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The post-June 4 challenges

Both majority and coalition govts will have to rule by consensus henceforth



BEYOND IDEOLOGY
R JAGANNATHAN

No matter who wins the Lok Sabha elections on June 4, the challenges the next government faces will be daunting. And no matter whether the government is a full-blown coalition or one led by a party with a majority of its own, these challenges will not be met without a consensus.

Three challenges will come to the fore a year or two after the new government takes over. And there is always that perennial one — jobs. The first challenge will be the 2021 census, which has been enormously delayed due to Covid. Suspicion that the census may be used for both the parliamentary delimitation exercise, and get linked to any future demands for a National Register of Citizens (NRC) will lead to "secular" posturing.

Next, there is the women's reservation Bill, which cannot be implemented without expanding the total number of Lok Sabha seats. The Narendra Modi government, while passing the law, wisely chose to defer its implementation to the next term — i.e., after delimitation and expansion of the Lok Sabha.

The next census is going to be a political dynamite, and will need careful handling, both in its implementation, and in dealing with its wider fallout. So, at the very least, the government will have to announce in advance that its results will not lead to any covert implementation of the NRC. But even if the minorities are reassured on this score, the results of the census will decide how many seats any particular state will get.

The examples of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu will serve as a contrast. Based on current projected population levels of these two states, UP, with a population of 257 million, has just 80 seats, or 18 per cent of the Indian population of 1,410 million, and 14.7 per cent of Lok Sabha seats.

The counter-argument, which has been repeated endlessly by southern politicians, is that states that did well on population control should not be penalised politically. But let us see if this argument really holds. In the 1960s and 1970s, when India had a tough time feeding its millions, any good population policy would focus on lowering the total fertility rate (TFR) to 2.1, which is the replacement rate.

India's TFR has already dropped below 2.1 (it could be 2 or below now), and Tamil Nadu's is 1.8 or lower, how can we use drops in TFR to decide what is good performance? If the proper goal for TFR is to help states maintain fertility in the range of 1.9-2.1 to stabilise populations, Tamil Nadu is an underperformer, not an outperformer. When the nature of the population change changes, the yardsticks of performance must change too.

But, of course, no Tamil Nadu politician, even those from the BJP in that state, will accept this logic without paying a huge political cost. Hence the only way out of this tricky situation is a political compromise where all states get more seats, but with the lower population states getting less than

their current proportional share. And with populated states like UP and Bihar getting less than their due shares. Only political farsightedness and a spirit of consensus can deal with this issue.

The same goes for the women's reservation legislation. If up to one-third of the men currently in Parliament, or hoping to make it there, are to yield places to women, most parties, especially the BJP, would have a revolt on their hands. But if the total number of seats were to be raised by 50 per cent, say from 543 to a little over 800, these issues will disappear.

The last and the most important challenge is jobs. The fact is, technology has posed a new threat. The problem is not one of no jobs, but of their quality. What tech does is damage the middle, where middle-level skills can currently yield good quality jobs. Tech impacts the jobs market both positively and negatively. At the top end, high-skilled jobs are in huge demand. At the bottom, since tech makes most jobs simpler (consider your Swiggy delivery boy or the Uber driver), it opens up more opportunities for the relatively unskilled.

The answer to this challenge is not just upskilling, but region-specific skilling. This means issues about jobs must also focus on sub-state regions like districts or municipalities, where opportunities may be region-specific, and this requires more devolution of power not only from the Centre to the states, but from states to local bodies. The kind of jobs that can come up in the Mumbai metropolitan region will not be the same as those that can happen in arid and rural Marathwada or Mizoram. They need different approaches.

Whoever wins, these issues cannot be solved through legislative majorities, but through widespread discussions among all stakeholders. A tall order, regardless of whether Mr Modi comes back to power with a majority or some weak coalition does. But that is what the stars foretell.

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Anchoring expectations

Food prices are disrupting the disinflation process

Episodes of food- and fuel-price volatility are not unusual in India. Sustained food-price pressure continues to drive the headline inflation rate, making it important to understand how such price shocks can get in the way of managing inflation outcomes.

From a monetary policy perspective, it is essential to understand how such price pressures from food or fuel can affect overall inflation outcomes. A new research article by economists at the RBI examines the second-round effects of food and fuel prices on headline and core inflation in India.

RBI economists also found evidence of convergence of core with headline inflation for the near term, indicating the transmission of shocks from non-core components to core inflation. From a high of 0.37 percentage point during the late 1990s, the response of the core-inflation rate to a 1 per cent rise in the food-inflation rate has been decreasing more or less consistently ever since then.

Yet, concerns remain. The high weighting of food and fuel items in the underlying consumer basket can strengthen the propagation of shocks to core inflation. The recent firming up of international crude oil prices also warrants close monitoring.

Message from US campuses

Suppressing protests may be politically self-defeating

In a reprisal of student protests against the Vietnam War more than half a century ago, the Israel-Hamas war is sparking demonstrations on campuses around the world. Signs of discontent with the Biden administration's policies on the Israel-Hamas war have been building for the past six months.

The issue has been complicated by anti-Semitic rallies, a hot-button issue in the US that prompted in January the resignations of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania following pressure from donors, politicians, and the alumni over perceived inadequate responses to campus anti-Semitism.

Nevertheless, an effort to highlight a distinction between anti-Semitism, which denotes racial prejudice, and anti-Zionism, a settler colonial movement in Israel, would be constructive. Professor and student protestors would do well to draw on the experience of their predecessors more than a generation ago — people who organised "teach-ins" at protest sites to educate people on the iniquities of the Vietnam War.

India's urban imperatives



BOOK REVIEW

BIBEK DEBROY

This isn't an easy book to review. It couldn't have been an easy book to compile either. Across institutions, and down the years, Om Prakash Mathur has written on urbanisation, regional development and local governance for years and years.

barring the first essay on "India's Urban Transition", "other papers were commissioned in different contexts and at different times by organisations" and these have been reprinted. From Rakesh Mohan's foreword, we learn, "He came to me with printouts of his many papers and, somewhat diffidently, asked whether it may be a good idea to publish a volume of collected works."

With his wealth of experience and expertise, would one have liked Om Prakash Mathur to write a fresh book instead, focusing on India's urban transition, expanding on that first essay? The answer is unambiguously yes.

doubt, the foremost urban scholar in India and has been for some time. He has worked on Indian urbanisation issues on a continuous basis for almost half a century, a record that may not ever be surpassed in the near future.

Given that report, since 19 of the essays were commissioned and not always published in standard academic journals, was there utility in reprinting them to make them more accessible? The answer is yes, which dilutes the demurring. Anyone interested in India's development and progress will be interested in urbanisation and its progress and problems.

urbanisation and development. Urbanisation trends have picked up in India and projections show mind-boggling numbers in mega-cities. Urbanisation trends will continue and urbanisation needs to be managed, typically, in brownfield rather than greenfield formats.

and issues of local capacity. All the six essays under the first head will be of interest to anyone interested in India's urbanisation. Under the second head I should point out in passing that Article 280 of the Constitution mentions (in connection with Union Finance Commission) panchayats but not urban local bodies. Of course, fiscal devolution is not merely through the Union Finance Commission, but also State Finance Commissions (SFCs).

For the fourth head, I would say three essays are particularly stimulating (the informal sector, who is in charge of the city and the urban challenge). Every essay cannot be expected to be stimulating and the list I have mentioned isn't a bad score. Gandhi's famous quote about India living in her villages is often cited. Increasingly, India lives in her cities and the share will only increase.

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Cloud over Surat amid election buzz

This election season, China is more than just a talking point in Gujarat's textile city, Surat, which has been in the news for producing a winner ahead of the polls. The China narrative has surfaced not just in internal industry chatter, but also quite prominently in stakeholders' meetings between political parties and businesses, as suggested by conversations in Surat before the May 7 elections for 25 out of the 26 Gujarat Lok Sabha seats.

The stakeholders' meetings, which attract anything between 500 and 1,000 business representatives and local politicians, kicked off in a big way a fortnight or so ago in Surat — ranked as one of the cleanest cities in the country, sharing the honours with Indore. It's another matter that Surat and Indore have also shared another commonality recently. Both constituencies have seen the exit of Congress candidates in dramatic ways.

Yet, Surat is as much in election mode as any other part of the state, despite Mukesh Dalal of the Bharatiya Janata Party emerging as the winner after the disqualification of the Congress candidate and subsequent withdrawals of other contestants. Hotels, parks, and markets in the city are hosting campaigns and rallies like anywhere else.

holds historical significance. It's known for the nearby Dandi village — the central point in the Salt March led by Mahatma Gandhi.

In this nostalgic setting, China is being spoken about in a matter-of-fact way. At the centre of it all are a series of QCOs or quality control orders, issued by the Union government. In the last one year, there have been some eight QCOs, including amendments related to technical textiles such as geo-textile, agro-textile and medical textile that are causing concern.

While QCOs are meant to prevent import of low-quality products, the idea is also to block dumping from China at cheap prices and strengthen India's position in the supply chain. That is bothering the textiles industry, estimated at \$165 billion (around ₹13.7 trillion at the current rate of conversion). As a large portion of the supply of yarn comes from China at cheaper rates, blocking imports from that country has resulted in yarn shortages.



NOT FOR PROFIT
NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

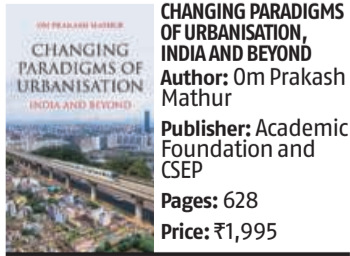
in the recent past for various domestic and international reasons. The industry is asking for nothing short of removal of those QCOs, which are resulting in non-tariff barriers on textile businesses.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and small weavers, already upset that there's nothing for them in the textile production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme because of the quantum involved, say that the QCOs are a hurdle they can do without.

