NEW DELHI | WEDNESDAY, 1 MAY 2024

Anchoring expectations

Food prices are disrupting the disinflation process

pisodes 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. While inflation outcomes have become relatively favourable, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expects the inflation rate to average 4.5 per cent this financial year, but that will still be above the 4 per cent target. Even though the core inflation rate has softened to below 4 per cent in response to monetary tightening and correction in input costs, the repetitive incidence of food-price pressures has deterred the headline inflation rate from converging to the core. Despite a decline from 5.7 per cent in December, the headline-inflation rate remained at 5.1 per cent during January-February 2024. Further, after correcting in January, the food inflation rate edged up to 7.8 per cent in February, primarily driven by prices of vegetables, eggs, meat, and fish.

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. While the headline and food-inflation rates move in tandem with a high correlation, there is also evidence of a high correlation between household inflation expectations and food inflation. This has implications for the behaviour of the core inflation rate, which is significantly determined by household inflation expectations.

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 foodinflation rate has been decreasing more or less consistently ever since then. As of the third quarter of 2023-24, the response was at 0.14 percentage point. Moreover, the impact of fuel-price shocks on core inflation is found to be largely insignificant, though such shocks persist for a longer duration. The recent decline in volatility in core inflation rates, specifically after the adoption of the flexible inflation-targeting framework in 2016, has been significant for monetary policy, implying better anchoring of inflation expectations.

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. Low reservoir levels, especially in the southern states, and the outlook of above-normal temperatures pose concerns in the short term. However, the above-average monsoon rainfall should bring some relief in terms of boosting agricultural output. Nonetheless, food-price uncertainties in the future, driven by the increasing incidence of climate shocks, would continue to weigh on the inflation outlook. Food-price volatility is becoming increasingly hard to predict, particularly in the face of rising extreme weather events. Frequent shocks might demand tighter monetary policy over time. The commitment of the MPC to attain the inflation target of 4 per cent on a durable basis should help anchor expectations and reduce volatility in inflation outcomes.

Message from US campuses

Suppressing protests may be politically self-defeating

n 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. Last week, Columbia hit the headlines when the university's president called in the New York police to clear pro-Palestinian protestors from campus. Following the arrest of 108 demonstrators, including professors, the protests have spread to at least 50 other campuses that include Yale; the University of Texas, Austin; the University of California, Berkeley; and Virginia Tech. Overall, some 900 students and faculty members have been arrested in the US over the past 10 days, raising questions about the democratic credentials of the world's most powerful democracy. Since then, protests against the war in Gaza have erupted also in France (at the elite Sciences Po, Paris), Canada, Australia, and the UK, all countries whose governments are underwriting Israel's war against Hamas.

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. The prosperous Jewish-American community has historically exerted a powerful influence on public life and politics, especially of the Democratic Party. Pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli groups clashed in the University of California, Los Angeles. These campaigns have offered the administration a handle to paint all protestors as anti-Semitic, which is not the case. In Columbia, where a tented encampment has sprung up, the protestors have a specific agenda: That the university cut financial ties with Israel and divest from Israeli companies. In the main, the protestors' demands are generic rather than self-interested or politically driven. There have been calls to cut back military support for Israel and for the Biden administration to leverage its financial powers over Tel Aviv to intervene more meaningfully and decisively in its ally's war against the Palestinians not just in Gaza but increasingly in the West Bank too.

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. This helped expand the protests from self-interested resistance to the military draft to protests against Dow Chemicals, a prominent campus recruiter, for making Napalm, the destructive chemical deployed by the US military in Vietnam and, finally, against the morality of the war. With US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declaring, without irony, that Hamas should accept Israel's "extraordinarily generous" ceasefire offer, US campuses are unlikely to revert to peaceful pedagogy anytime soon. One of America's more successful presidents, Lyndon B Johnson, saw his popularity eroded by the campus protests over Vietnam. With polls showing a majority of Americans opposing Israeli action in Gaza, it is an open question whether President Joe Biden, in a neck-and-neck contest with Donald Trump, will suffer the same fate.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The post-June 4 challenges

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

BEYOND IDEOLOGY

o 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. The big politico-economic challenges cannot be overcome by parliamentary majorities alone.

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. It could also trigger north-south tensions over future Lok Sabha seats and relative tax shares.

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. It would be a travesty if the populous Hindi belt is denied a fair increase in seats. On the other hand, it would be a political cop-out if the only consensus is to kick the can down the road, and freeze the Lok Sabha representation at current levels.

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. Tamil Nadu gets 7.1 per cent of Lok Sabha seats with 5.7 per cent of the country's population. How does this kind of suppressed representation of UP's population square with the idea of one-person-one-vote

in a democracy?

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. But when 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 challenge changes, the yardsticks of performance must change too. So, the claim that southern states are doing well demographically is only correct if the reference is to the situation a few decades ago. Now, with demographic degrowth as their challenge, the goalposts need to be changed.

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 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. Raising the total number to over 800 also means north-south tensions can be eased, since all states will get an increase in their MPs. Some may get more and some less, but everyone will get more except for small, single-MP states and Union Territories. An additional option is to give states losing a small share in the overall Lok Sabha seats some additional seats in the Rajya Sabha. The delimitation and women's reservation problems can be solved only with these kinds of compromises.

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. These minor skills can be acquired rather easily with small investments in time and money. But the increase in the supply of low-skilled workers for jobs puts pressure on wages. The jobs that are harder to come by are the relatively cushier ones in offices and shop floors (banks, manufacturing, telecoms, lower-end tech coding, and the like), which is what makes for a strong middle class. Tech will polarise incomes towards higher upper incomes and lower middle-income jobs. The middle-middle class is under threat.

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.

The writer is editorial director. Swarajva magazine



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

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. That's because the two adjoining towns — Navsari (called the twin city of Surat) and Bardoli — are part of the Surat region. Situated on the banks of the Mindhola river, Bardoli — remembered for the start of the Satyagraha movement here — is some 35 km east of Surat. Navsari, about 37 km south of Surat, also

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 OCOs, including amendelections for 25 out of the 26 Gujarat Lok Sabha seats.

The stakeholders' meetings,

ments related to technical textiles such as geo-textile, agro-textile and medical textile

that are causing concern. The industry has already escalated the matter to the level of Union Minister Nirmala Finance Sitharaman, Commerce and Textiles Minister Pivush Goval and Health, Chemical and Fertiliser Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who's among the few Union ministers contesting from Gujarat. Since some of the textile issues pertain to chemicals, Mr Mandaviva comes into the picture.

While QCOs are meant to pre-

vent 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. According to the textile industry, China provides stability in price and quality. With that gone, it's a fresh problem for the textile industry, which has gone through tough times 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. If Chinese products can be allowed in certain sectors, why not in textile, is the question.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) id small weavers, already unset that there's noth ing for them in the textile production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme because of the quantum involved, say that the QCOs are a hurdle they can

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 OCOs range from laminated highdensity 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.

India's urban imperatives



BIBEK DEBROY

his 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 vears and vears. This book isn't an exhaustive compilation of all his papers. There are 20 papers, grouped under four heads of urbanisation and urban sustainability development (two essays), governance and issues in urban research (six essays).

(six essays), regional planning in national and local government finance (six essays), We learn from the prefatory note that

barringthe 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." Dr Mohan said ves. I am inclined to demur. Overtime, one's researchinterests change. Papers lose relative relevance. The 20 essays cover a time-line of 1981 to 2023 (the ones on regional planning are relatively old.)

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. You might argue that he does precisely this, in the "State of the Cities, India" report. Coincidentally, for the latest version of that report, in 2021, Dr Mohan also wrote a foreword and said, "Om Mathur is, beyond

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." Those words are reported verbatim in the foreword for the present volume and no one will disagree with that assessment.

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. Indeed, there are problems with the definition of urban too and the consequent "silos" created between "rural" policies and "urban" ones. As Dr Mohan mentions in the foreword, that definitional issue isn't one addressed in this volume.

There is a correlation between

urbanisation and development. Urbanisation trends have picked up in India and projections show mindboggling numbers in mega-cities. Urbanisation trends will continue and urbanisation needs to be managed. typically, in brownfield rather than greenfield formats. What are the major issues? (1) Providing public services in

CHANGING

URBANISATION

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

cities; (2) Raising finance for those services; (3) Urban governance capacity: (4) Addressing poverty and slums; (5) Reconcilingtensions between elected and $executive\,arms\,of$ urban governance. Others might be

added, but those are the major ones. Not all the essays are about India. Four of them (numbers 8, 9, 13, 18) reflect an Asian or developing country perspective and issues are universal. The other essays are on India and cover the issues I have listed, with the exception of the difficult one of (5). Perhaps one can $also\,add\,the\,missing\,question\,of\,an$ urban-cum-municipal executive cadre

All the six essays under the first head

and issues of local capacity.

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) panchavats but not urban local bodies. Of course, fiscal devolution is

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Union Finance Commission, but also State Finance Commissions (SFCs). Intheurbanisation landscape, there is, therefore, the question ofrecommendations of SFCs (and their non-

implementation) and

not merely through the

the broader question of variable decentralisation funds. functions and functionaries 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.

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. As we think about the trajectory for 2047, we will need to think about urbanisation and its management. These essays are a distillation of Om Prakash Mathur's insight and wisdom, backed by conceptual clarity and data and empirical examinations. Is it a book worth reading? Of course, it is. But I think that reading should be supplemented by also reading the "State of the Cities, India" report. After all, both are by the same author, though the report has other co-authors too. When any author compiles essays, there is a tendency to ignore issues addressed in earlier publications and this volume was compiled immediately after the report. Therefore, one should read both.

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The Edit Page

In the Driver's Seat Of Driverless Cars

Tesla's Chinese lane – a test bed for smart cars

Elon Musk's vision for personal mobility is cars running on clean fuel and driving themselves. He has got the fuel bit right with battery-operated Tesla cars recharging on electricity generated from solar or nuclear energy (revealed last year in the 'nuclear diamond battery'). Musk's problem with this is, so have others. The second part of his vision — driverless cars — is still elusive. And this applies equally to Tesla as it does to its competitors. Musk has been struggling to lay his hands on enormous amounts of data to feed AI in cars to be able to drive themselves. His visit last weekend to China, where collecting data on driving behaviour is relatively easier than in the US or Europe, could yield the breakthrough Tesla has been seeking for a decade. It could also avert price wars that EVs are going through.

China has amassed a ferocious pack of EV-makers, led



by the world's top producer BYD, that are not only forcing price cuts but are also pushing the envelope on autonomous vehicles. This is helped by the fact that some of its EV-makers such as Huawei started out as smartphone manufacturers and have been quite adept at making cars smarter. Baidu,

China's answer to Google, has also moved ahead on lane navigation using data from the world's largest fleet of EVs equipped with sensory capabilities to avoid collision. Tesla may gain from these developments, but may have a fight on its hands introducing cars running on Baidu in other countries. Though, for now, Tesla, which recently laid off 10% of its workforce, cannot afford to stay away from the world's most elaborate test bed for smart cars.

Musk will have to go further with driverless cartechnology than his Chinese competitors to convince sceptical Western buyers that the tech is, indeed, safe. Driverless cars being developed are branded as fully supervised by humans, a claim that is called into question by driver behaviour like eating and texting in the smartish cars of today. The question is: who'll be in the driver's seat when it comes to driverless cars?

More Guts for Our Food Regulators

Whether food products we ingest are safe or not continues to worry us. Or, at any rate, should worry us. Recent reports by Hong Kong and Singapore food regulators of two popular Indian brands of prepackaged spice-mix products allegedly containing ethylene oxide, a carcinogenic substance — denied by both companies — does raise a flag, and brows. European food authorities reportedly found the same carcinogen in 527 Indian food products. The US FDA, which had raised the issue of salmonella contamination in prepackaged spice mixes, is conducting a fresh probe. Indian Spices Board, Gol's regulator for spice exports, is working with companies to address the issue.

Between Nestle's 'added sugar in infant foods' for Indian mar-



kets controversy, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) stopping malted beverages and mixes from being sold as 'health' drinks, and now l'affaire ethylene oxide, food safety is now a hot potato public health topic. Reputational damage that can affect exports aside, reports that we may be routinely consuming

harmful products is worrying. More so as growing affluence is changing our food basket and habits. This makes it more urgent to have a robust food regulator with the right capabilities. As gatekeepers of the nation's alimentary system, FSSAI needs more guts. It now has a network of more than 200 food testing labs. But more needs to be done given the range of food segments. Increasing accredited labs, ensuring functional state food labs, upping trained manpower and focusing on enforcement of norms must be prioritised. Whether to clear allegations or to clamp down on non-compliance, FSSAI must coordinate with other food-related regulators to ensure that what we consume — and sell elsewhere — is safe.

Akshay Kanti Wham Bam typifies the absurdist theatre that our polls are

Why Elections Are La-La Outlandish

One of the quiet sinful joys of following Indian elections if you have nothing better to do beyond the actual act of voting-is how la-la outlandish they have become. Take Akshay Kanti Bam. The man was Congress candidate for Indore a few hours before he dropped out to join BJP. This is the same candidate whose nomination BJP had earlier objected to owing to 17-year-old attempt-to-murder charges against him. So, as a voter, if you had decided to vote for Congress candidate Bam on May 13, now you have a choice of not voting, opting for Nota, or voting for anyone else, including the incumbent BJP MP. That's like going to a supermarket for bread, not finding it there, and having the option of not buying anything, or coming home with, say, eggs.

Bam's case is interesting, since it tells us much about what's going on in the 'world's biggest democratic exercise'. If candidates are replaced by, say, lampposts, it doesn't really matter. What matters is your party and/or poster boy of choice. The rest of the fray may just well be a number. What's doubly 'funny' is that more and more people find this kind of chicanery 'bold', an act of smart realpolitik - instead of anything from the rather cheap Dirty Tricks Dept. Free movement of candidates from one party to another is one thing. But Wham Bam's 'Thank You Ma'am' politics is quite another.

Like US, India should get less coy about surgically targeting credible threats to national security

What's Sauce for America...



Arnie Guha

n Monday, The Washington Post published an article, 'An assassination plot on American soil reveals a darker side of Modi's India.' The tone of the piece is dark. But the bit that caught my eye was: 'India is part of an expanding roster of countries employing tactics previously associated with China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other repressive regimes.'

The article goes to great lengths to explain why the central incidents - involving the alleged assassination attempt of a Khalistan advocate in the US and murder of another in Canada — did not lead to public censure of India by the US. That India today is geopolitically and commercially important to the US, and like Saudi Arabia, it got a free pass from the Americans because they are, at least at present, playing on the same team.

Where the article loses me, however, is in its linking the issue of extrajudicial killings with what it sees as the rise of 'deepening authoritarianism' in India. Killing dissidents, activists and journalists on foreign soil is chilling. And jailing them in a constitutionally democratic country is, indeed, a sign of creeping authoritarianism. But surgically targeting those deemed a credible threat to national security is what the US and its allies have been doing for decades.

Take 'Al-Aulaqi v. Panetta' (2012). The case involved the targeted killing of three American citizens by US drones in Yemen in 2011, a fact publicly acknowledged by the Obama administration. The court dismissed the case in 2014. In the words of Hina Shamsi, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) national security project director and one of the attorneys who ar-

The Washington Post

JUSTICE HAS BEEN DONE U.S. forces kill Osama bin Laden

BECAME THE GLOBAL FACE

...should be sauce for India

from any battlefield.

gued the case, the court, in dismissing

the case, treated 'the government's al-

refusing to allow those allegations to

be tested in court. The court's view

[was] that it cannot provide a remedy

for extrajudicial killings when the go-

vernment claims to be at war, even far

The two incidents — the killing of

Anwar al-Aulagi by the US, and the al-

Singh Pannun by Indian agents

leged plot to assassinate Gurpatwant

tend to find further resonance with

each other when considering then-at-

torney general (AG) Eric Holder's let-

ter to senator Pat Leahy, '[High] level

officials appropriately concluded that

al-Aulaqi posed a continuing and im-

minent threat of violent attack against

the United States. Before carrying out

the operation that killed al-Aulagi, se-

nior officials also determined, based

on a careful evaluation of the circum-

PAKISTAN WHERE

Use of force in foreign territory would be consistent with... legations [of terrorism] as proof while international legal principles if conducted... with consent of the nation involved – or after a determination that the nation is unable or unwilling to deal effectively with a threat

> stances at the time, that it was not feasible to capture him.'

