is what Trump stated the agency will be doing.

A department to cut red tape may seem fantastic, but it’s really more about cutting government budget, one perceives. In actuality, Trump has chosen Elon Musk, the richest man in the world who has thrown his weight behind Trump in his reelection, and Vivek Ramaswamy, a wealthy American biotech entrepreneur who competed in the 2024 Republican primary but abandoned his campaign in January 2024 and endorsed Trump, to head the

department. Trump had to give these two some sort of award, of course.

CRONY CAPITALISM

However, how would that benefit America? Although neither John Rockefeller nor Bill Gates accepted such a direct government assignment, some are questioning if this is the beginning of a new kind of crony capitalism.

It’s, however, remarkable how many billionaires themselves run for and occupy official political positions, even though they also indirectly influence politics “behind the scenes” through media manipulation, campaign contributions, and social connections with politicians. According to a 2023 study by Northwestern University academics, the rate of political entry for American billionaires is 3.7 per cent, whereas it’s 11 per cent for billionaires worldwide.

In fact, Trump stated during a campaign event in August 2024 that he would be open to offering Musk an advisory position if elected. Musk responded by posting on X, “I am willing to serve,” with an AI-generated picture of him facing a lecturer that read “Department of Government Efficiency.” Now, Trump has created exactly that – what he has called “the perfect gift to America.”

According to Musk, a commission of



DOGE PARTNERS. Vivek Ramaswamy and Elon Musk REUTERS

this kind could cut the US federal budget by \$2 trillion, or around 30 per cent. And the concept has received backing from the likes of Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase.

To be fair, Musk has demonstrated this level of efficiency when he laid off 6,000 employees at Twitter following his 2022 acquisition of the company, a move that some estimates reduced Twitter’s value by 80 per cent.

Following his takeover of Twitter, Musk sent a series of sobering warnings to his employees: Workers need to prepare for 80-hour work weeks; free meals and office perks will be reduced. Additionally, he eliminated the flexibility of working from home. But even in a capitalist economy, is such a strategy appropriate for the public

sector? The department’s name is a backronym that alludes to the online meme Doge as well as Dogecoin, a crypto asset that bears the meme’s name and is publicly supported by Musk. And is there any conflict of interest?

The New York Times, for instance, questioned whether Musk’s anticipated employment at DOGE would be in conflict with his companies’ status as federal government contractors. And Vox said that the organisation is “unlikely to have any regulatory teeth on its own, but there’s little doubt that it can have influence on the incoming administration and how it will determine its budgets.” But Musk wrote in X: “Threat to democracy? Nope, threat to BUREAUCRACY!!!!”

Donald Trump asserted that this effort would upend long-standing government structures by introducing an “entrepreneurial approach to government never seen before.” Ramaswamy may have been referring to the last lines of the 1996 action film Independence Day when he tweeted, “We will not go gently,” in response to Trump’s statement.

We’ll see if such a ministry eventually becomes the ministry of magic and a new norm in other countries too.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

✉ 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.

Polluted Delhi

This refers to a wonderful Pocket Cartoon ‘New Delhi Sights’ by Ravikanth (November 15) which sarcastically offers ‘sighting of the sun’ too, revealing the real inside story of the “air pollution” here. Sadly air pollution is just a blame game between the BJP-led centre and AAP-led Delhi Govt with no attempt being made to address the problem. Instead of blaming the Centre, the AAP government must act against the people responsible for this mess. One genuinely wishes that both the centre and Delhi govt urgently ‘rise to the occasion’.

SK Gupta  
New Delhi

Much needed correction

After reaching a high of 85,836 in September, the Sensex has now been on a downward spiral, indicating correction. The correction is broad-based now. Chinese measures to prop up the flagging economy, attractive stock valuations compared to the elevated valuations in India, strengthening dollar and policy expectations over the incoming Trump administration, and lacklustre quarter corporate earnings have played a key role in the present market correction. However, it is quite baffling that the market correction does not seem to have dampened the enthusiasm of domestic retail investors.

M Jeyaram  
Sholavandan (TN)

Tech savvy

This is with reference to “Digital pharma platform” (November 15). In 2024, the healthcare of senior citizens has undergone transformative revolution, thanks to the integration of digital technology. AI’s role in healthcare become increasingly pivotal, offering solutions that streamline administrative tasks, enhance clinical decision making and improve patient care outcomes for senior citizens. The convenience and accessibility of mobile technology have significantly reduced the barriers to healthcare access for seniors. As this revolution continues to evolve, it promises a future where

ageing is not just about living longer but living better.

P Sundara Pandian  
Virudhunagar (TN)

Inflation worries

Retail inflation has drastically reduced the purchasing power of the middle class, affecting corporate earnings and hurting the growth sentiments. It is also weakening the rupee and is likely to impact the import bill. October food inflation of 11.87, highest over a year exposes the vulnerabilities of India’s excessive reliance on imports for certain key commodities. The burden is being borne by the middle and lower classes and demands immediate govt intervention. Unseasonal rains has

also caused havoc. The need of the hour is to upgrade agricultural infrastructure that includes transportation, Cold storage facilities, and food processing. Production of traditional oilseeds sunflower, rapeseed, mustard should be encouraged. In addition, non-conventional oil like rice bran, corn oil potential must be explored to reduce dependence on imports. The way forward is to not just rely on monetary policies to address inflationary pressures but also improving resilience in agricultural products and industries performances.

Vijay Singh Adhikari  
Nainital (Uttarakhand)



# Here’s how Trump could lose the coming trade war



PAUL KRUGMAN

The good news: I don’t think Donald Trump will cause a global trade war. The bad news: The reason I say that is I believe that a trade war would be coming even if Mr Trump had lost the election, largely because China is refusing to act like a responsible economic superpower. Unfortunately, Mr Trump may be the worst possible person to guide US policy through

the turmoil that’s probably ahead. He won’t be the reason we have a trade war, but he may well be the reason we lose it. China is the greatest economic success story in history. It used to be very poor; there are still many people alive who remember the great famine of 1959-61. But after the reforms that began in 1978 its economy soared. Even now, China is only a middle-income country, with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita substantially lower than ours or in Western Europe. But China has a huge population, so by some measures it is now the world’s largest economy. However, all indications are that China’s era of torrid economic growth is behind it. For decades, Chinese growth was fuelled mainly by two things: A rising working-age population and rapid productivity growth driven by borrowed technology. But the working-age population peaked around a decade ago and is now falling. And despite

some impressive achievements, the overall rate of technological progress in China, which economists measure by looking at “total factor productivity,” appears to have slowed to a crawl. But a growth slowdown doesn’t have to be a catastrophe. Japan went through a similar demographic and technological downshift in the 1990s and has, on the whole, handled it fairly gracefully. China, however, has built an economic system designed for the high-growth era — a system that suppresses consumer spending and encourages very high rates of investment. This system was workable as long as supercharged economic growth created the need for ever more factories, office buildings and so on, so that high investment could find productive uses. But while an economy growing at, say, 9 per cent a year can productively invest 40 per cent of GDP, an economy growing at 3 per cent can’t. The answer seems obvious:

Redistribute income to households and reorient the economy away from investment toward consumption. But for whatever reason, China’s government seems unwilling to move in that direction. Again and again, stimulus policies have been aimed more at expanding productive capacity than at empowering consumers to make use of that capacity. So what do you do if you have lots of capacity but your consumers can’t or won’t buy what you make? You try to export the problem, keeping the economy humming by running huge trade surpluses. And I mean huge. Tellingly, China seems to be playing games with its trade numbers in an attempt to make its surpluses look smaller than they really are. But China appears to be exporting close to \$1 trillion more than it imports, and the trend is upward. Hence the coming trade war. The rest of the world won’t passively accept Chinese surpluses on that scale. The “China

shock” of the 2000s taught us that whatever the (real) virtues of free trade, a huge import surge does unacceptable damage to workers and communities in its path. Furthermore, China is an autocracy that doesn’t share democratic values. Allowing it to dominate strategically crucial industries is an unacceptable risk. That’s why the Biden administration has been quietly pursuing a quite hard line on China, retaining Mr Trump’s tariffs and trying to limit its progress in advanced technologies. So the trade war is coming; in some ways it has already started. What will Mr Trump add to the story? Ignorance, lack of focus and potential cronyism. Oh, and gullibility. Ignorance: Mr Trump’s insistence that tariffs don’t hurt consumers — even as businesses across America are planning to raise prices when his planned tariffs hit — strongly suggests that neither he nor anyone he listens to

understands how global trade works. Lack of focus: By proposing tariffs across the board, not on just China, Trump will raise costs for many American businesses and alienate allies who should be part of a cooperative response. Cronyism: The president has great discretion in granting tariff exemptions to selected companies. During his first term, such exemptions went disproportionately to companies with Republican political connections. It’s naïve to think this isn’t likely to happen again, and on a much larger scale. Finally, gullibility: During his first term, Mr Trump eventually stopped raising tariffs after signing what he called a “historic trade deal” in which China agreed to buy \$200 billion in American goods. How much of that total did China actually buy? None. As I said, serious trade conflict is coming as China tries to export its policy failures. But America just elected perhaps the worst possible leader to manage that conflict.

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ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY

## Neighbourly insights



### VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

The US elections have thrown a spotlight on a controversial polling method called the “Neighbour Effect.” A French national who calls himself “Theo” made a significant fortune betting on Donald Trump. Theo put the equivalent of at least \$30 million in bets on a Trump victory on the crypto currency betting site Polymarket. He may have received winnings of somewhere between \$48 million and \$84 million, according to various analysts. Theo bet on an Electoral College victory, Trump winning in four key swing states, and a win of the popular vote for the Republican. He claims to have placed these bets based on polls he commissioned using a reputed US pollster. What is really interesting is the way those polls were designed — instead of asking voters about their own preferences, they were asked to predict who their neighbours would vote for. According to Theo, the neighbour polls showed strong preferences for Trump in states where standard opinion polls were tied within very narrow margins. One caveat: It is impossible to judge the veracity of Theo’s statements, as he has refused to share any details

about the polls, or even the name of the pollster he hired. But this type of polling is not unknown. It teases out information by looking at revealed preferences rather than stated preferences. We do it all the time as individuals. For example, suppose you are trying to think of a gift for somebody you don’t know well. You might ask people close to that individual for suggestions on what would be suitable. You will tend not to ask the recipient directly, as politeness and social conventions may prevent that person from telling you what they really want. In an opinion poll involving politics, voters may shy away from revealing their true intentions, or refuse to respond. “Shy voters” are a well-known phenomenon. However, they may be more honest when discussing their neighbour’s likely preferences. And crucially, they may reveal their own in their responses, if such a poll is cleverly designed. In many cases, the respondent may also not consciously know their own preferences. Amazon and Netflix have discovered, for instance, that what people actually buy, or watch, often varies significantly from stated preferences, or wish lists. Zomato or Spotify know more about your culinary and musical preferences than you do. In politics, this can translate into an undecided voter making a snap decision right in the voting booth. However, leveraging a “neighbour effect” to get useful answers can also backfire. For one, it presupposes neighbours know each other. This is unlikely in a modern urban environment, or a gated community. You may have no idea who your neighbours are, if you live in a typical 30-storey building.

Neighbour effects would have to be gauged by accessing and data mining resident welfare association whatsapp groups. In a rural community or an old-style urban environment, people know each other well, but they may be afraid of standing out. Indian villages are often ghettoised by caste and community, and to a lesser extent, so are cities. This effect holds true even in America, with its Little Indias and Little Cubas. People who belong to a certain community and live in an area with many members of the same community will tend to avoid revealing their preferences if they run counter to the norm. I know, for example, Sikhs who smoke and Jains who are non-vegetarian. However, they won’t indulge in these activities publicly or reveal these preferences to members of their respective communities. Personally speaking, I often endure music I dislike in social gatherings. I will even use Spotify to play music I dislike out of politeness, if I’m entertaining folks with those preferences. Without controls to figure out what I listen to when alone, you will make the wrong guesses about my musical tastes, or assume the account was used by different people. These are pitfalls that make it hard for pollsters to use neighbour effects. Do such factors get amplified or normalised when dealing with large samples? That’s why the design, framing, controls and crosstabs of whatever Theo commissioned would be fascinating. Neighbour effects could be a sort of tiebreaker when conventional polls are tight. But they need to be used with care.

# Two-front deterrence

India needs clear deterrence against both likely adversaries. With China, it lies in raising costs of aggression to levels it should find unaffordable. For Pakistan, it has to be punitive

Two weeks back, we had raised questions about the decline in India’s defence budget as a percentage of both gross domestic product (GDP) and the national budget. We had then promised a second part talking about how to raise the resources to increase it to 2.5 per cent of GDP, from 1.9 per cent, over the next four years, and where to invest these additional funds. Donald Trump’s dramatic victory overtook events last week. That’s why the second part comes now. We can start this story from the fateful night of December 9, 1971, at the peak of fighting in that war. It was fateful because this was the night INS Khukri was sunk by the Pakistani submarine PNS Hangor, becoming the only ship the Navy has lost to combat. Instead of hiding, the Hangor had made its presence evident, setting up a bait. India took up the challenge and sent out a three-ship formation optimised for anti-submarine warfare to hunt for it. One ship, INS Kuthar, developed engine trouble and pulled back. The fact remains that all three had inadequate sonars.

Neither the Khukri nor the Kirpan spotted the Hangor. Two torpedoes fired at the Kirpan missed. The Khukri took three hits and sank almost instantaneously. That’s the reason for the high fatalities, with only 67 survivors. A tale of eternal regret, however, still hangs to this day. Though the Navy was aware of Pakistan’s formidable submarine force, not enough had been done to build anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. Even in this task force optimised for ASW, the sonars were inadequate. India had had months to prepare for this war, yet when it began, an experimental sonar was being tested on INS Khukri, in partnership with the Tata Group.

Now, which country sends out a 1,200-tonne warship with a “jugaad” sonar under testing? It obviously didn’t work. And you know what? An engineer from the Tata team working on this modification was aboard the Khukri on this mission. He became a rare civilian war casualty in action. The reason we tell this story now is to underline the *jugaad chalta hai*, we are too-big-to-bother-about-a-few-setbacks approach to our defence. The virus afflicts both the political and civil services, as well as the military leadership. That’s how, despite knowing for years that Pakistani submarines were its only credible naval threat, India still had such poor sonars on its anti-submarine ships. How much would it have cost to try and fill this gap? Very little. But do such small fixes have

the same appeal of buying a new ship, a submarine, a squadron of aircraft, or a new set of missiles? And yet, this is how we suffer avoidable setbacks. If this wasn’t bad enough, the very next day added insult to injury. The Navy flung all available resources to hunt for the Hangor. One of these, a French-made Alizé ASW two-engine aircraft, was shot down by a PAF F-104 loitering in ambush off the Kutch coast. Overall, the Navy had a stellar outing in the war, blotted by what could have been an avoidable loss. How do we know any of this? Please check out *Indian Navy 1965-1975: Transition to Triumph* by Vice Admiral G M Hiranandani, published in 2000. Hiranandani was the head of the naval history project. Also read Maj Gen Ian Cardozo’s *The Sinking of INS Khukri: Survivors’ Stories*. We can pick a dozen such stories from each of our engagements, where the forces went out to fight without vital elements — mostly to do with technology — which could have been avoided with greater alertness and commitment. We can leapfrog to Pulwama-Balakot in 2019 when PAF AMRAAMs outranged all the IAF’s missiles by a long distance, except probably the French MICA, with which fewer than 10 of its Mirages had been armed by then. These had provided escort to the bombing mission over Balakot. All the MiGs and Sukhois had the same Russian R-73s and R-77s. That gap persisted until the Rafale became operational. And even now, work is on to equip the Sukhois with the swadeshi Astra to counter the AMRAAM, which the PAF has had since 2010. You can see, therefore, that the missile gap was allowed to persist for nearly a decade.

It was important to tell this regrettable 1971 story, followed by the Pulwama-Balakot missile disadvantage, in detail because these are the starkest of all examples of our “there-will-be-no-war”, or “we can handle it with our numbers, so what if there are initial casualties or setbacks” approach. In both cases, almost 50 years apart, a much larger and more potent Indian force was put at a disadvantage just because some small but vital elements were lacking. Over the past three decades, beginning with General V P Malik, we have had several chiefs say in frustration that we will fight with whatever we have. The latest to say something similar is the current Air Chief. Everybody talks of China as the real threat, but we aren’t even building a decisive capability against Pakistan.



NATIONAL INTEREST SHEKHAR GUPTA

## Captain Bumrah

### EYE CULTURE

VISHAL MENON

jasprit Bumrah, the once-in-a-generation fast bowler, who has captained India in a solitary Test match and a couple of T20 internationals so far, has no qualms about picking himself as the “greatest Indian captain.” “My favourite captain is me. I’m the greatest captain,” Bumrah proclaimed in an interview for a leading publication earlier this year. Team India head coach Gautam Gambhir confirmed the 30-year-old fast bowler as the stand-in captain for the opening Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Perth next week, if incumbent Rohit Sharma opts out due to personal reasons. If Sharma remains unavailable in Perth, Bumrah will walk out for the toss with Pat Cummins, another talented pacer who was picked to lead Australia three years ago. Apart from the one-off Test from Ray Lindwall in 1956, Australia has never appointed a fast bowler to skipper their team in the game’s longest format. All-rounders Monty Noble and Jack Ryder were captains more than a century ago, while Richie Benaud, another all-rounder, led Australia from 1958 to 1964. Across other teams, Shaun Pollock led South Africa with poise in the turbulent post-Hansie Cronje era. Under Imran Khan, Pakistan cricket underwent a tectonic shift. Khan’s stint was followed by Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. West Indies relied on the indefatigable pursuits of Courtney Walsh through the late

1990s. Heath Streak was Zimbabwe’s undisputed leader for more than a decade, while Bob Willis was the last fast bowler to captain England. Last month, Tim Southee stepped down as New Zealand Test captain after the 2-0 loss to Sri Lanka. But they were, by and large, exceptions to the rule. Of the 10 bowlers to take 50 wickets or more as a Test captain, seven have a better bowling average as skippers. Nevertheless, cricket establishments become conservative and rarely go against the grain. It remains one of cricket’s biggest mysteries: Why do bowlers rarely become captains? Benaud remarked that Keith Miller, the mercurial all-rounder from the post-War era, was the best captain Australia never had. The same can be said about Shane Warne. Cricket’s greatest spin bowler was considered too erratic on and off the field for such a prestigious post. Even though Warne captained Australia in only 11 ODIs, the world saw his leadership skills in the opening season of the Indian Premier League (IPL), when he led a less-fancied Rajasthan Royals to their only title triumph. Warne’s captaincy in the 2008 IPL season was aggressive, vibrant, and in the words of Benaud, “he brought his gambling instincts onto the field.” One of the reasons why bowlers are rarely considered captains is because they are more susceptible to injuries than batters. The bowling captain’s primary skill is being utilised concurrently while he is required to call the shots on the field. In the compelling book titled *The*

*Art of Captaincy*, former England captain Mike Brearley argued that bowlers often struggled more than batters when appointed captains. “It takes an exceptional character to know when to bowl, to keep bowling with all his energy screwed up into a ball of aggression, and to be sensitive to the needs of the team, both tactically and psychologically,” he wrote. India won the 1983 World Cup under Kapil Dev. In the 1970s, Bishan Bedi and Srinivasaraghavan Venkataraghavan shared the captaincy duties, while left-arm spinner Vinoo Mankad skippered for six Tests from 1955 to 1959. Perhaps, Anil Kumble was India’s most underrated captain. The leg-spinner took over from Rahul Dravid in 2007. Kumble led in 14 Tests during the period of transition, including in the infamous 2007-08 series in Australia. “I became a captain by default because no one else wanted it,” Kumble had said. Left-arm pacer Zaheer Khan had the credentials for the top role, but was ignored. Apart from being a bowler of skill and intelligence, Khan also had a keen eye for talent. In 2001, it was Khan who suggested the then captain Sourav Ganguly to elevate Virender Sehwag as an opener. In Perth, Bumrah, India’s most valuable player (MVP), will seek inspiration from his opposite number. “We have seen Cummins doing well. He is a big example...a fast bowler who takes a lot of responsibility, who takes a lot of pride, and has won the World Cup and the World Test Championship,” he said. For Bumrah the captain to be successful, he needs Bumrah the bowler to be fit and firing.



BUSINESS & PURPOSE R GOPALAKRISHNAN

For over 50 years, almost every practitioner of business management has probably been a fan of Peter Drucker. I am, therefore, like a *bhakti* in a temple town as I visit his birthplace, Vienna, to participate in the “Davos of Management”. The Global Peter Drucker Forum and the Living Machine Institute in Austria have joined forces to reframe “The Next Management”, titled “The India Way: Humanism, Longevity, and Compounding Returns”. In recent times, more people have been struck that the capitalist-enterprise model, seeded in America, is perhaps broken. What is the model? Why is it thought to be broken? The centrepiece of this model is the joint-stock company, in which the liability of the shareholder is limited. Over the past decades, the single-minded focus of management leaders has increasingly been to promote shareholder wealth on the premise that the shareholders are the owners of the company. Are they really? The people who aspire,

dream, sweat, yearn, and love are usually not the shareholders but the people who are most affected by the company — community, society, employees, vendors, for example. The current model has evolved over a couple of centuries concurrently with the industrial revolution. When there is a sharp focus on shareholders, there emerges a strong emphasis on efficiency — of manpower, machines, and capital usage — rather than on effectiveness. What is the difference?