The list of orders on quality control talks about complex technical specifications that many of the textile traders may not fully understand. The items covered under the QCOs range from laminated high-density polyethylene woven geomembranes for waterproof lining to clothing made of limited flame spread materials, and the list is quite extensive.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) oversees the quality standardisation exercise for goods and articles across categories and sectors, from air conditioners to fans to kitchenware and clothes. In fact, central government ministries and departments issue QCOs after consultations with BIS. Any violation of the order can result in heavy penalties and even imprisonment.

There are reports suggesting that this year will see a further expansion of the list, with QCOs tapping some newer areas. Hoping that this will not dampen the spirit of Surat, the city which was earlier famous for silk weaving and is now a commercial centre for textiles. And hoping that its busiest textile markets, from Sahara Darwaja to Old Bombay Market, will remain robust in an election season and otherwise.



of variable decentralisation funds, functions and functionalities across states. Naturally, there are two essays (11, 12) that address such important issues. Under the third head, there are two sets of stimulating essays, case studies of Delhi (governance and financial framework and property taxes) and devolution, fiscal transfers and local government finance.











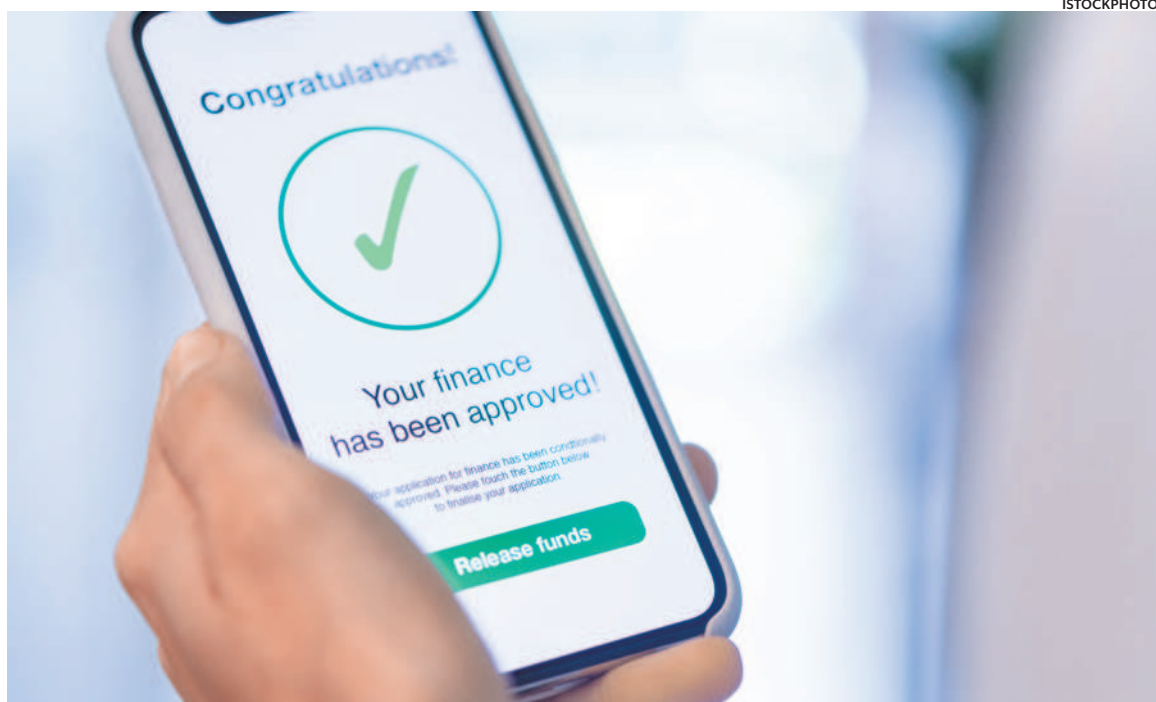








## OUR VIEW



## Credit penetration must not become a nightmare

Wider loan supply is a vital economic pursuit in India, but app-driven lending is exposing people to coercive recovery tactics. The depravity these have sunk to gives credit a bad name

That credit is good can be taken as a given. It plays an important role in any economy. Loans given out foster economic expansion by enabling commerce, typically done by banks making use of people's savings held as deposits. Credit also helps uplift those at the bottom of India's pyramid who lack the monetary means to make a better living, which explains our policy emphasis on financial inclusion. Rural self-help groups for microfinance are a key part of that mission. Yet, some parts of the country lag others on credit uptake. A study published last year by our bank regulator that covered 56 eastern districts of the 117 designated as 'aspirational' (for their backwardness), for example, found that bank credit as a proportion of deposits varies from under 11% in West Singhbhum to over 96% in Chandel. Data analysis showed that the supply of banking services was the main driver of an aspirational district's credit-deposit ratio. For more loans to be extended, this suggests, banks must reach farther into under-served areas. This was also the stated goal of bank nationalization back in 1969. The outreach afforded by the internet, however, has placed digital apps in the spotlight for taking credit far and wide. In theory, this is a loan multiplier like none other. In reality, it entails a risk we must not under-estimate: Of credit taking a blow as a concept.

Credit markets operate under the central bank's watch. On Monday, as part of its effort to stamp out unfair practices, the regulator warned lenders not to levy interest charges calculated from the day of a loan's sanction instead of its disbursement. This was done on behalf of retail borrowers. Last year, it had tightened capital

back-up norms for collateral-free lending, a move aimed at keeping a fintech boom of app-given personal loans within prudential limits. This was done to reduce the chance of bank cushions being hollowed out by a default crisis. But a sharp reminder of the other scars that the credit business can leave was served in April, when nine employees of loan-enabler Finsara were arrested in Gurugram on allegations of using extreme tactics for loan recovery. As reported, the police had acted on a complaint filed by a labourer who said digitally-made obscene images of her were posted online after she failed to repay a loan of ₹3,000, taken through the company's app. The seizure of devices during a raid on Finsara's office is said to have revealed a scandal of sexual shaming in wide deployment as a threat. The police claim that links with 1,577 cases across the country have been traced, involving loans of almost ₹5 crore. Even if these numbers seem small in the context of all-India lending, that such practices exist at all is an outrage. And since not everyone speaks up, how rampant they are is a guess.

The depravity of even a few can hobble an entire market. For centuries, unregulated lending has had an exploitative image among the needy—if not for usurious charges, then for the arbitrary extraction of assets and services by moneylenders with no scruples. India fought hard to end bonded labour, a form of slavery that debtors would be forced into. It's a sad reflection of today's tech-enabled times that small-ticket borrowers can be deprived so luridly of dignity for their debts. Credit being a good thing is far from clear to the vulnerable. We must crack down hard on ugly recovery tactics before credit gets a bad name among those who need it most.

## GUEST VIEW

## Let's use a behavioural insight to tackle climate change

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In a remarkable judgement delivered on 6 April 2024, a day that should stay marked memorably on our calendar, the Supreme Court of India (SC) recognized that "...the people have a right against the adverse effects of climate change." And that "this right and the right to a clean environment... [is] necessary to articulate... as a distinct right. It is recognised by Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (right to life)." The SC judgement clearly spells out that the right to health (under Article 21) is impacted by factors that degrade the environment.

It is not only the judgement of 6 April, but the manner and context in which it was made that is of particular significance. The country's top court was due to hear a case related to the survival of an endangered species, the great Indian bustard. The case was posted for hearing in August, but the broad climate-change judgement was uploaded on the court's website months ahead of it. The ruling sends out an important signal by recognizing a clean environment as a basic right

and not a market-determined outcome. However, we need 'glocal' (global and local) commitments and actions to treat a clean environment as a basic right.

While markets can solve complicated problems, 'market failures' often make outcomes worse than what would have been the case if market solutions had not been relied upon. The risk of market failure and its potential consequences are even larger with carbon markets, given the nature of the 'product.' Consider a carbon-credit market, a trading system in which carbon credits are bought by entities that have positive greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from others who remove these air pollutants. As with most markets, this mechanism, deployed under a policy that exerts CHG reduction pressure on all entities, punishes polluters by making them pay for emissions and also incentivizes organizations to capture these gases. Thus is the price mechanism expected to deliver an optimal path to net-zero emissions.

However, as we are already way beyond permissible GHG levels, the crucial question is whether we can afford to rely on a market mechanism to optimize reductions. For one, cleaning the environment will always fall badly short of emissions. Global emissions data highlights the precarity of it.

If one plots GHG emission levels on a graph, globally as well as for India, expressed as 1,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, as well as India's share in the global total, two facts would emerge. One, despite efforts and agreements, no dent has been made in the world's total emissions. Two, India's contribution, both in terms of absolute emissions and its global share of them, is quite low. The numbers highlight the familiar North-South global divide and raises the question of inequitable climate-action burdens.

Unless strictly enforced and fast-dropping limits are imposed by policy on overall emissions within various markets, larger market mechanisms could worsen that inequality. Activities that boost economic growth and create wealth will continue to sustain emissions, while raising the purchasing-power of emitters to buy more carbon credits. The result would be higher emission levels overall, and low GHG emitters might find carbon credit prices raised by demand and thus less

affordable. A price mechanism for emissions cannot succeed through market forces without decarbonization policies acting as the primary force on all polluters. This exposes the idea to the risk of failure. Perhaps a more effective way to cap GHGs is to go beyond economics and treat emissions as a violation of others' rights. Is there a good way to reduce GHG levels for each country?