Indeed, in 2012, Holder clarified that while '[it] is preferable to capture suspected terrorists where feasible... we must also recognise that there are instances where our government has the clear authority... to defend the United States through the appropriate and lawful use of lethal force.... This does not mean that we can use military force whenever or wherever we want.... But the use of force in foreign territory wo-

uld be consistent with... international legal principles if conducted, for example, with the consent of the nation involved — or after a determination that the nation is unable or unwilling to deal effectively with a threat ... '.

The issue, then, is not illiberality or authoritarianism, or 'transnational repression' of political opponents or critics. It hinges around what one nation sees as 'a continuing and imminent threat of violent attack' on its own security, a threat that another sovereign nation, to quote the former AG, is 'unable or unwilling to deal [with] effectively'.

And it comes down to where the extrajudicial incident takes place and whether the government of that state was in on the act. On this front, there is a lesson for India in the Pannun incident. As India's power and advantage grow within the new world order, there's little need to continue hiding in the shadows. Let it leverage its power into a relationship of mutual trust with its allies so that instead of being 'caught in the act', it may simply declare and, if necessary, defend its intent. This is what great powers do - they act to defend their interests, and own their part

in the act. As for the state of India's democracy, that is a different conversation altogether—one that doesn't, and shouldn't, influence a nation's ability to defend itself from threats sheltering on foreign soil. Linkingthetwoissues is, at best

lazy, at worst, a cynical sleight of hand Instead of being defensive, India should be able to quote the former US AG's words back at its interlocutors: 'We are at war with a stateless enemy, prone to shifting operations from country to country...Our government has both a responsibility and a right to protect this nation and its people from such threats.'

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Dangle Less Tax & Watch 'Em Go



Anjana Menon

Sam Pitroda, a yesteryear technocrat recently rattled the beehive after he suggested India should consider inheritance tax as a means of income redistribution. Even in the US, the super-rich avoid giving back by setting up tax-free trust funds for inheritance. In India, where tax evasion is both endemic and high, tax harvesting for distribution of wealth can only come from a highly incentivised low-tax regime with high volumes of taxpay ers, for whom gains from paying up outweigh pains of evasion.

In a 2001 IMF paper, 'Tax Policy for Developing Countries', Vito Tanzi and Howell Zee wrote, '...the most prevalent forms of incentives found in developing countries tend to be the least meritorious... personal income taxes have been contributing very little to total tax revenue in many developing countries'.

More than two decades later, this is still true. Worse, personal incometaxpayers in India live in an abnormal environment of taxation where they

get next to nothing for compliance and good citizenry. Sure, it can be argued that they get roads, utilities and other infra. But these are delivered to all citizens, including those who systematically evade taxes, giving honest taxpayers only the advantage of a good conscience.

Taxpayers plough a lot of extra money, providing for themselves what the state should. Other countries with high income-taxes and hefty inheritance tax can justify their tax regimes in a way that India can't. They deliver more to taxpayers.

For example, in Britain, which left behind a repressive legislation for us, taxpayers get world-class free healthcare, clean air and outstanding government schools. In India, hospitalisation at one of the better private hospitals can set your bank balance to near-zero, especially for senior citizens not covered by health insurance.

Unlike in Britain, we don't take care of our elderly with debilitating difficulties. Care homes in the country offer quality care for the elderly, even those who cannot fund self-care.

Young Indian families caught in the tax vortex have to pay ever-increasing fees for quality education for children. Most of our state schools are a stepping stone to basic literacy for the completely marginalised. It's no place for those preparing themselves for survival in a hyper-competitive



Less hooks for thriving fish

environment. We pay taxes that leave us with dirty

air and garbage mounds. We then pay more to buy air purifiers to breathe better: Our public transport is always overcrowded, sometimes unsafe and rarely comfortable. So, we spend on private transport that clogs our roads and adds to pollution. Affordable quality public housing is still a misnomer. So, we willingly get fleeced by private developers.

The rich, smarter than the 99%. therefore, want their money to be saved from inefficiency and the government's grip. Increasingly, India's billionaires have moved residence to tax-free places, such as Dubai or Antigua, or low-tax countries, such as Singapore, despite their social media patriotism.

The only way to end tax terror for the taxpayer and tax loss from the rich evader is to lower income-tax to single digits. A very low income level undermoney, and it will most likely eventually widen the tax net to a meaningful percentage of the population. The super-rich will have reason to stay. It also softens the blow for middle-class taxpayers, grappling with purchasing power erosion from inflation. The state should offer taxpayers

cuts the cost of whitewashing black

incentives, such as substantial discounts for insurance, healthcare and education, giving them tangible benefits. Non-taxpayers will know they are losing out in a system that rewards payees.

GoI could introduce a tax lottery in which individuals with a long track record of paying taxes could win a once-in-a-lifetime tax-free year. It's more motivating than a taxpayer certificate for induced honesty. In a country of more than 986 mn

voting adults, only 20.8 mn — roughly 2% — paid personal income-tax in FY2022. Of this, only 0.5% pay a valuable chunk. This won't do for development funding or wealth redistribution. Instead, end incentives and tax subsidies for big corporations, some of whose market capitalisation is as much as our GDP.

Tax the fat cats who want a bite of the big India market. Don't skin the lean folk. Free up their spending money and keep India juicy.

The writer is CEO, Content Pixies

'Vive La Alvolution!' in the Air



T K Arun

AI is many things to many people: a gold rush for VCs and young entrepreneurs (besides smart alecs who simply append AI to their company's name in a public offering of shares); a potential destroyer of jobs; a multiplier of skills for those who know how to wield its power; a solution to missing manpower in countries with falling birth rates and dwindling populations; a possible threat as potent as nuclear weapons when deployed to control swarms of deadly, autonomous drones targeting a faraway enemy; a tool to recalibrate and reorient, in microseconds, the magnetic field needed to hold in place the raging plasma at the core of a nuclear fusion reactor; a predictor of millions of protein shapes, aiding in dramatic, new drug discovery....

Let's add a new use case: as trigger for renewed efforts at grassroots-level empowerment of people - political, social and cultural, leading on to economic empowerment as well. So, what is the connection between AI, at the cutting edge of maths, computing and cognitive sciences, and this concern of rural NGOs and so-called 'urban naxals' for those who don't have even a nodding acquaintance

with any of these? Answer: we want India to become a

nation of wielders of AI, not victims of AI. The idea is not to make every one of 1.4 bn Indians a tech wizard, convert rust into gold or rid oceans of their waves. Rather, the goal is to make humans capable of using tools to do what can't be done with bare hands a generalised feature of the entire population. If such capability were to remain confined to a tiny elite, the result would be mass unemployment, misery, disaffection and revolt.

After adding 5,50,000 robots in 2022, the world's stock of industrial robots stood that year at 3.9 mn. China accounted for 52% of that year's incremental deployment. Japan, South Korea, Germany and the US are other major deployers of robots in industry and services, Combined with 5G telecom and AI, these robots would raise benchmark productivity levels so high that labour-abundant countries like India would need to either improve the quality of their labour massively, or climb on to the intel-



ligent automation bandwagon themselves, to compete

AI would also gobble up swathes of repetitive, predictable tasks, wiping out white-collar jobs by the million. The typical call-centre/BPO jobs would join the cartwright and the wheeler, which ended up in the dustbin of history when motor cars replaced horse-drawn carriages. Where will all such people, employed in occupations turned redundant by the march of technology, go?

Cars didn't just kill jobs of making carts and wheels but they also created entire new industries that required labour, albeit of a different kind of skill. What all industries AI would make possible, and what kinds of skill these would call for, can't be forecast. But it's certain that making use of AI tools will call for creativity, the ability to imagine something new, flesh it out into component parts, engineer their production and put them all together in a functional whole.

This calls for not just cognitive skills but also confidence—readiness to depart from the this-is-how-it's-alwaysbeen-done rut in which rural communities find themselves—access to technology, to people and ideas, and physical infrastructure. There is a certain kind of high-mind-

ed thinking that views development of human capability as the functional result of large-scale investment in education and healthcare. This is necessary. But is it sufficient?

Consider the tribal man on whose head a BJP activist of Madhya Pradesh urinated, just to show him where the

two of them stood in the universe's scheme of things. Had that tribal man never gone to school, or availed of healthcare at a government clinic? Or those dalit girls, who get routinely raped in some parts of the country. Haven't they gone to school and primary health centres?

The short point is that merely availing oneself of state-provided healthcare and education doesn't cure one of oppressive subalternity. That calls for organisation of the oppressed, to assert their rights vis-à-vis their deemed social superiors.

This is where land reforms play an empowering role. In Kerala, even after the gov passed land ceiling laws, it took militant mobilisation by tenants and landless workers to forcibly occupy surplus land and wrest it from landlords. Circumstances could vary from state to state. But there is little dispute that political organisation of the disempowered, to challenge and degrade the power differential vis-à-vis caste and asset superiors, is essential to make self-aware humans out of pas-

sive victims of age-old oppression. AI endows BR Ambedkar's call to eradicate caste with new urgency and meaning. The ascribed incapacity that goes with low caste status is sufficient to rob people of a part of their human agency. Here, too, organisation is the key first step.

Organised action for emancipation is the right move to crystallise and mobilise the innate creative intelligence of the entire population to make AI a benign assistant, rather than a vicious master.



THE SPEAKING TREE The Aim of

SHRI SHRI ANANDMURTI

Morality

Morality, good conduct, is the foundation of sadhana, spiritual practice. It is not the culminating point of the spiritual march. Sadhana, at its very start, requires mental equilibrium. This sort of mental harmony may also be termed morality. People often say, 'I follow neither a religion nor rituals; I abide by truth; I harm nobody, and I tell no lies. This is all that is necessary; nothing more need be done or learnt.'

Morality is only an effort to lead a well-knit life. It cannot be said with any certainty that the moralist who has resisted the temptation of a bribe of ₹2 would also be able to resist the temptation of an offer of ₹2,00,000. Nevertheless, morality is not absolutely valueless in human life. It is an

attribute of a good citizen. Morality depends on one's efforts to maintain a balance regarding time, place and person, and, therefore, there may be differences in moral code. But its ultimate end is the attainment of Supreme Bliss and, therefore, there should not be a possibility of any imperfections of relativity. It cannot be said that the ultimate aim of human life is not to commit theft; what is desirable is elimination of the tendency to commit theft.

Not to indulge in falsehood is not the aim of life; what is important is that the tendency of telling lies is dispelled from our minds. The aim of such morality is attainment of a state of Oneness with Brahmn where no desire is left for theft and all tendencies of false hood disappear.

Understanding Without Bias

When significant events occur, our minds often gravitate towards the notion that they must have been caused by something equally significant. This phenomenon - proportionality bias - acts as the magician's sleight of hand behind conspiracy theories. It's the tendency to weigh the scales of cause and effect, assuming that a grand force must have orchestrated a major event. If you're intrigued by this captivating phenomenon that bedevils each of us in some way or the other, aggravated



lifestyle podcast Unladylike's episode on Magical Overthinking. Hosted by Cristen Conger, Unladylike is a feminist lifestyle podcast with a clear mission: to foster curiosity, nurture empathy and challenge the status quo.

In this interesting episode, Amanda Montell, author of The Age of Magical Overthinking, presents insightful perspectives on contemporary irrationality. Montell skilfully navigates through a myriad of phenomena, ranging from the sunk cost fallacy in relationships to the halo effect surrounding female celebrities, providing a refreshing and thought-provoking analysis of today's overwhelming landscape of (mis)information.

Chat Room

Shared Values, **Shared Benefits**

Apropos 'Think of Inequality

Control' by Sam Pitroda (Apr 30), the proposed concept of shareholding, inclusive of workers and producers as in the cooperative model, is an idea that is desperately sought after in our times given the high inequity in the percolation of benefits to various strata of society under free-mar ket capitalism. A rising tide lifts all boats only in the waters but not in a top-down system. In addition, while the state may consider mandating a higher allocation to CSR from the current 2% to enable larger social outreach, businesses could offer Esops and enlist employee participation in management through regular relearning, upskilling and redeployment. Partnerships at multiple levels between governments and corporates through calibrated schemes can reduce inequality.

G RAJAGOPALAN NAIR

Kochi



1111011 WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2024



INDIA ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar

We are the largest country in the world. We are the fifth largest economy, soon we'll be the third. How we do at home is watched by everybody abroad. What decisions we make at home, is also very keenly followed by the world

Tread with caution

RBI should subject SFBs to stringent assessment before graduating them to universal banks

HE TRACK RECORD of a few of the promoter-driven banks in India over the past couple of decades would make any regulator cautious. While some have done exceptionally well, Bandhan, which graduated from micro-finance institutions (MFI), is muddling along. It's the casualties — whether a Global Trust Bank or a Yes Bank — that tell us not all promoters are fit and proper. In fact, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been reluctant to allow even strong nonbanking financial companies (NBFC) to become banks if they are a part of any business group. Against this backdrop, the RBI came out with the eligibility norms for small finance banks (SFB) to transition to universal banks. While eight of the 12 SFBs were earlier MFIs, they are gradually derisking themselves and have forayed into secured products — home, gold, micro, small and medium enterprise, and vehicle loans. That has lowered the share of microfinance credit to about a third of the book at the end of March 2023 from 40% in March 2020. This is an encouraging signal because a lender like Bandhan Bank has suffered because it is yet to shed its microfinance bias.

But SFBs, too, are coming out of a very rough patch. Since their borrowers are financially weaker, delinquencies rose sharply during the pandemic, driving down profits and, in some instances, causing losses. If their accounts look much better today, it is partly due to substantial write-offs. Many SFBs were compelled to raise growth capital after the pandemic. Going by the eligibility criteria, as of now only AU Small Finance makes the cut. Apart from a set of financial parameters, the RBI will also assess the qualitative criteria of a satisfactory five-year track record. Though some have criticised the subjective element in such assessments, it is very much required because numbers tell just one part of the story. In fact, the requirement that an SFB should have been profitable only in the last two financial years seems rather lenient; four years would have been more appropriate.

Again, the SFB needs to have a reported net NPA (non-performing assets) ratio of less than 1% in the last two financial years. That, again, seems lenient; the net NPA ratio should be read together with the extent of write-offs and recoveries during the period. In fact, going by March 2023 data, several of the SFBs are ineligible to transition because they fail to meet the NPA ratio criterion and also because the portfolios are not diversified enough. Of course, some of this would have changed in FY24; AU SFB, Equitas, and Jana have less than 20% exposure to MFIs. To that extent, SFBs are already competing with universal banks.

A licence to become a full-fledged bank would enable SFBs to offer more products and also to mop up more current account, savings account (CASA) deposits. In September 2023, the share of CASA deposit for SFBs was 27% compared with 38% for universal banks. That would help lift their net interest margins, which fell from 8.7% in FY20 to 7.5% in FY23. However, the regulator must vet the candidates carefully because we simply cannot afford any more failures. Also, competition merely for the sake of it cannot be good. Rather than create many small banks, which cannot compete effectively and run the risk of failing, it's better the RBI facilitates mergers of relatively weak SFBs with strong banks. That would help banks pursue the goals of financial inclusion.

DATA DEFENCE

SOFTWARE SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF OVERALL CYBERSECURITY

Digital scare to supply chain

HERE HAS BEEN a rise in the number of cyberattacks by exploiting inadequacies in the security controls around the software supply chain. Adversaries are using sophisticated techniques and exploiting vulnerabilities within supply chains in unprecedented ways. This uptick highlights the pressing need to bolster security protocols throughout the software supply chain.

The primary motive for cyber adversaries to mount attacks of any nature is to gain access to sensitive and confidential information that they may then misuse to coerce organisations for financial gains or leak it on the dark web. The most recent instance of data leakage that gained attention is the boAt incident in which data of over 7.5 million customers was leaked. Specific details of the breach are unknown at this point of time and the root cause of the incident is yet to be determined. The incident, however, highlights the importance of ensuring that customer data is secured via comprehensive security controls, which not only include controls in the individual organisation's context but also adequate measures to safeguard the supply chain from any potential risks. This has become even more crucial, following the enactment of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act in 2023.