**Peter Drucker on efficiency vs effectiveness** According to Drucker, you need effectiveness to magnify and translate efficiency into results. He emphasised that the sole purpose of a business was to create and satisfy the customer. In his seminal book *The Effective Executive*, he addressed the difference between “effective” and “efficient”. Which is more important when it comes to organisational performance? You recognise an effective organisation as one that enables ordinary people to collectively achieve extraordinary results. How simple yet profound — to encourage ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results! Efficiency is getting a lot of things done while effectiveness is getting the right things done. Further, Drucker wrote effectiveness, unlike innate attributes such as talent and intelligence, entailed a set of practices you could learn. In fact, it’s essential to learn effectiveness because without it, talent and intelli-

gence won’t get you anywhere. The contemporary capitalist enterprise model, with its excessive orientation to enhancing shareholder wealth, is hugely committed to efficiency — to extracting the maximum from a given resource. The model treats enterprise almost like a machine, whose efficiency can be enhanced by continuous improvement. Further, too often, human avarice, greed, and hubris get fed into the menu for efficiency. These lead to enterprise failures like Enron and Lehman Brothers — watch the play *Lehman Trilogy*, now running in theatres in London and New York. Think of India’s Satyam Computer and Kingfisher Airlines. The efficiency-only trap is a threat to all enterprises that are fixated on increasing market capitalisation (unicorn-aspiring startups to please note). To minimise the risk of getting trapped in this web, one must consider an alternative model: Effectiveness, underpinned by Efficiency. In this model, the shareholder is not the lone god for whom enterprise leaders cater. Employees, community, vendors, and many others who work to make the company into a “living machine” feature in the leadership agenda. The reason is that the value from a “living machine” is superior to that from a machine. The markers for a living machine are humanism, longevity, and compounding results, the theme of The India Way discussion at Vienna. When Roger Bannister made

the four-minute record of running a mile in 1954 at the Iffley Road tracks, many scientific minds opined that the limit of human endurance would not permit any further improvement to the record. Yet, the human “living thing” — through advances in motivation, physiology, nutrition, and equipment — has made it possible for Moroccan Hicham El Guerrouj to record three minutes and 43 seconds. Living machines yield more than inanimate machines because of flexibility, adaptation, and human consciousness, which machines cannot yet do. Here is the catch. Dealing with living machines requires reflection, thought, patience, and, above all, time. In the belief that their shareholders will not give them time, enterprise leaders push the fixed machine beyond its limits, breaking the machine rather than training it to adapt and renew. Some Indian companies seem to have learnt this, like Godrej, TVS, Birla, Mahindra, Tata, and Hindustan Lever (now Hindustan Unilever). It has been my singular fortune to have served in Tata and Hindustan Lever, where I learnt the “living machine” principles from the grassroots. It is satisfying to expose the ideas of the living machine to a global audience.

The author’s latest book is JAMSETJI TATA: Powerful Learnings for Corporate Success, coauthored with Harish Bhat. rgopal@themindworks.me



The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

# Breathless in the Capital

Delhi's pollution woes call for urgent, collaborative action from all stakeholders

The two photographs of the Lotus Temple on the front page of this newspaper on Friday, one a clear shot taken in May and the other on a hazy November morning, painted a stark portrait of just how far Delhi has descended into its annual pollution abyss. For the third consecutive day, the city's two million residents awoke to a day of "severe" pollution, as calm winds and the arrival of winter amplified a familiar nightmare: A thick, choking haze of smog blanketing the city, laced with the acrid tang of pollution. At Thursday 4pm, the air quality index (AQI) recorded 424.

The tragedy is that this is an annual feature. And, we already know what fuels this crisis, what damage it inflicts, and what could be done to curb it. Yet, every winter, Delhi endures the same pattern: Citizens struggle for breath and government agencies fumble. Those entrusted with addressing the crisis continue to shrug off responsibility, deflecting blame onto everyone else. The science, however, has always been clear. The local and external sources of Delhi's pollution are well-documented; experts even understand the exact proportions each source contributes to the toxic mix, a fact that should, theoretically, enable targeted interventions. But, the mounting scientific evidence only helps to underscore how inefficient the system has been in tackling the crisis. Year after year, the same players in government either remain passive or scapegoat one another, unwilling to act decisively.

Consider the case of stubble burning, a known villain in this saga. Courts have stepped in with stringent orders. Yet in fields across Punjab and Haryana, smoke continues to billow. In recent days, the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution levels has surged from 17% to 30%. On Thursday, data from Punjab revealed that nearly half of the state's paddy fields remain unharvested, signalling that the peak season for these farm fires — and the pollution they bring — is still ahead. The plight of farmers, who feel compelled to clear their fields swiftly for the next crop, is understandable. Many lack the resources to invest in stubble management machinery. This is where State intervention could make a meaningful difference — through rental schemes, subsidies, or other support systems to encourage alternatives to burning.

The fact is the government in Delhi has privileged political gamesmanship over meaningful engagement with neighbouring states. Effective solutions demand cross-border collaboration; administrators cannot afford to work in silos. Transparent, cooperative dialogue across state lines could yield more comprehensive anti-pollution strategies if only the political leadership is willing to take that step. To be sure, Delhi's geography also compounds its troubles, which makes proactive administration essential. It took two days of "severe" air for the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to enforce stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (Grap) in the city, which is counter-intuitive to its primary mission — to act preemptively before air emergencies arise, not after. Delayed interventions only prolong the damage.

To truly protect its people, Delhi must abandon piecemeal emergency responses and adopt a science-driven, proactive approach. Partisan political posturing has no place in a crisis of this magnitude. Instead, leaders need to work collectively, anticipate air quality threats, put public health before politics, and plan for the welfare of the city's residents.

# Trump's triumph and the revival of America's creed

The meaning of Donald Trump's return to the White House is that America is beginning to confront the jagged question of our time — can the West remain "the West"?

The triumphant return of Donald Trump brings to mind the saying that "once is an accident, twice is a pattern". But what is the pattern to notice here? To the losing side, the outcome reveals only the faults of others — apparently, Trump won by appealing to the worst instincts of the American people. But if the American people really are "garbage", as President Biden put it, then why did they vote for the Democrats for much of the past two decades? The conclusive nature of Trump's victory indicates a broader "vibe shift". His ranks are swelling because of a pervasive sentiment that something has gone deeply wrong in America. The fundamental worry is that public authority is not being used as it should — to maintain personal liberty and uphold public order.

Liberty is a cherished human value because free thought, voluntary association, and private enterprise allow human beings to take responsibility for their lives. Hence, we only want the authorities to interfere with our freedoms when there is wide consensus that this is necessary. But consider some of the more controversial ways that Democrats have recently employed public authority. In California, for instance, the law empowers teachers to keep from parents a child's decision to change their "gender identity".

What makes such a use of public authority alarming is not that it tries to protect or support vulnerable individuals, which is a perfectly reasonable objective, but how it does so. On the basis of still-controversial theories about gender, it brings public authority to bear on the intensely private, indeed sacred, relationship

between a parent and child. It is hard to imagine a policy better calculated to alarm a populace famous for its attachment to "family values".

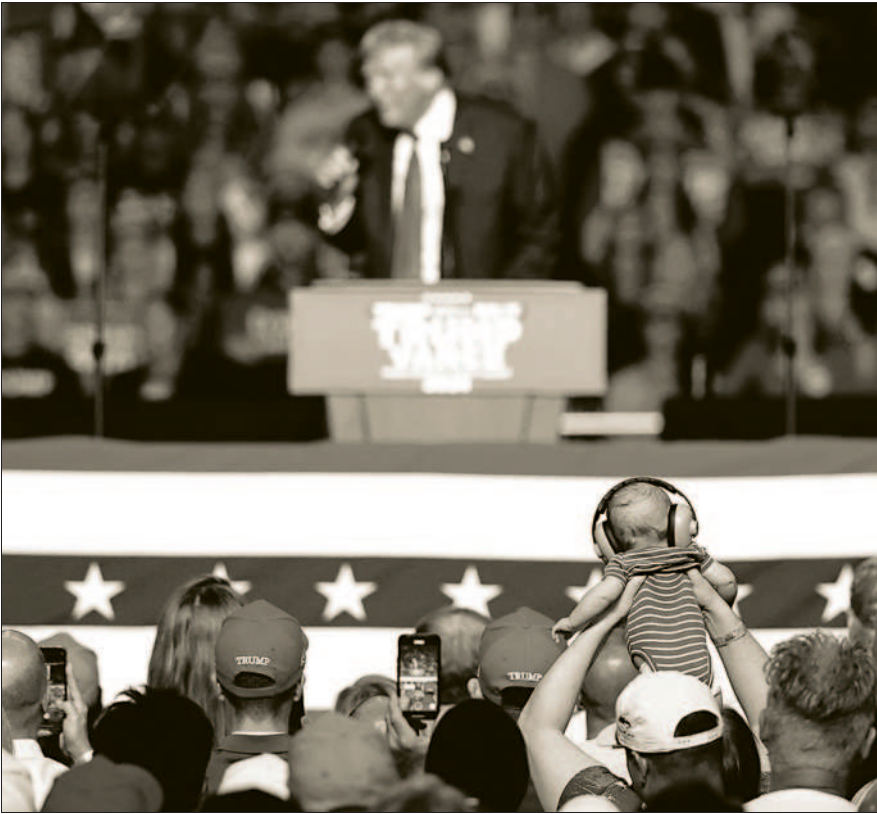
If public authority has been used too freely in some cases, in other instances it has been used too little. Consider some of the miseries that afflict America — crime, drug abuse, gang warfare, illegal immigration, and violent demonstrations. In these matters, where public authority ought to be employed vigorously, to police and punish wrongdoers, the Democrats suddenly evince a profound regard for individual liberty. Where does this leave citizens who abide by the law only to watch others — shoplifters in San Francisco and arsonists in Portland, for instance — go unpunished? It is not that Republicans have an enviable track record on matters of law and order; they do not, especially on gun violence and drug abuse. But they do have the bare virtue of being able to call a crime a crime. A border wall, for instance, may prove ineffective, but it is a sight better than Democrat-run "sanctuary cities" that use tax dollars to house and feed illegal immigrants, including those with criminal records.

The long and short of it then is that in some important respects, Democrats have governed America backwards: Where they ought not to meddle, they have; where they ought to show mettle, they have not. This is what Trump wants to change. But what the Democrats have done cannot be easily

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT THEN IS THAT IN SOME IMPORTANT RESPECTS, DEMOCRATS HAVE GOVERNED AMERICA BACKWARDS: WHERE THEY OUGHT NOT TO MEDDLE, THEY HAVE; WHERE THEY OUGHT TO SHOW METTLE, THEY HAVE NOT



Rahul Sagar



To produce lasting change, Trump will need to refashion American society — to change the mentality of the country at large

undone, because of how widely America's political system disperses power. Consider, for example, the mass deportations that Trump has promised. Such a policy will impose heavy costs, both moral and economic, when non-citizens are treated brutally and citizens see supply chains break down. It will also be fiercely opposed by Democrats who control large states and have powerful allies in media and civil society. The ensuing turmoil may lead the average voter to see Trump as the one abusing public authority.

This means that if Trump wants to create lasting change rather than mere disruption, he will need to refashion American society — to change the mentality of the country at large. Indeed, this has always been the ultimate objective of Trumpism: To revive the American "creed" or the values that reigned in the eras when the United States rose to greatness. This creed is under pressure on two fronts. A sizeable portion of the country has come to doubt the nobility of America's past. To them, its foundational values have been covers for social and economic domination. It will not be easy for a polarising figure like Trump to persuade them otherwise. A free society can only be inspired, not forced, to change its mind. Such inspiration cannot be conjured up and it tends to dissipate at the least sign of bad faith.

The other factor weighing on the American

creed is the demographic effect of immigration. Because the American creed rests on culture rather than race or ethnicity, it has the great virtue of being transmittable. But it is one thing to receive migrants from near cultures when fertility is high and quite another to receive them from distant places when fertility is low. The former raises the hope of assimilation, the latter creates a fear of inundation. This is because the culture of a people and a place owes much to having elements like language, religion, and history in common. No one of these elements is indispensable, but the less they are shared, the less certain the footing of that culture becomes. The implication is that the vitality of the American creed depends not a little on the willingness of Americans to reproduce more. But this is something that even the most powerful man in the world may not be able to convince them to do.

In sum, the meaning of Trump's return is that America is beginning to confront the jagged question of our time: Can the West remain "the West"? Different people will see the endeavour differently — as noble, quixotic or dangerous. What we can agree upon is that history is about to be made.

Rahul Sagar is Global Network Associate Professor at NYU Abu Dhabi. His most recent book is Krishna Kumari: The Tragedy of India. The views expressed are personal

# Blind men ignorant about the ways of the elephant

An old Indian parable describes the experience of blind men who touched an elephant for the first time. One man caught the trunk and described a snake, the second touched the ears and described a fan, another touched the legs and described a tree trunk, the one who touched a body described a wall and the tail was described as a rope by the last man. The adage holds true even today as we are still perceiving elephants in parts but not the whole.

As some communities see elephants as living Gods, farmers who lose their year's crop overnight to elephants see elephants as pests. While protected area managers take pride in growing elephant populations, managers of reserve forests or revenue land see them as a problem that needs to be driven from one area to the other. Ecologists see their vital role in the ecosystem but fail to understand the complex relationships that elephants have with human society and the increasingly changing landscape. To secure the future of this iconic species — less than 50,000 of which remain in the wild today — the world looks up to India, home to more than 60% of the species sharing space with 17% of the world's population in less than 3% of the global land area.

Recently, 10 elephants succumbed in Bandhavgarh tiger reserve, Madhya Pradesh. As per a toxicology report from the Indian Veterinary

Research Institute, Bareilly, the elephants consumed "a large quantity of kodo plants/grains", which was also found to be the cause of death. This unmasks underlying questions for conservation and management. While on one hand, elephants are ecosystem engineers that maintain natural systems, they are also responsible for substantial crop losses, faced by people who are often already marginalised. Requiring vast stretches of habitats that can provide 150kg of wild fodder and 80 litres of fresh water to a single adult individual, elephants are hardwired to move long distances. As these habitats become increasingly fragmented due to expanding human footprint, elephants and people meet more often, thereby increasing the probability of adverse interactions, particularly with marginalised people. Agriculture practices that do not account for local ecology often pit farmers against elephants as crops vital for local food security such as paddy, maize, and millets, being part of the grass family, are also staples for elephants. Further, mining in mineral-rich areas (such as parts of eastern India) displaces pachyderms. Elephants have recently moved back to Central India and are now permanently residing there after a gap of several decades. Going forward, several approaches have to be considered simultaneously.

First, crop compensation schemes have to be operationalised. In Madhya Pradesh, schemes exist but lack effective implementation. Second, innovations need to be made to reduce competition. What the elephant considers food, a person considers thieving. Joint approaches between the forest department, NGOs and the agriculture department can be adopted to promote crops that do not attract elephants in forest-adjacent villages like Bandhavgarh. Such a policy could have potentially saved the lives of the elephants

that died in Bandhavgarh and could have also saved marginalised farmers from yearly losses to raids by wild herbivores. Third, harmful weeds and invasive species have to be removed from areas with elephants to augment habitat. Fourth, we can strengthen coexistence through progressive means like a small cess from tourism revenue. As per state data, only five major protected areas in Madhya Pradesh witnessed as many as 6.3 lakh tourists in 2021. A small cess of ₹100 for human-wildlife coexistence from this tourist revenue could cover the annual cost of compensation for livestock loss and human casualties, which stood at an annual average of ₹3.43 crore between 2014 and 2019, as per the 2022 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, Madhya Pradesh on Wildlife Conservation and Sustainable Management of Wildlife Habitats.

In the Bandhavgarh instance, it is unclear how much time the elephants spent in the millet fields. A similar case of poisoning through kodo

millets was recorded in Vannathiparai, Tamil Nadu, in 1933 (recorded in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society in 1934). The viscera from the Bandhavgarh elephants have been sent to more labs for testing. While the ultimate cause of death is still to be ascertained, it is abundantly clear that the way forward includes communities and stakeholders working together in the landscape.

Finally, with no lived experience of sharing space with elephants in Central India among the local communities and wildlife managers (the last records of resident elephants in this region are from the 1900s) it is imperative to work fast and make the region conducive for elephants. Fair and prompt compensation for crop losses, early warning and rapid response mechanisms to prevent the loss of human lives, and overpasses and underpasses next to highways and railway lines to ensure free movement of elephants, are just some of the approaches that may work. Efficient delivery of these services would also need increasing cross-sectoral collaborations between government departments and greater involvement of the society at large. Surveillance systems and ground monitoring of elephants must be relayed to local people.

While the last remaining wild elephants still find solace in the forests of India and the hearts of Indians, the writing on the wall is that all is not well for these giants, or for communities that share space with them. The reoccupation of Central Indian forests by elephants presents us with an opportunity — to plan well, and to find synergies between state and non-State actors to secure the future of the species.

Aritra Kshetry and Neha Sinha are with WWF-India. The views expressed are personal



Aritra Kshetry



Neha Sinha

# Ram Narayan and the sarangi's many moods

India lost one of its last *sarangi* giants with the passing of Pandit Ram Narayan at the age of 96. He was the most passionate advocate of this string instrument that has gone through challenging cultural topographies in the historical landscape of Indian classical music. He was blessed with gifted hands on the *sarangi* and an articulate tongue in telling its story and those of the crosses its previous messiahs had to bear. Ram Narayan often used to recollect how giants like Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Ustad Amir Khan had to give up playing the instrument to pursue the greener pastures of vocal music. He, too, learnt vocal music but decided to continue on his *sarangi* odyssey.

The *sarangi* was an accompanying instru-

ment in *tawaif* music, Rajasthani and Punjabi folk music, and, of course, Hindustani classical vocal traditions. Ram Narayan had an appreciation for the systems in Carnatic music for many reasons — one, for its deep-rooted rhythmic patterns and, another, the organic space given to the violin artist in a vocal concert. He stopped accompanying vocalists and switched to solo concerts as sufficient creative room was not given to the accompanying *sarangi* artistes in Hindustani music. Vintage recordings of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan or Gaan Maharishi Krishnarao Shankar Pandit validate his argument showcasing some of the best *sarangi* accompaniments but sans the deserved time or space. He had accompanied legends including Amir Khan, Bade Ghulam



S Gopalakrishnan

Ali Khan, Pandit Omkar Nath Thakur, Hirabai Barodekar, and Gangubai Hangal as a staff artiste of the All India Radio (AIR) in 1947.

In 1943, Ram Narayan joined the Lahore station of AIR. Partition robbed India of an all-time *sarangi* great, Ustad Bundu Khan, who left for Pakistan, but gained another as Ram Narayan migrated from Lahore to Delhi. Ram Narayan considered two people the greatest in *sarangi*: Bundu Khan, and Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan, whom he considered the real founder of the Kirana *gharana*. He always lamented the fact that we don't have enough recordings of Bundu Khan, Sabri Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan, and also that most *sarangi* talents couldn't express themselves innovatively due to the innate positioning of accompanying artists in a vocal concert. Among Carnatic violinists, Dwararam Venkataswamy Naidu became an established soloist, and, fortunately, his music was recorded extensively by the public service broadcaster and private studios.

Ram Narayan was blessed with intelligent humour, and his stories about the place of the harmonium in North Indian music had plenty. Of course, he had a justified grief about the way the harmonium replaced the *sarangi* on stage, but he logically challenged the harmonium's

inability to express Indian music. He said, "Harmonium is an out-of-tune instrument and it will remain the same in future too. Whosoever sings with it, will suffer for it." He asked if even the *sarangi* couldn't match Pandit Kumar Gandharva on stage, then what can a harmonium do? Ram Narayan had a stint in Hindi film music, which he particularly didn't relish. However, he will always be remembered for making the *sarangi* popular in Bollywood. He knew that a western musician such as Yehudi Menuhin or Pablo Casals would understand the value of the bowing, four base strings and 35 sympathetic strings in a *sarangi* better than his Indian counterparts.

Today, as we mourn his passing, I remember his response on being asked why the *sarangi* was chosen as the music of mourning by the national broadcaster. He replied, "The *sarangi* encompasses all human moods. It is due to mere illiteracy that the *sarangi* is understood as music for mourning. The government must think about better ways to deal with ministers' passing."

S Gopalakrishnan is a writer, broadcaster, and founder of the podcast, Dilli Dali. The views expressed are personal

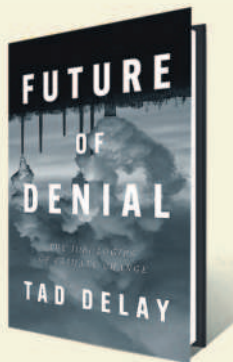
## { EDITOR'S PICK }

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

## THE SHAPE OF CLIMATE DENIALISM

Donald Trump won the US presidential election just days ahead of the ongoing climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan. Trump is a known climate-sceptic, and there is considerable dread about the course the US, the world's largest historical greenhouse gas emitter, may take. Climate denialism is, of course, not solely a Trump problem, if we look among world leaders. But is it merely one of rejecting evidence of the crisis unfolding or refusing to see its anthropogenic roots?

Tad DeLay, author of *Future of Denial: The Ideologies of Climate Change*, posits that climate denialism takes many forms, some of which we fail to recognise: Pinning climate action responsibility to persons reducing their individual climate footprints against economy-wide actions, the failure to understand that the space for hydrocarbons in the energy economy has long run out, banking on carbon offsets instead of overall reduction, among others. Some of DeLay's polemic militates against the concerns of developing nations, but much of it also rings true for the West. Amid climate talks and an incoming Trump presidency, *Future of Denial* is an essential read.



Future of Denial: Tad DeLay  
Year: 2024



और सभी न्यूज़ पेपर मैगजीन प्राप्त करने के लिए सर्वप्रथम इस टेलीग्राम ग्रुप को ज्वाइन करें नीचे दिए लंकि पर क्लिक करके ज्वाइन टेलीग्राम

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BLUNT INSTRUMENT

Re-imposition of AFSPA in parts of Manipur could aggravate distrust. Centre and state must address political failures

IN THE 19 months since Manipur has been roiled by ethnic conflict, the state government's actions have been restricted to empty rhetoric, blaming outsiders, imposing internet bans and issuing vague promises of dialogue. The Centre's moves to bring the warring communities to the negotiating table too have not inspired confidence. Now, after a fresh spell of violence, the Union Home Ministry has reimposed the Disturbed Area status under the Armed Force Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in six police stations of the state. The area covered under the Act may not be large. However, given the history of opposition to AFSPA in Manipur — and other parts of the Northeast — the move could aggravate the atmosphere of distrust in the state.

Ethnic identities have always played an important role in the socioeconomic life of Manipur — they have influenced landownership patterns and shaped the contours of the state's political faultlines. The latest conflict began with a Meitei demand for ST status and a Kuki-Zomi pushback. The conflict has displaced people from both sides and taken a heavy toll of lives and livelihoods of people. Today, volunteers from both communities reportedly patrol villages as part of "defence committees". More than 5,000 weapons looted during the early months of the conflict remain missing. The police and the army have not been on the same page in how to deal with the warring groups. The problem also is that the state government continues to view the problem from the sole prism of law and order. Its blinkered outlook could compound the difficulties of the Armed Forces in the Northeast, at a time when neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh are embroiled in political turmoil.