Richard Thaler, a Nobel laureate in Economics, has made some behavioural observations that may be useful. He asserts that the design of contracts may yield drastically different outcomes even if the eventual payoffs are identical. To illustrate this, he offers a simple experiment. Consider someone trying to quit smoking. He can opt

for either of two disincentive schemes: One, leave \$100 with a friend and at the end of the day get back an amount of \$100 minus X, where X is the number of cigarettes he smoked throughout the day. Alternatively, the person can pay his friend amount X if he smokes X cigarettes during the day. While

the cash penalty imposed in both cases is exactly the same, X, Thaler observes that the first mechanism reduces the number of cigarettes smoked much faster than the second. There is a lesson in this if we want to honour our commitment to reduce GHG emissions.

A mechanism should be devised that calculates before the beginning of every year the GHG reduction each country must necessarily achieve. A monetary equivalent of the same should be paid by respective countries into a global pool. Then, depending upon the actual GHG emissions throughout the year, the balance would be credited back to the country from that global pool. Commitment amounts for every country can be drawn from historical as well as projected GHG emission levels. In a democratic set-up, explaining to citizens why the government cannot recover a sum pledged at the start of the year will probably prove far costlier than explaining why a fine must be paid.

If countries consider the right to a clean environment a basic right, they must adopt processes that actually enforce this right. Ex post penalties could come later. This is what a 'rights' guarantee is all about. It can't be infringed and then compensated for later. India has made all the right noises. We now await actions that can show others the way.

## The regulation of AI should take its climate impact into account

AI is so costly for the planet to deploy that a cost-benefit analysis ought to guide its rules of usage



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India is undoubtedly a leading country in the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. A recent survey on cloud complexity by NetApp, a data infrastructure company, revealed that 70% of firms in India have AI projects up and running, as against 53% in the US, and that 91% of the companies in India plan to use their data to train AI models, as against a global average of 62%.

Globally, the AI industry is expected to grow by 37% annually till 2030, with great excitement over the opportunities it creates as also trepidation on its misuse. Regions/countries like the EU, US and China are expected to implement sweeping regulatory measures to bring about greater transparency, establish new standards and address activities that pose a systemic risk to citizens, with the EU already working on a bill to institute an "AI liability directive" that would provide financial compensation to adversely effected people. India too is cognizant of the need to develop a regulatory regime for AI, although it is likely to be light-handed, at least initially, with potential job losses its special focus.

It is important, however, to recognize the two-way relationship between AI and the energy sector. The electricity grids of today are only going to grow in complexity, with multi-dimensional flows of electricity now integrating all kinds of distributed and decentralized systems, including rooftop solar panels,

electric vehicle power-packs, and so on. Combine this with the complexity that accompanies the deployment of hybrid systems such as wind-solar or offshore wind-solar-tidal power, or other combinations thereof. Planning and operating such systems, in particular the vexed challenge of demand and supply forecasting, will greatly benefit from the use of AI systems. In fact, AI will likely be indispensable for sustaining the green energy grid of the future. While AI is already helping with the predictive maintenance of current energy systems, it is easy to imagine it playing a vital role in the maintenance of emerging systems that will be vastly more complex.

On the flip side, the energy guzzling nature of the AI industry is assuming alarming proportions. A search driven by AI could consume four to five times the energy needed for a conventional web search. It is estimated that the computational power required to sustain the rise of AI is doubling roughly every 100 days. To achieve a 10-fold improvement in AI model efficiency, demand for computational power could surge by up to 10,000 times. In Davos, Switzerland, OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman sounded a warning on the vastly higher power demand of the next wave of generative AI systems that energy systems will have to cope with. The water demands of the AI industry to cool data processors could be enormous too.

Research on other environmental consequences of AI is still in a nascent stage. However, staying with energy for the moment, there is no doubt that the world is off-track in meeting its sustainability goals. India's renewable energy programme, while impressive, has thus far only helped make a dent in incremental electricity demand and therefore incremental emissions; it has not yet started taking emissions out of the country's base of energy demand. Unchecked deployment of AI could increase incremental electricity demand enormously, making the task of reducing the growth of greenhouse

gas emissions and eventually reversing them that much more challenging.

In other words, India and the world could be locking themselves further into fossil energy use for much longer. And, while we have little evidence on other environmental consequences of AI, the adverse effects of fossil energy use on the planet is well established and may be proportionally attributable to AI in the future.

To remind ourselves, scientists have identified nine planetary boundaries, staying within which would provide a safe operating space for humanity. We have crossed six of these boundaries, capturing climate change, fresh water use, air pollution, biosphere integrity and plastics pollution—mostly attributable to our use of fossil fuels.

The relationship between AI and energy becomes even more consequential in the context of climate concerns driving net-zero ambitions around the world, the emerging jurisprudence around recognizing our right to escape the adverse impacts of climate change as a human right, and the rise of liability directives in the context of AI regulation. The Supreme Court of India said in a recent judgement that climate change impacts the constitutional guarantee of the Right to Life, and that citizens have a right to freedom from the adverse effects of our climate emergency.

Not only does the AI industry need to take responsibility for its climate impact, every user industry too, by virtue of its Scope 3 emission responsibilities, must weigh the costs and benefits of AI deployment carefully. We cannot afford to allow its use for frivolous ends. Similarly, the regulatory regime needs to recognize the high cost of AI application—in terms of investments, climate effects and other environmental factors—and provide clear AI-usage guidance and incentives to contain costs. India and Indian industry should work towards strong, precautionary and enabling regulatory regime for AI. The sooner, the better.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Climate change is real. The science is compelling. And the longer we wait, the harder the problem will be to solve.

JOHN F. KERRY



GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Expand political risk insurance to help our businesses go global

Outbound FDI is crucial for Indian firms to expand globally but coverage gaps in what local insurers offer must be plugged



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International news in India at the beginning of 2024 was dominated by a publicized phase of diplomatic tension between India and the Maldives following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Union territory of Lakshadweep. This was followed by an order by the government of Maldives asking Indian troops to leave the archipelago nation.

However, this wasn't the first time the relationship between the Maldives and India has been disturbed. If we go back a decade, in 2013, Malé had asked Indian infrastructure giant GMR to leave. After protracted arbitration, GMR was awarded \$270 million in 2016 against claimed losses of \$800 million.

Jindal Steel faced a similar fate in Bolivia when it had to walk out of a multi-billion-dollar project following a scandal over encashment of bank guarantees by the Bolivian government. The Indian company was awarded \$22.5 million against claimed losses of over \$100 million.

Given such instances, Indian industries wanting to spread their wings beyond Indian shores have been seeking political risk insurance (PRI).

Despite market demand for PRI, the question is whether this should be a significant policy matter, given the robust growth of India's economy and growing set of domestic and international investors. There is general euphoria about the India story and the arrival of Amrit Kaal—a propitious phase for turning India into a developed country. The continued buoyancy of Indian markets in the wake of the covid pandemic, slowdown in China and conflicts in Ukraine as well as Palestine has demonstrated the confidence of investors in the India story. Strong domestic markets, of course, are indispensable to a robust economy.

However, to transform India into a global economic power, Indian businesses must expand their footprint beyond domestic markets. Outbound foreign direct investment (FDI) will be instrumental in accomplishing this business expansion. India's outward FDI imperative may be understood from two perspectives:

One, India and Indian businesses must have a strategy to identify and capture markets abroad through forward integration in largely untapped and underserved regions such as Africa and South America. Many of India's small technology-enabled companies could move quickly into global markets. For these 'born global' startups and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), outward FDI may be a critical means of business expansion.

Two, in a globalized world, sourcing of raw material can play a significant role in businesses gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, unsurprisingly, some Indian companies have



invested in facilities across the globe in pursuit of such an advantage while expanding operations. The future expansion strategies of Indian businesses must stay cognizant of the emergence of some developing nations as major suppliers in the coming years. The drive for decarbonization across industries has been driving demand for critical minerals that go into clean-tech solutions from such countries. This presents an opportunity for backward integration by Indian businesses through outward FDI.

The outward FDI path, however, is not free of hurdles. Some relatively untapped markets are particularly prone to high political risk, unfortunately. Given this backdrop, PRI is a tool for businesses to mitigate and manage risks arising from the adverse actions or inactions of governments. As a risk-mitigation tool, PRI helps provide a more stable environment for investments in developing countries. It also eases the access of companies to finance on good terms.

In India, some private insurers and ECGC Ltd, a state-owned insurer, provide PRI. However, there is a major challenge that contributes to an observed under-utilization of PRI by Indian businesses as an effective tool for expansion: the low availability of US dollar-denominated PRI policies.

Rupee-denominated PRI policies are not adequately useful for businesses as the Indian rupee has been depreciating in value against the US dollar for years. Thus, the assured sum may not be sufficient to cover losses over extended periods.

Both backward and forward integration are long-term endeavours and necessitate insurance policy coverage for longer periods of time. Also, the frequent renewal of short-term rupee-denominated policies issued by Indian insurers is cumbersome and perhaps motivates businesses to opt for risk cover from international insurers that operate overseas.

Globally, most national PRI providers offer risk coverage in foreign denominated currencies. This includes the UK, where insurers offer 60-plus local currency options for PRI. For Turkey, its Exim Bank offers coverage principally in dollars and euros, although it also offers many other options, like the Japanese yen and British pound. In Japan, specific policy conditions are laid out for insurers to provide foreign currency denominated payouts; these include dates for applicable foreign-exchange conversion rates for such payments.

To facilitate the growth of Indian businesses outside India, India must overcome this problem associated with political risk insurance.

# Trump is scaring Republicans away from saving planet Earth

His popularity has led his party members to deny climate change



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Donald Trump's climate denial is making Republicans follow suit

After decades of refusing to acknowledge the link between human activity and a warming planet, most conservatives [in the US] no longer deny that climate change is real. Republican-led states have advanced proposals for developing renewable energy and are investing in clean fuel tech. Southern-state governors have embraced the green jobs boom created by US President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act by taking credit for it while cutting ribbons at new electric vehicle (EV) and battery manufacturing plants.