Over the past few years, there have been many instances of cyber adversaries targeting the supply chain. The most famous one was the Solar Winds breach in 2020, when hackers compromised the American firm's software updates, granting them backdoor access to thousands of companies and government agencies. Another incident occurred in 2023 — Okta, a company which provides identity and access management, was breached, leading to the disclosure of sensitive tokens. These were used for breaches in a software company, Cloudflare.

The most recent instance, which was uncovered in late March, was the attack on the XZ Utils backdoor. XZ Utils is a vital data compression tool widely integrated into Linux distributions. There are several

IN THE HEAT and dust of the ongoing

national elections, an intriguing feature

is the single-minded focus of the fron-

trunner, the BJP, in critiquing the Con-

gress party's manifesto rather than

showcasing its Sankalp Patra with its

10-year track record in office and

promise of Viksit Bharat by 2047. Top

leaders, led by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi — who is eyeing a third term — are busy stoking up fears on what the main

opposition party would do if it came to

power through its redistributive agenda;

of the prospect of women losing their

mangalsutra and ensuring Muslims had

the first claim on the nation's resources.

In this din, there is hardly any commen-

surate attention on the BJP's manifesto.

continually raising its level of ambition on

the economy's progress — from setting a

target of a \$5-trillion economy in five

years to \$10 trillion in the eight years

thereafter and now to a \$30-trillion devel-

oped nation by 2047. The official think

tank, Niti Aayog, has been tasked with

preparing a detailed sector-specific road

map for this vision. The thrust and parry

of an election campaign would definitely

have been enriched if questions were

raised about whether the Sankalp Patra

provided any clues on the sort of policy

measures that are necessary to enable the

currently \$4.1-trillion economy to make

this transition from a developing to an

advanced nation.

Over the last decade, the BJP has been

SHRIKRISHNA DIKSHIT

Partner-Cyber Security, Nangia Andersen India

Linux versions that have been affected by the vulnerability. The backdoor may lead

to unauthorised system access, denial-ofservice, and data tampering/exfiltration.

Strategies for defence

While the rise in these attacks is unprecedented and disconcerting, certain strategies are available for organisations to remain vigilant and proactive. Conducting thorough risk assessments of third-party vendors and suppliers is essential to identify potential vulnerabilities and evaluate their security posture. They should also

implement robust vendor management processes, including due diligence checks, security assessments, and contractual agreements that outline security requirements and responsibilities.

Adhering to cybersecu
Organisations must prioritise the security of software components and dependencies, including regular security assessments

Adhering to cybersecurity best practices, such as regular security updates

and patches, strong authentication mechanisms, and employee awareness training to reduce the likelihood of successful attacks should be inculcated in regular practice. This can be supported by providing ongoing cybersecurity awareness training to employees, contractors, and third-party vendors to educate them about the risks of supply chain attacks and how to recognise and report suspicious activities. On the organisation's side, collaborating with trusted thirdparty security firms or internal teams to perform these tests, ensuring a thorough and objective evaluation of security controls and incident response capabilities, can be adopted. Moreover, implementing secure software development practices,

including secure coding standards, code reviews, and vulnerability assessments, to mitigate the risk of supply chain attacks through compromised software components or libraries will complete this process.

Overall, a zero-trust approach to security must be embraced, which assumes that no entity, whether inside or outside the organisation's network, should be trusted by default. A comprehensive business continuity and disaster recovery plan should be in place that accounts for supply chain disruptions.

Power of collaborative defence

It is extremely important to collaborate with other organisations and entities to effectively mitigate the risks associated with supply chain attacks like the one affecting XZ

Utils. The organisation must identify and nominate individuals to actively participate in the security community. Communities bring together diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise from various stakeholders, including cybersecurity professionals, researchers, vendors, and users. By sharing knowledge and insights, the community can collectively identify emerging threats, vulnerabilities, and best practices for mitigating supply chain risks.

A collaborative community can serve as an early warning system for supply chain attacks, enabling rapid detection and response to emerging threats. By sharing threat intelligence and indicators of compromise, community members can help each other identify and mitigate supply chain attacks before they cause widespread harm.

Lessons learned

The incident of supply chain attacks, such as the one affecting XZ Utils, underscores several key lessons that organisations and the cybersecurity community can learn. Organisations must recognise the inherent risks associated with third-party vendors, suppliers, and software dependencies in their supply chain. This incident highlights the potential for attackers to exploit vulnerabilities in trusted software components, underscoring the need for heightened awareness and proactive risk management strategies.

Software supply chain security is a critical component of the overall cybersecurity posture. Organisations must prioritise the security of software components and dependencies, including rigorous vetting of third-party vendors, regular security assessments, and secure software development practices. Traditional security measures may not be sufficient to detect and mitigate supply chain attacks effectively. Organisations must invest in advanced threat detection and response capabilities, including realtime monitoring, threat intelligence analysis, and incident response readiness, to detect and respond to supply chain attacks promptly. Engaging in preemptive detection and response to possible breaches via penetration testing, red team assessment, breach attack simulations, etc. is important to continuously review the effectiveness of the organisation's security controls. Collaboration within the cybersecurity community is essential for addressing supply chain attacks effectively. Organisations should actively participate in industry alliances, and other community-based initiatives to share threat intelligence, best practices, and lessons learned to collectively strengthen defences against common adversaries and tactics.

Associate Director, Nangia Andersen

With inputs from Asif Balasinor,

The Fed's quantitative easing programme cost too much

THE US' EXPERIMENT with quantitative easing is almost over. This week, the Federal Reserve will likely announce plans to slow the shrinkage of its balance sheet, foreboding the end of a long period in which it sought to stimulate the economy by holding large quantities of Treasury and mortgage securities.

So did it work? Yes, but at excessive cost.

Without doubt, quantitative easing had benefits. When the onset of the pandemic convulsed financial markets in March 2020, the Fed's asset purchases kept funds flowing and stabilised prices. Over the next two years, they pushed down longer-term interest rates, providing economic stimulus at a time when the cen-

tral bank determined it couldn't lower short-term rates any further.

Yet one must consider the costs of the Fed's asset-purchase programme, too.

First, by lowering rates on mortgage loans, it over-stimulated the housing market. Demand soared, driving up home prices and overall inflation.

Second, it contributed to last year's regional-banking turmoil. The cash the Fed paid for securities turned up as deposits, a flood of money that banks had to manage. The institutions — such as Silicon Valley Bank — that foolishly invested such runnable deposits in long-term, fixed-rate securities have themselves to blame. Still, the Fed bears responsibility for creating the flood in the first place — something it failed to acknowledge in its otherwise candid post-mortem last May.

Third, it's expensive in dollar terms. Since the Fed raised short-term rates to more than 5%, its interest expense on liabilities (including bank reserves) has far exceeded its income from securities holdings. The Fed lost more than \$100 billion last year and cumulative losses could reach



Bloomberg

\$250 billion. The true cost is considerably higher: In the absence of quantitative easing, the Fed would have turned a sizable profit, given that its liabilities would have been mostly interest-free currency. In the final tally, the difference between what it actually earned and what it could have earned could exceed \$500 billion.

In hindsight, I can identify three mistakes that drove up the costs. First, the Fed kept buying assets far longer than needed. After effective coronavirus vaccines were introduced in late 2020, officials should have recognised that growth would bounce back as the economy reopened, and that the federal government's

vast pandemic-related fiscal transfers (more than \$5 trillion) would render further extraordinary monetary stimulus unnecessary.

Second, the Fed decided to keep buying assets until substantial progress had been made towards its stated employment and inflation goals, and to phase out purchases slowly rather than abruptly. Thus, it was still buying in the first quarter of 2022, even though growth was strong and inflation was high.

Third, the Fed committed not to raise short-term rates until the economy was at full employment and inflation both reached its 2% target and was expected to stay there long enough to offset previous downside misses. This ensured that it would respond too late to an overheated economy and higher inflation, necessitating a more radical reaction. If the central bank had begun to tighten monetary policy sooner, the peak in short-term rates would likely have been considerably lower, resulting in fewer losses.

The Fed's excessive balance-sheet expansion directly pushed up the costs of quantitative easing. The last trillion dollars of asset purchases, completed between June 2021 and March 2022, could end up costing the central bank (and the US taxpayer) \$100 billion, for very little benefit.

Fed officials should evaluate the quantitative easing programme as part of next year's monetary policy framework review. The aim should be to learn from past mistakes and develop a guide for the future — focusing not only on the benefits, but also on the costs.

The missing reforms imperative



N CHANDRA MOHAN

The writer is an economics and business commentator based in New Delhi. *Views are personal*

With the Congress busy defending its election manifesto — with a senior leader even thanking the BJP for creatively rewriting it — the party has not been able to mount an attack on the Sankalp Patra. A debate would have indicated that while the BJP proposes to improve infrastructure, turn India into a global manufacturing hub and create "high-value" jobs, there is virtually no mention of big-bang economic reforms in land, labour, and agriculture, privatisation of stateowned assets, and further opening up to foreign direct investment (FDI)

labour, and agriculture, privatisation of state-owned assets, and further opening up to foreign direct investment (FDI). These measures, among others, are critical to power the India growth story so it becomes one of the top three nations globally and an advanced economy by 2047.

This missing reform agenda possibly stems from the fact that the ruling party did attempt these measures but failed. In its first term, it sought to amend the previous UPA regime's Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement legislation through an ordinance but did not succeed due to a political backlash. In its second term, it sought to push through labour reforms but it developed cold feet after an initial show of enthusiasm. On agriculture, farmer unions after a yearlong agitation forced the government to

scrap three laws that provided farmers greater freedom to sell their produce and enter into contracts with aggregators to supply at predetermined prices.

Similarly, after announcing that the government has no business to be in business.

government has no business to be in business and featuring a sweeping agenda on privatisation in Budget 2022, the progress has been somewhat underwhelming with only Air India and Neelachal Ispat Nigam passing into private hands.

While the ruling dispensa-**Hesitant and modest** tion liberalised the regime efforts at reforms are for FDI in its first term, invariably halted by progress has slowed. Barriers to overseas investment societal resistance, exist in almost 40 indusespecially from tries and easing those, interest groups like "barring a few ultra-sensiorganised labour, rich tive sectors, would inject investor confidence", farmers, and ministers according to Richard Rossow, chair of US-India

Policy Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who was quoted in the *Financial Times*.

The fact that no big-bang reforms featured in Sankalp Patra is because they are politically problematical and might not help win elections. Despite a commanding mandate, the BJP's experience with them — although it has had successes with the goods and services tax and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code — resonates with what happened with earlier governments. Manmohan Singh, as finance

minister in the Narasimha Rao-led government, was able to implement difficult reforms at a time of crisis in the early 1990s. When that blew over, Rao pulled the plug on reform in favour of his middle path strategy after the Congress faced setbacks in the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka elections in 1994.

As such big-bang measures are highly contentious

and might not help win elections, they do not

feature in BJP's election manifesto

Why are reforms problematic? One line of thinking has been explored by this writer in a joint paper with Professor Ronald Herring entitled "Economic Crisis, Momentary Autonomy and Policy Reform" in The Post-Colonial States of South Asia. Partly this is because in a genuine democracy, state autonomy is always difficult to come by. Hesitant and modest efforts at reforms are invariably halted by societal resistance, especially from interest groups like organised labour, rich farmers, civil servants, and ministers. The Vajpayee-led NDA back tracked on privatisation despite initial successes precisely for such reasons.

To be sure, the absence of reforms in BJP's manifesto does not preclude efforts to kick-start them again in the first 100 days and five years in office if it gets a third term. But the deafening silence so far on highlighting its aspirations for Viksit Bharat in 2047, while attacking the Congress party's manifesto, does not behove a party that has thematically defined its earlier national electoral campaigns with the catchy promise of better times in 2014 and muscular nationalism in 2019.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Food safety standards

The recent study by two separate international agencies alleging Nestlé of adding unhealthy amounts of sugar to its baby products has raised concerns about the lax food safety regulations in India. Widespread and rampant adulteration of food products, which includes milk, spices, and edible oils, remains a grave challenge to food safety. The blatant violation of food safety standards

have far-reaching consequences.
Sufficient funding and resources are needed to conduct regular inspections and ensure compliance with safety standards. The regulatory framework should be made more accessible and business-friendly with strict enforcement of food safety standards, including imposing stringent penalties for violations and taking legal action against defaulters. A comprehensive public awareness campaign on food safety should be

launched. The controversy around
Nestlé should lead to debates on the
quality of products in the market for
children and catalyse tightening of
rules and plugging regulatory gaps.
—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Patanjali in peril

The order of the Uttarakhand government to suspend manufacturing licences of Patanjali's 14 products has come as a big blow to yoga guru Ramdev. It is obvious that the state government did not want to agonise the Supreme Court further. It has been a long downward trajectory for Ramdev who once believed nobody could "touch" him because of his political connections. This should be a lesson not just for him, but others as well, to not shoot their mouths off but be a little more guarded in their public utterances.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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Editorial



Poll time, prison time

Kejriwal's continuing imprisonment casts a shadow on election campaign

he continued incarceration of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the midst of a general election highlights the hard political realities that seem to determine which leader gets prosecuted or arrested on allegations of corruption. Over the decades, it has become clear that only an unfriendly regime usually pursues charges against key political rivals; and that the status of relations between the party that runs the government of the day and those facing such charges dictates the course of action for supposedly independent agencies. That the number of leaders whose offences are forgotten as soon as they join the ruling party or become an ally is increasing, while jail time is reserved for adversaries. In Mr. Kejriwal's case, there is an astounding element of politics vitiating his arrest and prosecution for allegedly taking kickbacks to formulate a liquor policy favourable to the industry. Mr. Kejriwal, who leads the Aam Aadmi Party, has been denied participation in the campaign for the general election. The adverse implications of his absence are quite obvious, even though there is no law that spares politicians from criminal liability in election time. The Delhi excise policy case was registered in August 2022. The CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) have filed charge sheets, but the investigation has been continuing piecemeal. Witnesses have been giving multiple statements, with each one containing newer material.

The power to arrest a suspect exists only to prevent suspects from fleeing justice, influencing or threatening witnesses and tampering with evidence, or repeating a crime. There is a huge gulf between the power to arrest and the necessity to arrest. It is a disturbing reality that political leaders have been arrested in this case on the basis of statements made by approvers, and not any independent witnesses. The timing of the arrest has also become an issue of substance. That Mr. Kejriwal did not respond to multiple ED summonses may be cited as a reason for his being arrested now rather than months ago. However, this expectation that the accused should "cooperate" with the investigation agency is quite peculiar. Agencies ought to be able to prosecute people without their statements. It is known that Section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act has been weaponised by the ED to record a statement that is admissible and then record the person's arrest. Whether non-appearance in response to a summons is a ground for arrest and denial of bail is a question that has arisen in this case. Equally tenable is the question whether arresting serving Chief Ministers through central agencies and keeping them in prison throughout a multi-phase election does not amount to subversion of federalism and democracy.

Competition, conflict

<u>U.S. and China must manage their</u> differences responsibly

.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's marathon talks with top officials in China, which includes President Xi Jinping, have underscored the desire of the two countries to stabilise their relationship and the resultant challenges. Mr. Blinken stressed that the U.S. would make sure that the competition between the world's two largest economies "doesn't veer into conflict". Mr. Xi said they should seek common ground "rather than engage in vicious competition". But the Blinken visit also exposed the structural fault lines in the Sino-American competition. He raised America's concerns about what he called China's "support for Russia's defence industry" and threatened actions if Beijing "doesn't address this problem". China slammed the "hypocrisy and irresponsibility" of the U.S., which just decided to send military aid worth \$61 billion to Ukraine and then made "groundless accusations" against normal economic and trade exchanges between China and Russia. China also attacked the U.S. policy towards Taiwan and the South China Sea and urged Washington to look at

China's development "in a positive light". Both the U.S. and China have mutual deep misgivings. U.S. National Defence Strategy documents name China as a "revisionist power" and a pacing technological and military challenger. The U.S. has imposed export controls to limit China's growth in strategic sectors, particularly semiconductors, and imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods. It has also doubled down on its support for Taiwan and bolstered defence cooperation with the Philippines, which has disputes with China in the South China Sea. Beijing has blamed the U.S. for South China Sea tensions and called Washington's support for Taiwan as an intervention in its internal affairs. While it is practically impossible to reset ties given these structural challenges, there are areas of cooperation as well. In November 2023, when Presidents Xi and Biden met in California, both sides decided to resume bilateral military-to-military communication, cooperate in addressing the risks of artificial intelligence and launch efforts to control the production of fentanyl. Tackling climate change and global food security are also areas of cooperation. A key lesson from the Cold War is that if competition between superpowers turns ugly, it could affect the world through proxy conflicts, economic wars and diplomatic crises. As the two most powerful countries, they should stay away from repeating history. Even if they are not able to resolve their ideological and geopolitical differences, they should build the guardrails that could prevent the competition from turning ugly and stay focused on the areas of cooperation, addressing the common challenges of the world.