AFSPA was first imposed in Manipur in 1958 in the Naga-dominated districts of Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul. In the 1960s, the Act was extended to the Kuki-Zomi-dominated Churachandpur district. The rest of the state came under its sway in 1979, when groups in the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley began an armed insurgency. The sweeping powers it provides to the Armed Forces made the Act unpopular. In 2000, activist from Sharmila began a hunger strike against AFSPA that would continue for 16 years. In 2004, the then-UPA government set up a five-member committee under former Supreme Court Justice Jeevan Reddy. The Commission recommended the repeal of AFSPA a year later, describing the Act as "highly undesirable". The Second Administrative Reforms Commission endorsed these recommendations. In recent years, the Centre has been rolling back AFSPA from several parts of the Northeast. As Union Home Minister Amit Shah rightly pointed out in 2021, these moves have been guided by the decline of militancy in the region, fast-tracked by the government's development projects, Manipur, it appears, has been an outlier. Once amongst the most prosperous regions in the Northeast, the state now brings up the rear in most socioeconomic listings. It's imperative, therefore, that the Centre and state government address political and administrative failures, and not resort to blunt measures such as the restoration of AFSPA.

ANOTHER JOB SCAM

Alleged irregularities in job exam in UP will erode public trust. Probe must be conducted and accountability fixed

MINISTER'S NEPHEW; the son of the Legislative Council secretariat-in-charge; the son and daughter of the Department of Parliamentary Affairs-in-charge; the son of a Deputy Lokayukta. These are some of the candidates who were selected to fill administrative positions in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly and Legislative Council after at least two rounds of tests in 2020-21. An *Indian Express* investigation has revealed that a fifth of the 186 vacancies for which approximately 2.5 lakh people had applied went to relatives of officials, with at least five successful candidates connected to owners of the two private firms that had conducted the recruitment test. For young aspirants competing for the security and mobility afforded by a few hundred government jobs, these revelations would be further evidence of the odds being stacked against them.

As the Allahabad High Court observed on September 18, 2023, when hearing a plea by three unsuccessful candidates, the process is "not less than a recruitment scam". The CBI probe it ordered was stayed by the Supreme Court, following an appeal by the Legislative Council, with the next hearing scheduled for January 6, 2025. Delays will add to the anxiety and frustration of the youth, at a time when public trust in education and recruitment exams is already low. Earlier this year, controversies over irregularities in NEET and NET severely dented the credibility of the National Testing Agency, while an investigation by this newspaper in February revealed 41 documented instances of paper leaks in recruitment exams, across 15 states in five years, and affecting 1.4 crore job seekers. These instances, taken together, point to a deeper crisis that needs urgent attention. At a time when jobs that number in the mere hundreds attract lakhs of applications, it is all the more important that a level playing-field is ensured. When the integrity of such a system is compromised, as seen in the NEET-NET episode, it can be extremely dispiriting for young people, who have spent years preparing for an examination that they believe will change their lives for the better.

A probe into these irregularities must be conducted urgently, else the erosion of already diminishing public trust in the system will not be easy to overcome. Consider the protests this week against the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission's decision to conduct exams in different shifts and using a normalisation system for evaluation to obviate unfair advantage to candidates at any one shift. Applicants alleged that these complicated procedures would expand the scope for corruption of the process. Of course, the demand-supply mismatch is so large that it is open to constant exploitation. For a country hoping to reap the dividend of a large working-age population, expanding opportunities should be top priority.

FADING STRAINS

With the demise of Pandit Ram Narayan, the sarangi seems to have lost its glory days

WHEN SARANGI GIANT Pandit Ram Narayan, a rare musician who could coax magic out of one of India's oldest bow instruments, passed away last week in Mumbai at 96, the country lost a brilliant musician. The maestro's demise is also a cause for anxiety about the sarangi's future. There is no doubt that some of the younger artistes today — Sabir Khan, Kamal Sabri, Suhail Yusuf Khan and Murad Ali — who play regularly as accompanying musicians in Hindustani classical concerts are giving the sarangi its due and also inspiring others to take up the instrument. But the sarangi has been yielding in concerts to the harmonium — an extremely versatile instrument. Add to that, the difficulty of learning to play the sarangi.

A folk instrument, the sarangi evolved as an important accompaniment to the music of courtesans in the 18th and 19th centuries. The anti-naatuch movement, which marginalised these singer-performers, also degraded the status of sarangi players. The instrument was resurrected and put on a high pedestal by musicians such as Ram Narayan, Ustad Sultan Khan, and Ustad Sabri Khan. Before them, maestros such as Ustad Abdul Latif Khan and Bundu Khan played important roles in raising the sarangi's stock. It found status as a solo instrument — this status hangs somewhat in the balance after Ram Narayan's demise.

A glimpse into the sarangi's glory days comes to the fore in a grainy video of Abdul Latif Khan — a home *baithak*, where he plays while holding a cigarette and smoking it at regular intervals. After a particularly captivating glide of the instrument's strings, a patron takes bundles of cash and showers them over Khan. Such pomp harkens to an era, long lost. However, it will be tragic if the sound that mimics the human voice at its soulful best is lost.



ABHISHEK SINGHVI

HOW DO YOU judge a Chief Justice of India or, for that matter, any person in high office? The tests must be contextual to the job but, above all, if the overwhelming predominance of any person's work is good, praiseworthy and positive, the fact that he has, fractionally, committed errors, does not deserve a harsh verdict. It only shows that he, like us all, has no claim to divinity or infallibility. When eminent persons, within and without the Bar, use the 10 per cent test to chastise or condemn, they not only choose to ignore the 90 per cent glass full but do disservice both to the man and to the institution.

The recently retired CJI, usually referred to by his acronym DYC, firstly did what all judges, including CJIs, are supposed to do, but frequently do not. That is the dual activity of judging and writing judgments. Both as a puisne judge and as CJI, DYC has authored more nine, seven, five and three-judge judgments than any of his predecessors in the past two decades. Seminally vital issues were jurisprudentially addressed with high intellectual quality — not by mere numbers alone. They range from the nine-judge *Puttaswamy* privacy judgment to *Common Cause* on the right to die with dignity to *Shafin Jahan* on the right to marry freely to an expansion of abortion rights in *X vs NCT*. From striking down the criminality attached to same-sex consensual sex in *Navtej* to the recognition of queer couples' right to relationships to overruling his father not once but twice while decriminalising adultery and negating the infamous *ADM Jabalpur*, DYC has painted with a broad brush. Federalism issues, from the five-judge decision in the NCT case to the very recent nine-judge decision in *States versus Centre mining rights*, have coexisted with his judgments on religious issues like Sabarimala and Ayodhya as also the Electoral Bonds case.

Merits apart, to wield the pen (actually the computer) with such dexterity has not been seen since the 1960s and '70s. If judging and writing judgments, and writing them well, is the primary test for a judge (something too easily forgotten), no fair view can say that DYC has not passed it with flying colours. We all

DY Chandrachud's tenure as CJI was almost without blemish. It should be celebrated, not denigrated

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That he has been able to do it while being on the lecture circuit, speaking across the country on diverse issues, dealing with myriad administrative and management issues of the Supreme Court is testimony to his unprecedented industry and diligence, reinforced by a lifetime of discipline. It is reflected in his self-confessed musings on being a lark (and not an owl), yoga, alternative medicine, diet restraint of a high order and meditation. It is this humongous industry which has let him leave a mark on so many issues.

Thirdly, no CJI has done so much for infrastructure and technology. Accessibility issues, so much in sync with his passion for facilitation of the differently abled, staff training and exam centres, staff library, a national judicial museum, archives, the beautification of the lawns, the new enclosed spaces with air-conditioning, renovation of courtrooms and bar rooms, media enclosures, crèche facilities, the new cafe by the differently abled, all sit majestically with his most important contribution — the institutionalisation of virtual hearings in most courts and tribunals across India, despite resistance. The use of avant garde technology and AI has yielded a huge number of translated judgments in Hindi and regional languages, a more efficient national judicial grid linking all courts from the lowest to the highest across India. Again, many of these achievements are statistical, even boring, and are continuous journeys not destinations, but he does shine on all these fronts by contrast.

Fourthly, his conduct of proceedings inside courtrooms has been almost blemishless — no mean achievement amidst strong provocations and the vicissitudes of high-profile cases and sometimes irritating trivialities. He has been polite, courteous and considerate, yet firm and decisive. Hardly any advocate, irrespective of seniority, has gone back

feeling that he/she has not been heard or that his/her point is not appreciated. The presence of such qualities, in earlier eras taken for granted, are now remembered frequently in the breach amidst the pressures of modern day, over-congested judging.

There is no doubt that he could have avoided both the "PM at home" episode as also the pre-Ayodhya decision comment. It has led to a lot of snide remarks in the last days of an illustrious career. But it would be wrong to ascribe a motivated plan of action to what I think is at best an error of judgement. Contextually, the second comment is understandable, though may not be justifiable, coming as it did amidst small children in his own village's school, who were chatting informally about all and sundry with the illustrious son of their village. The PM episode leaves him open to all kinds of misinterpretations and was best avoided. That DYC continued to explain or justify these episodes in his later retirement-eve interviews was a third error of judgement.

Equally blameworthy may be the decision not to decide the Shiv Sena/NCP disqualification cases as also the NCT vs LG constitutional cases. He listed them time and again, never refused to hear them but allowed time to run out under his watch. The NCT example was even more inexplicable because two earlier judgments, both by DYC himself, had decided and clarified the issue in great detail, leading to the new NCT parliamentary amendment by the Modi government. There was no one more familiar with the subject than him in the SC to decide the issue expeditiously.

In the end, I have no hesitation in saying that all these shortcomings fall well within the 10 per cent rule, neither besmirching nor eroding nor erasing his spectacular achievements and lasting legacy.

*The writer is fourth term MP, jurist, former Chair, Parliamentary Standing Committees on Commerce, Law & Home; Member, Congress Working Committee; former Additional Solicitor General; senior National Spokesperson, Congress; Chair, Cong Department on Law, Human Rights & RTI and author*



SHUBHRA GUPTA

SOME FILMS BECOME cult for the right reasons. That they were hidden gems, unappreciated for their plots and performances. That they had zeroed in on the high and low notes of the times they were set in. That they were lost in the slew of surrounding films, and "paarkhi darkshaks in later dashaks" gathered them up in fervent embrace.

And some films are like *Andaz Apna Apna* (AAA), written and directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, starring Aamir Khan and Salman Khan, the two clean-cut legacy star kids who had hit the movies right at the end of the dreadful '80s and become overnight sensations. Despite its starry wattage — with Raveena Tandon and Karisma Kapoor playing the female leads, along with a whole bunch of popular comic actors — the film disappeared without having left off any noticeable firecrackers. It's only much later that it was dusted off, and appropriated: Thirty years on (the film released in early November 1994), it is truly baffling why it is such a darling amongst those who worship at its altar.

I watched it again after all those years, and of course it hasn't aged well — it's determinedly mid qualities are even more glaring. It feels like it was assembled as it went along, the way so many Hindi films used to be, back in the day. The lads and lassies, the former in colourful shirts and mullets which switch lengths, continuity be damned, and the latter in bright orange and pink lipsticks and big hair, jump about Ooty's hillsides. The villains show up as and when, in and out of their den.

What struck me most, all over again, was

ANTI-CLASSIST AND CHEERFUL

If there's an ode to silly, it has to be 'Andaz Apna Apna'

its anti-classist cheap-and-cheerful aesthetic. Everyone in the film exists to tell us that regardless of the exigencies of the thing that passes for a plot — heiresses looking for true love, layabouts in search of purpose, look-alikes switching identities, and a bag of diamonds — all will end well. That happiness is just around the corner. And most importantly, nothing matters as much as silliness: If there's an ode to silly, it is *Andaz Apna Apna*. When you can celebrate silliness, life is still worth living.

The '90s was a decade when movies were in recovery mode. Except for a handful of films, with home entertainment having nearly steamrolled theatrical outings, Hindi cinema had sunk from B grade to C. The back-to-back success of two youthful romances — Aamir's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988) and Salman's *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) — brought the "gen-try", and optimism, back to the movies.

Santoshi himself was coming off the success of serious dramas like *Ghayal* (1990) and *Damini* (1993), and was looking to make a "light" film: *Andaz Apna Apna* felt like such a 360 degree turnaround that it was hard to believe that it was from the same director who had made movies toplining the hard-knocks-hero-and-heroine and their grim struggle to stay afloat.

There is nothing grim about AAA. It spreads only grins. Yes, you can groan, like I did, at the non-stop carousel of lame jokes — Salman revealing an ability to carry a line lightly, even more so than Aamir, even though both played well with each other — but you can't help cracking up in some places. How

else to react when Shakti Kapoor, immortalised as Crime Master Gogo, the nephew of the legendary Mogambo (one of the endless hat-tips to beloved filmi characters), leaps out from behind yet another bush, his patently false moustache straggling off a lip? Paresh Rawal who may have invented the serio-comic baddie in Bollywood has a double role, and his yearning-for-riches Teja remains a rumpled classic.

I did feel distinctly uncomfortable at Aamir's Amar falling all over Raveena's Raveena in a few songs-and-sequences (a most a precursor to the 1995 *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* with Shah Rukh Khan doing ditto with Kajol in the back of a Eurail compartment), but again that is a post-facto insight. Thirty years ago, as in the previous decades, heroes and heroines were routinely bracketed in ways which would be considered strictly off-limits these days.

Which is really the thing — this is very much a 1994 film, presenting a time of idealised innocence, teetering on the brink of a just-liberalised India, when two callow gold diggers who had clearly never seen the inside of a gym, and whose six packs were well into the future, could make you believe that they were really after, what else, *sachcha pyaar*.

Finally, it is all about the candyfloss nostalgia of a bygone era when you could happily wallow in the nonsense surrounding those markers of unserious menace, Mark and Teja. And in the belief that Amar and Prem were forever.

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NOVEMBER 16, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

MRS GANDHI'S ASSASSIN

POLICE INVESTIGATORS REPORT that a senior officer ordered the shooting of Indira Gandhi's assassins after their surrender. Surviving assassin Satwant Singh claims guards fired without provocation. This contradicts earlier police statements that the assassins were shot while resisting commandos. Evidence shows they were shot in the guard room ten minutes post-surrender.

TERRORISTS ESCAPE

SEVEN TERRORISTS FREED four colleagues from police custody, killing one bus passen-

ger and injuring two police escorts near Faridkot district in Punjab. The incident occurred while the arrested terrorists were returning from court to jail. The terrorists also seized ammunition from injured policemen. The freed terrorists were identified as Sukhdev Singh and Kulwant Singh. Just four policemen — three constables and one head constable — were put on duty for as many terrorists

TAMIL NADU POLLS

THE TAMIL NADU Governor, S.L. Khurana, dissolved the State Assembly on the recommendation of the Council of ministers. The Finance Minister met the governor on

November 14 to convey the Council's decision, seeking a fresh mandate from people for implementing socialistic and secular programmes alongside parliamentary elections.

BJP'S VISION

THE BJP'S NATIONAL executive called for "a new polity, new government and new leadership" in the country. In a resolution passed at their concluding session, the party committed to value-based politics, democracy and positive secularism. The resolution emphasised the need for a government that represents the country's diversity and restores the state's moral authority.



# THE IDEAS PAGE

## My two Indias

The country I was born in will, sadly, not be one in which I will die. I was told to ‘go back to Portugal’. This toxicity is symptomatic of mindsets that have grown across families and WhatsApp groups



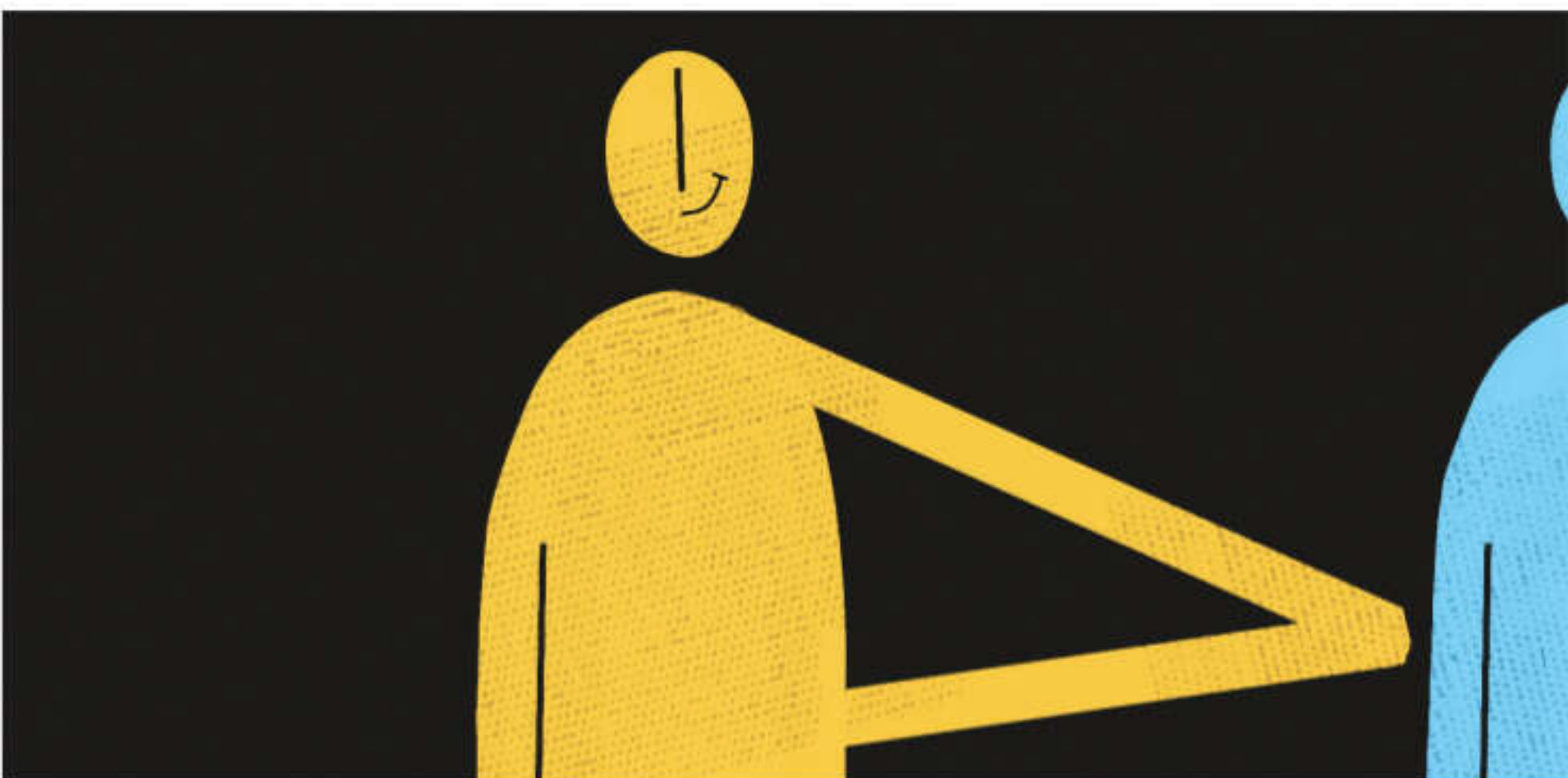
PETER RONALD DESOUSA

THE STORIES OF discussions taking place in Resident Welfare Association (RWA) chat groups, University Alumni gatherings, the Officer’s mess, and even in IIT Whatsapp groups — where the scientific temper is supposedly pervasive — of members being trolled because of their religion and ethnicity, I only half regarded as serious. These to me were passing moments of toxicity. Essential India with its philosophical openness would re-emerge from such cesspools of prejudice. I have now learnt that I am mistaken. The poison has gone very deep. It has entered the groundwater of our national soul.

A few days ago, during an argument, I was told to “go back to Portugal”. Not one to take such abuse without a fight I responded and asked my adversary to “go back to Afghanistan”. He was outraged. “I’m not from Afghanistan,” he roared”. “Well, I’m not from Portugal,” I said. Two things come together in this brief exchange that are worth thinking about. My name and his outrage. For him I was obviously the outsider and, equally obviously, he was the insider. Both for him were self-evidently true. In this exchange, my argumentativeness faced his righteous anger. He said he was confronting me because I was evil. That we went to school together more than half a century ago did not matter.

I narrate this story because I must honestly admit I was surprised at the vitriol. There was more abuse directed at me but I ignored it. His educational and professional journey seemed to have had little tempering effect on his views, not just as an adult but as a retired senior. What began as a discussion on an Indian festival, soon descended into a toxic spat watched by others who, in their silence, appeared to endorse his views that it was inadmissible for me to talk about things Indian, especially Indian culture. What did I know? And who was I anyway? An Indian on probation! Now I know what Draupadi must have felt in the assembly when she asked the custodians of *dharma* her question. They did not answer. They remained silent. It is unclear to me if they looked down in embarrassment, but Sanskrit pandits tell me that they did not. Which only makes it worse!

Curiously, we were both defending the same thing, *bharatiya sanskruti*. He was doing it from a worldview constructed after listening to hours of lectures at Hindutva university. An alternative view comes from analysing the exchanges in the Constituent Assembly. When one reads the interventions of illustrious Indians such as Rajkumari Amrit Kaul, KM Munshi, N Gopalaswami Ayyangar, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Jerome D’Souza, Maulana Azad, S Radhakrishnan, and of course B R Ambedkar, and others, it is clear that in the India they imagined both of us are equally insiders. The word “equally” is crucial here since what was being given to us, when we adopted the Constitution, was equal citizenship. That is under threat today. My story is only a pointer to the challenge ahead. I must admit that in my naivete I was unprepared



CR Sasikumar

for the ferocity of the onslaught. The language of “us vs them” has clearly taken root among educated middle-class Indians.

As I narrate this story, I’m not sure if it is an admission of defeat. As one who has spent more than 40 years as an educationist believing in the promise that we were building rational minds and a rational public sphere, the experience of both vituperation and silence surprised and saddened me. It was as good a laboratory experiment as one can get in the social sciences, all things being constant. Members who were a part of the group were educated in a public school and later in a public university. They worked in secular organisations both national and international. They held club memberships and played the occasional game of golf. They even enjoyed whiskey on the rocks. But views from Hindutva university had begun to dominate their perception of the world.

If my story is unique to me then it need not go any further. But I believe it is symptomatic of the mindsets that have grown not just across the country but also in families and neighbourhoods. My experience the other day dispelled the illusion that I had harboured, as a political scientist, that this toxicity was only temporary, that India’s fabled hospitality (our welcome to the Parsis and the Jews) was deeper than the surface poison.

And this is where my anxiety lies. I firmly believe (or believed) that the only way to build a strong nation is to make it a nation of people, to nurture its diversity, based on the imagination crafted in the Constituent Assembly. It would not be easy. Ambedkar warned us that we would be entering a world of contradictions. Contradictions are good. They enable new resolutions that can lead to exciting new outcomes. Like our cricket team. This will, however, not happen if the more powerful among us impose their viewpoints on others, maligning them as anti-national. I believe that this demonising that is being encouraged is not the way to build a future India. But maybe I’m wrong.