But as it becomes clear that Donald Trump will win the Republican presidential nomination, there has been a notable retrenchment in the commitment of many GOP clean-energy advocates. Republicans across the country are reversing course for fear of triggering Trump, who has repeatedly called climate change a "make-believe problem," even suggesting that the concept was a "hoax" concocted by China.

In Florida, where Governor Ron DeSantis broke with Tea Party-led climate deniers in 2016 and acknowledged that "humans contribute to what goes on around us," the Republican-led legislature has sent him a bill that requires all references to "climate change" be deleted from state statutes. DeSantis is likely to sign it. To DeSantis and Republican legislators, climate change may be menacing their state, but it's someone else's problem.

Republican House Speaker Paul Renner, who represents the Palm Coast area that was pummeled by Hurricanes Idalia and Ian, defended the retreat from use of the words "climate change," claiming the bill's intent is to keep energy cheap and reliable. For him, it's fine to throw taxpayer money into fortifying homes and businesses against windstorms, floods and rising seas instead of focusing on policies that would help prevent the damage in the first place. "So if the climate's changing, if that's going to have negative consequences, [then] we put aside a bunch of money for flooding and resilience," Renner said.

There is no 'if.' Earth's climate has changed because of decades of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. Property insurance rates in Florida have risen 57% between 2015 and 2023 and its residents already have wasted, as Renner says, "a bunch of money," because people keep building and rebuilding in places prone to these natural disasters.

Maybe Renner is hoping to extract campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry—like Trump and DeSantis. The

clean-energy backtracking is costing jobs. Trump has called for the elimination of the clean-energy tax credits contained in the Inflation Reduction Act and promised to slash incentives for EVs if he is elected. It's become uncool for anyone who supports Trump to own an EV. So it's no surprise that EV sales are far below expectations and that automakers have scaled back or delayed production.

The decline in EV sales led Rivian Automotive to indefinitely pause construction of a \$5 billion production plant in Georgia. And in South Carolina, Albemarle suspended plans to break ground on a \$1.3 billion plant to manufacture EV batteries.

This short-sighted thinking is going to hurt more than jobs. Bob Inglis, a former Republican congressman from South Carolina who lost his seat in 2010 because he campaigned on fixing the climate crisis, says precious time is being lost in the fight to adopt policies aimed at halting the damaging changes.

"The scientists are ringing in my ears saying, 'Faster, Inglis faster.' We don't have time for to wait," he told me. He founded an advocacy organization, republicEN.org, to work with conservative climate activists. "A majority of Americans, including a majority of Republicans, and an even larger majority of young Republicans, believe the science of climate change, and want to see our leaders put forward serious solutions," George Behrakis, vice president of Young Conservatives for Carbon Dividends said.

Despite being out of touch with most Americans, Trump has doubled down on his derision for climate change "because it excites some part of his base," Inglis said. The result is a Republican Party stuck between advancing an optimistic market-driven solution to the problem and angering the retribution-driven Trump.

With the loudest mouth on the planet spewing misinformation with his anti-clean-energy narrative, it is no surprise that Trump's followers are parroting him. Of course, that won't matter when another hurricane blows through the US south this summer. But never mind talk of policies aimed at preventing the destruction these events bring. It's all just a hoax we should ignore to 'make America great again,' as Trump's slogan goes. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

# Muralidharan's take on governance is quite refreshing

RAHUL MATTHAN



is a partner at Trilegal and also has a podcast by the name Ex Machina. His Twitter handle is @matthan

Since so much of my work lies at the intersection of law and technology, I'm always interested in theories of governance. If I can understand how governance works, I believe I will be better informed as to how technology can be used to make it more effective. Which is why, ever since I heard that it was being written, I've been waiting to read Karthik Muralidharan's tome, *Accelerating India's Development*. This, in many ways, is a remarkable book, not just because of its size (at 800 pages, it could easily do duty as a doorstop), but because of how it has been written. It's neatly organized into bite-sized essays that are easy to digest, with each chapter building on those before it to collectively contribute to the grand argument. Most importantly, unlike so many books of its ilk, instead of just focusing on what is wrong with the Indian state, it offers implementable suggestions as to how to make it better.

The starting premise of the book is that the last time we made any "systematic

investments into the institutional foundations of the Indian state" was in 1950. Since then, all we have done is increase our expectations of what the state must provide us without making necessary investments in its capacity to deliver.

One of the reasons for this, Karthik argues, is that Indian citizens had universal adult franchise right from the country's birth, unlike those of other nations. Where other countries pursued development at the cost of initially disenfranchised interest groups (women, minorities and the like), Indian politicians had to appease everyone and as a result could take no short-cuts. This is why as powerful as universal adult franchise has been for democracy, it has affected the pace of our development.

He points out a number of ways in which Indian bureaucracy falls short of its potential, many of which came as a surprise to me. For instance, even though we think Indian civil servants are underpaid, I learnt that they earn, on average, far more than their counterparts in the private sector. This is why government jobs are so highly sought after. I also learnt that the Indian bureaucracy is not bloated, but woefully understaffed, with just 16 public officials for every 1,000 citizens (China has 57). These factors

and more have meant that incentives rarely align with effective governance.

For instance, the sinecure of government jobs has made civil servants risk averse. They have no interest in innovation because not only do they see no financial upside, should the experiment fail, it could literally cost them their career. Similarly, they have no incentive to be frugal, seeing how every paise they save will be taken out of their budget next year.

Technology rears its head off and on throughout the book, showing up like R.K. Laxman's Common Man in a variety of different contexts. In the chapter on education, Karthik shows us how it can be used to solve the quintessential challenge of classroom education: that teaching aimed at the average student is neither sufficiently challenging the more intelligent, nor simple enough to be understood by those struggling to keep up. Educational software that can assess the competence level of students and dynamically adjust the teaching plan to

suit their learning requirements will make it possible for children in the same class to learn at different speeds.

In his chapter on justice reform, he suggests a technology solution to reduce delays, proposing the establishment of a portal on which lawyers can seek adjournments in advance, so that the court can process these requests asynchronously without wasting time that should be reserved for arguments. He also proposes establishing a digital land-record system to bring more certainty to land titles, so that we can reduce the volume of real estate disputes in India.

While it was good to see these scattered references, I was expecting better coverage of the role of technology in governance. Given the success of India's digital public infrastructure, I thought the book would at least devote a chapter to it. Karthik's explanation is that technology is just an enabler and not the panacea for all that ails Indian governance. He worries that as useful as it can be, technology has the potential to exacerbate

inequities rather than mitigate them. This is why, he explains, it does not have an entire section to itself.

These are concerns I've heard before and even spilt ink trying to defend. And while there is truth to what he says, technology is such an essential arrow in the quiver of the modern bureaucrat that I don't think any treatise on improving governance can be complete without engaging with it.

Reading through the book, one is struck by the fact that without the political will to effect change, the suggestions it makes are of little practical relevance. Politicians operate on five-year timescales and typically have no interest in pursuing governance reform—projects that typically take longer than that to show success.

But it is here that the book is at its most optimistic. Karthik argues that Indian voters are increasingly appreciative of good governance. He has evidence to show that reforms can bear results within a politician's term of office. Both these factors, coupled with a very human desire to leave behind a lasting legacy, offer some solace that change might come.

Which is why despite the seemingly pessimistic initial premise, this is such a refreshingly optimistic book.

**His book stands out for the solutions it offers India but underplays the role of technology**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Repeat offenders

Pro-Khalistan slogans raised again at Toronto event in front of Trudeau; India hits back

Yet another event which saw pro-Khalistan slogans being raised, this time in Toronto, has triggered diplomatic tensions between India and Canada. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was also present in the programme, which made it look like the Canadian Government was condoning the act. It prompted India to summon in New Delhi a Canadian diplomat and express strong disapproval. The event, celebrating cultural diversity and inclusivity, took an unexpected turn when a group of individuals began chanting slogans in support of Khalistan, a separatist movement. The unfortunate incident is indeed a setback to ongoing discussions between the countries on various issues. For India, the incident struck a sensitive chord as it perceives the Khalistan movement a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Indian authorities view any display of support for Khalistan, especially in the presence of heads of State, with utmost seriousness. The Indian Government, therefore, wasted no time in conveying its concerns to Canadian authorities. The summoning of their diplomat serves as a clear signal of India's displeasure and underscores the gravity with which it views the matter. Meanwhile, in Canada, the incident has sparked discussions about the limits of freedom of expression and the implication of such incidents on diplomatic relations.



While Canada may uphold the principles of free speech and assembly, the chanting of pro-Khalistan slogans on its soil in the presence of its Prime Minister raises questions about the appropriateness of such actions, particularly in a diplomatic context. Trudeau, who has been an advocate for multiculturalism and

diversity, has yet to publicly comment on the incident. However, it is expected that he will address the matter in due course, considering the diplomatic ramifications and the need to maintain constructive relations with India. Given the history of the roots of Khalistanis in Canada, it was a foregone conclusion that something of this sort might come up. The Canadian Prime Minister should have ensured in advance such a thing would not happen as it reflects badly on his Government and strains relations with India. Indeed, pampering Khalistanis on its soil is going to be a problem for Canada as history repeats itself and all those regimes that once harboured such elements have paid a heavy price for it. The incident also underscores the complexities of managing diaspora politics, particularly when it intersects with sensitive geopolitical issues. Canada is home to a significant Sikh population, many of whom have strong ties with India and hold varying views on the Khalistan movement. Ultimately, the Toronto incident highlights the interconnectedness of global politics and the need for vigilance in safeguarding the principles of sovereignty, unity and respect for diverse perspectives. It is a stark reminder that actions and words uttered in one corner of the world can have far-reaching implications, shaping the course of international relations for years.