Make EPI an 'Essential Programme on Immunisation'

he year 2024 marks a significant milestone for immunisation programmes, both globally and in India. It commemorates 50 years since the launch of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1974. The EPI was introduced as the eradication of smallpox virus was on the horizon, and a need to leverage the then immunisation infrastructure and a trained workforce was recognised to expand the benefit of available vaccines. Following the announcement, nearly every country across the world initiated its national immunisation programme. India launched the EPI in 1978, which was later renamed as the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) in 1985. In India, this year is also two decades since the country conducted the last nationwide independent field evaluation of the UIP, in collaboration with international experts. This is an opportune moment to assess the progress made and envision the future.

Globally, and in India, there has been significant progress in terms of the impact of immunisation and vaccines. While in 1974, there were vaccines to prevent six diseases, five decades later, there are vaccines against 13 diseases which are universally recommended; and vaccines against 17 additional diseases are recommended for a context-specific situation. There is research in progress to develop vaccines against nearly 125 pathogens — many would prevent diseases prevalent in low- and middle-income countries.

A success story

The children with three doses of DPT, a tracer indicator of coverage, has been rising over these years. In the early 1970s, around 5% of children in low- and middle-income countries had received three doses of DPT, which increased to 84% in 2022 at the global level. Smallpox has been eradicated, polio eliminated from all but two countries and many vaccine preventable diseases have nearly disappeared. In India, the coverage has increased every passing year and in 2019-21, 76% of children received the recommended vaccines.

Since the launch of EPI, studies have shown that vaccines have saved millions of lives and prevented billions of hospital visits and hospitalisations. Economic analyses have estimated that vaccines are highly cost-effective interventions, with every single dollar (or rupee) of expenditure on vaccination programmes ensuring a seven to 11-fold return.

In nearly all low- and middle-income countries, including India, the immunisation programme remains a success among all government initiatives, nearly always with far greater coverage than any other health programme.

Moreover, in mixed health systems with both the public and private sector delivering services, immunisation often remains the only health



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In the 50 years of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, it is time for another expansion intervention with greater utilisation from the government sector. For instance, in India, the share of the private sector in overall health services is nearly two thirds; however, nearly 85% to 90% of all vaccines are delivered from government facilities. Experts often argue that the immunisation coverage is a tracer indicator of the possible highest coverage any government intervention can achieve in a given setting.

Yet, it is not without challenges. In early 2023, the UNICEF's 'The State of the World's Children' report revealed a concerning trend: for the first time in more than a decade, the childhood immunisation coverage had declined in 2021. In 2022, globally, an estimated 14.3 million children were zero dose (did not receive any recommended vaccine) while another 6.2 million children were partially immunised. Over the years, the vaccination coverage in India has increased, both nationally and State-wise. However, there are persisting inequities in coverage by geography, socio-economic strata and other parameters, which demand urgent interventions.

From childhood focus to life course

It is interesting that when it comes to vaccination, people often (and wrongly) believe that the vaccines are only for children only. The truth is that in nearly 225 years since the availability of the first vaccine against smallpox in 1798, vaccines have always been available for individuals of all age groups, including adults. The first anti rabies vaccine, cholera, and typhoid vaccines developed between 1880s to mid 1890s were primarily for adults. The first vaccine ever developed in any part of the world against plague (in 1897) was from India and meant for individuals across all age groups. The BCG vaccine (against tuberculosis) was first introduced in a nationwide campaign in 1951 and was also administered to the adult population. Influenza vaccines have always been administered to adults and children alike. This history clearly illustrates that vaccines have always been intended for individuals of all age groups.

However, considering that children are most vulnerable from vaccine-preventable diseases, they have rightly been prioritised for vaccination. A few decades ago, the supply of vaccines was limited, and the financial resources and trained workforce that governments had were scarce. Thus, vaccines were aimed to be delivered to the population groups which would benefit from them the most – children.

However, in the last five decades, things have changed for the better. With increased vaccine coverage, children are better protected. However, diseases that are preventable with vaccines are increasingly becoming common in the adult population. Therefore, it becomes imperative that government policies now focus on the vaccination of adults and the elderly, as well, as is happening in many countries. For better coverage of adult vaccines, we can learn from the past and five decades of the EPI.

First, there are some initial policy and technical discussions regarding expanding immunisation coverage in additional populations. The recent announcement on HPV vaccines for teenage girls is a good start.

However, the Indian government needs to consider providing recommended vaccines for a wider section of adults and elderly population. Considering that vaccines are highly cost effective, once recommended by the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI), vaccines for all age groups should be made available as free at the government facilities.

Second, the NTAGI in India, which provides recommendations on the use of vaccines should start providing recommendations on the use of vaccines in adults and the elderly. We need to remember that once a vaccine is recommended by the government body, the coverage is likely to be far greater than if the vaccines are not recommended by the government.

Third, the prevailing myths and misconceptions about vaccines must be proactively addressed to tackle vaccine hesitancy. The government must consider the help of professional communication agencies to dispel myths (and in a layperson's language and with the use of social media). This also requires citizens to learn and educate themselves about these vaccines from reliable sources.

Fourth, various professional associations of doctors – community medicine experts, family physicians and paediatricians should work to increase awareness about vaccines among adults and the elderly. Physicians treating patients with any disease should use the opportunity to make them aware of vaccines.

Fifth, medical colleges and research institutions should generate evidence on the burden of diseases in the adult population in India

There are studies which have noted that the introduction of new vaccines in national programmes contributes to increased coverage of all existing vaccines. Therefore, it is likely that expanding coverage of vaccines for adults and the elderly may result in improved coverage with childhood vaccines and reduced vaccine inequities. India's EPI has made major progress and it is arguably a time for another independent national level review of the UIP in India, engaging key partners and international experts.

In late 2023, India launched a pilot initiative of adult BCG vaccination as part of efforts to 'end TB' from India. The COVID-19 vaccination of the adult population has made the public sensitized to the need for and the benefits of adult vaccination. This is a right opportunity to start a new journey of adult vaccination in India. In the 50 years of the EPI, it is time for another expansion of the programme with focus on zero dose children, addressing inequities in vaccine coverage and offering vaccines to adults and the elderly. It is time to make EPI an 'Essential Program on Immunization'.

The need for the use of labour statistics

he reform of labour institutions is always in the air as objective (variables) and subjective (orientation of agencies involved) factors keep changing. In the case of the industrial relations system and labour market (IRS-LM), variables such as product market, technology, trade and investment, and labour institutions such as trade unions, collective bargaining and strikes keep changing. There are two aspects of reforms – substantive issues and procedural aspects.

Social dialogue is an important procedural institutional process to debate and arrive at consensual conclusions which could be used for legal and other policy-oriented actions. In the post-reform period, the government uses social dialogue agency, *viz.*, the Indian Labour Conference (ILC), to push the reforms agenda. Evidence-based reform arguments enrich social dialogue – something which has not happened thus far. Social partners have been advocating their "class-based opinions" unbacked by credible data or experience. The ILC has degenerated into a "talking shop".

Labour statistics, unlike economic and industrial data, are not rigorous. For example, the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) and the National Sample Survey Office produce excellent statistics but have limited information relating to the IRS-LM. The Labour Bureau provides statistics on a range of industrial relations (strikes and trade unions) and labour statistics (contract labour, absenteeism, labour turnover, labour inspections). It mostly provides administrative data, viz., those generated as a part of implementing labour laws. The statistics on work stoppages are collected voluntarily. The composition and the scope of data published by the Labour Bureau has remained virtually the same over the decades.

Reform arguments

Reform arguments
Let us look at three reform arguments put forth
relentlessly by employers and neoliberal
academics. Employers have criticised the labour
inspection system as a case of "Inspector-Raj"



K.R. Shyam Sundar

is Adjunct Professor, Management Development Institute, Gurgaon and called for its reforms. This criticism stems probably from their "limited experience". They have complained that State governments hardly sanction applications for retrenchment or the closure of establishments. They also demand a curb on the right to strike and prefer non-union workplaces. Some academics and global agencies such as the World Bank/International Monetary Fund which have "priors" similar to the reform opinions of employers have published studies "consistently" supporting the benevolent impact of reforms and refuting their obverse. For example, a study by Besley and Burgess (B&B) on the impact of labour regulation in 2004 has been widely used by employers and others to push hire and fire reforms, among others. This is despite glaring weaknesses in the studies using B&B methodology, original or revised. The government has fallen for these "strong prior-based evidence" hook, line and sinker and sought to introduce labour law reforms.

To counter the reform arguments mentioned above, trade unions should have collected the relevant information/statistics on inspection (such as the number of sanctioned and actually employed inspectors, the universe of inspection and actual inspection, the frequency of inspections) and studied them to make informed arguments to support labour inspection – even strengthening them. It is then that social partners and the government would have realised the poor quality of data on inspections. They would realise that labour inspectors are much fewer in number than the inspection universe. Research has shown that there is no all-India data on labour inspections.

Closure reform

Again, on firing/closure reform, trade unions have not collected data on the retrenchment/closure applications under Chapter V-B submitted to the labour department, permissions granted/refused by the labour department. These are not published in most States except in Maharashtra for a limited period. The denial of permissions was surely prevalent

during the command economy, but is this prevalent in the post-reform period? My study on retrenchments/closures under Chapter V-B in 2001-05 showed that Maharashtra was more liberal in granting permissions for retrenchments/closures (Impact of Labour Regulations ... in Maharashtra, Bookwell, 2008).

On strikes

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 Code on Industrial Relations (CIR) has made legal strikes well-nigh impossible. Illegal strikes carry a heavy penalty. Trade unions could have used the data on strikes and lockouts published by the Labour Bureau which would show that lockouts are more frequent and account for more workdays lost than strikes during the post-reform period. This evidence would have challenged the need for introducing harsher clauses on strikes in the CIR.

Trade unions are well placed to "produce" statistics on several aspects of the IRS-LM at the establishment level. Employers' organisations such as NASSCOM generate statistics on the IT industry which is used indiscriminately.

India has ratified the Labour Statistics Convention (No.160), 1985 and Labour Inspection Convention (081), 1947. India must generate statistics that are valid, comprehensive and reliable on IRS-LM. Trade unions must know by now that reforms are contested not only by street struggles but also primarily in the realm of ideas where objective data and rich empirical studies are used.

In essence, trade unions should produce labour statistics, do research on IRS-LM, build an active and productive interface with academics and use academic studies to make "evidence-based arguments" in the ILC. Imagine a massive strike demanding good labour statistics! The larger society and the government are bound to stand up and seek reform labour statistics. For once, strikes would enjoy public legitimacy.

This May Day, in 2024, trade unions must resolve to carry out these measures. If nothing, statistical agencies such as the Labour Bureau will be reformed as a result of these pursuits.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Examination dates issue

The date for the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysuru's computer-based All India Entrance Examination 2024 for Bachelor of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology (B.ASLP) falls on the same day as the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research

Aptitude Test (IAT), i.e., Sunday, June 9, 2024, at 9.a.m. Many students who have completed Class 12 are now anxious on getting to know this as they want to appear and write both tests. Could the authorities/officials please look into this? P. Murugiah,

Corrections & Clarifications

A Business page story on a Coca Cola bottler setting up a plant in Amethi (April 30, 2024) erroneously gave the name of the bottler as SLAM Beverages. It should have been SLMG Beverages.

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of the world. Entrance Examination 2024 Education and Research to know this as they want to Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu

Trade unions

pivotal role in

labour statistics

can play a

producing

THE HINDU

Implementing the Street Vendors Act

decade has passed since the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act came into effect on May 1, 2014, marking a significant milestone after nearly four decades of legal jurisprudence and the tireless efforts of street vendor movements across India. Celebrated as a progressive legislation, the Act now faces numerous challenges in its implementation. Looking back, the mere enactment of a law did not ensure the protection and security of street vendors in Indian cities; there was much to be desired in its execution.

Provisions of the law

Street vendors, estimated to constitute 2.5% of any city's population, play multifaceted roles in city life. Local vegetable sellers and food vendors are essential providers of daily services. Vending offers many migrants and the urban poor a source of modest yet consistent income. The vendors also make city life affordable for others by providing vital links in the food, nutrition, and goods distribution chain at reasonable prices.

Street vendors are also integral to Indian culture – imagine Mumbai without its vada pav or Chennai without its roadside dosai. The law was enacted to acknowledge this reality. It aimed to 'protect' and 'regulate' street vending in cities, with State-level rules and schemes, and execution by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) through by-laws, planning, and regulation. The Act clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of both vendors and various levels of government. It recognises the positive urban role of vendors and the need for livelihood protection. It commits to accommodating all 'existing' vendors in vending zones and issuing vending certificates. The Act establishes a participatory governance structure through Town Vending Committees (TVCs)



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Celebrated as a progressive legislation, the Act now faces numerous challenges in its implementation

and mandates that street vendor representatives must constitute 40% of TVC members, with a sub-representation of 33% of women street vendors. These committees are tasked with ensuring the inclusion of all existing vendors in vending zones. Additionally, the Act outlines mechanisms for addressing grievances and disputes. proposing the establishment of a Grievance Redressal Committee chaired by a civil judge or judicial magistrate. Its provisions set a crucial precedent for inclusive and participatory approaches to address street vending needs in cities, at least in theory.

Three broad challenges

However, the Act has faced three broad challenges. First, at the administrative level, there has been a noticeable increase in harassment and evictions of street vendors, despite the Act's emphasis on their protection and regulation. This is often due to an outdated bureaucratic mindset that views vendors as illegal entities to be cleared. There is also a pervasive lack of awareness and sensitisation about the Act among state authorities, the wider public, and vendors themselves. TVCs often remain under the control of local city authorities, with limited influence from street vendor representatives. And the representation of women vendors in TVCs is mostly tokenistic.

Second, at the governance level, existing urban governance mechanisms are often weak. The Act does not integrate well with the framework established by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act for urban governance. ULBs lack sufficient powers and capacities. Schemes like the Smart Cities Mission, laden with resources and pushed through as policy priorities from the top-down, mostly focus on infrastructure development and ignore the provisions of the Act for the inclusion of street vendors in city planning.

Third, at the societal level, the

prevailing image of the 'world class city tends to be exclusionary. It marginalises and stigmatises street vendors as obstacles to urban development instead of acknowledging them as legitimate contributors to the urban economy. These challenges are reflected in city designs, urban policies, and public perceptions of neighbourhoods.

The way forward

While the Act is progressive and detailed, its implementation requires support, possibly (and ironically) necessitating top-down direction and management starting from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. This needs to be decentralised over time to ensure effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs and contexts of street vendors nationwide. PM SVANidhi, a micro-credit facility for street vendors, has been a positive example in that direction. There is a strong need to decentralise interventions, enhance the capacities of ULBs to plan for street vending in cities, and move away from high-handed department-led actions to actual deliberative processes at the TVC level. Urban schemes, city planning guidelines, and policies need to be amended to include street vending.

The Act now faces new challenges such as the impact of climate change on vendors, a surge in the number of vendors, competition from e-commerce, and reduced incomes. The Act's broad welfare provisions must be used creatively to meet the emerging needs of street vendors. The sub-component on street vendors in the National Urban Livelihood Mission needs to take cognisance of the changed realities and facilitate innovative measures for addressing needs. The case of the Street Vendors Act highlights the complex interplay of contestation over space, workers in urban areas, and governance, offering valuable lessons for future lawmaking and implementation.