I see such “poisonous othering” pervading our opinion-forming institutions. In addition to the media, we find this attitude of constructing the “hostile other” being formulated in NCERT textbooks, university curricula, ICHR research projects, and of course,

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WhatsApp groups. Minds are being infected. The “other” is being vilified. Although this has been said many times before, I bring it up again not because of my recent experience but because of the silence of the majority who watched the exchanges as if it were a theatre performance. The silent majority will, through their silence, become colluders in this venomous new India.

This bothers me as a *desi*. But what bothers me more is the impossibility of this Hindutva project. India, I believe, cannot be built on the idea of majoritarianism, as Hindu supremacy. Its fundamental diversity will break out of this forced and imposed uniformity. Our civilisational history shows this to be the case. It will not permit such uniformity. Astika and Nastika philosophical systems, each with their own warring groups, cannot be reconciled. Nor can the Zaidi school of law in Shia Islam agree with the Hanafi school in Sunni Islam. Even within our small Parsi community, there are grumblings against the rulings of the Parsi panchayat. And even God, I’m told, does not know how many Christian groups there are in India. The Constituent Assembly recognised such diversity and constructed an institutional and legal edifice to accommodate it. We had embarked upon the greatest experiment in human history, of making a plural nation of equal citizens. It was unparalleled in its ambition. But this has been stalled by Hindutva. It is being dismantled. It appears to be succeeding.

Maybe I am wrong. Maybe it is possible to build a majoritarian nation even in the face of the challenges of modernity. According to the IMF, we are not doing too badly. Hindutva may be able to build a modern, technological, economically successful, and supremacist nation. They will find ways to dance to Diljit Dosanjh’s hip-hop while also crushing Valentine’s Day celebrations. The majority will be silent. The toxicity has spread. Paraphrasing Ambedkar one thing is certain: The India in which I was born will, sadly, not be the India in which I am going to die.

*The writer is an independent scholar and co-editor with Rukmini Bhaya Nair of Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21st century*

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“[PTI] has seemed quite rudderless and impatient for instant gratification of its demands. Its mercurial support base does not really help: Without discipline from within, the PTI cannot expect to achieve much.”

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

## What we burn is what pollutes

Acknowledging the true scale and sources of our pollution crisis is the first step toward meaningful action



CHANDRA BHUSHAN

A QUARTER-CENTURY AGO, over 200 scientists from the US, Europe, the Maldives, and India came together to study the haze over the Indian Ocean. Led by atmospheric scientist V Ramanathan of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California, the Indian Ocean Experiment (INDOEX) undertook intensive field observations using aircraft, ships, surface stations, and satellites. They discovered a giant brown layer of cloud hanging over much of the Indian Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean between October and February, which they termed the Indian Ocean Brown Cloud or Asian Brown Cloud. INDOEX revealed that this layer was primarily created by the burning of biomass in fields and homes, as well as fossil fuels like coal in industries, and that it traveled thousands of kilometres. The study also found that the haze significantly affected regional temperatures, precipitation patterns, and ground-level pollution, reducing agricultural productivity and causing widespread respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

When the UN Environment Programme published the INDOEX report in 2002, some prominent Indian scientists called it sensationalist and argued that the “Indian Ocean” or “Asian” Brown Cloud was not unique to India or Asia and should, therefore, be renamed. Because of their opposition, the name was changed to “Atmospheric Brown Cloud with a Focus on Asia”. Governments in South Asia ignored the report.

This episode underscores two key points: First, the causes of air pollution have been known for at least 25 years and second, we have been avoiding the issue for just as long. By injecting ideology and politics into what should be a straightforward matter, we continue to muddy the waters. Debates over rich versus poor, farmers versus city-dwellers, SUVs versus cook stoves, and Diwali versus stubble burning have stalled real action.

The result of this obfuscation is that today, from Amritsar in Punjab to Agartala in Tripura, an arc of brown haze, up to 3 km thick, has engulfed the Indo-Gangetic plains (IGP), impacting lives, livelihoods, and the economy. While pollution levels are severe in the IGP, air quality is poor across the country. Most Indian cities fail to meet national ambient air quality standards, which are quite lenient compared to WHO’s health-based guidelines. The primary cause of this pollution remains the same as what Ramanathan and his colleagues identified 25 years ago.

In a study conducted by my colleagues and me in 2023, we estimated that India emits about 52 lakh tonnes of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in size, which has high health impacts) annually, excluding dust from natural and manmade sources. Around 48 per cent of these emissions come from biomass use — such as agricultural residue, fuelwood, and dung cakes — for cooking and heating in homes. Stubble burning contributes an additional 6.5 per cent, making biomass burning responsible for 55 per cent

of total PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions.

Industry and power plants are the second-largest emitters, contributing about 37 per cent, primarily from coal burning. The transport sector, a major focus of air pollution mitigation, contributes about 7 per cent of the emissions, while the remainder comes from sources such as open garbage burning.

These findings are not surprising if we follow the dictum: What we burn the most, pollutes the most. In India, we burn about 220 crore tonnes of fuel and waste. Of this, 85 per cent is coal and biomass, while 15 per cent comprises other fuels such as petrol, diesel, and natural gas. Naturally, most of our pollution is due to burning biomass and coal. Additionally, dust from roads, construction sites, and barren land contributes to particulate pollution, especially PM<sub>10</sub>.

To address air pollution decisively, we must follow a scientific approach, and move beyond optics like odd-even, construction bans and artificial rain, and instead focus on the real solution — energy transition. Shifting households to LPG, biogas, or electricity for cooking and heating will eliminate a significant proportion of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions. It will also prevent 8,00,000 premature deaths, caused by exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> inside homes. Though challenging, this is achievable through targeted policy initiatives like a new PM Ujjwala Yojana that provides sufficient incentives to encourage low-income households to move away from traditional biomass.

Similarly, energy transition in industry, especially in MSMEs, along with rigorous monitoring and enforcement, is necessary to reduce pollution. A programme encouraging MSMEs to adopt cleaner fuel and technologies, such as electric boilers and furnaces, could curb emissions significantly. Law enforcement of stringent pollution norms is a basic necessity for larger industries and thermal power plants. For that, the modernisation of pollution control boards is urgently required.

On the other hand, eliminating stubble burning is essential to decrease severe and hazardous pollution days in October and November. Technological interventions along with incentives/ disincentives can solve this problem. The simplest technological solution is to modify or mandate combine harvesters that cut closer to the ground, like manual harvesting, leaving minimal stubble behind. Additionally, an incentive of Rs 1,000 per acre — similar to what the Haryana government provides — could encourage sustainable stubble management, along with fines and exclusion from government schemes for those who continue to burn.

As far as automobiles are concerned, scaling up electric vehicles and public transport is crucial. This will need clear targets for EV adoption and the promotion of public transport as a lifestyle choice. Lastly, to reduce local sources of pollution — dust from roads and construction, garbage burning, and traffic congestion — local bodies must be strengthened and held accountable.

Real progress will only begin once we accept the science. Acknowledging the true impact and sources of our pollution crisis is the first step toward meaningful action.

*The writer is CEO, International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST)*



RAM RAJYA  
BY RAM MADHAV

## Don’t cry over Article 370

J&K Assembly resolution on restoration of special status is futile, duplicitous

THERE WAS A futile *tamasha* in the Jammu and Kashmir legislature last week in the name of passing a resolution on the restoration of special status. Without directly referring to Article 370, the resolution demanded the restoration of the “special status and constitutional guarantees, which safeguarded the identity, culture, and rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir”. If anyone harboured doubt as to whether it referred to the Articles 370 and 35A, abrogated five years ago, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah laid them to rest by explaining the “special status” in his maiden address: “We have lost a lot in the last six years. When I was last in this House, we were a State, we had our own Constitution, and our flag. But all of that was taken away from us.”

Resolutions of this nature don’t have any constitutional validity. Sometimes, they acquire sanctity because they express the solidarity of the nation. On February 22, 1994, both Houses of the Indian Parliament unanimously passed a resolution on J&K, demanding that Pakistan must vacate the areas in that state that it occupied “through aggression”. It was hailed as the expression of “national resolve”. On the contrary, the resolution that the UT legislature passed on November 6 was a hogwash. What sanctity would such a resolution have, which was hurriedly pushed through a voice vote amidst strong opposition from the BJP? The resolution can at the most be described as the deception by the “Gupkar Group”.

The history of Article 370 demonstrates the deceptive politics practised by both Congress and National Conference in the last seven decades. For example, they repeatedly lie to the people that Article 370 granted “special status”. Where did that phrase come from? In fact, when Sheikh Abdullah approached B R Ambedkar for special status for J&K, the latter firmly rejected saying that “making limited application of laws made by Parliament for the state of Jammu and Kashmir would create lots of problems rather than solving.” The Article was finally inserted in the Indian Constitution only as “Temporary provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir”. Nowhere did the Constitution describe it as “special status”.

As regards the so-called “constitutional guarantees”, the Article was subjected to major amendments at least on four occasions — in 1954, 1966, 1975 and 1986 — taking away whatever temporary powers the state enjoyed courtesy of the infamous Delhi Agreement of 1952. It must be remembered that it was the Congress that was in power on all these occasions.

During Jawaharlal Nehru’s tenure, demand for the repeal of Article 370 was raised in Parliament several times. India’s first spy chief, B N Mullik, claimed that in a private conversation, Nehru made the extraordinary admission that India “agreed with the Jana Sangh’s views that Jammu & Kashmir should be fully integrated with India and

was taking steps in that direction”. In Parliament, in an oral reply, he said that Article 370 had been “eroded and Kashmir stands fully integrated”.

When Prakash Vir Shastri, a Jana Sangh member, moved a Private Member’s Bill in Parliament in 1964 on Article 370, it received wide support. Abdul Ghani Goni from J&K, a close associate of Sheikh Abdullah’s, delivered an aggressive speech stating that the then Prime Minister of J&K, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, had moved for abrogation of Article 370, but the central government was not agreeable to it at that time. “I do not know whether the Central Government is under the influence of the West or wants appeasement policy towards Pakistan... they want to please their neighbours at our cost. The people of Kashmir had decided once and for all that Kashmir is an integral part of India, whether there is Article 370 or no Article 370. It is only a provisional and temporary provision which can be removed at any time,” he said, appealing to the Congress members for support to the bill “so that we may also be treated as equal citizens, as good citizens of India as any other citizen. Don’t treat us as second-class citizens, and don’t treat us as a colony of India. We are as much a part of India as other states.”

Syed Nasir Husain Samnani, another member from that state, rose to make a passionate speech, saying, “We, the people of Kashmir, never demanded that we should be treated differently. We do not want Article

370. I want to end this curse in my lifetime, for my safety, for my children’s safety, for the safety of our future generations. We should have the same laws as Maharashtra, Madras, Kerala, Bengal.”

The reality is that by the time of its neutralisation in 2019, the Article was largely hollowed out by the Congress party under popular pressure, while the NC supported it tacitly by looking the other way. But Congress lacked the courage and political will to remove the Article. Displaying that courage, the BJP government did away with the vestiges of it for two reasons. First, it was being used by Gupkar leaders to create a false sense of “special status” and an emotional wedge between the people of Kashmir and the rest of the country. Second, the namesake separate state constitution that existed was creating hurdles in running the administration. For example, while J&K acceded to the GST law, it continued to levy state taxes also, a double whammy on its people, because there was no provision to amend the state constitution.

It is clear that the ending of the 370 regime gave great relief to the people of the UT. But the NC and Congress, known for their duplicity of stating one thing in Delhi and the opposite in Kashmir, are again displaying their mastery over the politics of deception. They know very well that Article 370 is dead, “long live Article 370”.

*The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### FALL IN SENSEX

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A correction’ (IE, November 15). The fall in the BSE Sensex can be attributed to the slow momentum in the domestic economy. Rural demand has also plummeted substantially. China has again become an attractive destination for FDI, owing to the government’s recent economic policies. The US is expected to change its economic policies under the Trump administration. It remains to be seen whether Trump will bring about substantial tariff changes, as these would affect India’s trade policies and the stock market’s performance. Domestic retail investors are hoping for better returns, as they believe that the Indian economy will show dynamism and resilience.

*Atul Thakre, Nagpur*

### SMOG WINTER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Severe air again’ (IE, November 15). As winter sets in, Delhi again confronts an extreme pollution crisis. The seasonal smog has rendered the capital’s air quality “hazardous”, driving pollution levels to among the highest globally. Reduced visibility, grounded flights and indoor confinement warnings reflect an emergency

affecting millions. Although natural factors contribute, human activities — vehicle emissions, industrial discharge and stubble burning — remain the primary causes. Each winter’s predictable haze reflects systemic failures in air quality management. The situation demands comprehensive, preventive solutions targeting root causes.

*Khokan Das, Kolkata*

### SPORTS AND BORDERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Cricket & violence don’t go together’ (IE, November 15). Matches between the two nations are among the most watched sporting events globally, with fans passionately supporting their teams. However, the spirit of cricket has been overshadowed by political tensions that complicate India-Pakistan ties and threaten regional stability. The ripple effects of this tense dynamic affect players and fans, who often carry political discord into what should be friendly competition. This has led to verbal abuse and social media conflicts, creating a hostile atmosphere and restricting matches to international tournaments like the World Cup or Asia Cup. To honour cricket’s spirit, both nations must foster respect and sportsmanship.

*Siddhant Pathak, New Delhi*



## Who to tax?

It’s premature to shift tax burden to individuals; growth of the middle class must be the priority

**IT IS INSTRUCTIVE** to note that industry chambers have refrained from demanding another reduction in the rate of corporation tax after it was slashed from 30% to 22% for domestic companies effective FY20. In their wish list for Budget FY26 presented to the revenue secretary recently, the chambers have turned their focus on seeking relief for individuals, rather than for themselves — for instance, they want a lower tax on interest income from bank deposits to align it with taxes on capital gains from equities, where the bulk of the beneficiaries would be individuals rather than firms. The shift in the approach of India Inc stems from the fact that our corporate tax is now at par with or even lower than in the developed countries; for companies with profit before tax higher than ₹500 crore, the effective tax is just around 20%. The average statutory corporate tax rate across 181 jurisdictions stood at 23.45% in 2023, and, when weighted by GDP, at 25.67%. The average top corporate rate among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries is 23.7%.

Also, the global trend, barring the promise of the US president-elect Donald Trump to cut corporate tax further (and even eliminate personal income tax), is to raise the tax rates on businesses, as was seen in the UK and Turkey recently. Even the low-tax jurisdictions with minimal or nil corporate income tax are embracing the concept of minimum tax of 15% under the OECD’s “Pillar Two” agreement. A lower tax on corporate income hasn’t triggered an investment spree as the government expected. This lays bare the fact that corporate investments are less of a function of taxes or interest rates, but influenced predominantly by the aggregate demand in the economy. A further reduction in tax burden on individuals is now being wished by even the large companies because they want consumption demand to pick up. This raises a question mark on the efficacy of the investment-led growth strategy being steadfastly followed by the current government. Unless India’s middle class acquires greater purchasing power, demand is bound to remain subdued.

Policies in recent years have engineered a shift of the tax burden away from businesses to individuals. As a result, personal income tax (PIT) is now the largest source of tax revenue (19% of government receipts in FY25 BE versus 17% from corporate tax), and is growing at the fastest clip. Year-to-date growth in gross PIT collections (pre-devolution) is 20% against the BE of 13.6%, while corporate tax receipts growth so far in the year is just 6.5% against 12.2% targeted for the full year. Government functionaries acknowledge the shift was the result of a conscious policy decision, and call it a “pro-equity step”. According to them, in a country where a large number of people have started investing in the capital market and equities and the tax on capital gains is the most elastic source of revenue, when corporations are taxed at a high rate, the tax incidence moves away from the super-rich and becomes average across all. However, it is too early for India to adopt such a tax policy given that even today, just 30 million people or only 2% of the country’s population actually pay tax on income. The priority must be to rapidly increase the number of taxpayers. It will let the tax burden reduce and the tax-GDP ratio go up.

## How Musk's DOGE can actually do some good

**THE NEWLY ANNOUNCED** Department of Governmental Efficiency, to be known by the acronym DOGE (get it?) and headed by billionaire Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, is evidence that President-elect Donald Trump’s administration will at least attempt to deregulate the US economy. All memes aside, this could turn out to be a worthwhile enterprise, deserving of bipartisan support — so long as people temper their expectations.

The first thing to realise is that it is not possible to eliminate every law, regulation, committee, or agency that deserves to be. The system was set up such that getting rid of anything is a tough legal slog. It is not easy to fire large numbers of bureaucrats, and in any case their pay is a small part of the federal budget. When it comes to reducing red tape, there are bound to be more losses than victories.

So it’s important to set priorities. One is that it is easier to keep new sectors of the economy free from regulation than it is to deregulate existing sectors. The US should not impose onerous restrictions on the development of artificial intelligence, for example. With so many state-level bills pending, the federal government should aim for preemption and a light regulatory hand, at least initially.

The government does not have a great track record, to put it mildly, of addressing major problems before they have surfaced. Over time, AI might need more regulation, especially around some areas that implicate national security. In the meantime, AI offers the potential for boosting US productivity in many other sectors, from software to health care.

Cryptocurrency is another new sector of the economy, and here the goal of efficiency may require more government involvement rather than less. The Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission should give greater regulatory clarity and predictability to crypto, which currently has an unclear legal status. This would keep the US in the forefront of financial innovation and prove popular with the millions of voters who own crypto assets. This is one case where “deregulation” consists of writing new laws and legal definitions.

Another way to make the government more efficient would be to embrace the YIMBY movement, which aims to make it easier to build more housing in part by reducing government regulation. Not only will this help the economy, but embracing YIMBY would also allow Trump to be bipartisan, as many of the movement’s ideas are popular among Democrats. He could even expand the definition of YIMBY to include more freedom to build nuclear, solar, and wind power. That will boost green energy, attract moderate voters, and help sustain the AI revolution.

Another priority should be to deregulate medical trials. America is now in a golden age of medical discovery, with mRNA vaccines, anti-malaria vaccines, GLP-1 weight loss drugs, and new treatments against cancer all showing great promise. AI may bring about still more advances.

Unfortunately, the US system of clinical trials remains a major obstacle to turning all this science into medicine. There are regulations concerning hospital protocols, the design of the trials, FDA requirements, the procedures of universities and institutional review boards, and the handling of data, among other barriers. America can have better and speedier approval procedures without lowering its standards.

Of all the tasks I’ve outlined, this is by far the most difficult, because it involves changes in so many different kinds of institutions. Yet it has one of the highest possible payoffs, because more treatments might be developed and made available if the clinical trial process weren’t so onerous. Reforming clinical trials should also appeal to older Americans, who are especially likely to vote and who think the most about their medical care. The goal should be an America where most people live to 90.

Many Republicans are very excited about DOGE. But its governance structure is undefined and untested. It does not have a natural home or an enduring constituency. It cannot engage in much favour-trading. Its ability to keep Trump’s attention and loyalty may be limited. And it’s not clear that deregulation is a priority for many voters. In other words: DOGE, and Trump, will have to pick and choose which things to make more efficient. In government, as in economics, there is an equity-efficiency trade-off.

## ● BLOW TO ESTABLISHMENT

IT HELPED TRUMP’S WIN AND ALLOWED A COUNTER-ELITE TO USHER IN A NEW POWER STRUCTURE

# It was the economy, stupid

## MOHAMED A EL-ERIAN

President, Queens’ College, University of Cambridge, and professor, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

pointed to robust US growth, which has outpaced the rest of the G7, and to recent gains in real wages, owing to the decline in the inflation rate. And, of course, there have been multiple record highs in the stock market.

But this approach signalled to many voters that the Democrats simply did not understand what was going on, that they are fundamentally disconnected from pocketbook realities on the ground. On some occasions, they even came across as being full of hubris.

After all, a “K-shaped economy” means that improvements associated with robust growth are not evenly shared. Some sectors and households prosper; others struggle. Among those struggling the most are very low-income households that have exhausted their pandemic savings, maxed out their credit cards, have no financial buffers, and, therefore, live with an unsettling degree of economic insecurity.

Michael Spence, the Nobel laureate economist, put it well at a recent lecture at the University of Cambridge’s Judge Business School. Pointing to data illustrating the financial fragility of the bottom half of the income distribution, he noted that such households hearing about economic exceptionalism from the traditional media may have one or more of the fol-

lowing reactions: “the media doesn’t know what it is talking about”, “the media is biased”, or “the media is not to be trusted”. From these starting points, one can easily arrive at a belief that whoever is talking about the economy doing well simply doesn’t understand or represent one’s interests.

The Democrats also lost control of the narrative on inflation. It did little good to tell people that the rate of price increases,

while still positive, had fallen sharply from its 2022 high, when their concerns were with the overall price level. The cumulative effect of inflation has added to their cost of living and thus reduced their quality of life.

Similarly, record-breaking equity-market runs mean little to households that own few, if any, stocks. Meanwhile, a housing-price boom is far from a blessing

for those seeking to buy their first home.

But the issue is not just how each party communicated to voters. The traditional expert economic consensus also has proved wanting, not least in its inability to describe clearly and widely the interaction between these two views. Mainstream economists also stood little chance of changing voters’ minds about the other big issue in this election: immigration.

By bolstering the US economy’s sup-

One reason why Democrats failed to respond is they were obsessed by another (ironically correct) characterisation of the economy



## SRINATH SRIDHARAN

Policy researcher and corporate advisor  
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**IN RECENT YEARS**, Indian insurance leaders have faced a tough task when talking about “industry growth drivers” and “consumer trust”. For some, it has turned into little more than lip service, detached from the consumers’ real challenges and insurance potential. While the industry speaks of lofty goals, the hard truth is that Indian insurance remains far from realising its potential. Despite regulatory ideas to increase penetration — from opening up 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) to reducing capital requirements for new insurers — the industry has seemingly lost sight of a core need: consumer trust.

Insurance penetration in India stood at just 4.2%. The Indian insurance sector is also heavily skewed toward life insurance, which accounts for 76% of total premiums, compared to a global average of 43.7% with non-life insurance forming 56.3% of the market.

Consumer trust is foundational to insurance sector, yet recent surveys suggest many Indians would not even recommend their insurer to a friend. This lack of advocacy reflects an industry that appears self-serving, with talent often shifting between companies but rarely moving towards customer-centred reform. The primary focus has instead been on metrics and the same pool of industry insiders. True security in insurance lies not in policies or profits alone, but in the trust earned by placing consumers at the heart of every decision.