### PICTALK



Fireworks light up the sky at the Golden Temple on the birth anniversary of Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, in Amritsar

## Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?



ASHOK K MEHTA

The BJP's election focus has shifted away from recent China tensions, opting instead to highlight Nehru's actions during the 1962 conflict

China has been generally missing from election manifestos and campaigning so far. Former Army Chief Gen Naravane at a literary festival in Ajmer recently called China India's primary threat adding confrontation along LAC was a good thing as it exposed this ground reality that Delhi was shy to admit. EAM S Jaishankar and especially Defence Secretary Giridhar Armane have made unkind references to Beijing. In his book Four Stars of Destiny Naravane has written extensively about the India-China confrontation which started under his watch. It was a serious failure of intelligence which allowed the Chinese PLA to occupy nearly 2000 square km of territory on the Indian side of LAC corresponding to their 1956 claim line. The avoidable tragedy at Galwan and the refusal of the Chinese to restore the status quo ante April 2020 even after 21 rounds of military dialogue (the last round on 21 February) place India at a serious disadvantage. In 1998 India gave China as the reason for conducting nuclear tests which incensed the Chinese, requiring then foreign minister Jaswant Singh to travel to Beijing to "untie the knot". I was witness to the repair exercise in Beijing even as then our Army was retaking Tololing Heights, Kargil. Singh had to say that China was not a threat. Later then defence minister George Fernandes called China the number one threat though it was misreported as "No 1 enemy". This caused a diplomatic furore as China is acutely sensitive to being seen as or worse a threat by any country. The Government is careful in its articulations on China as it hopes to secure full disengagement diplomatically. But the gloves came off Feb /Mar. Jaishankar speaking at the Raisina dialogue said that China should not be allowed to play mind -games to counter which India must use other means (implying US help) to seek better equilibrium. His comments came a day after Armane at the INDUS-X FORUM in Delhi unprecedentedly called Beijing a bully adding "we expect our friend US will be



there in case we need their support". Not since 1962 have we sought unequivocally US military support. This is bound to have upset China. Worse, no Indian official had ever called China a bully. Surprisingly China has not reacted. Naravane's book and excerpts have been withheld by the Government in damage control after publishers circulated excerpts of Operation Snow Leopard Night 29/30 August 2020 which belittle the Government's political control in war and explosive comments on Agniveer. Armed with material from the horse's mouth, the opposition is targeting the Government in China and Agniveer — during election rallies where foreign policy is an issue. How Army intelligence cleared the book for publication is a mystery. In parliament on 10 Feb 2021, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed Parliament about withdrawals in the North Pangong Tso Lake Fingers area. But he made no mention of vacation from Kailash Heights, which presumably was implied in 'mutual withdrawal'. But Singh added: "Chinese side is aware of our resolve not to allow an inch of territory to be taken". Former NSA, Shiv Shankar Menon in his writings has observed: "we don't know what happened in South Bank (Kailash heights) as we know



FORMER ARMY CHIEF GEN NARAVANE RECENTLY HIGHLIGHTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CAUTIOUS ARTICULATIONS ON CHINA AIM TO SECURE FULL DISENGAGEMENT DIPLOMATICALLY, DESPITE THE SERIOUS INTELLIGENCE FAILURE ALLOWING CHINESE OCCUPATION OF INDIAN TERRITORY ALONG THE LAC

about North Bank (Pangongtso Lake)". Recently Congress leader Jairam Ramesh cited an X post by Chushul Councillor Konchok Stanzin of autonomous Ladakh Hill Development Council that the Rezangla battle 1962 memorial was dismantled as it fell in the 'buffer zone' negotiated with China during the vacation of Kailash Heights. That undisputed Kailash Heights in Indian territory had been made a buffer zone is a revelation that the Government never even informed parliament. In the critical operational situation replete with vertical and horizontal escalation that developed at Kailash Heights that critical night, no political guidance had been provided by CCS/RM/PM to Naravane which became clear from his conversation with Singh urgently seeking orders. With Naravane's book and excerpts embargoed for release, the book may never materialise as it showed the political direction of a war-like situation in poor light. But Naravane will know why he didn't become CDS even as critical Kailash heights are lost for perpetuity. In the election campaign, no BJP leader has so far mentioned Galwan or Kailash heights which were examples of valourous use of force against China as it could open a can of worms. Keeping Naravane

out of the fray, the opposition is attacking the Government for losing 2000 sq km of land as well as 26 of 65 patrolling points. Campaigning in Pune and speaking to the media on 12 April, Jaishankar emphasized "there was no encroachment by China; it has not occupied any of our land; but the situation is sensitive, competitive and challenging." The PM, HM and RM have all also denied loss of territory. In his interview with Newsweek in response to a question on China, PM Modi's terse reply was: "New Delhi ties with Beijing are important and the prolonged situation at the border should be addressed urgently, for peace and tranquillity to be restored and sustained at the borders". The Chinese welcomed the statement adding sound and stable ties were in common interest. Restoring the LAC to April 2020 as sought by India, the Chinese will never do. It's tough to conceive of a compromise formula. Consequently, the C word is almost missing from the BJP election discourse, cleverly diverted to Nehru's follies in 1962. But Naravane deserves praise.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### CHALLENGES FOR NEW GOVERNMENT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Challenges loom ahead of the July Union Budget," published on April 30, this is my response. The forthcoming union budget already stirs anticipation, underscoring the critical juncture India faces. Economic discourse dominates electoral debates, eclipsing divisive issues. However, the electorate's focus on core economic woes signals a paradigm shift. Spiralling inflation, mounting household debts and sluggish job creation demand urgent attention. Yet, electoral promises veer towards populism rather than pragmatic solutions. The fiscal landscape is daunting, with staggering debt repayments curtailing budgetary flexibility. Amid global economic headwinds, India's export slump exacerbates trade deficits. Addressing structural issues like low productivity and high taxation is imperative for sustained growth. Furthermore, infrastructural development must align with socio-economic welfare, assuage rural discontent and foster inclusive growth. A judicious blend of public and private sector involvement and prudent fiscal policies can steer India towards its lofty economic aspirations. Ultimately, the onus lies on the new Government to navigate these challenges deftly, prioritising the populace's wellbeing over partisan agendas.

Neha Iyer | Pune

#### ENGAGING YOUTH IN POLITICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why are the young not joining politics?" published on April 30, this is my response. Witnessing the apathy of young voters towards participating in the political process is disheartening. While some may feel disillusioned with the quality of politicians, others might believe their voices won't make a difference. However, by abstaining from voting, they relinquish their right to shape the nation's future. On the other end of the spectrum, the

#### State Assembly sessions



Apropos the news article, "Delhi, other state legislative meetings dwindle," published on April 29, this is my response. As someone who follows daily news, the pattern of state assembly sessions raises concerns. The data compiled by PRS Legislative Research reveals a significant disparity in the number of days assemblies convene. While some states meet

the constitutional mandate of at least one session every six months, others fall drastically short. The emphasis on budget sessions, evident from the majority of sittings concentrated within these periods, indicates a rushed legislative process. Such haste might compromise the quality of debate and scrutiny essential for robust policymaking. Moreover, the prolonged sessions in some states, stretching beyond a year in extreme cases, question the efficiency and accountability of legislative bodies. The instances of bills being passed swiftly after introduction raise doubts about thorough deliberation and stakeholder consultation. Efforts to streamline legislative processes and ensure meaningful engagement during sessions are imperative to uphold democratic principles and deliver effective governance.

Nisha Menon | Bhopal

lack of interest among older individuals in entering politics is concerning. The decline in ethical and social values, coupled with the high cost of electioneering, deters many from pursuing political careers. Addressing these issues requires systemic changes, such as the delimitation of electoral constituencies and measures to reduce election expenses. Compulsory voting could also enhance participation and diminish the influence of vote-bank politics. Moreover, curbing the distribution of freebies is crucial to prevent elections from devolving into mere transactions. True democracy demands active engagement from all citizens, irrespective of age or background.

Meera Patel | Ahmedabad

#### NUTRITION FOR ORAL HEALTH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Diet, Mint, Ginger Impact," published on April 29, this is my response. Maintaining oral health extends beyond brushing and flossing; it's about what we eat too. Sugary and starchy foods can

feed harmful mouth bacteria, leading to gum disease. A balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein, calcium-rich foods and whole grains not only supports a healthy body but also promotes a bright smile. Opting for natural foods over processed ones is key to oral and overall wellbeing. Remember, oral health impacts your entire body; bacteria from the mouth can spread, increasing the risk of various diseases. Mint and ginger offer natural remedies for oral care. Mint's antiseptic properties combat bacteria, freshen breath and prevent cavities. Meanwhile, ginger, with its gingerol compound, fights infections and inflammation, strengthening teeth. Incorporating these ingredients into a refreshing drink like Mint & Ginger Healthy Drink adds flavour and health benefits to your routine, promoting a radiant smile and robust health.

Arjun Reddy | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Recognising workers' resilience and struggle

On International Labour Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to worker welfare and advocate for fair, empowering policies

On May 1st, as we celebrate International Labour Day, these words of Karl Marx resonate with renewed significance. May Day is not merely a day of rest; it is a powerful reminder of the resilience and collective strength of workers worldwide. It is a day to honour the countless individuals who have fought for the rights and dignity of labourers and to recognise the ongoing struggle for justice in the workplace.

Every year on May 1st, International Labour Day serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles, sacrifices and triumphs of workers worldwide. It is a day to honour the contributions of labourers across various countries and industries, while also acknowledging the ongoing battle for labour rights and social justice. As we commemorate International Labour Day on May 1, 2024, let us reflect on the significance of this day and recommit ourselves to advocating for the rights and welfare of workers.