Impartial volunteers no longer

The YSRCP has been using village and ward volunteers for its election campaign

STATE OF PLAY

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he village and ward vo-'lunteers' system, introduced by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in 2019 in Andhra Pradesh to bridge the gap between the government and citizens, has become deeply politicised, with the Opposition accusing the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) of using the volun-

teers as its foot soldiers. At its core, the system aimed to decentralise governance by appointing local residents as volunteers to oversee implementation of government welfare programmes. Each volunteer is assigned to 50 households and is responsible for ensuring the transparent delivery of services such as social security pensions and essential commodities. For their work, volunteers are paid a monthly sum of ₹5,000 each as honorarium. There are 2,62,483 volunteers, as per government data.

Essentially, the volunteer system aims to bring governance to the people's doorstep. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteers became the backbone of Andhra Pradesh's response efforts. They distributed masks, facilitated the transportation of patients to healthcare facilities, and conducted household surveys to monitor the health status of every family. Their tireless efforts earned them praise from various sections of society and showed the potential of community-driven governance in times of crisis.

But as elections loomed on the horizon, allegations of misuse and manipulation began to surface. The Opposition accused the YSRCP of exploit-



ing the volunteer network to sway voters in its favour. It raised concerns about the lack of impartiality, claiming that the volunteers had turned into assets for the ruling party for its electoral campaign. This claim was substantiated by the fact that more than 60,000 volunteers resigned from their posts and officially began working with the YSRCP to help it during its campaign. It was clear that the party hoped to use the volunteers' familiarity with the people at the grassroots to its advantage.

Following complaints by Opposition parties in various districts, District Election Officers suspended a number of volunteers. Later, based on a writ petition filed by Dr. Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, Secretary, Citizens for Democracy (CFD) of Andhra Pradesh the Andhra Pradesh High Court barred volunteers from participating in the distribution of welfare schemes after the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was put in place. Mr. Ramesh Kumar is a retired Indian Administrative Service officer who served as State Election Commissioner. The court ruling was met with both praise and criticism: while some lauded it as a necessary safeguard against electoral malpractice, others claimed that it created obstacles in the delivery of services.

Based on the court orders, the Election Commission of

India (ECI) instructed the

State government to bar volunteers from delivering government services for as long as the MCC was in place. Following this, Chief Secretary K.S. Jawahar Reddy instructed the village and ward secretariat staff to disburse the money and asked pensioners to collect it from the respective offices. However, later, as per the directions of the ECI, the State government said it would disburse pensions through Direct Beneficiary Transfer to up to 75% of the pensioners. The rest would receive it at their doorstep during May and June, it said.

While the plan seemed to work on paper, in reality it turned into a tragedy. Some of the pensioners died, allegedly because they stood in the heat for hours to collect their due. This expectedly led to a controversy. Mr. Jagan Reddy and other YSRCP leaders blamed the CFD and the National Democratic Alliance for the deaths, while Telugu Desam Party national president N. Chandrababu Naidu and other Opposition leaders faulted the State government, claiming that it wilfully avoided employing village and ward secretariat staff to disburse pensions at beneficiaries' homes.

Based on multiple complaints that volunteers are influencing voters at the grassroots level, the Andhra Pradesh High Court asked the ECI to take action. The ECI has barred the volunteers from distributing cash benefits under any scheme, including pensions. The YSRCP continues to staunchly defend the volunteer system and claims that it is being politicised. This entire episode could have been avoided if the volunteers were merely allowed to do their duty and were not appropriated by the YSRCP for its own political gain.

Cost of meals rose by 71% in five years, salaries by just 37%

This disparity means that households with regular salaried people might be cutting back on spending on non-essential items or luxury products

DATA POINT

Sruthi Balaji & Vignesh Radhakrishnan

he average cost of a homecooked vegetarian thali in Maharashtra increased by 71% in the last five years. At the same time, the average monthly salary earned by a person through regular employment in the State increased by only 37%. While the wages of casual labourers kept pace with the rise in prices, increasing by 67% in the period, it is crucial to note that labourers were already spending a high share of

their monthly wages on food. For this analysis, it has been assumed that an average Indian family will be able to meet their daily dietary needs if they consume food equivalent to two thalis per day, spread across breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Non-vegetarian meals were not considered due to lack of past data. To get commodity prices, Maharashtra was chosen as an exemplar due to the availability of consistent data. The average wages and salaries of workers in Maharashtra were considered for comparison.

To decode how much two thalis cost, on average, in Maharashtra, the ingredients used were identified – white rice, toor dal, onion, garlic, green chilli, ginger, tomato, potato, peas, atta, cabbage, sunflower oil, and salt- and the grams required for two servings were measured. The average retail cost for buying those ingredients in Maharashtra – as of March this year, a year ago (2023), and five years ago (2019) - were collated from the Consumer Affairs Ministry and the National Horticulture Board. For some vegetables, for which data were not available, prices in Mumbai were considered as a proxy.

For instance, the cost of buying 125 grams of toor dal, which is required to make two thalis, increased from ₹9.3 to ₹20.1 in the

past five years (Table 1). Similarly, the cost of buying 300 grams of potato increased from ₹6.8 to ₹8.6.

The average cost of all the ingredients for two thalis in Maharashtra totalled ₹79.2 this year, ₹64.2 last year, and ₹46.2 in 2019 (Table 2). In essence, the cost of making two thalis in a household in Maharashtra every day of a month increased from ₹1,386 in 2019 to ₹2.377 in 2024.

The daily average wage of an individual in Maharashtra increased from ₹218 a day in 2019 to ₹365 a day in 2024. This was then extrapolated for 30 days to arrive at monthly earnings. The average salary of a person in Maharashtra increased from ₹17,189 to ₹23,549 in the same period.

The cost of making two thalis every day of a month, when considered as a share of wages/salaries, marginally increased from 21.1% of a casual labourer's monthly earnings in 2019 to 21.7% in 2024. This is assuming that the labourer got paid on all days, including rest days. In the case of regular salaried workers, there was a considerable increase from 8.1% to 10.1% in the same period (Table 4).

As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3, while the cost of making a thali increased by 71% in the past five years, the monthly salary increased by only 37%. As can be seen from Tables 3 and 4, while casual labourers' wages kept pace with the rise in prices, they were already spending over 20% of their earnings on food, the cost of which also went up marginally.

This disparity between salaries and expenditure means that households with regular salaried people might be cutting back on spending on non-essential items and luxury products. For daily wage-earning households, such spending anyway remained elusive as their expenditure on food was high and has now marginally gone up.

Sruthi Balaji is interning with The Hindu

Food has become more expensive

The tables are constructed based on data sourced from the Department for Consumer Affairs, National Horticulture Board, Periodic Labour Force Survey, and Report on District Level Estimates for the State of Maharashtra



`Sunflower oil All figures in ₹ except those in Column A (grams)

Table 1: The table lists the weight of commodities required to prepare two thalis and its retail prices in ₹

Item	A: Grams needed for 2 thalis	B: Cost of a kg. (March 2024)	C: Cost (1 year ago)	D: Cost (5 years ago)	Buying price (March) (B*A/1000)	Buying price (1 year ago) (C*A/1000)	Buying price (5 years ago) (D*A/1000)
Rice	125	51.12	43.12	35.83	6.4	5.4	4.5
Atta(wheat)	250	42.74	41.1	30.03	10.7	10.3	7.5
Oil^	36.3	119.92	150.39	90.71	4.4	5.5	3.3
Tomato	100	28.28	20.78	25.56	2.8	2.1	2.6
Onion	100	26.01	22.04	14.3	2.6	2.2	1.4
Salt	12.8	23.43	23.39	16	0.3	0.3	0.2
Potato	300	28.65	25.07	22.55	8.6	7.5	6.8
Toor dal	125	160.99	119.94	74.23	20.1	15.0	9.3
Garlic	25	238.7	100.87	43.04	6.0	2.5	1.1
Green chilli	25	102.61	57.83	68.7	2.6	1.4	1.7
Ginger	7.5	163.04	80	86.09	1.2	0.6	0.6
Peas	60	76.52	46.96	37.83	4.6	2.8	2.3
Cabbage	250	36.09	34.35	20	9.0	8.6	5.0

Table 2: The table shows the cost of a thali in ₹ in

March 2024, a year	ago, and five ye	ars ago			
All figures in ₹					
Cost	As on March 2024	1 year ago	5 years ago		
Cost of making two thalis	79.2	64.2	46.2		
Cost of making one thali	39.6	32.1	23.1		
Cost of making two thalis every day for a month	2,377.4	1,925.7	1,386.7		

Table 3: Average daily wage of a casual labourer and the average salary

of a regular salaried employee in urb	an Maharas	htra	
		Д	ıll figures in ₹
Average earnings in Maharashtra	As on March	1 year ago	5 years ago
Average wage earnings of a person per day from casual labour work other than public works in CWS*	364.93	328.24	218.35
Average salary earnings of a person during the preceding calendar month from regular wage/salaried employment in CWS*	23,549.45	21,810.82	17,189.56

*CWS: Current Weekly Status provides a snapshot of a person's employment during a particular reference week

Table 4: The table shows the cost of making two thalis every day for a month as a share of monthly wages/salaries

g , . ,		ll figures in 4	
	As on March	1 year ago	5 years ago
The cost of making two thalis every day for a month, when considered as a share of daily wage	21.72%	19.55%	21.15%
The cost of making two thalis every day for a month, when considered as a share of regular salary	10.10%	8.82%	8.06%



FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1974

Central Government employees to go on strike

New Delhi, April 30: The Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers to-day directed its Class III and IV employees all over the country to go on an indefinite strike from May 10. The Confederation, which claims to represent over seven lakh employees, called upon its members, who include those belonging to the Posts and Telegraphs Department, Audit, Income Tax and several other departments, excluding the Defence Services and Railways to commence the strike at 6 a.m. The strike will be preceded by a two-day "non-cooperation movement" from May 8 in the form of mass casual leave, work-to-rule, tool-down and pen-down to coincide with the threatened strike by railwaymen, Mr. S.K. Vyas, Secretary-General of the Confederation, said in a press statement. He added that this action would continue till the demands, already submitted to the Finance Minister and the respective Heads of Departments, were conceded. The demands included parity in pay scales with the public sector undertakings, a need-based minimum wage and bonus. The statement said the affiliates of the Confederation including the National Federation of P and T employees and the All-India Non-Garetted Audit and Accounts Association, had meetings of their policymaking bodies here from April 27 to 29. They held a joint meeting to-day at which the decision to go on strike was taken.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1924

Broadcasting in Madras

A Broadcasting concert took place for an hour this forenoon in the office of Messrs Milton & Co, Mount Road, next to Simpson and Coy. Some songs playing on Piano and a short speech were transmitted from the premises to the Gramaphone Department of Messrs. Spencer Buildings where the receiving appratus was fixed. The concert was well attended by Europeans and Indians. It was very much appreciated by those present and was voted a success. Mr. Coningsby, the Marconi Engineer, is in communication with Mr. Weston of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore where there is a receiving apparatus and has requested the Institute to receive the programme that is going on in Madras.



{ OUR TAKE }

Lessons from the Revanna episode

Parties should not shy away from acting against politicians accused of moral misdemeanours

he Prajwal Revanna episode is a symptom of the culture of impunity that prevails in Indian politics, especially among politicians who see themselves as local influencers. On Tuesday, the Janata Dal (Secular) suspended sitting MP Prajwal Revanna, grandson of the party patriarch Deve Gowda, from the party after police booked him for alleged sexual assault of multiple women. The police action came after the voting in Hassan, where Prajwal is the JD(S)-BJP candidate. Reports suggest that local leaders had raised apprehensions about repeating Prajwal in the wake of reports about video clips highlighting his behaviour. Yet he landed the nomination and political heavyweights, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, campaigned for him, presumably because he was the sitting MP and endorsing him was essential to keep the Gowda clan, necessary for the transfer of JD(S) votes to the BJP, happy. A similar predicament seems to be holding back the BJP from declaring its candidate from Kaiserganj (UP), where sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accused by Olympians of sexually harassing women wrestlers, expects to be renominated. Singh, reportedly, has the resources to influence outcomes in multiple Lok Sabha constituencies, and, hence, wants to be appreciated. And the same seems to have played a part in the Congress' nomination of Lal Singh, a former Congressman who moved to the BJP, then hit the headlines for his vocal support of the accused in the heinous Kathua rape and murder of a minor.

That this tendency, which has cross-party resonance, has prevailed despite elections moving away from fractured verdicts to decisive outcomes is truly surprising, and disturbing. Political parties seem to privilege the allegiance of these influencers over the damage to their own image — and political morality. This has bred a culture of impunity among a section of the political class, who invoke their political, caste, or class inheritance to brazen out the consequences of their crimes. It is heartening that those at the receiving end of the depravations of the influential now seek redress in the criminal justice system rather than stay quiet. However, closure takes time as such cases often become a battle of attrition in the courts.

It is nobody's case that due process should be given the short shrift and the accused denied a hearing. Nor should the circumstances be ignored; the scandal broke when half of Karnataka is yet to vote. That, and, possibly, factionalism may have forced the JD(S) to distance itself from the accused. However, the principle that should guide parties in such situations is that the people in public life need to have high moral standards. That may sound antiquated at a time when winning seems to be the only thing that matters.

Farm resilience is key to managing climate crisis

felt in agriculture, the Centre has done well to set up two expert panels: One to work on technology solutions to improve extreme weather forecast precision, aiding calibration of tilling and sowing decisions, and the other to find ways to hasten assessment of yield losses for timely disbursal of payouts under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). The farm insurance scheme has suffered delays — last August, the Centre blamed yield data transmission lags and disputes between insurance firms and the states for the ₹ 2,760 crore pending against admissible claims till 2021-22. Disbursal delays have a compounded effect, with farmers often dependent on harvest income/

compensation for the next sowing. That apart, the government must ensure a faster transition from a climate response orientation to a climate resilience one for the farm sector. This will require concerted efforts across the plough-to-plate spectrum. First, sustained gains in shifting away from water-intensive crops need to be demonstrated to farmers. While some states incentivise such diversification, these seem inadequate against the existing price support and assured procurement arrangement that rewards the cultivation of waterguzzlers. Second, greater attention must be paid to changing consumer preferences, to wean them away from grains whose acreage will suffer as the climate crisis worsens. This transition will be much harder to nudge, but as the unfolding millet consumption story promises, the needle can be moved meaningfully. The government and market players will need to redouble their efforts here.

In intelligence, perils of poor judgement

The Pannun plot was an instance of overreach and misjudgment. But its aftermath reflects the strengths and depth of India-US ties

ccording to The Washington Post, Vikram Yadav was the mid-level Indian intelligence official who allegedly directed the alleged plot to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, the terrorist that the United States (US) and Canada have awarded their citizenship. Western intelligence agencies also believe that the then Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) chief Samant Goel approved the plot.

The report excavates more details, from the western perspective, of a storyline that has now been known since the end of last year. The Indian government — either due to its political instinct that incentivises a certain aggression; or due to the spike in Khalistani activity; or due to the constellation of actors from Punjab that dominated R&AW under Goel; or due to a political-security assessment after the 2020-2021 farmers' protests that Khalistanis abroad had gained the ability to shape domestic political events decided that these extremists posed a direct threat to India's security.

Either because it was frustrated by the unwillingness of western law enforcement to take action, or due to a prior assumption that western law enforcement would not take action, a segment of India's security apparatus

decided to respond to this threat through extra-territorial action without exploring all diplomatic options.

At the very least, Indian agencies were enmeshed in the diaspora networks of extremism and criminal networks, as any smart intelligence agency must be to get political or operational intelligence or even keep a pathway open for future political dialogue. The line between what is official and unofficial, legal and illegal, intelligence collection and intelligence operation is almost always blurred and every intelligence agency, including the

operates in this grey zone.

But it appears that the Indian agencies weren't just in touch with criminal networks or aware of the world in which the Khalistanis operated outside. The Ameri-

Prashant

Central Intelligence Agency,

can (and Canadian) allegation is specific. India went a step beyond to directly seek to eliminate what it saw as threats through action that clearly violated the sovereignty of a partner country. Encounter killings within one's country aren't acceptable, but they assume a deeply offensive character when attempted outside one's country.