Looking back, certain lobbies sought to keep FDI capped at 49%, benefiting from fixed internal rate of return (IRR) deals that many foreign “partners” had signed to access India. These arrangements effec-

tively meant foreign brands renting local support to gain legitimacy. When FDI range restrictions changed, many hoped for improvements in products and service. But ownership alone doesn’t address underlying issues. What the sector truly needs is patient capital, committed to at least 10-12 years of strategic investment. Instead, there’s a focus on rapidly building a profitable book and diluting stakes for higher valuations. This behaviour — enabled by a lenient regulatory stance — prioritises short-term gains over consumer interest and product quality.

While regulatory shifts have been taking place, they have often felt incre-

Regrettably, the insurance industry’s influence is akin to regulatory capture, often muting any true accountability

mis-selling of financial products across industry segments. Without regulatory accountability, the consumer is left vulnerable, with little recourse in a legal and grievance redress system known for inefficiency and delay.

Take health insurance, a prime example of the sector’s brokenness. It seems an open stakeholder conversation that hospital bills are often inflated, purportedly hand in glove with the sector, with insurers only partially covering costs, claiming fraud concerns. Yet the lack of regulatory

blanket approach creates a deeply hostile environment for policyholders. In general insurance claims as well, policyholders often express concerns about settlement times and the final amount. No amount of digital innovation or streamlined processing will fix this if the underlying attitude remains distrustful.

Insurance is unique as a sector where consumers rely on absolute trust, given that the benefits of policies are often realised only in difficult times — after a loss of life, health, or property. Unfortunately, a gap seems to exist in meeting this essential expectation. Despite the industry’s attempts to dazzle with buzzwords like “consumer engagement”, “distribution reach”, and “digital access”, these efforts ring hollow.

Financial regulators like the Reserve Bank of India, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India should work together to curb malpractices like

mis-selling of financial products across industry segments. Without regulatory accountability, the consumer is left vulnerable, with little recourse in a legal and grievance redress system known for inefficiency and delay.

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ply side, illegal immigration has, in fact, supported growth. But the experts who formulate the consensus economic opinion were never going to be able to communicate this to sceptical voters, and even more so because they belong to a club that has taken one credibility hit after another for the past 16 years.

It started with the failure to anticipate the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent Great Recession — which almost resulted in an even more devastating depression. Likewise, in 2021, the mainstream expert economic consensus insisted that the rise in the US inflation rate would be “transitory”, that is temporary and reversible. But this view was upended when inflation continued to rise, peaking above 9% in June the following year.

This saga also served as a reminder of an unusual fact: the head of the world’s most powerful central bank, the US Federal Reserve, is not an economist, but a lawyer. Would we have someone lacking in formal medical training put in charge of the National Institutes of Health?

All these threads are consistent with a broader theme that was apparent in this election. Not only has the “establishment”, including traditional media, taken a big hit, but the incumbent elites that have led this establishment are being seriously threatened by the rise of a counter-elite. As the historian Niall Ferguson put it, this election was also a victory for “the new generation of builders whose autistic-virile qualities [Elon] Musk exemplifies”.

There are many important messages in Trump’s decisive victory and the down-ballot results. Democrats and the economics profession would do well to heed them.

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# Insurance must regain consumer trust

Financial sectors in India have seen regulatory action against malpractices, but insurance appears insulated from such scrutiny. It calls for tougher regulatory stance

action on this speaks volumes. A simple yet radical change would be to mandate “full settlement” within a stipulated period, forcing insurers to pay out fully and promptly unless they can prove otherwise. This would shift the burden from consumer to insurer, creating a system where the regulatory position is to honour rather than deny claims.

Regrettably, the insurance industry’s influence is akin to regulatory capture, often muting any true accountability. While other financial sectors have seen regulatory action against malpractices, insurance appears insulated from such scrutiny. This calls for stricter supervision and a tougher regulatory stance.

The regulatory vision of “Insurance for All” by 2047 to match the political aspiration of Viksit Bharat is well-intentioned, yet setting a distant goal without clear, annual milestones is more tactic than true strategy. With most industry leaders and regulators unlikely to hold their positions by then, this approach lacks immediate accountability. The insurance sector needs an overhaul, not just superficial changes.

Indian insurance needs genuine introspection and a shift in behaviour, where consumer welfare becomes the core purpose of its existence. The regulator must reinvent itself to adopt a “consumer-first” and “digital-first” approach, to cut through the sector’s hubris and bring accountability. Without reform, the industry risks remaining in its own echo chamber, ignoring the very consumers it claims to serve. Only by stepping out of this cycle can Indian insurance achieve the credibility and relevance it so desperately needs.

have to do the heavy-lifting here. And to top it all, the first statement given by President-elect Donald Trump against clean energy is worrisome. So, clarity on climate accounting and equitable climate finance should be given to achieve something meaningful out of this meeting in the larger interest of the world. Developed nations must toe the line. —Bal Govind, Noida

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



## NEED TO SIMPLIFY TAX BRACKETS AND BROADEN THE NET

THE government has claimed that the tax burden on individuals earning less than ₹20 lakh a year—that is, the middle class—has reduced over the past decade, while that on the rich—those earning more than ₹50 lakh—has substantially increased. As per income tax data, the number of filers above ₹50 lakh increased five fold from 1.85 lakh in 2013-14 to 9.39 lakh in 2023-24, while their tax liability shot up 3.2 times from ₹2.52 lakh crore to ₹9.62 lakh crore. In other words, they contribute the lion's share of about 76 percent to the annual income tax kitty. On the other hand, the share of those earning less than ₹10 lakh reduced from 10.17 percent to 6.22 percent and, after adjusting for inflation, it translates to an almost 60 percent decline in tax liabilities over the decade.

If individuals earning above ₹2 lakh had to pay income tax a decade ago, thanks to exemptions and deductions, all those earning up to ₹7 lakh pay no income tax now. Their tax liability stood at an average of ₹43,000 in 2023-24, which officials say is the lowest among the emerging economies. Owing to simplified tax return forms and strong anti-evasion norms, the number of individual income tax returns saw a 121 percent jump in the past 10 years to 7.97 crore in 2023-24. Within this, individuals with taxable income of over ₹1 crore jumped five fold from 44,078 to 230,000, of which the salaried class accounts for about 52 percent.

While the increase in tax filers and collections is heartening, there is still a need to simplify the Income Tax Act and further broaden the tax net. The government's willingness to streamline the filing processes is visible, but it needs to step up and reduce the compliance burden and eliminate complexities of the filing process due to numerous exemptions, deductions and rebates. There is also a need to simplify the tax brackets and rates, and importantly, extend tax relief to the middle class, which will in turn help improve private consumption and domestic demand. Striking a balance between tax relief and revenue mobilisation is a continuous process. Given that substantive income tax reforms have remained elusive until now, the upcoming Union budget in 2025 would be a good place to start.

## T'GANA MUST WIN OVER PEOPLE TO ACQUIRE LAND

THE small village of Lagcherla in Vikarabad district of Telangana has sent state officials and politicians into a tizzy after a public hearing on land acquisition for a pharmaceutical cluster turned violent. Heated arguments and even minor scuffles are expected at such hearings, since the locals stand to lose land—and, as we know, the bond with land is emotional. However, what happened at Lagcherla was shocking as protestors pelted stones, smashed vehicles, manhandled a few officials and even sought to rough up the district collector. That this happened in Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's constituency Kodangal does not seem accidental.

The issue has taken a political turn with the police arresting 21 people including a former BRS MLA, Patnam Narender Reddy—formally named accused number 1—for instigating the people. Narender's confession, albeit retracted now, claiming BRS working president KT Rama Rao's hand behind the incident has added fuel to fire. We condemn the violence and suggest an impartial investigation to bring out the truth. Unfortunately, in this entire episode, the main issue of the people has been relegated to the background. When the Congress came to power last December, it scrapped the Pharma City project conceived by the previous BRS dispensation. Instead, the government proposed to develop 10 pharma clusters within reach of the Outer Ring Road, arguing it would reduce pollution, generate jobs and make it easier to monitor the units as each cluster would have a limited number of them. A sprawling city spread over 14,000 acres with a number of pharma units would be a challenge in terms of regulating pollution and ensuring compliance of norms. The government's idea is surely sensible.

In Dudyal mandal, it has proposed to acquire 1,350 acres in three villages including Lagcherla. But in view of the recent happenings, the government should exercise restraint and conduct a free and fair public hearing to solicit opinion and allay the locals' fears. It must keep in mind not only fair compensation as per the Land Acquisition Act, but also the recent Supreme Court verdict on private land or resources. The only way forward, as we see it, is to explain the necessities to the people and persuade them. The government must respect their wishes. Development in a democracy cannot ride roughshod over the people.

### QUICK TAKE

### LIFESTYLE SOLUTIONS FOR DIABETES

A new study published in the *Lancet* that claimed India has a quarter of the world's population of diabetic people should alarm us all. The report said that India had 212 million of the 828 million adults around the world afflicted with the condition in 2022. Keeping aside the quibble about the kind of test used to arrive at the numbers, we must note that even Indian studies show that a worrying 14 percent of Indian adults are diabetic. We need to focus on lifestyle changes that include more physical activity. Battling the condition with pharmaceuticals, as western nations have urged, is not a long-term solution for our country.

CENTRAL bankers are rarely out of the media. When not changing rates or announcing new infusions, they are jawboning markets and pontificating on economic conditions.

This prominence is recent. Building on the credibility of his predecessor Paul Volcker in controlling inflation, Alan Greenspan of the US Federal Reserve intervened after the October 1987 stock market crash despite little evidence of any threat to economic activity. The Bank of Japan interceded to deal with the aftermath of the 1990 collapse of the bubble economy.

The rulebook expanded after the 2001 dot com problems and the 2007/8 financial crisis. The staple was interest rates. When they approached zero, central banks innovated with negative rates and implemented quantitative easing (QE), purchasing securities, government bonds but later including mortgage-backed securities, corporate bonds and shares, using newly created reserves.

Central banks implemented yield curve control (YCC) to target specific rates. Policy-makers introduced financing arrangements to provide funds to banks to bolster liquidity and also on-lend to clients. Critics joked that central bankers would deploy these tools to even combat an alien invasion.

An analysis of these policies is unflattering. The effects on economic activity were inconclusive. Low rates and abundant money did not always convince households, some already heavily indebted, to take out new loans. Businesses proved reluctant to borrow to invest when demand was low.

Another objective was to create inflation to encourage spending to avoid higher future prices, reduce debt in real terms by decreasing purchasing power and, most importantly, avoid deflation where falling incomes and taxes would make debt servicing difficult. But labour market changes—particularly the shift away from permanent work and reduced wage bargaining power in part due to reduced unionisation, and industrial over-capacity—especially in China, kept prices in check. Inflation remained stubbornly low until the supply shock of the pandemic and military conflicts. The use of low rates to devalue the currency to increase export competitiveness flourished because every country followed similar strategies.

The policies were more successful in reducing the risk of corporate bankruptcy by lowering debt servicing costs. It helped banks recapitalise by using cheap funding to invest in higher yielding government bonds to increase earnings. It helped governments raise money by borrowing de facto from its central bank to finance spending.

The real effect was on asset markets. As

History will not be kind to central bankers fixated only on the financial economy. It will also be critical of govts passing the hard decisions to such unelected technocrats

## THE LEGACY OF MONETARY MANDARINS

SATYAJIT DAS

Former banker and author



SOURAV ROY

values reflect future cash flows discounted back to the present, an upward shift in prices was natural. Near zero rates meant the adjustment was exaggerated.

Low rates drove a search for higher returns, causing investors to overpay for long duration bonds, high and low quality corporate debt, equities and real estate. It enticed investment in illiquid assets like infrastructure, private debt and equity, and venture or start-up capital. It encouraged increasing leverage to enhance available returns.

Intervention by the authorities and their underwriting of risk-taking suppressed volatility. This encouraged investors to sell options to enhance their returns through the premiums received. Asset managers employed investment strategies, often camouflaged under innocent names such as

'risk parity'. There were pernicious feedback loops with falling returns leading to more risk taking compressing yields and margins boosting prices further.

These developments have significant costs. First, the policies encouraged rapid growth in private and public debt. It facilitated fiscal indiscipline of governments who ran large budget deficits. An economic model of consumption and investment using borrowed funds became entrenched.

Second, capital was mis-allocated. Easy money allowed the survival of 'zombie' enterprises—indebted businesses that generated sufficient cash to cover costs and loan interest but not sufficient to invest in operations or repay the debt itself.

Third, asset prices became detached from intrinsic values, creating the constant spec-

## THE TEEMING UNDERBELLY SUPPORTING A GLITZY TOP

MADHAVAN NARAYANAN

Senior journalist

### REVERSE SWING

him, coming under the eye of unscrupulous politicians and local goons... still, he perseveres for his dreams."

A year before the movie's release and long before the current project, I had my own brush with the idea of a makeover of Dharavi when I met the then chairman of



WIN MEDIA COMINGS

Asia's biggest slum Dharavi is as populous as Austin, Texas. Over the years, it has formed the backdrop of films such as Mani Ratnam's *Nayakan* and Sudhir Mishra's eponymous *Dharavi*. They portray the gritty souls of the area who have played a key role in making Mumbai what it is

the National Housing Bank (NHB), Manohar Pherwani, for a casual afternoon chat in Delhi. The man had fallen into some disrepute for his alleged mistakes as the chairman of Unit Trust of India and had been transferred to the NHB; but he was his feisty self' before his premature death during the *Scam 1992* months that followed. The scam involved stock market manipulation by disgraced broker Harshad Mehta, with whom NHB had a link.

Pherwani discussed Dharavi with me, and when my publication ran it as front-page news, he not amused—he clarified that his talk about rehabilitating slum dwellers while developing a corner of the area for high-rise commercial develop-

ment was only "loud thinking".

Dharavi was and is a touchy subject. Can one really reverse-swing it to some glory? I do not know much about the government's joint venture, but can say for sure that such projects involve high risks—economic, political and social. That is precisely why any attempt to explain its redevelopment in simple terms is met with cynicism. Another party plans to build an international finance centre in the area. I wonder what shape that will take, but know that the area is more than a highrise or two.

Dharavi alone is as populous as Solapur in Maharashtra or Austin in Texas, US. It must also be remembered that Dharavi is estimated to process 60 percent of Mumbai's plastic waste—it houses an underbelly that supports the city's swanky, not-so-sustainable lifestyles.

Like the protagonist in the eponymous movie, the typical Dharavi slum-dweller is a struggling soul chasing dreams that are not easy to realise. A few wads of cash and even a roof promised over his head are not substitutes for a livelihood that would give him a sense of long-term security and growth.

Is it this angst that leads slum-dwellers to make heroes out of dons? Tall talk and tall buildings are beyond their everyday understanding of life. Come election time, they often like those who oppose changes because they give out a promise that their life would not get worse even if it does not get better.

Maybe this project can beat that jinx. A little south along Mumbai's suburban railway tracks, we have seen closed textile mills of Lower Parel spring back as high-technology office parks. That holds out hopes as a precedent. But Dharavi is no private compound. It is a sprawling swathe of shanties, streets and spaces that offer succour to struggling souls. For any meaningful redevelopment, its denizens must be treated like hard-working shareholders.

(Views are personal)  
(On X @madversity)

tre of financial instability. Rising prices for financial assets favoured high income, wealthy cohorts exacerbating inequality.

Fourth, it fundamentally altered financial markets. Abundant cash, low rates and YCC artificially reduced risk. The US Federal Reserve, the Bank of Japan, the Bank of England and the European Central Bank hold around 16, 53, 27, and 30 percent of outstanding government debt. The Bank of Japan holds around 7 percent of the stock market. The Swiss National Bank has a share portfolio (consisting mainly of US stocks) of around \$200 billion (around 20 percent of GDP). This overhang and potential central bank activity distorts prices and liquidity.

Fifth, speculation and risk taking is now underwritten by the 'Greenspan Put'. Investors assume in case of problems, central banks will step in to ensure survival of banks and institutions deemed 'too big to fail'.

Sixth, the ability to normalise policy settings—increasing rates or selling asset holdings—is restricted. Higher interest costs would increase the risk of financial distress for the growing numbers of over-indebted borrowers. Governments with high debt levels face larger financing expenses and must raise taxes or cut spending elsewhere. This combined with falling collateral values threatens lenders. The current pressure on central banks to cut rates reflects, in part, these pressures.

Finally, the policies generated toxic interest rate exposures that damaged balance sheets. QE created an asset liability mismatch as central banks purchased longer maturity securities with modest fixed rate coupons, funding them with reserves paying short-term rates. When rates rose in 2021 to counter inflationary pressures, the value of these bonds fell sharply. Central banks now have large unrealised losses that would be crystallised on sale. Their income is affected by the higher interest paid on reserves, below the earnings on the bonds.

Major central banks are now nursing large market-to-market losses and some have negative shareholder's funds—not ideal for the guarantor of the financial system. The mismatch affected commercial banks, who used the liquidity provided by central banks similarly, investing in long-dated assets to boost income. This was behind the problems of US regional banks in 2023.

History will not be kind to central bankers fixated on financial economy and who created serial speculative booms to sustain the illusion of prosperity. It will also be critical of governments unwilling to address weaknesses, who deflected shifting hard policymaking to independent, unelected and largely unaccountable central banks.

(Views are personal)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Tackling infiltration

Ref: Govt must use census to start resolving infiltration issues (Nov 15). The integration of information from the census with advancements in technology significantly improves the ability to tackle infiltration challenges. This also equips urban planners and engineers with the tools to develop innovative and sustainable solutions, leading to a substantial decrease in infiltration issues.  
**NR Jagannath, Bengaluru**

#### Farical elections

Ref: How to place the citizen back in democracy (Nov 15). Factors like money, power, illiteracy, and castism disturb the functioning of a democracy. Elections have become a mere farce, with people being attracted and guided not by principles, programmes and quality of candidates but by cheap slogans and freebies.  
**RPichumani, Kumbakonam**

#### Dravidian politics

Ref: Shrinking landing space for film stars in politics (Nov 15). The days of a film superstar sustaining and succeeding in the political field, especially in Tamil Nadu, are over. Actor-politicians like Kamal Haasan, who tested the political waters of TN by launching his party six years ago, do not have any significant political relevance in the state till date. It seems politics in Tamil Nadu will continue to revolve around the two Dravidian parties for now.  
**RSivakumar, Chennai**

#### Fandom unhelpful?

The author has stated that if Tamil actor Vijay contests with his party as a part of a strong alliance, he could have a political future. I don't agree with him. In the 70s, veteran actor Shivaji Ganesan campaigned vigorously for the Congress in the assembly election. But it managed to win seats only in two districts.  
**GPurushothaman, Tirunelveli**

#### Volatile Manipur

Ref: AFSPA back in 6 areas of Manipur (Nov 15). As the news rightly points out, the situation in Manipur is still volatile and the Centre needs to do more. Thousands of people are still living like refugees in their own state.  
**Amarthiya K, Dharmapuri**

#### Entrepreneurial governance

The appointment of Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to lead the newly-formed US Department of Government Efficiency is an ambitious step toward reducing bureaucracy and cutting waste. While their expertise in business and innovation is undeniable, applying an "entrepreneurial approach" to the government raises concerns.  
**Sayooj Sunil Kumar, Kozhikode**

### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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Resident Editor (Telangana) : T Kalyan Chakravarthy\* Printed and Published by R K Jhunjunwala on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd., at H.No.6-3/1113/1, B.S.Makta Lane, Somajiguda, Near Grand Kakatiya Hotel, Punjagutta, Hyderabad - 500 016 and printed by him at Sakshi Press, Plot No.D-75 & E-52, Industrial Estate (APIE), Balanagar, Medchal-Malkajgiri District, Telangana. Hyderabad: Vol. 48, No. 273 RNI Reg. No. 32179/77. Phone: 040-23413908. \* Responsible for selection of News under the PRB Act. Copyright: Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd., All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.



# Branded as Tasteful, We Can Serve It Up

Bind artisanal food to place, process, people

Are we doing enough to protect our rich array of artisanal cuisine against the globalisation of palates? India has a cornucopia of recipes in need of brand protection. Examples abound in all corners of the country, from dosa to dahi vada. The trick is to fence them by geography and process, say, the Amritsari kulcha being made from atta of a particular district using a standardised process and prepared by designated local cooks. The benefits are obvious and flow all the way from the thali to the kheth. Each point on the value chain gains pricing power that makes the ecosystem more sustainable and preserves the culinary tradition.

Essentially, this would involve providing some legal standing to artisanal cuisine and then building administrative fences to bind it to a place, process and people. Collectives of artisans can set out metrics for sourcing, processing and training. These will not be as rigid as patented products and processes that help large food companies expand their footprint. Yet, if these are upheld rigorously, they can help to keep traditional food on modern plates. Accompanying marketing initiatives will be needed to keep food in the public eye. Events surrounding local food have second-order effects on tourism. This was the traditional approach to gastronomic pluralism that now needs a modern avatar.

Guilds pooling available traditions are a stronger defensive force than family establishments for handed-down recipes. This type of structure permits easier entry and exit, which is important as economic opportunity expands for succeeding generations. Drawing in fresh talent is key to upholding quality. The bigger gain is through expanding the micro-economy around artisanal food by incorporating modern business practices. Countries such as Japan and France have been fairly successful in preserving their gastronomic traditions through this approach. Indian policymakers would do well to adapt some of their experience for domestic use. Bon appétit!

# India, a War Zone for Foreign Travellers

Abysmal air quality has to be the worst advertisement for India as a travel destination. No amount of government PR can stop foreign travellers from seeing our country as a 'war zone' that is best avoided, at least until the smog of war clears. This week, severe air pollution across northern India pulled off a Houdini act, making the Taj Mahal in Agra 'vanish'. But focusing on Agra or Delhi misses the point. As does the disaster management line that pollution has affected only parts of 'our wonderful country', so visitors have plenty of other places within India to go to. Most Indians seem to be blasé about their own well-being. But outsiders are not. Reputational damage is serious.

The Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP) is among India's most polluted regions, and air quality across northern India has worsened this past week. Flight disruptions were inevitable. Yet, administrative inaction remains a constant challenge, as does an apathetic citizenry. While stubble-burning as winter approaches gets the lion-share of the blame, pollution is not a seasonal menace but a year-round crisis for IGP, fuelled by polluting factories, an increasing number of vehicles and weak enforcement of green laws. Cooler temperatures and slow-moving winds worsen the situation by trapping deadly pollutants each winter.

Last month, after years of dithering, GoI finally set up a panel to develop an airshed approach, a much-needed step to address this scourge. But will it deliver results, or merely shuffle papers? If the Taj's disappearing into a smoggy abyss isn't a wake-up call, what is? The stakes — health, economy and India's global standing — demand action, not more bureaucratic tiptoeing. Those hopeful of visiting India can only hope this happens sooner than later.