The roots of International Labour Day trace back to May 1, 1886, when workers in



Chicago staged a massive protest demanding an eight-hour workday. This pivotal event led to the establishment of International Workers' Day, symbolising the collective struggle for fair labour practices. Since then, May Day has evolved into a global movement, with workers from all walks of life coming together to advocate for their rights. May Day holds immense significance in highlighting the importance of workers' rights. It serves as a platform to address issues such as fair wages, equal opportunities, maternity benefits, healthcare and safe working conditions. By amplifying the voices of workers, May Day fosters solidarity and empowers individuals to strive for better living standards and dignity in labour.

In India, May Day was first celebrated in 1923 by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan in Madras (now Chennai). Led by visionary leaders like Singaravelu Chettiar, this event marked the beginning of a movement to champion the rights of workers. Since then, May Day has been observed with fervour across the country, with various labour organisations leading rallies and campaigns to advocate for workers' welfare. Dr BR Ambedkar, a towering figure in India's labour movement, played a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of marginalised labourers. He emphasised the principles of equal pay for equal work, maternity benefits, eradication of discrimination and fair treatment of workers.

Through his leadership and advocacy, Dr Ambedkar laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable society. While we have made significant strides in advancing labour rights, challenges persist. Many workers, especially those in the informal sector, continue to face exploitation and lack of protection. We must address these issues and work towards creating a more just and equitable working environment for all. As we celebrate International Labour Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to the welfare of workers. We must advocate for policies that promote fair labour practices, empower workers and ensure their wellbeing. As International Labour Day dawns upon us once again on May 1st, 2024, let it serve not just as a commemoration of past struggles, but as a beacon lighting our path towards a future where every worker's dignity is honoured, every voice is heard and every dream finds its fulfilment in a world of equality and justice.

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)



SANTOSH MATHEW



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Canadian laxity

Anti-India elements continue to have a field day

THE pro-Khalistan slogans raised at a public event, which was attended by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other leaders in Toronto on Sunday, validate India's claim that Canada has been giving space to separatism and extremism. India summoned the Canadian deputy high commissioner on Monday and lodged a strong protest over the incident, which was described by the Ministry of External Affairs as 'disturbing'. New Delhi has stated that such actions not only impact the India-Canada relations but also encourage a climate of violence and criminality in Canada.

The ties between the two nations have been under strain after Trudeau announced in September last year that Canadian agencies were probing the alleged involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was designated as a terrorist by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA). Canada, however, has failed to substantiate the charges, which were promptly dismissed by India as 'absurd'. Having repeatedly asked Ottawa to share credible evidence in the Nijjar case, India has been asserting that its core issue with Canada continues to be the latitude given to separatists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country.

New Delhi has also taken exception to a *Washington Post* report that named an Indian official who allegedly hatched a plot to kill NIA-designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. India has said that the report makes 'unwarranted and unsubstantiated' imputations on a serious matter. A high-level committee set up by the Indian government is already carrying out an investigation into the security concerns shared by the Biden administration on networks of criminals and terrorists. The US, which has affirmed that India has been taking the Pannun case seriously, needs to ensure that its territory is not misused by troublemakers to whip up anti-India sentiment.

## Food safety concerns

FSSAI to scale up quality checks

AMID a controversy over alleged adulteration of spices exported by MDH and Everest and the concerns over high sugar content in infant food products of Nestle India and Cadbury, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has announced a comprehensive plan to enhance inspections across the nation. By conducting pan-India monitoring of spices, culinary herbs and other food items, the FSSAI aims to enforce stringent standards and safeguard consumers against potential health risks.

However, it is a poor reflection on the FSSAI's regulatory mechanism that this initiative stems not from its own findings but from the US authorities' refusal of certain spice-related shipments over the past few months and the recent ban imposed by Singapore and Hong Kong on spice companies which are suspected of supplying contaminated condiments and *masalas*. Earlier, the row over high sugar content in infant foods had prompted the FSSAI to scrutinise baby formula products, in accordance with its mandate to protect vulnerable users.

In another proactive step towards addressing the challenges in food safety, the FSSAI has decided to leverage the expertise of specialists from universities, research institutes and government organisations to enhance its capacity for risk assessment and mitigation and, thereby, ensure robust oversight of the food supply chain. By expanding its ambit to fruits, vegetables, fish products, fortified rice and milk products, the FSSAI aims to deal with diverse aspects of the problem. Looking to allay concerns over adulteration and contamination through surveillance, testing and enforcement, the FSSAI can play a bigger role in promoting food safety and building consumer confidence in India's food industry.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, MAY 1, 1924

## Government propaganda

WHETHER or not the Central Provinces (CP) Government intends to dissolve the present council, signs are not wanting to show that it is carrying on a vigorous campaign to discredit the Swarajists and expose their tactics to the public. We have before us a number of leaflets printed at the Government Press, Nagpur, during the last month in which the writer, whose name is not disclosed, has tried to explain the immense harm done to the people of the province by the obstructive attitude of the Swarajists. Whatever may be the value of the arguments used in these leaflets and the facts represented therein, it may be seriously questioned whether the government is justified in using the services of its Press and evidently the departmental agencies to carry on a party campaign of the kind attempted in the issues of the leaflets. Leaflet No. 100 is headed 'Folly of Obstruction', No. 101 'Madak Smoking Bill and the Swarajists' and No. 102 'Agricultural Department and the Swarajists'. In all these, the action of the party in opposition to the government has been criticised in the usual partisan spirit. Methods of this kind are perfectly legitimate when adopted by rival parties during an electioneering campaign, but we doubt if they can be adopted by the executive in power with justice and fairness — unless it relinquishes office and contests the council seats to regain its power. Evidently, the CP Government is trying to win over the CP voters to its side and weaken their support of the Swaraj Party — a scheme which, if it proves successful, will harm the Swarajists.

## Poll rhetoric threatens India's plurality

The country's ability to sustain a vibrant democracy is in danger of being lost forever

SHYAM SARAN  
FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY

INDIA's compelling reality is its immense diversity. No political dispensation, no matter how powerful and ideologically driven it may be, can succeed in putting a monochromatic frame over this. Ours is a shared culture, but the emphasis lies on the aspect of sharing, not of adhering. It's a crossroads culture, created through the assimilation of influences India was exposed to through the millennia. It lay at the intersecting point of the caravan routes from Central Asia, stretching into the West Asia and to the Mediterranean, and the maritime sea routes connecting it to both the eastern and western flanks of the Indian Ocean. Just as Indian religious and political thought, languages and art and architecture flowed out to these geographies outwards from the subcontinent, so, too, did corresponding influences from the latter spread across India. This has bequeathed to Indian culture and to the temperament of its people an innate cosmopolitanism, which makes Indians one of the most adaptable people in the world. We have been the original global citizens of the world.

When India hosted the G20 summit in September 2023, it was most appropriate to have *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole world is one family) as its defining motto. But to embrace the whole world, one must begin with embracing the people of one's own country. This is also the reason why the Preamble to the Constitution lays as much stress on fraternity as it does on liberty and equality. Fraternity is particularly important for a diverse country like India. It cre-

BENCHMARK: When India hosted the G20 summit in September 2023, it was most appropriate to have *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole world is one family) as its defining motto. ■■

ates a sense of affinity that transcends differences in caste, creed or religion and in the ways of living. It is fraternity which is the true basis of nationhood. Of belonging to a common cause and engaged in the pursuit of a shared national mission.

The framers of the Constitution recognised that Indian nationalism would have to be built on acknowledging rather than suppressing the multiple identities of its people. And yet, in the final analysis, they did not quite trust the people of India to successfully balance their separate identities with an overarching concept of equal citizenship. In its final shape, its subsequent amendments and in laws passed by the legislature, the Constitution enabled the coercive power of the state to be progressively strengthened at the expense of the citizen. The state became selective in allowing some assertions of separate identities but in seeking to suppress others, the touchstone being what best served political interests of the moment. Suppression of some identities would be justified on the grounds of a threat to national unity. Others may be promoted and even legitimised to ostensibly advance

It is a matter of pride that the country has been able to conduct elections on an unprecedented scale every five years and that there has been a smooth & uneventful transfer of power.

national unity. The state is able to use its control and influence over the media and information channels to demonise some communities but ennoble others. Political rhetoric, then, aligns with the strategy of the moment. Such rhetoric often takes on a hysterical pitch, which drowns out all reasoned arguments. In a democracy, the holding of free and fair elections is indispensable but not sufficient. An independent media and a vibrant civil society provide the means to safeguard the ordinary

citizen against transgressions by the state. They hold the state accountable on behalf of the citizen and constitute an alternative channel of information for the people. This is also the role played by a powerful and independent judiciary. In history, it has often been the case that the national security and national unity arguments have been used as powerful labels to delegitimise independent institutions and dissenting voices and, eventually, political competition.

India is midway through its 18th General Election. It is a matter of pride that the country has been able to successfully conduct these elections on an unprecedented scale every five years and that there has been a smooth and uneventful transfer of political power without violence or challenge. An independent Election Commission makes certain that all political parties and politicians play by the rules when seeking votes during their election campaigns. It is expected to make sure that candidates do not use religion, caste or creed to mobilise votes, but it is not always successful, and sometimes it is allegedly selective in imposing penalties. But during the ongo-

ing elections, the rhetoric indulged in by certain political parties and leaders has crossed all limits. There has been a most vulgar and scurrilous attack against our Muslim citizens and charges of 'anti-national' activities have been repeatedly flung at political rivals. There is a thick fog of deliberate misinformation and outright lies designed to mislead and confuse voters. We profess *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and yet indulge in openly creating dangerous fissures in our fragile social fabric. I have said this before and will repeat it: an overarching national unity cannot be constructed on a Hindu-Muslim binary.