If these allegations have merit, then it is a story of Indian overreach. No cost-benefit assessment can justify plotting to kill a Khalistani terrorist in New York when weighed against the enormous value of the US-Indian strategic partnership. It is a story of Indian incompetence. Serving and retired intelligence officials, in private conversations, have said that if true, they were stunned by the shoddiness of the operation, both in its conception and execu-

tion. It is a story of Indian hubris. Yes, they admitted, the western world does this too, but hypocrisy is the fundamental feature of the international system, power determines your ability to preach one set of norms and practice another, and India isn't powerful enough to play this game outside its immediate neighbourhood just yet. And it is a story of Indian misjudgment, they reasoned, listing out the damage: Delhi's carefully constructed international reputation as a responsible power externally has taken a blow at

the very time its reputation as an internally robust democracy is under strain; it is unfairly getting clubbed together with countries that practice "transnational repression"; and it has given a coalition of actors from Chinese and Pakistani proxies in western capitals to ideological

issue to campaign around.

But having said all this, three ele-

ments of the episode stand out.

For one, the fact that neither Washington nor Delhi allowed this issue to interrupt bilateral ties is a remarkable testament to the strength of the Indian-US relationship, the level of trust that exists between the top political leadership, the openness and candour with which discussions happen, and the ability of both governments to remain laser-focused on the big strategic challenge and threat of the times: China.

The striking feature of this story is not that the US is unhappy. The striking feature is that the White House has been aware of the issue since at least last July, yet the American political



Sullivan and Doval have continued to maintain a relationship of trust

leadership maturely decided to compartmentalise the issue from the rest of the relationship. It has sought accountability from India and warned, in explicit terms, this must never recur. But Joe Biden and his team have continued to support India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic ambitions (think the G20 in September), India's ability to cope with China (military intelligence-sharing continues; high-level diplomatic and security exchanges have only deepened; defence deals are on track), India's wider integration into the western institutional apparatus (think of something as mundane but critical as India participating in the Minerals Security Partnership), and India's quest to be a high-technology power (think of the continued work on the initiative on critical and emerging technologies in general and space and semiconductors

in particular).

Two, this also suggests that those who run foreign policy in America are aware of who within the Indian system knew about the operation — and all indications are they don't think National Security Advisor Ajit Doval was among them. Even the *Post* report hedges its bets in the case of attributing responsibility to him; there is no evidence at all to link India's topmost national security leadership to this

Top American officials have indicated to this writer that at the exact

time this operation was being planned in June, they were struck by Doval's remarkable work with his counterpart, Jake Sullivan, in deepening the strategic relationship during Modi's State visit. US officials appear incredulous that Doval would have done anything to undermine bilateral ties given what was at stake, especially with an operation of this quality and nature. Tellingly, Sullivan and Doval have continued to maintain this relationship of trust and engagement and discuss developments in every global theatre with candour. The US system also accepted the legitimacy of a Doval-led committee to investigate the allegations, another marker of

And finally, the story isn't over yet, for the US demand to see legal accountability fixed in this case is colliding with India's willingness to take internal administrative action but probably will go no further. More broadly, there will continue to be reputational consequences for India in the wider public sphere in the West even if systems are more closely aligned than ever before. But what is critical is that India learns the right lessons, proceeds with a careful set of intelligence reforms and exercises more discerning judgment to deal with threats outside the borders especially at a time when its actions are under much higher scrutiny.

The views expressed are personal

Celebrating the life and works of Sudhir Kakar

Salman

Akhtar

first met the eminent Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, on July 22, 1999, at the wedding of the American psychoanalyst John Munder Ross. The elegant threestory brownstone in Manhattan was jampacked with the glitterati of our psychoanalytic world, Broadway stars, and sundry celeb-

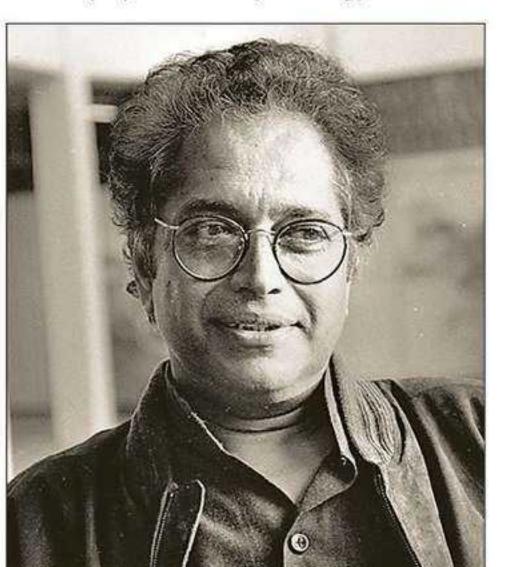
rities of the New York Jewish intelligentsia.

Our meetings over the subsequent 25 years were no less dramatic. Just envision the two of us, leisurely walking along the Atlantic Ocean in Hyannis, Massachusetts, a short distance from the hallowed Kennedy family compound; crunched, along my brother Javed (poet and lyricist), in the backseat of a Mercedes, en route from St Stephen's College to the Meridian Hotel in Lutyens' New Delhi;

seated on a podium with the popular Urdu poet Nida Fazli at the release of one of my books at the India International Centre; celebrating his 70th birthday on the rooftop terrace of his son's apartment in New York City; having a drink in the bar of the majestic Taj Mahal Hotel in Lucknow and chatting over coffee in the sun-filled atrium of The Imperial in New Delhi.

The affectionate and mutually respectful bond between us was as unlikely as it was inevitable. Unlikely because we were temperamentally quite different, with I being talkative, brimming with anecdotes, given to spontaneously reciting poetry and him being somewhat shy and unexpectedly taciturn for a charming and ambitious man. Inevitable because we shared, at a deep level, an abiding love of ideas, psychoanalysis, beauty, and creativity. My quiet and meditative self was covert and his flamboyance was veiled. We met infrequently but each encounter was touching and meaningful.

Sudhir Kakar was a seeker in the truest sense of the word. Peripatetic in geography, profession, and passion, Kakar began his life in Nainital (where he was born on July 25, 1938) and then lived in succession in Sargodha (now in Pakistan), Rohtak, New Delhi, Shimla, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Hamburg (Germany), Vienna (Austria), Ahmedabad again, Boston (US), Frankfurt (Germany), New Delhi



Sudhir Kakar died last week but the generative impact of his life will continue to shine through the effort and work of young psychotherapists in India HT PHOTO

again, and finally in Goa (where he died on April 21, 2024).

No less dizzying was his passage through careers in mechanical engineering, macroeconomics, psychoanalysis, social anthropology, mysticism, historical fiction, and popular literature. While the novels he wrote during the last two decades of his life — The Ascetic of Desire (2002), The Seeker (2007), and The Crimson Throne (2010) — are widely read, less known is the fact that he had started his career as a short story writer before turning to engineering, economics, and so on.

At the young age of 24, Kakar was already a well-published author. But Kakar's meteoric rise was due to his tutelage with the great Erik Erikson, the psychic cartographer of concepts

like "basic trust", "identity crisis", and "generativity". Sponsored by Erikson, Kakar underwent formal training in psychoanalysis in Frankfurt, Germany. Upon returning to India, he noticed the sharp elbows of Eurocentrism in the theory he had absorbed and thus began to fervently produce a body of work that explicated child development, personality functioning, and sexual life in terms

of Indian culture. He thus became a pioneering figure in the shift from the theoretically imperialistic "psychoanalytic anthropology" to a bidirectional and socially nuanced "anthropological psychoanalysis". His seminal books *The Inner World* (1978) and *Intimate Relations* (1990), respectively, opened up new vistas in the understanding of the emotional and erotic life of the people of India.

After the stunning psychoanalytic monograph (Concept of Repression, 1921) of Girindrashekhar Bose, who maintained a correspondence with Sigmund Freud till the latter's death in 1939, Kakar's books constituted a renewed and more forceful breakthrough in the application of depth psychology to nonwestern cultures. Kakar soon gained universal recognition. He taught at Harvard and Columbia Universities, collaborated with the masterful (admittedly, maligned by some in India) Indologist Wendy Doniger, and was held in high esteem by Sir Vidya (the doyen of postcolonial, emigre English fiction, VS Naipaul). He received numerous national and international awards, including Germany's Goethe Prize for Literature, which made him the only other psychoanalyst after Freud to have been

so honoured for his literary skills.

Sudhir died last week but the generative impact of his life will continue to shine through the effort and work of young psychotherapists and psychoanalysts in India and, in fact, throughout the world. To be sure, we mourn his death but equally, we owe him (and ourselves) a proud celebration of his venturesome, passionate (did I mention that he was a professional-level table tennis player?), and an impressively technicolour and creative life. He has left behind a legacy of generosity, authenticity, and wisdom that shall continue to live in our hearts and minds.

Salman Akhtar is an acclaimed psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and poet based in Philadelphia, US.
A 10-volume collection of his Selected Papers was recently released at the Freud House and Museum in London.
The views expressed are personal

ADMIRAL DINESH KUMAR TRIPATHI } CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF

The emerging challenges in the maritime domain mandate the Indian Navy to remain operationally ready to deter potential adversities at sea in peace and to win the war at sea when asked to do so

India needs to lead agri-tech innovation for Global South

he global food system must be transformed to both mitigate the climate crisis and feed a rapidly growing population. Food insecurity is already a major challenge, with the number of those facing acute hunger has risen for the fifth consecutive year in 2023. By 2050, we need to nourish over 10 billion people while significantly reducing emissions and minimising the use of land and water. This challenge is acute across Africa and Asia, which will face higher population growth and more severe impacts of the climate crisis, including droughts and declining agricultural yields.

In this scenario, India could play a pivotal role in leading a transformation. One major obstacle these countries face is gaining access to advanced technologies that can revolutionise

their food systems. Over the last two decades, innovations such as gene-edited seeds, enhancements to the soil microbiome, and fermented proteins have emerged. These technologies have the potential to improve yields, enhance climate resilience, and bolster food security at scale.

However, these innovations are predominantly developed within Western ecosystems and reflect a disparity in innovation that continues to persist. Private investment in agricultural technology (agri-tech) primarily flows into North America and Europe. Consequently, there is a wealth of innovation in climate-resilient corn and soy, for example, but far less in crops like millets or rice, which are crucial for many Global South countries.

Innovation ecosystems in the Global South are generally less developed, with limited access to the funding and industry connections needed to bring new technologies to the market. They also face fragmented markets that are less familiar to start-ups and lack the supportive mechanisms that could attract these companies.

The international community has recognised these challenges, yet national commitments and global funding mechanisms for transforming food systems and facilitating technology transfer remain limited. This situation likely means that countries will continuously be in catch-up mode; their own emerging ecosystems may take decades to develop comparable deep scientific capabilities.

Nonetheless, there is a proactive approach that the Global South can adopt, with India at the forefront. This involves pooling capital to create a multi-stage fund aimed at steering innovation addressing Global South-specific problems. For example, grants at the university level for cutting-edge research (akin to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency grants in the US) could guide advanced labs towards developing biotechnological solutions appropriate for these countries. As these innovations progress from labs to start-ups, additional grants could help refine these solutions. Drawing from models like the Gates Foundation's Global Access, intellectual property (IP) provisions in these grants could ensure that the IP developed is accessible to the Global South. As companies mature, targeted early- and mid-stage equity investments — similar to those made by Singapore's EDBI or Abu Dhabi's Mubadala — could

attract them to these regions.

Further, enhancing the attractiveness of the Global South to innovative companies is essential. One effective strategy is through

tial. One effective strategy is through demand aggregation, particularly for seeds, fertilisers, and other inputs, which could enhance these countries' bargaining power and reduce the overhead for companies seeking market entry. Here, India could leverage its scale and infrastructure to develop a marketplace that other countries can participate in

Nanda

entry. Here, India could leverage its scale and infrastructure to develop a marketplace that other countries can participate in.

As breakthrough innovations ate reshape or create new industries, regulatory frameworks often struggle to adapt. Countries like Singapore created new regulatory frameworks to support emerging industries. Yet, navious gating multiple regulatory systems can be costly

reshape or create new industries, regulatory frameworks often struggle to adapt. Countries like Singapore created new regulatory frameworks to support emerging industries. Yet, navigating multiple regulatory systems can be costly and time-consuming for companies expanding internationally. India could advocate for greater regulatory coordination and common standards, leveraging its regulatory expertise and deep understanding of developing country contexts. This could mean that regulatory approval in India could potentially open doors to several countries simultaneously.

These approaches require collaboration and longer timelines for some. However, in the backdrop of global climate negotiations, the reshaping of multilateral financial institutions, and the flux in global climate finance, there is a valuable opportunity for India to cement its position as a leader of the Global South by helping it take more proactive action towards transforming its food system, both through diplomatic channels as well as by facilitating dialogue through its business and investment communities.

Kabir Nanda has worked in multiple roles scaling innovative climate-friendly technologies globally and currently works at the intersection of food and biotechnology. The views expressed are personal

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WORDLY WISE

THE GREATEST DECEPTION MEN SUFFER IS FROM THEIR OWN OPINIONS.

— LEONARDO DA VINCI

The Indian EXPRESS

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Indian economy has fared better than expected, momentum is expected to continue. Concerns, especially over jobs, remain

AST YEAR, THE Indian economy fared better than expected. The National Statistical Office's second advance estimates have pegged growth for the full year at 7.6 per cent. As per the International Monetary Fund's Regional Economic Outlook report, India has been a "source of repeated positive growth surprises". There are expectations of the growth momentum continuing this year as well. In its most recent World Economic Outlook, the IMF has upped its growth projections for the country. The Fund now expects the Indian economy to grow at 6.8 per cent in 2024-25, up from its earlier projection of 6.5 per cent. The Reserve Bank of India is more optimistic. In the last monetary policy committee meeting, the central bank had projected growth at 7 per cent. The Asian Development Bank has also upped its estimate of growth this year to 7 per cent. The World Bank has pegged the economy to grow at a marginally lower rate of 6.6 per cent in its recent South Asia Development update. Rating agency Crisil expects growth at 6.8 per cent, while ICRA is less optimistic at around 6.5 per cent. This range of GDP growth estimates from 6.5 to 7 per cent does suggest that the Indian economy is likely to remain the fastest growing large economy in the world.

There are several reasons to be optimistic about the country's growth prospects. As per the India Meteorological Department, the southwest monsoon this year is "most likely to be above normal". There is a 60 per cent chance of La Nina conditions developing by June-August as per the most recent update from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. A good monsoon would bode well for food production, and, as a consequence, possibly provide a fillip to rural demand. There are also expectations of a firm pickup in private investment activity as capacity utilisation rates rise. Both bank and corporate balance sheets are healthy — bank non-performing loans fell to 3.2 per cent in September 2023, while the corporate debt-to-equity ratio has fallen from 1.16 in 2014-15 to 0.85 in 2022-23 as per a report from Nomura. However, there is a possibility of government capex slowing down in the first few months of the year due to the elections. On the trade front, while the IMF does expect world trade volume in both goods and services to pick up, uneven global growth and geopolitical conflicts do create uncertainty.

There are, however, several sources of concern. As per the IMF, growth in the global workforce will be driven by India and sub-Saharan Africa, with these regions accounting for "nearly two in every three entrants over the medium term". Creating more productive forms of employment opportunities for the millions entering the labour force each year should be a top priority for the next government. Alongside, it must also commit to the path of fiscal consolidation and bring down its debt.

SELECTED TO OFFICE

No contest in Surat and walkover in Indore raise questions. Election Commission should ask some hard questions

'N THE 2019 general election, a total of 5,67,636 electors voted for the first runnersup in the Surat and Indore Lok Sabha constituencies. While BJP candidates won both seats by massive margins (74.5 per cent of the vote in Surat and 65 per cent in Indore), they did so through the competitive, often adversarial, process that is an Indian election. Five years on, it could be argued that the BJP candidate from Surat, Mukesh Dalal, has beaten his predecessor's record: Congress candidate Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination form was rejected by the District Election Officer after three proposers submitted affidavits saying the signatures on the form were not theirs. Other candidates too withdrew, making Dalal the first MP-elect this election cycle. The lack of an electoral contest has robbed lakhs of voters in Surat of their franchise. Now, a similar saga is unfolding in Indore with Congress candidate Akshay Kanti Bam withdrawing his nomination. The developments in the two constituencies run counter to democratic principles and procedure.