**JUST IN JEST**  
Is there method in the madcapness of hiring a grade-A anti-vax activist?

# Trump's Health Head Is Bob's Your Uncle

So, Don-bhai has hired Bobby Kennedy Jr as the incoming secretary of health. Even Trumpites are secretly scratching their J D Vance-style beards trying to make sense of bringing in an anti-Covid vaccine advocate as America's health honcho, while Trump himself had praised the vaccine during his first presidency as 'one of the greatest achievements of mankind'. So, is this counterintuitive hire the secret sauce to Trump's corpo-political genius? Kennedy's résumé certainly screams, 'Ambulances are for cowards!' And yet.... So, is there any method in this madcapness? Hiring the 'worst' candidate, Trump may reckon, will bring expectations down so low that even ho-hum policy action will come across as fab. Unburdened by 'traditional wisdom', Trump's outliers — including incoming director of national intelligence 'Tulsi' 'Putin is swell' Gabbard — may innovate in ways that may seem ludicrous but could lead to, well, if not revolutionary breakthroughs, then at least keeping the polarisation pot boiling.

A more reasonable explanation could be arch conspiracy theorist and anti-vaccine advocacy group Children's Health Defense founder RFK possessing some information or value that has forced Trump's hand. In lieu of Bobby the environmental lawyer 'staying away from the oil', this chair may well be a 'you don't scratch my eyes out, and I'll scratch your back' deal.

Indian companies must up their game for tech-abled next-gen momentum diversification

# Millennial Dil Maange More



Shivaji Dasgupta

Recently, Swiggy piloted a services marketplace, Yello, for astrologers, therapists, etc, as well as Rare, a premium ticketing service for events and restaurants. While patently unrelated to Swiggy's core ensemble, the new entities are systematically attracting existing customers with newer offerings. Such next-gen business growth strategies, joysticked by scalable technology, can be classified as 'momentum diversification' (MD).

Historically, brand diversifications were based on existing competencies, 'line' or 'imagery' driven. Line extensions are amply defined by the never-ending variety of aerated drinks in Coca-Cola's and PepsiCo's portfolios, not to mention the innumerable iPhone iterations. Imagery extensions originate from category-agnostic customer associations, such as couturier Giorgio Armani launching perfumes, or Porsche designing mobile phones. Line-ups scarcely conceal legacy connectivity, whether competency-based or appeal-driven, and are invariably subject

**Jugaad, poster boy of a gagged-and-bound era, is being exiled by millennials and post-millennials who demand genuine value creation**



to the scathing scrutiny of the boardroom and armchair marketers.

MD is the outcome of a booming alliance of personal technology and customer-centricity. An established trust-cum-convenience equation with a substantial consuming class can be the foundation for unlimited opportunities, undeterred by draconian filters of brand suitability. Here, trust is the consistent delivery of measurable value, and convenience, a smooth process that facilitates access and choice.

The JAM perfectly plays the role of an indulgent accomplice. Brought to life by the omnipotent smartphone, it bridges the gap between a value proposition — whether product or service — and a highly-informed buyer base, who are primarily influenced by peer-to-peer networks and personal experiences for any kind of purchase decision.

Over the decades, corporate credentials, romantic narratives and historical evidence have become less important, thereby offering a level playing field for every aspirant. For instance, out of nowhere, Chinese EV-maker BYD plans to tap 90% of India's EV market to consolidate its leadership in the ₹30 lakh-plus segment.

According to the 2024 Bain & Company-Swiggy report 'How India Eats', the addressable customer base for the Indian food services market is expected to expand by 110 mn, growing from the current 320-340 mn to 430-450 mn by 2030. Going by Uber data, the ride-hailing service has over 100 mn users in India across 125 centres, with 75% of customers re-evaluating their need to buy a personal vehicle.

Statista confirms that Amazon had over 295 mn monthly visitors in March 2024, while Amazon Shopping state that the Great Indian Shopping Festival last month recorded 1.4 bn customer visits, with 85% from non-metro centres. According to Urban Company, the services provider brand enjoyed 5.8 mn annual transacting users as of April 2024, with about 77% of its business from repeat customers.

Every case above, and countless others, thrive on the non-stop and reasonably loyal buying prowess of a prolific customer base across tiers. If one we-

everywhere, and probably capable of doing absolutely everything, more effectively and seamlessly, courtesy tech-instigated logistics.

Public-private handshakes can well become yet another frontier of MD — income-tax and GST returns being delivered, online or offline, via Amazon or Uber; Ayushman Bharat medical claims processed by Urban Company, etc. Tata CLIQ, feeding wannabe-luxury desires, can lend its ecosystem to golden passports in Portugal and Dubai. ITC's consumer portal, with its solid hybrid origins, can be a compelling ally to implement state-run public welfare programmes from ORS and family planning to disaster management.

MD demands India-specific inno-

**Imagery extensions originate from category-agnostic customer associations, such as couturier Giorgio Armani launching perfumes, or Porsche designing mobile phones**

May a hundred apple stores bloom

re to simply apply the principles of MD, the possibilities can be truly spectacular. Trust and convenience, propelled by easy technology, can help bridge many more experiences and users — as long as the delivery ecosystem is charmingly democratic. This is the true power of this unprecedented momentum, detached from the old-world logical-emotional sequential baggage.

Swiggy can expand its portfolio with ticketing facilities for airlines and trains, legal services (notary service, etc), physicians, home tutors, nurses, caterers, decorators and much more. Uber can jolly well expand to ambulances, hearses, carriage tempos, etc. Urban Company may consider a Vande Bharat Express tie-up where salon services are provided in designated coaches via travelling beauticians. Higher-end gig economy recruitment can also be a possibility, whether for a graphics designer or software programmer. Amazon is already almost

vation. Jugaad, the poster boy of a gagged-and-bound era, is being gradually exiled by millennials and post-millennials who demand genuine value creation. In the form of identifiable authenticity, customers are valuing personalised engagement and non-negotiable convenience.

According to a 2019 IIM Calcutta report, the 400 mn-strong Indian millennial segment in the 18-36 yrs (median age 29-32 yrs) age group has a collective spending power of \$330 bn. Goldman Sachs projects that car ownership would be almost dead 25 years from now, with digital natives driving tech-based purchases of the future. The rampaging influence of AI will be intuitive turbine fuel for this transformation.

The desirable future is residing snugly in the provocative present. MD is a winning formula for every stakeholder in India. Where everybody can, must and needs to win.

The writer is an autonomous brand consultant

# Doing More With Less Matters



Amitabh Kant

India's commitment to doubling energy efficiency is the central pillar of its plan to achieve Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, which aims for a 45% reduction in carbon intensity and a 1 bn t reduction in GHG emissions by 2030. Hitting these targets is indispensable to its long-term goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2070.

Bottlenecks that hinder adoption of energy-efficient technologies — finance, sustainable supply chains and policies — must be identified and addressed. For emerging markets, energy demand is essential for development. The developing world must look to sustainable progress through improved energy efficiency, integration of RE, and adoption of innovative technologies that promote cleaner and more efficient energy systems. To do this, financing, supportive policy frameworks and continued international collaboration are required to ensure access to necessary resources, supply chains and expertise.

One such critical area for collaboration is sharing best practices among

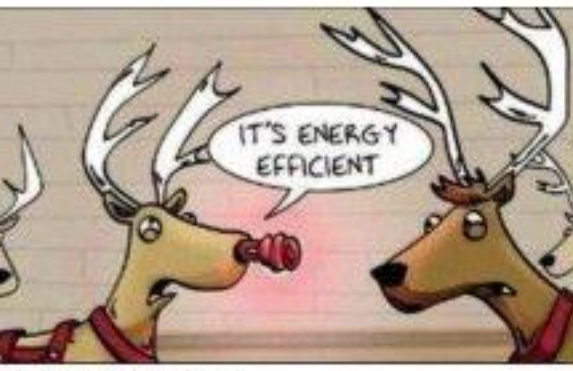
developing countries like Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia. These nations often face similar challenges in enhancing energy efficiency. Working together can lead to significant advancements. For example, India can champion initiatives that facilitate access to investments and technologies, particularly for manufacturing countries.

Also, establishing systems that uphold stringent energy performance standards can protect countries from low-quality and inefficient imports. This is particularly vital as adverse effects of environmental dumping — flooding markets with low-quality products at lower prices — could undermine local businesses and public health.

► **Build smarter** For developing economies, the infra sector — particularly buildings — presents a significant opportunity for energy-efficiency improvements, particularly with soaring demand for cooling systems. Implementing Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) for appliances can deliver substantial reductions in energy use. For instance, mandating that all new lighting is LED by 2030 and that all AC units sold by 2035 are best-in-class can lead to a projected 25% drop in energy consumption.

Also, establishment of robust building energy codes can ensure that buildings are designed not only to reduce energy consumption but also to utilise materials in ways that minimise waste and environmental impact.

► **Green cooking tech** Policy mea-



Rudolph is right

sures that prioritise universal access to sustainable cooking technologies by 2030, particularly in regions that continue to rely heavily on fossil fuels, must be implemented. Access to clean cooking solutions can significantly reduce indoor air pollution, improve public health — particularly women's — and decrease reliance on unsustainable energy sources.

► **Sustainable business** Industrial sector is another primary consumer of energy, accounting for 43% of India's energy consumption. Opportunities for energy efficiency are abundant, particularly within energy-intensive industries and MSMEs. Governments should create conducive conditions for adoption of advanced, energy-efficient technologies, such as high-efficiency motors and heat pumps. These technologies can also lower operational costs, making them both lucrative and energy-saving.

► **Clean transport sector** This sector is responsible for over 80% of global energy demand and needs urgent attention. Establishing comprehensi-

ve fuel-efficiency standards is a necessary step toward improving efficiency of public and commercial transport fleets. Sharing India's successful mass deployment of electric buses could inspire similar projects in other countries, potentially changing the future of urban mobility.

► **Sustainable finance** Investment is the lifeblood of any initiative aiming for significant change. To triple the investment in energy efficiency — from \$300 bn to \$840 bn annually by 2030 — an innovative financing framework is needed. Strategies like creating blended finance vehicles, and designing the right financial instruments for private investors, can unlock substantial funds needed for energy efficiency projects.

► **Tax, subsidies, PPPs** These are essential components of the broader policy framework that supports energy-efficiency initiatives. With the right policies, investments and collaborative frameworks in place, countries can unlock a multitude of opportunities that energy efficiency provides.

For India, leading this charge on the global stage strengthens its position as a climate leader, while amplifying collective efforts towards sustainable development. The resolve to embrace energy efficiency can drive transformative change, offering a pragmatic solution to the pressing challenges of our time.

The writer is G20 sherpa, GoI

# Guard Rails for Capitalism, Not AI



Jaspreet Bindra

Something that happened on Nov 17, 2023, could well shape the future of AI. That day, Sam Altman was fired by OpenAI's board. While he did make a triumphant comeback four days later, that moment decided how AI would be shaped. And, in turn, how it would shape the world.

Before Altman's brief exit, there were two competing visions of AI. One, where it was a tool like electricity, drastically improving productivity and bringing even more prosperity for humanity. The other was of a new kind of super-intelligence, which, if harnessed with maturity, could usher in a new era of world peace, universal income and societal good. OpenAI was set up to achieve the latter. After the Altman 'blip', it took a sharp turn towards the former.

Parmy Olson, in her 2024 book, 'Supremacy: AI, ChatGPT and the Race That Will Change the World', describes how the founders of AI superpowers — DeepMind, OpenAI and Anthropic — started with lofty ideals and independent labs, but sold out to Big Tech. As Kevin Roose wrote in a 2023

NYT article, 'AI Belongs to the Capitalists Now': 'A technology potentially capable of ushering in a Fourth Industrial Revolution was unlikely to be governed over the long term by those who wanted to slow it down — not when so much money was at stake.'

Eventually, corporate and shareholder interests won over future worries and public good.

The ills of AI are well-known, with dark concerns around privacy, surveillance and deepfakes, its bias against minorities and women, environmental damage it can cause, and the fear of a malevolent super-intelligence. This explains the hyperactivity to build guard rails and contain AI before it disrupts our jobs, society and, perhaps, civilisation itself.

But is AI the real problem here? As Nathan J Robinson posits in a 2023 article in Jacobin, 'The problem is

that new generative AI is being introduced into a capitalist society that is ill-equipped to handle it.'

By all conventional measures, capitalism has been a resounding success. But while overall wealth increased, inequality of its distribution increased even further, leading to the richest 1% owning nearly half the wealth, and the bottom 50% owning just 2%.

There are many reasons for this. A famous one highlighted by Thomas Piketty found that the rate of return on investment frequently outstrips the overall growth. This discrepancy, with compounding, means that the wealth held by owners of capital will increase far more rapidly than other kinds of earnings (wages, for example). Similarly, tech superiority and the wealth it generates have been concentrated in fewer and fewer companies and individuals.

This will get even more pronounced with AI, which requires more money to build than any tech before it — hundreds of billions on Nvidia GPUs to power compute, internet-scale data available only with Google, Meta and the like, and expensive talent to build the models that run AI. Only the moneyed have the money needed to build AI. Companies like IBM, BuzzFeed and Klarna are shedding employees and replacing them with AI, with the stock market rewarding them handsomely for this move.

The astonishing progress in tech has not necessarily created a more equal

world. Computers have driven up productivity, the internet has democratised information, and now AI promises to make intelligence abundant. But prices of land, education and healthcare have risen faster than inflation. Standards of living may have gone up, but the quality of living has decreased.

The problem is not with the technologies but with the economic system. As SF writer Ted Chiang wrote in a 2023 New Yorker article, 'Will AI Become the New McKinsey?'. 'The only way that technology can boost the standard of living is if there are economic policies in place to distribute the benefits of technology appropriately.'

Capitalism developed as a reaction to feudalism, mercantilism and colonialism in Europe in the 16th century. Now, ironically, a new kind of capitalism is being created. It's not tech creating this embarrassment of wealth. It's the economic system that houses it. It's not generative AI that is built to harm humanity. It's the economic incentive that encourages them to deviate from the goals for which they were created.

Guard rails around AI were built at the creation stage itself. It is shareholder pressure that forced us to lower them. We do not need guard rails for AI. We need them around capitalism itself.

The writer is founder-MD, The Tech Whisperer



THE SPEAKING TREE

## Know Yourself

SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

We need a lifetime to discover ourselves; to unravel mysteries of our minds, to understand our vulnerabilities, impulses, reactions, attitudes, dark urges and divine intimations. The ancient aphorism carved on the lintel of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, 'Gnothi Seauton' — 'know thyself', is an endless endeavour full of riches, for he who knows himself knows all.

We are shaped by various experiences, and in moments of heightened introspection, we begin to understand our reactions to stimuli in our lives. We understand the sum of ourselves.

The birdsong and the regeneration of leaves are a testament to the overwhelming beauty of life and our response to it. Tragedies we endure are pointers to the resilience of the human mind, whose purity is enhanced by suffering — while joyful events warn us that life is transient.

We are also plagued by existential questions of right and wrong that often lead to regret. Did we listen to our conscience and do the right thing? Did we forgive others' transgressions, or are they still in our memory? Did we put our best foot forward in performing our duties? Did we accept consequences of our choices, taking responsibility — including moral responsibility — without looking for scapegoats?

At the end of it all, through self-reflection on an 'examined life', we understand ourselves in some measure and become better, which enables us to look towards a happier future.

## ROLLING ON SATURDAY

### Watch That Space

SpaceX was preparing for a manned moon mission. Some of the astronaut training took place on a Navajo reservation. One day, a Navajo elder and his son came across the space crew. The old man, who spoke only Navajo, asked a question that his son translated: 'What are these guys in the big suits doing?'

A crew member said they were practising for their lunar trip. The old man got all excited and asked if he could



send a message to the moon. Recognising a promotional opportunity, the SpaceX folks recorded the man's message on a phone recorder and then asked his son to translate it. He refused.

The PR people brought the recording to the reservation, where the rest of the tribe listened and laughed, but refused to translate the message.

Finally, SpaceX called in an official government translator. His translation of the old man's message was: 'Watch out for these guys; they have come to steal your land.'

**Nut Case**  
My friend thinks he's smart. He told me an onion is the only food that makes you cry. So, I threw a coconut at his face.


## Chat Room

### Biz Comes Home To White House

Apropos the Edit, 'Trump Inc. Musk CEO, Ramaswamy MD' (Nov 14), Trump Inc represents a unique intersection of business and politics, especially with figures like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy at the forefront. Musk, as CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, has revolutionised industries through innovation, while Ramaswamy, founder of Roivant Sciences, emphasises the importance of biotech and health. Their influence showcases a trend where corporate leaders are increasingly involved in political dialogues, aiming to reshape governance and public policy. As they navigate this landscape, their actions could significantly impact the relationship between business interests and political ambitions in the US.

PURVA PANDYA  
Ujjain





CONTRAPUNTO

Socialists invent class, nationalists invent the nation, and so the populists invent ‘the people’

- CAS MUDDÉ

# Don’s Darlings

## Voters want a shake-up, so long as he delivers

The lib commentariat, all shook by the breadth of the Trump win, didn’t even get a chance to catch its breath, before his selections for key govt positions started coming in fast and furious, and had them gasping all over again. Some of these picks have a comfortable conventionality, such as Marco Rubio for Secretary of State. Many do not.

Tulsi Gabbard, his pick for Director of National Intelligence, says that resistance from “the swamp in Washington” is to be expected. How long the Trump govt will stay on the right side of this anti-establishment tilt will of course depend on how his eventual crew delivers on his promises. It will have to square several odd pledges too, such as raising tariffs and reducing inflation. But first, it can enjoy a honeymoon period, basking in phrases like America First and Dream Team, before these are put to the test. Afterwards, much will come down to whether they can keep an Arjun-like focus on reform targets. Don’t get derailed into waging war against the critics. Many a popular mandate is done in by vindictive neuroses.

Meanwhile, the calling out of his candidates’ qualifications loses half the crowd when it’s prefaced by declaring Trump himself as unqualified for the job. He has won both the Electoral College and a popular vote convincingly drawn from across all the demographic categories. Insofar as his post-2020 candidacy has been even more disruptive than in 2016, the mandate he has got is for an even more Trumpian govt. He did pick more establishment candidates then, and how that played out would be influencing his decisions now, making ‘loyalty’ climb much higher on the CV meter.

# BahuBullies

## In India, daughters-in-law don’t have rights, just ‘duties’

Stopping a wife/daughter-in-law from visiting temples, watching TV, or forcing her to sleep on the ground aren’t, legally, ‘cruelty’, held Bombay HC’s Aurangabad bench in a dowry, abetment to suicide case, acquitting the dead woman’s marital family. Judges have the latitude to read the law basis own values – and they’re plucked from the very society they serve, so such a reading is unsurprising. For, the real cruelty is such attitudes to daughters-in-law remain routine.

Beti-beti welfarism of several decades ensured much progress in how far the ‘daughter’ has come. But it remains a scary road to ‘daughter-in-law’ status. Will the marital home be a safe space? Or hell? In the marital home, her “duties” are sharply defined, but her basic rights ambiguous – if anything, a source of conflict. Her well-being is at the mercy of in-laws’ expectations. Suffice to note studies show the number of grandkids is decided on grandma’s preference, where bahu is less educated than mom-in-law.

Popular culture without pause reiterates the daughter-in-law code of conduct: ‘obedience’ numero uno. Society celebrates ‘bahus’ juggling multiple roles till the last breath, but hey, not a choo of complaint – it is but her ‘dharma’ to serve us so. PM-EAC policy briefs on caregiving note “women are coming under extraordinary pressure due to...disproportionate burden of care...on their shoulders...”, touching all the right chords: invisible work, falling PLPS, etc. But policy works in silos. Survival of the family as society desires it rests 100% on controls over the daughter-in-law. Is it killing her? Of course it is. But apparently, that’s alright – even for HC judges.

# Losing Our Senses & Serendipity

## Technology is dooming us to virtual unreality

Today, the line between the online and offline worlds is blurred, as phones and algorithms mediate more of our daily activities. Most of what passes for authentic experience is vicarious and virtual. *The Extinction of Experience: Being Human in a Disembodied World* by the philosopher *Christine Rosen* reminds us of the value of the physical reality we share.

It wasn’t always this way. Direct experience is our first teacher. A fighter’s scar, stretch marks from pregnancy, metaphors about a broken heart, or a nosy neighbour; these remind us that we experience things with our bodies. Face-to-face interaction is how we learn patience, and a sense of public space. It helps us conceptualise a shared reality.

But now, online communities tell us how the ‘real world’ works. Consensus reality seems insubstantial, as more of us mistrust our actual experience and live in these mental cocoons. Increasingly, young people prefer virtual interactions. To minimise awkward human contact, airports rely on kiosks to check-in and salespersons are replaced by iPads.

We’re meant to look at each other. Our intuition rests on the ability to read faces, physical signals, postures, micro-expressions. Encountering each other on screens, through texts and posts, deprives us of that ability. Children’s first experience of play, music, words, might now come from screens. Teachers struggle to hold their attention in real classrooms. Reading emotion and intent needs extended in-person contact, a capacity that children and teens are increasingly missing out on as physical playtime shrinks.

‘Veja du’ is what some technologists call this illusory reality: the sense of having done something virtually without having experienced it in real life. We consider ourselves familiar

with famous destinations through VR, or imagine what we’ll look like when we age, or even simulate romantic relationships with fictional characters.

This means losing out on embodied cognition. We think with our bodies, by making things physically. Note-taking on a laptop means shallow processing. Architects who draft by hand know the connections between mind and body that they are trading off for the efficiency of computation.

We now perform our emotions, with memes, gifs and emojis. One study found that college kids score 40% lower on empathy than those from 30 years ago, and this decline coincides with smartphone adoption.

Tech is also racing to supply what we miss in terms of bodily cues. Sensors and gadgets to measure breathing, heart rates, autonomic nervous signals already exist, but could soon be a standard smartphone capability. Persuasive tech, armed with huge amounts of precise data, could manipulate us and subvert our intentions.

Even the mediated pleasures of online living – the capacity to experience travel, sex, food, art, music – are overstimulating, the book says. “Artificially strong explosions of strong synthetic experience” habituate us, weaken our ability to notice the less intense moments of real life, which are more like “fleeing whispers of pleasure”. As public places in cities – pavements, parks, cafes – became spaces where we are half in and half out, absorbed in our phones, we are robbed of serendipity and civic bonds.

While such panics have accompanied all new technologies from telegraph to television, the book warns that the digital takeover has had sudden and sweeping effects, and that it is important to recognise what we lose with every convenience we gain.