It is easy to dismiss the offensive and threatening statements made against India's Muslims as election rhetoric, which will dissipate once the polls are over, but this is not true. The hurt and pervasive fear they have inflicted will simmer long after the elections conclude. Words once spoken cannot be retracted. The damage is done. As Rahim has said in one of his most celebrated couplets:

*Rahiman jhwa bawari, Kah gai sarag paatal*

*Aapu toh kahi bhitar rahi; Jooti khaat kapaal.*

(My warrior tongue has said all that lies between heaven and hell. It has said what it wanted and retreated, but it is my head which is receiving painful blows as a consequence.)

Election rhetoric must remain within the limits of civilised discourse. The pursuit of political power cannot be without ethical markers, for that will take us on a dangerous road of national and social fragmentation. I write this with a sense of deep concern about our country, whose ability to accommodate incredible diversity and sustain a vibrant democracy has been our pride and the envy of the world. It is this most precious of assets, honed over the centuries, which is in danger of being lost forever. This is a treasure which a future *Vishvaguru* may be unable to resurrect.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision. — George Eliot

## When we waged a war over water

NJ RAVI CHANDER

IT'S hard to believe that packaged water was once a rarity. People considered safe drinking water a privilege. Groundwater served as the primary source of drinking water for many households. However, in certain pockets of Bengaluru, the municipal authorities took a significant step, installing taps in every neighbourhood and introducing piped water. However, although most houses had water supply connections in the 1970s, the precious liquid rarely poured out. When residents turned on the taps, hissing sounds greeted them from the empty pipes.

Back then, we were forced to rely on the street taps for drinking water. Our parents would stir us up in the middle of the night. We would clutch buckets and brass vessels and join the serpentine queue in front of the street tap. The arduous task of fetching water would take over an hour, often forcing us to sacrifice sleep. And yet, the taps would run dry a few hours later. The early birds would get their fill, while the latecomers would return with empty vessels, a cycle that was repeated day after day.

Getting water from the public tap was a challenging task. You had to remain steadfast to keep wise guys from jumping the queue. The jostling often resulted in fisticuffs and brawls punctuated with a liberal use of unprintables.

At places like Lingarajapuram in Bengaluru, where we lived in the 1990s, the absence of running water was a stark reality. The locals had to endure a daily struggle for water, relying on traditional carriers like the *bhishtis*. These bicycle-borne persons would sell plastic pails of water, sourced from the nearby town, from morning till night.

At school, we drank unfiltered water from the faucets. On one occasion, when I went up to the school's water tank and peeked inside, I was shocked to discover that the insides were covered with moss. The school authorities hadn't bothered to clean it, and we didn't dare question them. But luckily, thanks to our robust immune system, we never fell ill.

Sadly, the harm caused to the environment outweighs the advantages of packaged water. Inadequate plastic waste disposal contributes to global warming, clogs waterways and imperils ecosystems. This crisis demands immediate attention and action, as the consequences are already upon us.

Sikkim, a northeastern state, deserves utmost admiration for its progressive step of banning plastic mineral water bottles. The state, blessed with abundant natural resources, has set a commendable example of environmental responsibility. Visitors are not permitted to bring packaged water bottles, which can take centuries to break down and endanger plant, animal and marine life. This is a model that other states should not just emulate but strive to surpass, helping to save our country from the destruction caused by plastic.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## India-Canada ties sour

Refer to the news report 'Delhi summons Canadian envoy over pro-Khalistan slogans at Trudeau event'; India rightly summoned Canadian Deputy High Commissioner Stewart Wheeler on Monday to convey its concern and express its objection to the pro-Khalistan slogans raised at an event addressed by PM Justin Trudeau. Notably, Opposition leader Pierre Poilievre was also present on the occasion. Such incidents not only impact relations between India and Canada but also hurt the interests of Canadian citizens. Trudeau may not see a problem with the Khalistani supporters yet, but he would be left wringing his hands when these extremists show their true colours.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

## Misuse of free speech in Canada

The event in Toronto, where slogans for a Sikh separatist state were raised, has stirred a diplomatic maelstrom. India's summoning of the Canadian envoy underscores the gravity of the situation. The bilateral strain, exacerbated by the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar and subsequent allegations, demands a delicate balance between freedom of expression and respect for a state's sovereignty. While Canada's commitment to safeguarding rights is commendable, it is imperative that such freedom is not misused to fuel separatist sentiments. It is a matter of international concern that requires a nuanced approach.

SEWA SINGH, AMRITSAR

## Reduce the trade deficit

Refer to the editorial 'China's trade edge'; the vast difference between India's \$16-billion exports to China and its \$101-billion imports from the Dragon is a matter of concern. Such a huge trade imbalance certainly affects India's economic health and vulnerability. It is imperative to improve the situation by strengthening 'Make in India' projects and boosting exports. Those connected with commerce and trade can contribute heavily to reducing the trade deficit. An increase in the export of textiles, pharma products, handicrafts, processed food, etc, can significantly narrow the trade gap.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

## Failure of society

With reference to the article 'The abominable stigma of failure'; while advertisements of coaching classes carrying photos of toppers adorn public walls, the 'failures' are nowhere to be seen, as if they have been erased from public memory. Unfortunately, this stigma is prevalent in families too. Students who do not achieve academic success are regarded as a disgrace to the family. The higher the social and financial standing of a family, the greater is the burden on its children to succeed. It gets worse when children from a humble background crack an exam. For every success story, there are thousands of tales of failure. The inability of society to accept failures is a shame.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES, MUMBAI

## Coaching culture is toxic

Apropos of 'The abominable stigma of failure'; it is a timely and comprehensive analysis acknowledging the intensity of intellectual damage caused by coaching enterprises. The rise of such enterprises has corresponded with the slow and steady death of classroom teaching. The writer has rightly stated that the hyper-competitive ethos of social Darwinism is altering the self-perception of even schoolchildren and ruining the creative rebelliousness of youngsters. It is also causing them to have grave mental health issues. The traditional classroom teaching was far more meaningful and less stressful. The coaching culture, on the other hand, is all about cut-throat competition, pushing the young generation into the rat race.

VITULL K GUPTA, BY MAIL

## Scourge of coaching culture

Refer to the article 'The abominable stigma of failure'; the arguments made by the author are on point. He has aptly dissected the burgeoning racket of coaching. The proliferation of private coaching institutions starkly highlights the shortcomings of the government education system, which fails to deliver what these profit-driven academies promise. Many of these private establishments lack basic safety infrastructure and appear to operate hand in glove with public educational authorities. The piece should serve as an eye-opener for all.

BALVINDER, BY MAIL

# Lack of a National Security Strategy disquieting



**RAHUL BEDI**  
SENIOR JOURNALIST

**T**HE ongoing General Election has further delayed the long-deferred National Security Strategy (NSS), despite the plethora of high-powered consultative and advisory bodies and think tanks in India's strategic and military planning realms.

For the defence and security establishment that continually toms its achievements, the lack of an NSS — despite three attempts to produce one in recent years — is disquieting. It is especially troubling as this hiatus persists at a juncture when India confronts threats from nuclear neighbours China and Pakistan and faces technological challenges on the 21st-century battlefield frequently enumerated by the country's military chiefs.

The absence of an NSS, from which would also flow the long-delayed and equally vital National Defence Strategy, is believed to be impacting the reorganisation of the military into tri-service integrated theatre commands (ITCs) by harnessing their combined financial, materiel

and overall operational capabilities. The architecture of the ITCs was to be forwarded to the government for approval by 2022 by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) before operationalising them the following year, but it remains a work in progress.

Media reports in late 2023 had indicated that the National Security Council Secretariat was being tasked with drawing up an NSS with inputs from ministries and assorted departments and forwarding it to the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by PM Narendra Modi for eventual sanction. But no deadline was seemingly determined for such a document, the responsibility for which will now be that of the government which will assume office after the elections.

But these recurrent rain checks in framing the critical national security architecture were in inverse proportion to the cluster of recommendatory organisations established over decades to devise a robust NSS. Topping this list is the high-rolling, but seemingly dormant, Defence Planning Committee (DPC) created in April 2018 as an 'overarching' body to manage India's defence and security strategy, prepare military capability plans, fast-track materiel acquisitions and augment military diplomacy.

In tandem is the attendant Strategic Policy Group (SPG), revamped some six



**CLARITY:** Once framed, the NSS would make it clear whether the military's role is just to defend the country's land borders and territorial waters or if it extends to the wider primary strategic arc.

months later the same year as the first level of the three-tiered National Security Council. The group's founding responsibility was to foster inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs for formulating national security policies like the NSS and related policies and procedures.

Both organisations are headed by National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, and their membership was more or less analogous, comprising the three service chiefs and the defence and foreign secretaries. DPC members also include the federal revenue secretary and Chiefs of Staff Committee Chairman — a responsibility that trans-

ferred itself to the CDS in December 2019. The Integrated Defence Staff, also headed by the CDS, was designated the secretariat of the DPC, which encompassed four sub-committees to execute its myriad responsibilities.

SPG membership was larger and included heads of the domestic and overseas intelligence-gathering agencies, the cabinet secretary and the secretaries of home, finance, defence production, revenue, atomic energy and space. The scientific adviser to the defence minister and the NITI Aayog vice-chairman, too, were members of the SPG, which was earlier chaired by the cabinet secretary. But after its refurbish-

The absence of an NSS is believed to be impacting the reorganisation of the country's military into integrated theatre commands.