The Congress has, predictably, accused the BJP of intimidating candidates and promising them inducements. It has said that it will contest the Surat election in court after June 4. In Indore, the fact that Akshay Kanti Bam has been photographed with BJP leader and state minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, who has also welcomed him to the party in a post on X, casts a shadow over the nomination and poll process. The potential erosion of faith in the electoral process is something that should worry the ruling party as much as the Opposition. A Member of Parliament who gains office unopposed — in practice or in effect — especially when there is no broader political consensus behind such an outcome, is in essence selected, not elected.

It is important to underline that Surat and Indore are anomalies. This general election, like all the ones before it, is being fought robustly across the length and breadth of India, with the Election Commission overseeing what is arguably the most challenging poll in the world. The EC must now live up to its well-deserved reputation as a watchdog. It needs to thoroughly investigate the dropping out of candidates in the two constituencies and put to rest any doubts about the sanctity of the nomination and poll process. In India's constitutional scheme, the voter is the ultimate source from which the entire edifice of the state derives authority and legitimacy. The fundamental right of every citizen to exercise their franchise should not be abridged.

AGONY AND THE ECSTACY

Paris's Louvre museum wants to shift the Mona Lisa to a room of its own. Will it solve its peculiar challenge?

HERE COULD BE an idea here for a museum edition of the popular board game Guess Who, if only product designers would take note. From across the museums of the world, pick out its most distinguished showcase. Now, do a picture gallery of its neighbours. Guess which artwork abuts Picasso's 1937 masterpiece Guernica in room number 205.10 of Madrid's Reina Sofia museum? Who flanks Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring in Hague's Mauritshuis? As for the dour Lisa Gherardini in Louvre's Salle des États, known to the world as the mysterious *Mona Lisa*, is she touched by the miracle and festivities in Veronese's canvas that hangs opposite? The Wedding Feast at Cana is, after all, one of the finest representations of late Renaissance painting

As things stand though, only the first among equals seems to have recall value. The rest of the artwork — a wealth of them really — stand forgotten in the mad rush to catch a glimpse of the celebrity among them. It's one of the reasons Paris's Louvre has announced its decision to shift the *Mona Lisa* from its present location to an exclusive subterranean room of its own. Museum authorities are in consultation with France's culture ministry for a potential solution that gives both Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece and those of other Renaissance masters currently sharing space with it, maximum display. According to the museum's estimate, about 80 per cent of its daily footfalls are for the Mona Lisa. In 2023, the museum had close to 8.9 million visitors.

A large part of contemporary museum experience involves a negotiation with new, participatory modes of cultural consumption. In 2023, for instance, after three decades, the Reina Sofia allowed for the Guernica to be photographed. From selfie-taking hordes to environmentalists hurling soup as protest, to the fleeting, underwhelming glimpse of the painting, wondering why the prima donna of the art world is such a letdown, the Mona Lisa's particular challenge has been multi-pronged. A room of its own might allow more elbow room for such deliberations.

The new productive force

Modernising technological foundation of economy and national security must be a priority for next government



TECHNOLOGY POLICY IS arguably too esoteric to figure in India's election discourse this season. But the next government in Delhi will

By C Raja Mohan

have its hands full in dealing with the impact of the rapidly unfolding technological changes on the major economies, the geopolitical rivalry between them, and the global governance of artificial intelligence, space industrialisation, and the bioeconomy. Above all, the next government will have to focus on a wide range of internal reforms to make India ready to gain command over emerging technologies. The rest of the world is not waiting. Consider the massive new campaign in China on mastering the "new productive forces". The Chinese Communist Party's new campaign is

quite central to Beijing's current ambition to overtake Washington in the production of advanced science and technology and rise to the top of the global power hierarchy. The notion of productive forces — or technological means of production — and how they drive social and political transformations is central to classical communist theory.

President Xi launched the current usage of the term last September during a visit to China's old industrial heartland in the northeast of the country. The location chosen for the speech was about turning the north-eastern rust belt into a shining tech belt. Since then, the term has acquired a near-mystical quality and has found its way into the canon of "Xi Jinping Thought".

In a work report presented in March to the National People's Council, Prime Minister Li Qiang promised a "new leap forward" by supporting advanced technology sectors, including electric vehicles, new materials, commercial spaceflight, quantum technology and life sciences.

The idea that China should move from the labour-intensive production of the last century to a more technology-intensive economy has been around for a while. President Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, talked about the importance of "scientific development", stressing the importance of technology and innovation in moving to a higher stage of development and the building of a "harmonious society".

In India, science and technology have long been a major part of its developmental strategy. Over the last decade, we have seen Prime Minister Narendra Modi leverage digital technologies for the delivery of services, emphasise investments in renewable energy, focus on a mission mode to put India back on the map of semiconductor production, and develop a strategy for the acceleration of India's AI capabilities. Technology has also figured prominently in the Modi government's foreign policy — especially in making it a key element of building strategic partnerships with the US

and Europe.

As Xi stokes up China's nationalism and seeks to reduce reliance on foreign technologies, full control over the new productive forces has become a major strategic objective for Beijing. China has made impressive advances under Xi and has acquired dominance over some sectors like solar panels and battery storage. It also lags well behind the US in several other areas including semiconductor production and the innovations in generative AI.

The new obsession with technology policy is not limited to China; the question of mastering the technological revolution animates all major economies. In the last few years, President Joe Biden has focused intensely on regaining its leadership in the advanced technology sectors.

The Biden administration successfully mobilised bipartisan support in the US Congress to pass three pieces of legislation — the Infrastructure Investment Act, the CHIPS Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. Together, they form a muscular industrial policy - long taboo in the US economic discourse — aimed at renewing American leadership in advanced technologies.

It has also sought to limit the support of US capital to Chinese technological development and restrict advanced technology exports from the US and its allies to Beijing. The US is also trying to develop new global technology coalitions with its friends and partners, including the Quadrilateral forum with Australia, India, and Japan, and the so-called Chip-4 alliance between the US and three leading semiconductor producers — Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It is also building deep bilateral partnerships in critical and emerging technologies with India (the iCET).

In a major speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris last week, French President Emmanuel Macron talked of the urgent need for Europe to reclaim a major spot in the distribution of global technological power. Calling for strengthening of Europe's "industrial and technological sovereignty" and closing the gap with the US and China that are boosting their technological sectors with massive subsidies, Macron demanded big investments in AI,

quantum computing, space, biotechnology, and such new energy technologies as green hydrogen and nuclear fusion.

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In India, science and technology have long

egy. Over the last decade, we have seen Prime Minister Narendra Modi leverage digital technologies for the delivery of services, emphasise investments in renewable energy, focus on a mission mode to put India back on the map of semiconductor production, and develop a strategy for the acceleration of India's AI capabilities. Technology has also figured prominently in the Modi government's foreign policy — especially in making it a key element of building strategic partnerships with the US and Europe.

The BJP election manifesto has a section on technology and innovation that promises, among other things, to make India a leading space power, promote a robust national research and development (R&D) infrastructure, set up a research fund, and launch a new mission for quantum computing.

To keep pace with the new global race for mastery over the "new productive forces", though, Delhi needs to undertake a sweeping overhaul of its technology departments, significantly raise the national expenditure on R&D, and encourage greater participation of the private sector in the research, development, and production of modern technologies.

The entrenched S&T monopolies under the government created in the early years after Independence are out of sync with the imperatives of building a large technologydriven economy that India now aims for. Modernising the technological foundation of the Indian economy and national security must necessarily be at the top of the agenda for the next government if Delhi wants to be a part of the global map of "new and highquality forces of production".

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and a visiting professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore



THE REPUBLIC AND ITS PEOPLE

Saving the Constitution has become an electoral issue. This is heartening

D RAJA

FOR THE FIRST time in India's electoral history, saving the Constitution from the onslaught of the BJP and RSS has become as much an election issue as a core agenda of the people. The opening words of the Preamble – "We the People of India" — transmit unequivocally the idea that the people are united, regardless of religion, language and caste, and are resolved to constitute India into a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic".

People across the country are anxious because some BJP candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections have reportedly hinted that their party's target of winning 400-plus seats is aimed at changing the Constitution. Dalits and other communities that have suffered due to the caste system fear that altering the Constitution would mean, among other things, removing reservation and affirmative action. Muslims too fear that the architecture of equality, liberty, and fraternity enshrined in the Constitution would be dismantled.

On November 30, 1949, four days after the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution, the RSS opposed it in an editorial in Organiser. It wrote, "The worst thing about the new Constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bharatiya about it... there is no trace of ancient Bharatiya constitutional laws, institutions, nomenclature, and phraseology in our Constitution; there is no mention of the unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat. Manu's Laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this

In 1999, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government proposed that the Constitution be reviewed. Many sections of society opposed this, and K R Narayanan, who was the President of India at the time, in a historic speech delivered on the occasion of our Republic's golden jubilee in 2000, said, 'Let us examine if the Constitution has failed us or we have failed the Constitution.'

day, his laws enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the world's admiration and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits, that means nothing."

In 1999, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government proposed that the Constitution be reviewed. Many opposed this, and KR Narayanan, who was the President of India at the time, in a historic speech delivered on the occasion of our Republic's golden jubilee in 2000, said, "Let us examine if the Constitution has failed us or we have failed the Constitution." The Vajpayee government was forced to abandon the decision to review the Constitution and instead appointed a commission to review the workings of the Constitution.

After Modi became Prime Minister, he described the Constitution as a holy book. Yet, in 2017, one of his ministers, Anantkumar Hegde, said that the Constitution would be changed. He later apologised for his remarks. Last month, he said again that if the Modi regime returns to office after winning 400 plus seats, it would change the Constitution.

Even before this, last year, the Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankar repeatedly criticised the Basic Structure of the Constitution, held by the Supreme Court to be beyond the amending power of the Parliament. Even the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council, Bibek Debroy, in an article published last year, gave a mischievous interpretation to a Chicago Law School study, which stated that the "mean life span"

of written constitutions worldwide since 1789 is 17 years. He wanted our Constitution to be replaced by a new one, writing, "We should go back to the drawing board and start from first principles, asking what these words in the Preamble mean now: Socialist, secular, democratic, justice, liberty and equality."

It is against this background that we must see recent statements by BJP leaders like Anantkumar Hegde, Arun Govil, Lallu Singh, and Jyoti Mirdha regarding changes to the Constitution. In the face of this threat, people have come forward to make saving the Constitution an electoral issue. This is truly refreshing. We have seen how President Narayanan defended the Constitution from the BJP's assault. Now, the INDIA bloc has come together to do so. In the face of such resistance, the Prime Minister's statement that even Ambedkar himself cannot alter the Constitution sounds hollow. The Home Minister too expressed his newfound love for secularism when he said that the BJP would never change the Constitution and even the word "secular" would not be removed from the Preamble. Union Minister Nitin Gadkari was also forced to reiterate this.

Now that "We the People" are at the forefront of the movement to save the Constitution, the BJP and its leadership, which assails the Constitution, must be defeated in the elections.

The writer is general secretary, CPI



May 1, 1984, Forty Years Ago

EX-PUNJAB COP KILLED

IN A SHOOT-OUT, terrorists killed Bachan Singh, retired deputy superintendent of police, and others in Amritsar. In another incident, unidentified persons hurled a hand grenade at a Central Reserve Police Force picket at Ferozepur, injuring three CRPF personnel. Bachan Singh was on the hitlist after he interrogated Bhai Amrik Singh, the right-hand man of Sikh leader J S Bhindranwale.

No Sikh Personal Law HOME MINISTER PC Sethi said that the government had been having "closed door" meetings with the Akalis to find a solution to the Punjab problem, but ruled out a separate personal law for the Sikhs. Sethi's assertion on the personal law issue came in his reply at the end of the debate in the Rajya Sabha on the National Security (Amendment) Bill, 1984.

BJP WALKOUT

NEW LT-GOVERNOR P G Gavai's maiden address at the opening session of the Delhi Metropolitan Council was marked by a walkout by the entire opposition. Leader of the opposition Madan Lal Khurana (BJP), said that the opposition was staging a walkout to protest against the Delhi Administration's failure in dealing with the extremist activities. Khurana said that the opposition's action was not aimed at insulting the new governor.

MIZORAM CM TUSSLE

ONCE IMPRISONED FOR being with the banned Mizo National Front, Lalthanhawla, on being elected leader of the Mizoram Congress (I) legislature party, staked his claim for being the next chief minister of the Union territory before the Lt-Governor HS Dubey. Brig T Sallo, who submitted his resignation. has been asked to continue till an alternative arrangement is made. His party, the Peoples Conference, was mauled in the elections.

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THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Conservatives' rightward journey on asylum, like that of hard-right governments elsewhere, risks taking the country to a dark place. In making the Rwanda policy so central, Mr Sunak has chosen an ugly straw to clutch at." - THE GUARDIAN

Don't write off US campuses

US universities are better equipped to withstand opposing worldviews than most other institutions. But divisions beyond them have created breeding ground for political bottom-feeders



BHASKAR CHAKRAVORTI

ARE AMERICA'S ENVIABLE institutions of higher learning coming apart? Viral videos of duelling student groups, police handcuffing protestors across campus quads and a parade of university presidents laid low by a single combative Republican legislator suggest a crisis of monumental proportions.

Before we write them off, remember, we have been on these troubled quads before. Consider April 23, 1968. The United States was still reeling from the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and many parts of the country – especially Harlem, the neighbourhood around Columbia University was a tinderbox. The campus, normally an island of calm with the madness of Manhattan just outside its wrought-iron gates, was anything but calm. Community activists opposing the building of a racially segregated university gym in Morningside Park abutting the campus joined hands with a student group that had taken issue with Columbia's connections with a think tank conducting weapons research for the Vietnam War. They ended up occupying five campus buildings and taking a dean hostage. On April 30, New York City police moved in to clear the occupied buildings. Arrests, violence, and suspensions followed, and the university closed for the balance of the academic year. Columbia inspired protests elsewhere, on and off campuses. Robert F Kennedy, the leading candidate for president from the Democratic party was assassinated in June, followed by anti-war riots at the Democratic National Convention in August. The cumulative effect was a backlash against chaos. The "law and order" Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, was elected president later that year.

Now, here we are in April 2024. Columbia's South Lawn looks about the same as it did 56 years ago, with students parked on it once again. And once again, the New York City police moved in, and arrested and removed students. The students were protesting the flattening of Gaza by Israel and the deaths of over 34,000 people, mostly innocent civilians. Israel was responding to the brutal attack by Hamas on its citizens on October 7, last year. Jewish students on campus were feeling threatened by the protests and feared a return of anti-Semitism. Pro-Palestinian students felt their voices were shut down more often by the administration. Just the day before, Columbia's president, Minouche Shafik, had committed to countering acts of anti-Semitism on campus; a swift invitation to the police to clear the grounds seemed like her way of showing she meant it. Now, protests in solidarity with Columbia students have broken out on campuses across the country, including my own.

While we can legitimately worry about the state of American universities, I have confidence in their resilience. Of all places, they are better equipped to withstand the collision of ideas, clashing groups, and opposing worldviews than most other institutions; and this is despite the evidence of groupthink and "cancel culture" at far too many top universities. In the aftermath of 1968, Columbia suffered a decline in applications and funding, but today many kids would sell their parents to attend the school and the university makes enough to build



a \$600 million campus for its business school. US universities are still places where breakthrough discoveries happen and there are instructors who are legends in the classroom. I am far less sanguine about the larger story unfolding beyond the quad and the wrought-iron gates.

For one, anger is rising over the cascading events in the Middle East within and beyond the university. Acts of hate have spiked: Complaints over both anti-Semitic acts and anti-Muslim incidents have gone up dramatically. The American Left has splintered. In a country that religiously upholds the right to freedom of speech many are self-censoring or speaking in hushed whispers for fear of offending others or being called out by one group or another.