# No Magic In Musk-aswamy?

## Will Elon & Vivek be able to tame the beast that’s US govt? Think back to Trump I.O. Jared Kushner had brought in Jeff Bezos & Tim Cook to lead Office of American Innovation. That idea was dead on arrival

Dan Cassino



Columnist based in New Jersey

Republicans are hopeful that Trump will now be able to fundamentally reshape American govt in a way that largely eluded him during his first term. This belief follows from Trump this time being unbound by a need to run for re-election, or by insider appointees who thwarted some of his more extreme ideas last time.

A flurry of appointment picks by the President-elect includes far-right Matt Gaetz as Attorney General and former Democrat Tulsi Gabbard as Director of National Intelligence. The one announcement Maga Republicans are really excited by is that Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy will be leading a Department of Government Efficiency. But despite Trumpers’ confidence, he isn’t likely to have an easy time carrying out his ambitious agenda.

While there is a great deal that a US President can do on his own – action on immigration, tariffs, or foreign policy – most changes to domestic policy, like those expected from DOGE, require that he go through Congress. And while Trump will come into office with majorities in both House and Senate, and likely has two years before Democrats take control of one or both chambers, this doesn’t ensure that passing bills will be easier.

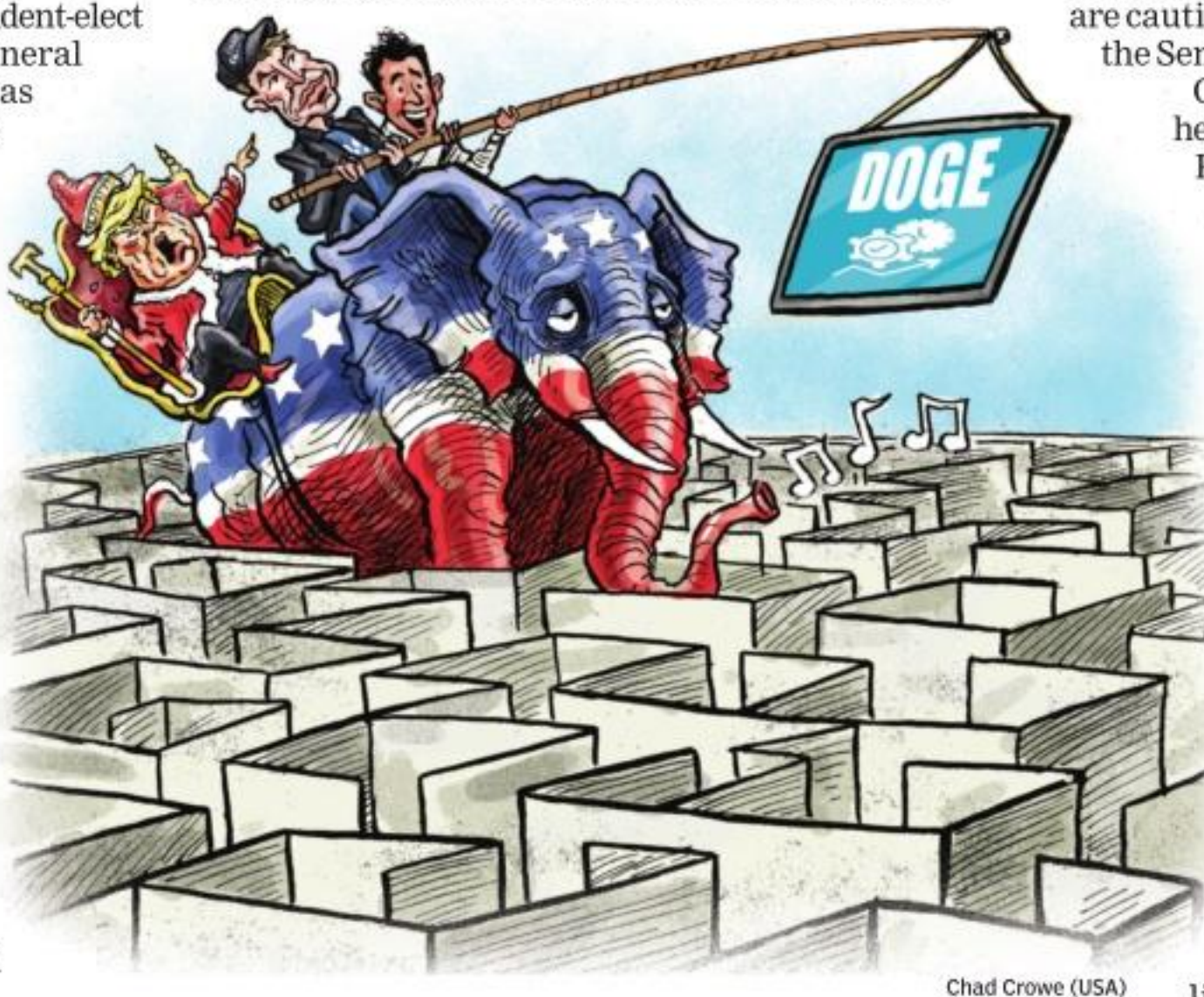
US President’s ability to shape Congress to his demands is largely driven by his popularity, and Trump is going to come into office with the same kind of low approval numbers that characterised his first term.

When Eisenhower was President in the 1950s, he was enormously popular – more popular in the districts of many members of Congress than those members of Congress themselves were – and he was able to use that popularity to trample over the opposition to his agenda.

Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, was so unpopular by the end of his term that his legislative proposals were routinely ignored by Congress. Unable to get anything done in Congress, he was reduced to filling out the tennis schedules for the White House courts. Trump can threaten members of Congress, but low popularity means they can also choose to ignore him.

His attempts to pass bills will also be complicated by the very narrow margin he can expect in the House of Representatives, which operates on a majority rule basis. If the Speaker can secure a majority of the chamber, he or she can ram through just about any bill, with little or no opportunities for debate or amendment.

Some Speakers, like former Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi, proved themselves adept at pulling together majorities, even when the margins were tight. The current Speaker, Mike Johnson, has so far shown himself to be largely incapable of building those coalitions.



Chad Crowe (USA)

Having Trump pressure members of the extreme right wing of the party, who have been the biggest thorn in Johnson’s side, might help. But passage of controversial bills through the House will require Johnson to get a lot better at his job than he’s been to this point.

Proportionately, Trump will have a larger majority in the Senate, but face the additional obstacle of the Senate filibuster. Passage of any major bill requires 60 votes in the Senate, and Republicans would need the support of seven Democrats to reach that mark.

Trump and his supporters, like Democrats before them, have already started to argue that the filibuster

needs to be weakened to allow them to pass their legislative agenda. And while there might be a majority of Republicans willing to vote for that agenda, historically, there has never been a majority willing to drastically reduce the power of the filibuster.

Senators like the power it gives them as individuals to shape laws, and they worry about what a majority of the other side would do if they didn’t have to worry about filibusters. Senators, unlike Trump, are likely to be worried about what happens five or ten years from now, when they’re in the minority party, and therefore are cautious about hurting the power of the minority in the Senate now.

Of course, in both House and Senate, Trump is helped by the fact that most of the Trump sceptical Republicans, like John McCain or Mitt Romney, are no longer in office.

Many of the traditional conservatives who pushed back on Trump’s legislation during his first term, as when McCain blocked the passage of Trump’s attempt to repeal Obamacare, aren’t in office anymore. Trump may have smaller majorities to work with in Congress, but those votes are much more loyal than during his first term.

Musk, Ramaswamy, and many of the people that Trump is bringing into govt believe that they can come in and fix the system. But there is precedent for the Department of Government Efficiency in Trump’s first term – the Office of American Innovation.

That office brought together tech leaders like Jeff Bezos and Tim Cook in an attempt, led by Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, to fundamentally reshape federal govt along the lines of tech companies. Like DOGE, it started out with great ambitions – to solve the opioid crisis, boost the economy, modernise federal govt. With that much talent, and the ear of the President, it seemed like a sure bet.

At the end though, it made some recommendations, which were largely ignored by Congress, and was disbanded. Unless Trump does something fundamentally different this time around, and is somehow able to overcome the greater barriers facing him in his second term, his legislative agenda, and DOGE, are likely to meet the same fate.

The writer is Professor of Government and Politics at Fairleigh Dickinson University

# Abuja Marks The Beginning Of This African Safari

## Former envoy to key African nations argues PM’s Nigeria visit is crucial bilaterally and for increasing India’s heft in the continent

Rajiv Bhatia



Modi travels to a two-day trip to Nigeria – capital, Abuja – starting today. It constitutes the first leg of PM’s transcontinental foray into summit diplomacy, which will also see him attending G20 summit in Brazil on Nov 18-19 and then visiting Guyana.

This trip offers a valuable opportunity to advance India’s growing cooperation with Africa and the Global South. It comes on the heels of the Indian President’s recent visit to three African countries.

By picking Nigeria, PM has recognised this nation’s unique significance as Africa’s most populous nation and its fourth-largest economy. India has enjoyed close historical ties with it, as well as a “strategic partnership”. However, the relationship is a work in progress, requiring a strong political push, especially as Nigeria is a regional and continental powerhouse.

Given its rich civilisational legacy, the Commonwealth connection, and its strong belief in unity amidst ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, Nigeria has much in common with India. After struggling with a disastrous civil war and a cycle of military coups, Nigeria succeeded in building a democratic polity from 1999 onwards.

The nation admires India’s classic path of ‘democracy with inclusive development’, drawing it to the country. Thanks to the excellent work of Indian teachers and traders in the past, the two peoples are familiar with each other,



FILE PHOTO

with Bollywood being another factor that has brought them closer.

Modi will become the fourth Indian PM to visit Nigeria, after Jawaharlal Nehru (1962), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (2003), and Manmohan Singh (2007). The gap of 17 years since the last prime ministerial visit is notable, but it was punctuated by the visit of Vice President Hamid Ansari in 2016.

The commonalities and complementarities between the two countries make them natural allies. Betting on Africa’s economic growth and expanding global profile, India needs to cooperate more extensively with Nigeria, which is a member of regional groupings like Ecowas and Opec.

India recognised Nigeria’s global significance by inviting it as a guest nation to the G20 Summit last year. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who participated in the summit, is reciprocating the gesture by now hosting Modi. Taking the cue, Brazil has invited Nigeria to the G20 Summit this year, and South Africa may do so next year.

Nigeria has, thus, indeed arrived on the world stage. It is especially pleased with India’s leadership role that resulted in the African Union securing permanent membership of G20. Nigeria’s entry into Brics as a partner state is further proof of its growing heft.

Preparatory work has already been completed to elevate the India-Nigeria relationship. In Jan, foreign minister Jaishankar visited Nigeria to co-chair the Joint Commission meeting and held wide-ranging discussions with key stakeholders. Yet, on the economic side, there are challenges. Bilateral trade has declined from a peak of \$14.95bn in 2021-2022 to \$7.89bn in 2023-2024.

This is partly due to India buying Russian oil at a discounted price rather than Nigerian crude from spot markets and partly due to Nigeria banning rice imports. However, India’s export of engineering and pharmaceutical goods has much potential for bilateral trade. Areas such as agriculture, green energy, healthcare, and digital cooperation also show promise.

In this context, there is need to expand India’s investment commitment of over \$27bn. Development cooperation, too, can be scaled up. Over 200 Indian companies based in Nigeria are regarded as the biggest foreign employer in the country.

Besides, the 60,000-strong Indian community has been making a useful contribution to bilateral relations.

Defence ties represent another significant pillar. The National Defence Academy at Kaduna and Naval War College at Port Harcourt are fine examples of defence cooperation between the two nations, buttressed by regular dialogue, exchange of training facilities, and Nigeria’s purchase of Indian defence equipment.

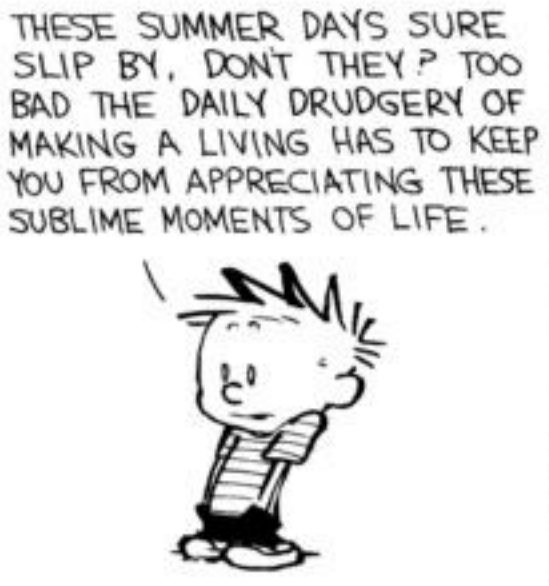
Strategic cooperation is now being piloted through a periodic dialogue between NSAs. Ajit Doval recently hosted the latest round. The dialogue focused on forging a close partnership to counter threats from terrorism, extremism, and radicalisation through cyberspace, international crime, arms, and drug trafficking, and a practical programme to enhance maritime security.

During Manmohan Singh’s 2007 visit to Nigeria, four agreements were signed, and an understanding was reached to conclude nine additional agreements. Several of these agreements are nearing finalisation, and a few may be signed during Modi’s visit.

The leaders now need to institute an effective mechanism to monitor progress in implementing all agreements. Greater involvement of apex business chambers should also be encouraged.

Finally, financial support should be extended to universities and think tanks to undertake studies on India-Nigeria relations and ensure dissemination of such efforts. Greater engagement at the people-to-people level would yield rich dividends in the long term.

# Calvin & Hobbes



# From Matter To Consciousness To Supreme Cognition

Shri Shri Anandamurti

What is the meaning of the term ‘purush’? The first meaning is: the entity that lies quiescent in the psycho-physical structure of another entity is called Purush. You may have noticed that different people perform various tasks in a house preparing for a marriage ceremony. However, the head of the family does not do any specific task but supervises the proper completion of all tasks. Similarly, Purush, cognitive faculty, lies hidden in the physical body. Without His wish, no organ of the body can function.

The second meaning is that the entity that resides before all other entities is Purush. The import of the above definitions is the same: Param Purush is the supreme reflecting principle. You may have thought about the primordial cause of this creation.

Early humans had an undeveloped intellect. To them, rainfall, the dawn and rice were symbols of gods and goddesses. The matter was of paramount importance. Long afterwards, humans realised that Param Purush is the supreme cause of creation. ‘Time, nature, fate, accident and the five fundamental factors – combination of all these – was thought to be the supreme cause of creation.’

While trying to discover the original cause of creation, we thought it must be eternal tempos. However, when the intellect developed, we discovered this hypothesis was incorrect because time is the mental measurement of the motivity of action. If there is no action, there is no question of any measurement of time. If the moon does not move around the Earth, no

question of days, months or years can arise. Hence, time is not the original cause.

Yet, out of inquisitiveness, human beings continued to search for the ultimate cause of creation. A question arose in their minds: Is nature the ultimate cause? The answer is no. Prakriti, the supreme operative principle, functions according to the limited freedom that Purush, the supreme cognitive faculty, has granted it. Purush is the transcendental entity; Prakriti is merely the immanent power of Purush. The style in which Purush functions is called nature. Nature cannot act independently and thus cannot be regarded as the absolute cause of creation, the supreme reflecting plate. The instrumental cause of the universe’s metamorphosis lies in Prakriti’s three principles. Prakriti is an entity that acts; however, it cannot be the

# Sacredspace

You don’t meditate to experiment with altered states of consciousness or whatever else. You meditate only to perceive by yourself that everything is within us, every atom of the universe, and that we already possess everything we would wish to find outside of ourselves.

Daniel Odier



THE SPEAKING TREE



# The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## New dawn in Lanka

Dissanayake gets mandate to roll out reforms

PEOPLE of Sri Lanka have emphatically empowered leftist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to go ahead with his pro-poor and anti-corruption reforms. The National People's Power coalition, led by his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party, has recorded a big win in the parliamentary elections. The strong mandate comes with great expectations: Dissanayake's prime task would be to spearhead a robust recovery from the 2022 economic crisis that had brought the island nation to its knees.

The writing was on the wall after Dissanayake triumphed in the presidential poll in September. Sensing the winds of change, former President Ranil Wickremesinghe did not contest the parliamentary polls for the first time in decades. The once-mighty Rajapaksa brothers also did not enter the fray. Both the Wickremesinghe-backed New Democratic Front and the Rajapaksa family's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party have suffered an electoral debacle as voters have made a clean break from the country's longstanding tradition of dynastic politics. Having gained the confidence of the people, Dissanayake cannot afford to put a foot wrong. The civil society protests in early 2022, locally known as the 'Aragalaya', had showcased the massive anger against the arrogance of the Rajapaksa brothers, who had taken almost total control over the levers of government at the time. A lot depends on how the President handles the IMF's \$2.9-billion bailout programme that has kept Lanka afloat on the fiscal front.

Regarded as pro-China, Dissanayake would be well advised not to put all his eggs in the Beijing basket. He needs to build strong ties with India, a friendly neighbour which has come to Lanka's rescue time and again. His tough stance against Indian fishermen illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters may not be music to New Delhi's ears, but his assurance to Tamils that their land occupied by the government would be returned seems to have struck a chord with the minority community. It is hoped that Dissanayake will do a deft tightrope walk to safeguard his country's strategic and economic interests.

## AFSPA returns

A setback on the road to peace in Manipur

THE reimposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in Manipur marks a sombre turn in the state's struggle for stability and peace. After years of gradual reduction in AFSPA-designated areas, recent escalations have led the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to reinstate the Disturbed Areas status in the jurisdiction of six police stations across the state. This decision reflects the grim reality that, despite past gains, Manipur's path to peace remains perilously uncertain. AFSPA is controversial due to its broad powers, which allow the armed forces to act with significant immunity. This, in turn, has created an environment of mistrust between civilians and the military. In Manipur, its presence has often been linked with allegations of human rights violations, further complicating the peace process in a region where historical grievances already run deep.

While the MHA has cited 'volatile' conditions and "active participation of insurgent groups in heinous acts of violence", the decision to reintroduce AFSPA as the most effective approach to quell these issues is questionable. The state's challenges extend beyond insurgency and violence. Ethnic divides, regional grievances and economic stagnation have contributed to the unrest.

Manipur's people, including the Kukis and Meiteis who are mainly embroiled in the conflict, deserve a future free from violence and repression. To achieve this, the Central government must prioritise non-military solutions, promoting dialogue, economic investment and social programmes that address the underlying issues fuelling the unrest. Enduring peace in Manipur will not come from the barrel of a gun but from comprehensive efforts to bridge divides and build trust. Reimposing AFSPA may restore order; but it is a step backward in the quest for sustainable peace.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

# The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1924

### The excise debate

THE debate that took place on the Punjab Excise Amendment Bill at Thursday's meeting of the Legislative Council was not an excise debate at all, but a debate on one of those proposals to amend the criminal law of the land in the direction of further increasing the already excessive powers of the administration and further diminishing the attenuated liberties of the subject, which the bureaucracy in this country seems to regard as a panacea for all evils, real and imaginary. The clause of the Bill around which the discussion centred runs as follows: "When any of the articles mentioned in clause (c) of subsection 1 of section 61 or any unlawfully manufactured liquor is found in any building or structure which is in the joint possession of several persons, it shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proved, that all such persons who had at the time the article was found attained the age of 18 years were in joint possession of such articles or such unlawfully manufactured liquor." The proposal is not only repugnant to all our notions of criminal justice, because it shifts the onus of proof from the prosecution to the defence, but is so sweeping as to take one's breath away. Not only the existence in any building of the implements with which illicit liquor is manufactured, but the very existence of such liquor is to penalise all those who are in joint possession of the building, subject only to their having attained the age of 18. The unlawfully manufactured liquor may have been brought into the building by only one of the persons in possession of it without the knowledge or consent of anyone else, and may have been brought by someone who is not in possession of the building at all — as some of the speakers pointed out, just to satisfy his greed or his public or private animosity.

# OPINION

## Gurpurb lessons for Centre, Punjab

Impasse between Delhi and Chandigarh is turning into a chasm, where conversations are drying up



THE GREAT GAME  
JYOTI MALHOTRA

I am thinking of two of Guru Nanak's keywords '*nirbhau*' and '*nirvair*' — 'without fear' and 'without enmity' — tweeted by the good JNU professor Surinder Jodhka on the morning of Gurpurb, adding, "I'm hoping that they can somehow infuse our lives, our interactions, our politics."

It seemed as if he'd been listening to an interview I had conducted with BJP leader Sunil Jakhar earlier this week (he hadn't), in which Jakhar seemed to wrestle with a variety of thoughts and feelings — often, it seemed, as if he was talking to himself, rather than responding to the questions in the interview. Some comments, of course, pertained to his own turbulent journey, first in the Congress and latterly in the BJP; many others related to the turmoil in which Punjab finds itself in this particular moment in its history, far larger than the personal to-be-or-not-to-be dilemma that Jakhar seems to be grappling with.

Certainly, there's a lot to be said about the Marxist schools which believe that individuals are but specks in the large drama of time — guess Marx must have devoured his Shakespeare — and certainly the current dramatic personae both in the state and in Delhi sometimes seem like little men whose silhouettes are extraordinarily large shadows, albeit reflected on an imposing canvas.

But as we all know, shadows disappear in the cold light of the morning. By noon, they are underfoot, ready to be trampled upon. At any time of the day, they have little or no substance.

So let's start at the beginning, with what we know. First, that Jakhar has told PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah that



AT A CROSSROADS: The turmoil in which Punjab finds itself is far larger than the personal dilemma that BJP leader Sunil Jakhar seems to be grappling with. ANI

he will no longer continue as the state party president. Second, he won't return to the Congress either; a party he served for several decades, because he is hurt by the way it treated him — we know that another Congress veteran, a Hindu Punjabi leader, Ambika Soni, had said a few years ago that Jakhar cannot become the chief minister of Punjab "because he is a Hindu" — and also because Jakhar feels Rahul Gandhi has "no control" over party factions.

And then there are the larger questions — beyond party loyalty and party interest. Questions about identity, faith, ability and trust. Why, for example, is the BJP in Punjab unable to expand influence and gain the confidence of its people when it fights without the support of the Akali Dal? Is the Akali Dal's decline and fall a result of its close cinch with the BJP or should it look for other reasons within? Moreover, do Sikhs fear the RSS-BJP will undermine this special, egalitarian quality that '*nirbhau*' and '*nirvair*' spawns and envelop Sikhism into Hinduism's fold?

On Gurpurb, especially on the 555th birth anniversary of the great Guru, the questions seem even more insistent. At the Nada Sahib gurdwara on the outskirts of Chandigarh as well as in scores of

### What better day than Gurpurb to face the mirror? Perhaps you can begin with '*nirvair*' and end with '*nirbhau*'?

gurdwaras across the region, as Hindus and Sikhs — and indeed, people of other faiths — wait patiently for a glimpse of the holy Guru Granth Sahib, you wonder if Punjab's society today is ready to absorb Guru Nanak's charmed mantra ("*na koi Hindu na koi Muslim*"). Meaning, would the state's predominantly Sikh population (about 57.7 per cent) rather be led by a person of its own faith, than a non-Sikh, perhaps a Hindu?