# Palestinian knowledge ecosystem under Israeli attack



**AMARJIT BHULLAR**  
EX-PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

**I**SRAEL'S attack on universities and other educational institutions in Gaza is seen as a deliberate effort to destroy Palestinian knowledge and learning ecosystem. So far, all 12 universities have witnessed aerial strikes. Israel's targets included Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), resulting in the destruction of years of research by Palestinian faculty, scholars and the students.

Prof Sufian Tayeh, President and Vice Chancellor of the IUG, and his family members were killed in an Israeli attack on the campus. The IUG is Gaza's leading academic institution, and Prof Tayeh was an internationally acknowledged researcher. Dr Refaat Alareer, a professor of English literature at the IUG, is among 90-odd university professors killed in the ongoing assault.

As per statistics released by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, till January

20, 2024, nearly 4,400 students were killed and 7,800 injured, while 231 teachers and administrators were killed and 756 injured in the attacks along with the complete or partial destruction of 378 state-run schools and those run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza. At least 97 journalists and media workers are among more than 35,000 fatalities since the war began in October 2023.

In the International Court of Justice, the legal representative of South Africa, Blinne Ni Ghralaigh, said: "Almost 90,000 Palestinian university students cannot attend university in Gaza. Over 60 per cent of the schools, almost all universities and countless bookshops and libraries have been damaged and destroyed. Hundreds of teachers and academics have been killed, including deans of universities and leading Palestinian scholars... obliterating the prospects of education of Gaza's children and young people."

Many cultural heritage sites, including libraries, archives and museums, have also been wrecked, wiping out the symbols and documented history of the people.

Palestinian intellectuals see it as an effort to 'erase the Palestinian existence from history' and 'erase Palestine from the political



**SOLIDARITY:** Students at a pro-Palestine encampment at the University of California in Los Angeles. REUTERS

map', as Muhannad Ayyash, Professor of Sociology, Mount Royal University, Canada, describes it in a letter to the Canadian Association of University Teachers. "The devastation of Palestinian knowledge, knowledge producers, and knowledge-producing institutions is nothing short of epistemicide," says Prof Ayyash.

Epistemicide means the killing, silencing, annihilation or devaluation of a knowledge system. Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos coined this term and designated it as the "death of knowledge — of a subordinated culture

Epistemicide means the killing, silencing, annihilation or devaluation of a knowledge system.

caused by colonisation, oppression and genocide'. It can be both military as well as ideological/epistemological. It involves appropriation/destruction in the name of liberation, aggression in the name of peace, destruction of life in the name of the sacredness of human rights in the name of the protection of rights.

Rebuilding the Palestinian education system was the topmost priority of the Palestinian educated elite after their displacement to make way for Israel in 1948. They saw education as an engine to rebuild their lives and make progress. Many

scholars moved to Gaza from different places with the hope of making it a place of meaningful cultural exchange, scientific advancements, understanding of history, creative literary works and advancing the Palestinian society. Whether they succeeded or not can be debated, but for sure, Palestine is counted among the regions having the highest literacy rate. Palestine's literacy rate is 97.51 per cent, as per estimates of the World Bank. Palestinians are known as the "world's best educated refugees".

Academics worldwide understand this and that is the reason behind the uprising by university professors and students in the US and other countries. The reverberations of what is happening in Palestinian educational institutions are being felt on campuses abroad.

Encampments have been set up in several universities to protest the US government's continuous monetary, military, diplomatic and moral support to Israeli aggression. The police were called in at about 10 universities and 645 arrests were made; many of those arrested were released later. Highly ranked Columbia and Boston universities have become hubs of protests; more than 200 arrests were made from the campuses of

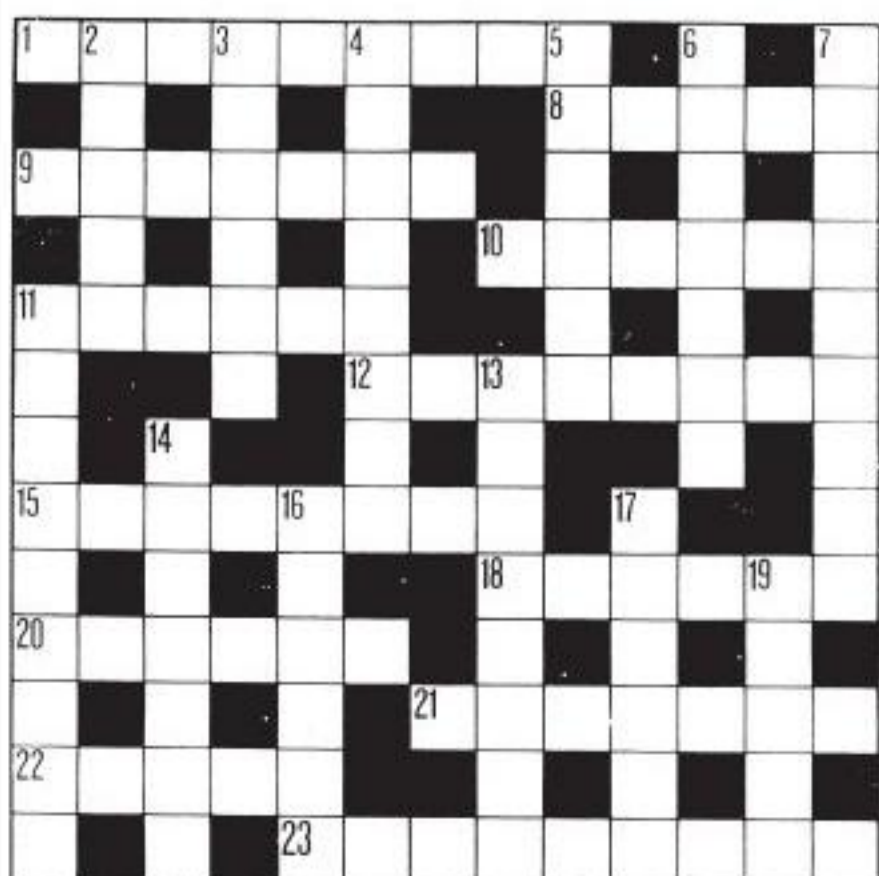
these two universities. A significant number of faculty members have either participated or supported the call for a ceasefire in Gaza. In some universities, the administrators have cracked down on agitating students, resulting in the expulsion of some of them.

Scuffles have been reported between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel demonstrators at the University of California at Los Angeles and other places.

The world must raise the pitch to save Palestinian education from destructive and divisive misadventures. It takes weeks to destroy the knowledge system but decades to rebuild it.

Sadly, Palestinian universities have faced exclusion in the past, when some universities of countries aligned with Israel showed reluctance to enter into academic exchange agreements with Palestinian institutions. On the other hand, students from universities of Israel were welcomed to enjoy the benefits of international collaboration. Israeli universities have 60 existing academic agreements with post-secondary institutions of Canada. It is time for academicians, faculty associations and unions, especially in the developed world, to introspect and build public opinion to end the war, besides promising support for rebuilding the beleaguered Palestinian system.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 1 Stand up under analysis (4,5)
- 8 Approximately (5)
- 9 Pariah (7)
- 10 Forgive (6)
- 11 Elder (6)
- 12 Forebear (8)
- 15 Word for word (8)
- 18 Cope with (6)
- 20 Language (6)
- 21 Occupy (7)
- 22 To research (5)
- 23 Unduly difficult assignment (4,5)

### DOWN

- 2 Helpful (2,3)
- 3 Duplicity (6)
- 4 A summary (8)
- 5 Devastate (6)
- 6 A smokeless explosive (7)
- 7 Whatever happens (2,3,4)
- 11 Slavery (9)
- 13 Shared by a group (8)
- 14 To wheel heavily (7)
- 16 Charm worn against evil (6)
- 17 Inequitable (6)
- 19 Willness (5)

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

**Across:** 1 Modicum, 4 Banjo, 7 Carp, 8 Stand out, 10 Walk of life, 12 Beckon, 13 Schism, 15 Able-bodied, 18 Blow over, 19 Pool, 20 Nurse, 21 Thrifty.

**Down:** 1 Macaw, 2 Derelict, 3 Mettle, 4 Benefactor, 5 Nook, 6 Optimum, 9 Go for broke, 11 Hit it off, 12 Bourbon, 14 Defect, 16 Dally, 17 Tour.

## SU DO KU

				8			
6			4		7	8	
8	3	5				2	
	8	9	1		5		
			2	5			
1			9		2	4	
9				7	1		8
3	6		8				9
			3				

EASY

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

1	8	4	7	2	3	9	5	6
6	9	3	1	4	5	8	7	2
2	5	7	9	6	8	3	4	1
7	1	2	3	9	6	5	8	4
5	3	6	2	8	4	7	1	9
8	4	9	5	1	7	6	2	3
9	7	8	4	3	2	1	6	5
4	6	1	8	5	9	2	3	7
3	2	5	6	7	1	4	9	8

### CALENDAR

**MAY 1ST 2024, WEDNESDAY**

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Vaishakh Shaka 11
- Vaishakh Purnimite 19
- Hijari 1445
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 8, up to 4.02 am
- Shubh Yoga up to 8.01 pm
- Shravan Nakshatra up to 3.11 am
- Moon in Capricorn sign

## FORECAST

SUNSET:	WEDNESDAY	19:00 HRS
SUNRISE:	THURSDAY	05:39 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	19
New Delhi	35	21
Amritsar	34	14
Bathinda	35	15
Jalandhar	34	15
Ludhiana	34	16
Bhiwani	39	24
Hisar	35	18
Sirsa	35	19
Dharamsala	27	15
Manali	22	06
Shimla	25	14
Srinagar	19	05
Jammu	33	15
Kargil	16	06
Leh	13	03
Dehradun	32	19
Mussoorie	20	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C