Imagine for a moment that people say that it doesn't matter, that Hindus are also fine, because the man may even be a good leader — and that Hindu families, until recently or perhaps, even now, 'gave' their eldest sons to the Sikh faith. In that case, what happens to the nagging fear at the back of your head about Hinduism's ability

to be so conciliatory and tolerant that it will absorb you long before you realise that Gurpurb really falls on Kartik Purnima?

Only an outsider like me can vouch for the fact that while Punjab faces a score and a half problems — drugs, crime, extortion, young people fleeing to Canada and leaving empty villages with ageing parents behind, huge unemployment, overdependence on agriculture, a falling water table, an extraordinary leaching of the soil, corruption, no money to even employ a full-time principal at the Ludhiana Government College which gave the country the mathematician and aerospace engineer Satish Dhawan as well as scores of other brilliant sons and daughters, and more — that there is a strength and a self-confidence in Punjabis that has little to do with the fact that they only occupy 13 seats in the Lok Sabha of 545 MPs.

The problem with the BJP-ruled Centre is that it considers numbers to be the bottomline. Only 13 seats? Okay.

That's when conversations between Delhi and Chandigarh begin to meander, slow down, taper off. So when you have a crisis over paddy procurement, Delhi doesn't need to do much more than throw the rule-book

at Chandigarh. Officials will wag a disapproving finger at the moisture meter in the mandi which checks the moisture content of the paddy being weighed as soon as it skips the 17 per cent mark, and sigh loudly. Too much moisture in this paddy. This consignment cannot pass muster. All entreaties and pleas and wheedling ("*bhai sahib, jaane do*") fall on deaf ears. The official has withdrawn his pleasure. Nothing else matters.

Few remember the time when Parkash Singh Badal, the former Akali chief minister, persuaded Delhi to allow 20 per cent moisture content in paddy because unseasonal rain happened to have hit Punjab. Few remember today, because few want to remember. There is such an impasse between Delhi and Chandigarh that it is no longer about the differences between AAP and BJP — Punjabis are beginning to wonder whether they are being punished because they stood up to the three farm laws brought by the Modi government. And whether 'Hindus' want to punish 'Sikhs'.

Some of this may sound fanciful, even bizarre. The problem is that the impasse between the Centre and the state is turning into a chasm, where conversations are drying up, if not freezing over. And some drawing-room conversations in Chandigarh are beginning to echo with the question, whether 'Jai Shri Ram' is a war-cry, a '*lalkar*', or an entreaty, a '*pukaar*'.

At the Nada Sahib gurdwara, you pay only Rs 50 for a leaf-filled bowl of '*karah parshad*', everything else is free, in the service of the great Guru Granth Sahib. Across the Shivalik hills on the other side of the gurdwara in Una district of Himachal Pradesh, the sacred Chintpurni shrine board has decided it will soon charge Rs 300 for a '*swift darshan*', where you basically jump the queue to pray to the goddess.

What better day than Gurpurb to face the mirror and ask all these questions of yourself again? Perhaps you can begin with '*nirvair*' and end with '*nirbhau*'?

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In politics... never retreat, never retract... never admit a mistake. — Napoleon Bonaparte

## Weekend woes of a wild bunch

V VISWANATHAN

WEEKENDS in the early 1970s were tough in our home. Even at 7 am, six children would be wriggling under blankets, pretending to sleep and dreading the morning routine. We lived in Thoothukudi in the southern part of Tamil Nadu, where my dad worked as a college lecturer.

At that time, our family of four children expanded when my aunt came to stay with us for nearly a year, along with her two sons who were about our age. Managing six energetic children in a small house couldn't have been easy; so, our parents and grandparents laid down rules to keep us in line.

One rule was the Saturday oil bath ritual, which we all hated. One by one, we would be slathered in oil by my paternal grandmother, a caring but no-nonsense woman who tolerated no escape attempts. After the oil application, we had to wait for 30 long minutes without moving around the house, lest we made the place slippery.

Inevitably, we would hover near the old copper boiler in the back of the house, fascinated by the crackling coal or wood shavings that fuelled it. But every time we got too close, grandma would pull us back with a tough grip, mainly out of concern for our safety.

Sundays brought a different kind of torture: neem paste. Each child had to swallow a small ball of this bitter green paste, ground manually on the grinding stone from fresh neem leaves. It was meant to keep our stomachs worm-free. Anyone refusing the neem paste had an alternative — a spoonful of castor oil. It was a classic 'out of the frying pan into the fire' kind of choice. Most of us picked the neem, braving its bitterness for the reward of a spoonful of honey. As we scattered in every direction to avoid the treatment, the elders would chase each of us down.

One day, my cousin tried to protest the neem treatment and was swiftly disciplined with a tiny drop of onion juice in his eyes. Furious, he blamed my elder sister for provoking him, insisting that she should suffer the same fate. She ended up teary-eyed, both before and after her 'sentence.'

Occasionally, we had fun tasks, like the annual tradition of repainting steel chairs. Just like Tom Sawyer, we relished this responsibility. In our maiden attempt, we mixed a lot of paint thinner. When a guest sat down, his *dhoti* was glued to the still-wet paint. As he struggled to stand, the *dhoti* took most of our hard work with it. Watching him squirm in discomfort, we kids couldn't hold back our laughter!

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### US needs to focus on China

Refer to the article 'Trump's America must stand up to China's aggression'; the Permanent Court of Arbitration at Hague, convened under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), ruled in favour of the Philippines in the South China Sea case against China in 2016. China refused to participate in the arbitration and rejected the outcome. It will take more than military operations and harsh statements to counter Beijing. Washington's refusal to ratify UNCLOS and dissipating the opportunity to support the Philippines in the enforcement of the award have undermined efforts to push back China. Rather than making this mistake again, the US should simultaneously focus on China, in addition to the ongoing wars in Ukraine and West Asia, to support its allies in the South China Sea.

VAIBHAV GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

#### Going overboard over diaspora

Refer to the news report 'Trump banks on Tulsi of Hindu faith as Intel chief'; when someone who is even remotely connected to India makes it big in a foreign country, Indians start gloating and become overenthusiastic about the perceived benefits that would accrue to India. India has never received any special attention or favour from Indian expatriates occupying high positions. Their ancestors migrated from this country decades ago. Born and brought up abroad, they hardly have any attachment to India. In the case of Tulsi Gabbard, her only link with India is that she adopted the Hindu faith through her mother. Instead of going overboard, we must understand that for them, their adopted country comes first and all others become secondary.

YOGINDER SINGHAL, LADWA

#### Making a quick buck

Apropos of the news report 'Swift *darshan* at Chintpurni shrine to now cost Rs 300', it is not a good sign that one has to pay money for visiting temples, although it is known to everybody that it is a money-minting ploy of the cash-strapped HP government. It conveys wrong signals to other religious bodies. Instead of arranging free langar as well as board and lodging, temples are becoming money-making machines. Thousands of devo-

tees throng the temple daily and people offer donations as per their paying capacity. This is not the right approach for any government to improve the state's economy. Governments should desist from such practices.

RAJ KUMAR KAPOOR, BY MAIL

#### Centre's decision may cause rift

Chandigarh, the shared capital of Punjab and Haryana, has always been a bone of contention for them. Now, the Centre has given the nod for the exchange of land with Chandigarh to construct a Haryana Assembly building. The allocation of the land was announced in 2022 too, but work was forbidden due to environmental concerns. The decision to reallocate land has not gone down well with Punjab's politicians. Truly, it is going to create a wider rift not only between the two states, but also between the Centre and Punjab. The Central Government needs to tread cautiously and solve the matter amicably.

BIR DEVINDER SINGH BEDI, SANGRUR

#### Wake-up call for states

Apropos of the article 'Public health at risk'; the CAG report regarding mismanagement in Haryana's healthcare system is deeply alarming. Procuring medicines from blacklisted firms and distributing substandard drugs reveal a serious breach of ethical governance and public trust. A constant delay in drug supply highlights lapses in the supply chain management. How can a state purport to prioritise healthcare when essential medicines and resources are mismanaged? It is a wake-up call for state governments to restore public confidence in the state healthcare system.

NETRA, JAMMU

#### Air quality worsening in Punjab

The air quality in Punjab is getting worse with each passing day. A major contributor to this malaise is stubble burning. But it is not the only reason why Punjab's air is getting polluted. Other reasons for the poor air quality include the increasing number of vehicles, industrial pollution and waste burning. People breathing toxic air are suffering from numerous diseases. Chronic patients of lung ailments like asthma and bronchial infection are the worst affected.

ANGEL SHARMA, BY MAIL



# Pak beset with economic and border woes



**G PARTHASARATHY**  
CHANCELLOR, JAMMU CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, & FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PAKISTAN

WHILE living in Karachi as India's Consul-General four decades ago, one could not help but notice that there was a quality in the lives of its people that kept them well fed, relaxed and humorous. There were little signs that the country was heading for difficult times, economically.

A decade later, in the late 1990s and in the first years of the 21st century, it became increasingly clear that with a consistently low rate of savings and growing debt, Pakistan was heading towards becoming a tottering economy en route to virtually falling apart. Pakistan's people, however, still retained the ability to laugh at themselves. When asked how they reached this situation, the answer was: "We depend on the three almighties: 'Allah, Army and America' to protect us."

Such situations were, however, of a short duration, during which western financial institutions, the US and rich Arab Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, financially bailed out Pakistan. Its

donors were, however, soon finding it far more difficult to open their pockets to pay for Pakistan's bailouts.

The net result has been a continuing precarious economic situation in Pakistan and of it being unable to raise adequate foreign exchange resources to meet its needs. London has, meanwhile, remained the Mecca of Pakistan's elite. Its leaders like Nawaz Sharif and the late General Pervez Musharraf owned large properties in the UK, while the poor and middle classes in Pakistan struggled to make both ends meet.

Amidst this evolving situation, people like the wealthy Sharif family, with money stashed away in houses and bank accounts in London and elsewhere, still call the shots in today's Pakistan. They, meanwhile, continue playing second fiddle to the army, now led by General Asim Munir. The worthy General Munir, who is now loathed by civilian politicians, rules the country by using coercion. While former cricket hero-turned-politician Imran Khan, undoubtedly, enjoys public support, the army leadership loathes him and resents his popularity.

India must carefully watch these developments and deal firmly with any challenges posed by the present regime, controlled by General Munir, whose rash talk and behaviour are very different from those of his mentor and predecessor,



**DIFFICULT TIMES:** The poor and middle classes in Pakistan struggle to make both ends meet. AP

General Bajwa.

The country's Prime Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, functions under pitiable conditions. He has to silently listen to the dictates of his elder brother and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the one hand and General Asim Munir on the other.

According to a recent study by the University of Utah, Pakistan remains today a "country plagued with high inflation rates, trade deficits and debt." Adding to its problems, the study notes, Pakistan also still imports a lot of its urban requirements, defence and fuel, leading to constantly rising trade deficits. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have dwindled to just around \$4 billion in June this year. This is not enough to meet the cost of even a month's imports.

There is nothing to sug-

Pakistan appears set to remain an 'international basket case', looking for foreign doles to balance its monthly accounts, while at the same time seeking to repay its growing debts.

gest that Pakistan can overcome these challenges anytime soon. The country appears set to remain an "international basket case", constantly looking for foreign doles to balance its monthly accounts, while simultaneously seeking to repay its ever-increasing debts.

This situation will prevail. While living within available means requires an effort, there is nothing to suggest that Pakistan's serious problems in repaying its foreign debts will end in the foreseeable future. Constantly boasting about its China-designed nuclear weapons and missile arsenals, amidst the continuing need for foreign doles, does not really meet the immediate needs of Pakistan's people, or add to Pakistan's international stature.

Pakistan's woes are not

confined to its economy. The biggest setback it has received is in its relations with Afghanistan, with whom it shares a 2,600-km border. The border has been marked by shootouts and tensions in recent years. According to Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these skirmishes have involved the Baluchistan Liberation Army and the Pakistani Taliban. There have also been clashes between the two countries. The Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted recently: "The 2024 Afghanistan-Pakistan skirmishes were a series of armed clashes, consisting of cross-border airstrikes and exchanges of gunfire between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The conflict also separately included the Baluchistan Liberation Army and the Pakistani Taliban."

It is clear that Pakistan is facing a situation where its security is being challenged across its northern borders with Afghanistan. The display of bravado on its borders with India, with continuing infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir, could well lead to Pakistan ending up with a "two-front situation."

With President Trump assuming power in the US, any possibility of Pakistan escalating tensions in relations with India can be ruled out. The US, more than others, knows well about the Chinese content in Pakistan's nuclear weapons and missile programmes. Presi-

dent Trump is, moreover, not a "panda lover", ready to look the other way at China's policies and strategic ambitions.

India's relations with the Trump administration will most likely be better than those with the Biden administration, which was critical of what it felt were human rights violations in India.

That both China and Pakistan will face a tough time with the incoming Trump administration is now clear. Trump has voiced his views on China, with whom he intends to act firmly. Meanwhile, despite his problems, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Asif Munir, appears determined to infiltrate well-armed terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir.

The time has, perhaps, come to respond to General Munir's adventurism, especially given the advantage of having several options available to India. It is no secret that the Punjabi-dominated Pakistan army is not exactly popular in the provinces other than Punjab.

New Delhi also needs to take a closer look at the challenges the less-than-popular General Munir faces from opposition leader Imran Khan, who has been having a hard time since Munir took over. Imran Khan is, however, no friend of India, since the days he played cricket against India in the early 1980s. Pakistan would have, meanwhile, no doubt, taken note of India's improving ties with Afghanistan.

# Trump 2.0 policies can benefit Indian economy



**SUBIR ROY**  
SENIOR ECONOMIC ANALYST

THE victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election is likely to mark a sharp change in the domestic and global policies of his country. It is imperative for India to try and quickly figure out how its relations with the US will pan out.

Let's see how the IMF (International Monetary Fund) is looking at the scenario ahead while Trump readies to take over. The risk to the Asia-Pacific has increased (even before Trump won) and is likely to lead to a lower economic growth rate. There is the prospect of new trade restrictions being imposed by the US. China will offer no help as a growth engine as its population will keep ageing and productivity growth slows down.

If you think that Trump will step in with growth for all to fill the gap created by China's slowdown, then it

will be downright naive. He has been shouting from the rooftops that he will raise import duties and throw out illegal immigrants. Legal immigrants will, as a result, seek to ask for more. Higher wages will put pressure on business and likely lead to lower rates of return.

This will put downside pressure on stocks and put off investors who will not come forward to pay out more and create the groundwork for businesses to invest and push economic growth. As against this, Trump has promised to cut tax rates to help businesses to raise manufacturing investment and enable the country to grow.

India will be hard pressed to raise exports to the US. It is set to benefit from the western strategic pursuit of 'China plus one' policy so as to get the business arms of western manufacturing units in China to relocate to South and Southeast Asia. India aspires further. It wants to manufacture for its own markets as well as for the rest of the world. But India can hardly do this if the new Trump administration raises tariffs as a part of its overall inward-looking policy.

Trump's aim will be to make America great for Americans, without much



**LIKELIHOOD:** India will be hard pressed to raise exports of goods and services to the US. TRIBUNE PHOTO

concern about what happens to the rest of the world. There will be a few attempts to corner China. In such a scenario, it is ideal for India to plan to export more goods and services to the US, which will lower import duties and ease regulations for incoming skilled workers.

The higher possibility right now is that India will manufacture more for its own consumers. Its skilled workers will not plan to seek entry for themselves and their wives into the US through H1B visas but look for well-paid jobs in global centres of multinationals in the country. Global companies will come to India to

India will become a more powerful economy, but it will become more inwardly focused, thanks to Trump's own inward-looking policies.

get their development jobs done here and make it a more skilled country. India will become a more powerful economy, but it will become more inwardly focused, thanks to Trump's own inward-looking policies.

As against this somewhat negative perception of economic ties between the two countries, those taking a positive view are recalling that Trump had, during his first term, presided over a community summit termed "Howdy Modi" in Houston during Modi's visit there. And the call, "Namaste Trump", had been aired in Gujarat during Trump's

visit to India. Plus, Trump had called Modi "fantastic".

As against this, Trump had also earlier expressed feelings that India was a trade abuser and engaged in being a "tariff king". What it means is that this sentiment can change, depending on the mood and need of the day.

Those minding the Indian economy will have to wait for Trump to settle down in office and put behind his election rhetoric. Simultaneously, his administration will need to work out the details of his economic policy framework. Once this crystallises, the Indian policy framework will work out how best to live with the new times and, hopefully, make the best out of the scenario.

It is clear that high tariff barriers for goods will not be an issue as the gut feeling in India is to try to become more atmanirbhar. This is with the exception of India's desire to play a key role in the manufacture of semiconductors.

The quicksand will be the export of services or skills. The best Indian engineers will continue to want to work in the US. But how many will be able to do so will depend on what the US administration will agree to in response to the negative pressures

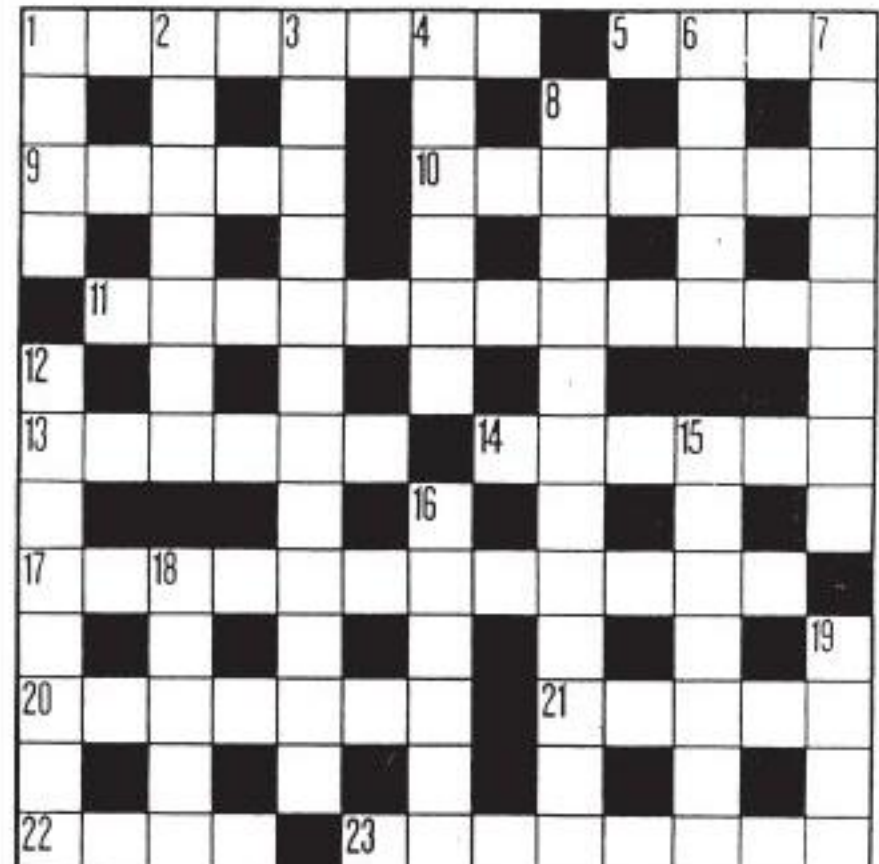
which will be created by the skilled workers' unions.

Turning to the global scene, Indian strategists will argue that the US cannot entirely cease to remain the world policeman. The US administration will be forced to try and stop the wars raging in Ukraine and Palestine that Trump himself promised to do during his campaign. This will bring the US into the quagmire willy-nilly. It is Palestine which is likely to become the more intractable. Far more Jewish money went into the Democratic campaign as compared to that of the Republican Party. Simultaneously, there will be enormous pressure on the US to stop the killing of civilians in Palestine even as Israel works to get more resources to keep fighting the war.

India should not have too many problems as it already does a good bit of defence exports to Israel. It also continues to import substantial amounts of petroleum from Russia. Overall, global oil prices are likely to soften as Trump has signalled that the US oil industry will be able to go forward unabated.

So, despite what Indian liberals want, India is doing rather well even as the two wars continue.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 To display (8)  
5 Growing abundantly (4)  
9 Stage setting (5)  
10 At tedious length (2,3,2)  
11 Even so (12)  
13 Hazardous (6)  
14 Place of worship (6)  
17 Shared on a popular app (12)  
20 Extreme distress (7)  
21 Be brilliant in some respect (5)  
22 Ballerina's skirt (4)  
23 Based on experience (8)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Tight spot, 8 Evade, 9 Hearsay, 10 Shrink, 11 Stride, 12 Overturn, 15 Pathetic, 18 Regard, 20 Piracy, 21 Satanic, 22 Route, 23 Withstand.

Down: 2 Id est, 3 Hermit, 4 Stakeout, 5 Tether, 6 Fatigue, 7 Weak-kneed, 11 Soap opera, 13 Encroach, 14 Stirrup, 16 Eschew, 17 Aghast, 19 Reign.

SU DO KU

4 5 7 9

2 9 1

3 7 1

4 9 8 5 1

6 4 7 2 5

7 6

9 2 7

3 7 8 2

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

3	2	6	9	5	1	4	7	8
4	9	5	3	8	7	1	2	6
8	7	1	2	6	4	3	9	5
2	5	8	6	3	9	7	4	1
9	3	7	4	1	8	6	5	2
1	6	4	5	7	2	9	8	3
5	8	9	1	4	3	2	6	7
6	4	3	7	2	5	8	1	9
7	1	2	8	9	6	5	3	4

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 16, 2024, SATURDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Kartik Shaka 25
- Margshirsh Parvishle 1
- Hijri 1446
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 1, up to 11.51 pm
- Parigraha Yoga up to 11.48 pm
- Kritika Nakshatra up to 7.28 pm
- Moon in Taurus sign

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	17:26 HRS
SUNRISE:	SUNDAY	06:48 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	25	14
New Delhi	30	15
Amritsar	22	15
Bathinda	28	17
Jalandhar	22	15
Ludhiana	22	15
Bhiwani	27	15
Hisar	27	14
Sirsa	30	18
Dharamsala	23	10
Manali	17	08
Shimla	19	09
Srinagar	14	05
Jammu	26	13
Kargil	08	-03
Leh	09	-01
Dehradun	—	—
Mussoorie	19	10

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## Hindi Newspapers»»»

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