This atmosphere offers a perfect breeding ground for political bottom-feeders. There are many of these, as America is gearing up for a presidential election in November. The ghosts of the 1968 elections sit at this year's electoral table as well. Of course, 1968 was an exceptional year in the US. Amidst a sense of chaos, far too many in the Democratic base chose not to turn up to vote and Nixon won with the clarity of his message. Also, Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate and supporter of the Vietnam war alienated the Democratic base, especially the campus protestors.

We find ourselves, again, in an exceptional year. Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican candidate is juggling a criminal trial and 91 felony counts. He is looking to unseat the incumbent Joe Biden,

instead of fretting over whether America's celebrated institutions of higher learning are coming apart, we ought to ask a more critical question: Are America and an already fragile world order at risk of coming apart? Imagine a Trump presidency 2.0 alongside the famine and flattening of Gaza, the fanning of flames across the Middle East, with war raging in Ukraine and a sword dangling over Taiwan. The world may not be resilient

who can point to more legislative accomplishments than most other presidents in recent memory, but is also the recipient of the lowest approval rating of any other firstterm president besides Jimmy Carter. Once again, Trump's message is so clear he can wear it on a hat and its four-letter acronym, MAGA, is his entire vision for America. Biden's message cannot fit on a hat. His age turns off young voters. His support of the war in Gaza has alienated many in the Democratic base. And yes, that includes those campus protestors.

So, instead of fretting over whether America's celebrated institutions of higher learning are coming apart, we ought to ask a more critical question: Are America and an already fragile world order at risk of coming apart? Imagine a Trump presidency 2.0 alongside the famine and flattening of Gaza, the fanning of flames across the Middle East, with war raging in Ukraine and a sword dangling over Taiwan. The world may not be resilient enough to survive two rounds of Trump. If Nixon left a permanent scar, Trump will leave a perpetually open wound.

We need to find a resolution to the crisis in Gaza and Israel not so much to save America's universities but to prevent further loss of innocent lives, to save America itself and the global order that hinges on the country not being led by an unhinged man. With a Trump return, campus protestors will have much more to protest about.

The writer is Dean of Global Business at The Fletcher School at Tufts University

A defector's rebellion

Arvinder Singh Lovely's resignation is symptomatic of all that is wrong with Congress party. It should invest in new faces



ASHUTOSH

DELHI CONGRESS PRESIDENT Arvinder Singh Lovely's resignation is symptomatic of all that is wrong with the party. Resignation of the state president is no ordinary event within the organisational scheme of things. In a democracy, elections are nothing less than war. Nothing could be a more serious betrayal than one of the senior lieutenants of the party leaving the battlefield when the party is engaged in an existential fight. This shows that the party in the state was led by people who had no commitment. For them, personal interest was paramount; they were not in the party for any cause, all they had was hunger for power and post. Opportunism was their only virtue and once that was denied, they were left with no choice but to resign.

When the Congress party ruled Delhi and Sheila Dixit was the chief minister for three consecutive terms, Lovely and Rajkumar Chauhan were given important portfolios in the cabinet. But once Congress was decimated by the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP in 2013, they started looking for greener pastures. Lovely had left Congress and joined the BJP with much fanfare. But when he realised that the BJP would not oblige him with any plum post unless he proved his loyalty, he went back to Congress. It was wrong of the Congress high command to give him such an important responsibility during an election year. In my opinion, a defector is always a defector and, under no circumstances, should he be relied upon to deliver for the party, especially at a time of crisis.

The 2024 parliamentary elections are no ordinary elections — constitutionalism, democracy and the future of the country are at stake. It is said, and also believed by a section of society, that if Narendra Modi comes back as prime minister with a substantial majority then the Constitution can be changed. When every political party and leader in the Opposition is under the radar of investigating agencies, when the Enforcement Directorate (ED) can arrest one of the tallest leaders of the country — Arvind Kejriwal — and no Opposition leader is safe from its clutches, when the Congress bank account has been frozen, then circumstances demand politicians of steel who can face the crisis and fight like gladiators.

India is going through exceptional times and it has no need for chicken-hearted leaders. In Delhi, the Congress has been in dire straits since 2013 because of such leaders, who have neither mass appeal nor the appetite to fight for the party; who are, at best, self-seekers and opportunists. In con-

trast, AAP, despite its supreme leader Kejriwal being in jail, is fighting with a vengeance, unafraid, and with commitment to their leader. One can disagree with their unorthodox style of firefighting, but one can't discount the fact that, up to a large extent, they have succeeded in turning the crisis into an opportunity. Today, if there is sympathy for the AAP at the grassroots, credit should be given to its fighting spirit. Congress, in contrast, after losing to AAP in the 2013 assembly elections, made no effort to fight back. Rahul Gandhi should realise that a war is never won by paper tigers. Battle-hardened soldiers who are not scared to take the fight to the enemy are the need of the hour. The last two parliamentary elections

have proved that, on their own, AAP and Congress are no match for the BJP's might. No doubt, AAP won the assembly elections in 2015 and 2020 with unprecedented mandates. It also defeated the BJP in the last MCD elections. But in parliamentary elections, the Modi magic had no parallel. In the 2019 elections, the BJP not only won all seven seats but also received an unassailable 54 per cent vote share. On the other hand, not only did Congress draw a blank in both parliamentary elections (2014 and 2019), it failed to win a single seat in the two assembly elections as well. The party's performance in the MCD elections has also been pathetic. In this context, it would be naïve to think that Congress could work wonders if it contested the Lok Sabha elections on its own. The reality is that Congress is in a hopeless situation. The local unit has neither a leader of stature nor any imagination as to who could be relied upon to resurrect the party. The alliance with the AAP was a way out. Together, these two parties can offer a good fight to the BJP.

Today, the BJP is facing 10 years of antiincumbency. Unemployment and price rise are huge issues. If the BJP thought that the consecration of the Ram Mandir would help the party sail through the election in the national capital, then it appears to be mistaken. The Hindu-Muslim binary is slowly but definitely losing its sheen. Mundane issues are dominating the daily discourse Local BJP leaders have no appeal, their Lok Sabha candidates are rootless wonders. Without the Modi magic, they will struggle to win. Like in other parts of north and central India, candidates are not important – either people will vote for or against Modi.

My sympathies are with those who think and believe that Lovely and Chauhan's resignations will make or mar the elections. If they were so good, Congress would not have been in such a sorry state. If Congress is to grow in Delhi, then sooner rather than later, it should bid adieu to such leaders. It should learn from AAP, which invested in new leaders. The time for old faces and ideas, and party hoppers, is over.

The writer, a former member of AAP, is cofounder and editor of SatyaHindi and author of Hindu Rashtra

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Short on

safety' (IE, April 30). The renewed spotlight on significantly high sugar, salt, and fat content in food in India has sparked a debate about public health and transparency. Some major business houses including Nestlé find themselves at the forefront of this debate. This allows all stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to consumer well-being. Consumer awareness is pivotal in shaping food choices and driving industry practices. The food industry must reassess its practices and the food regulators strengthen their enforcement strategies. This need is particularly significant in India, where the burden of nutritionrelated non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovas-

cular ailments, is rapidly escalating. Khokan Das, Kolkata

GEN Z FOR RETRO

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Boring and fine' (IE, April 30). Change is cyclical; so is fashion. Simplicity was the way of life for previous generations and now it seems that newer generations are also fed up with overabundance and lightning-fast speeds. Innumerable distractions create an unsettling environment. No wonder the youth of today yearn for things for "relaxing" times. The word "newtro" defines Gen Z.

Devendra Awasthi, Lucknow

HARMFUL APPROACH THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Cries for

help' (IE, April 29). The alleged death by suicide of at least seven students in Telengana is proof of the high-stress level that students are experiencing – in Telengana and beyond. Young students are highly impressionable and susceptible to heightened emotions due to hormonal and environmental changes. For their all-round development, all stakeholders such as parents, peers, teachers, activists and counselors must focus on providing conducive learning environments. Worrying solely about grades and not the child burdened with scoring them is an unhealthy approach that will yield unhealthy results.

Shantanu Bhadra, New Delhi

DANGER OF HEAT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Health on a hot planet' (IE, April 26). With each year, global average temperature levels witness a new high. Apart from catalysing infectious diseases, heat stress also takes a sizable toll on human and animal lives. In 2023, the states of UP and Bihar alone accounted for more than 100 heat stroke-related deaths. Hitherto cooler places like Pune, Bangalore and the Northeast are nowadays subjected to IMD-indexed heatwave alerts. Soaring mercury levels dry up water reserves resulting in scarcity of potable water and associated health risks like dehydration and waterborne illnesses. No less is the risk of revival and reintroduction of deadly viruses and bacteria for the people. **Sagar Borade**, Mumbai

Look beyond the sexual abuse clips

enough to survive two

left a permanent scar,

open wound.

rounds of Trump. If Nixon

Trump will leave a perpetually

Why blind eye to Prajwal Revanna? Is dignity of women of no relevance to them?

Nayana Motamma

IN A WORLD where he could have been anything, why did Prajwal Revanna, an incumbent Member of Parliament from Hassan in Karnataka, and the grandson of a former Prime Minister of India, become an alleged sexual predator? With his perverse acts, India is probably facing one of the biggest sexual abuse cases in its recent history. I must admit that I saw some of the videos and photos and my immediate reac-

tion was one of horror. Before I venture to express my opinion about Prajwal, let me reiterate that I am disturbed by the plight of all the women in the videos. I cannot fathom what they must be going through — the shame, their mental agony and that of their families and friends. These are women of different ages, professions and backgrounds caught in an unspeakable situation. Permanent damage has been inflicted on them. I, as a woman, a legislator (not just a woman legislator), first want to seek justice for these women in a manner that will give strength to them and their families. I do not want my words to sound hollow but our primary concern should be to find ways for these women to live with dignity after this incident. I lay stress on this because our politics and a section of our media will only end up chasing Prajwal for political mileage and headline-making material, forgetting the plight of the hundreds of women who became victims of an individual's perversion. We will have to raise our voices to ensure speedy justice to all.

Prajwal used his political position and influential family background to allegedly lure some of these women and, in some cases, coerce them. I leave the criminality of his offences to be determined by the Special Investigation Team set up by the Karnataka government. But I must point out that it is a crime to use a democratically elected position to abuse women in the manner that he did. He was elected to make the lives of the public better. Furthermore, if the allegations that Prajwal himself recorded these videos are correct, he is guilty of a double violation.

What needs to be also discussed is the moral bankruptcy of political parties. It appears that while Prajwal was seeking a Lok Sabha ticket for the second term to represent the BJP-JD(S) alliance, the top brass of both parties were aware of the recordings. However, they chose to ignore them despite a BJP leader from his district writing a letter to the party's state and national presidents expressing his dissent against Prajwal's candidature. Many were aware that Prajwal had sought the court's intervention months ago against the publication of the videos. This is where I seek answers from these political parties: Are their slogans of nari shakti, "Beti Bachao Beti Padao," empty political posturing? Is the dignity of the women in the videos of no relevance before an alliance partner perceived to be politically beneficial? I shudder to attempt an answer because I already know the answer.

Prajwal has reportedly fled the country. His family — it comprises a former prime minister, a former chief minister and a former minister — has reportedly distanced itself from him. But they are not addressing the real issue. What is also distressing is the fact that none of the leaders from the BJP, including its women leaders, have spoken up. The "elephant in the room" is not being addressed by the Prime Minister or the Union Minister of Women and Child Development.

Even though I represent the Congress and am currently an elected legislator unparty to not show selective outrage in cases of abuse against women involving a member of your party, especially when such a person is in a democratically-elected post. The moral onus on an elected representative is much more than that of an average citizen. It's upon us to ask why the former wrestling federation head still remains unpunished and to ensure that the women of Sandeshkhali get justice. I wait to raise my voice in the Assembly which may soon go into session after the Lok

der the party symbol, I urge every political

Sabha elections. That's my platform to speak up, to question the political parties and their leadership, who turned a blind eye towards Prajwal's heinous acts. But you, as a citizen of this country, need to be outraged as your elected Member of Parliament has blatantly misused all the powers you entrusted him with. You need to outrage for all the women who have been left vulnerable due to one man's perversion. Speak up, India, before it's too late. Speak up for your women — I am here to speak up with you.

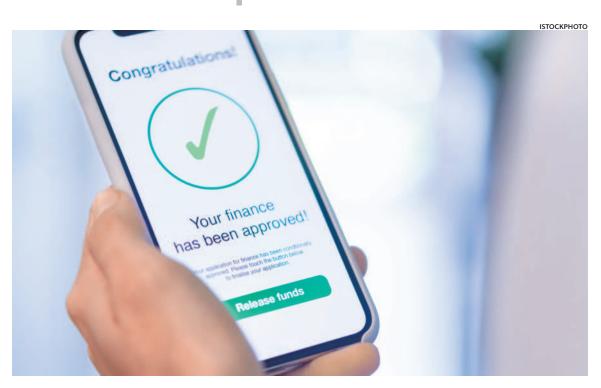
> The writer is a Congress MLA from Karnataka

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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

hat 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 disbursal. 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 appgiven 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.

MY VIEW | ECO SQUARE

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



LEENA SRIVASTAVA
is an independent expert on climate
change and clean energy.

ndia 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 improve ment 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 vet 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 PEAKS 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

Let's use a behavioural insight to tackle climate change

BAPPADITYA MUKHOPADHYAY



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n 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

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 rec-

ognizing 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

An approach

based on the

SC's climate

ruling combined

with nudge

theory could

deliver results

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 odisincentive schemes: One

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. Alternately, 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.

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



are, respectively, director of public policy, senior associate, and an associate at Cyril **Amarchand Mangaldas**

nternational 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 eco nomic 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

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

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.

MINT CURATOR

Trump is scaring Republicans away from saving planet Earth

His popularity has led his party members to deny climate change



Bloomberg Opinion

fter 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 tax payer 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



Donald Trump's climate denial is making Republicans follow suit

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 Benrakis, vice president of Young Con servatives 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 marketdriven solution to the problem and anger ing the retribution-driven Trump.

With the loudest mouth on the planet spewing misinformation with his anticlean-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.

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Muralidharan's take on governance is quite refreshing

RAHUL MATTHAN



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ince 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 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 the last time we made any "systematic | 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. Simi-

larly, 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 class-

room 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

His book stands

out for the

solutions it

offers India

but underplays

the role of

technology

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 that 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 politicians 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.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Repeat offenders

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

Tet 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.



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?

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

hina has been generally missing from election manifestoes 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 Fernades called China the number one threat though it was misreported as ' No I 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 Armane at the INDUS-X FORUM in Delhi unprecedently called Beijing a bully adding we expect our friend US will be



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, Sniv Snanka 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

North (Pangongtso Lake)". Recently Congress leader Jairam Ramesh cited an X post by Chushul Councillor Konchok Stanzin 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 valorous 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

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka ana a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence

Staff. Views are personal)

1962. But Naravane deserves

THE EDITOR

Recognising workers' resilience and struggle



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

n 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 Ínternational 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



protest demanding an eighthour 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 work-

ers' 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 soci-

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 wellbeing. 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)

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.

State Assembly sessions the constitutional mandate of at least one session every six months, others fall drastically



propos the news article, "Delhi, other state Alegislative 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

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

robust policymaking.

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 politicareers. 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 On the other end of the spectrum, the 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

short. The emphasis on budget sessions, evi-

dent from the majority of sittings concentrat-

ed within these periods, indicates a rushed leg-

islative process. Such haste might compromise

the quality of debate and scrutiny essential for

Moreover, the prolonged sessions in some

states, stretching beyond a year in extreme

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

Arjun Reddy | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com



CONTRAPUNTO

Power doesn't corrupt people, people corrupt power

WILLIAM GADDIS

Many Revannas

JDS chief's grandson is yet another example of how the system coddles the powerful

Tt's election season. That's the most likely explanation for JDS suspending Prajwal Revanna, grandson of the party president, who has been accused of sexually exploiting women. Political parties typically push back against similar accusations made against powerful functionaries.

Revanna contested the Hassan LS seat on NDA platform. He was then already under a cloud. Last June, he successfully moved a civil court to obtain a gag order against the media bringing up the issue. Subsequently, a local BJP functionary publicly brought it up.

Look away, deny | The sequence of events in the Revanna case is not uncommon. Neither is it unique to political parties. It's a pattern of behaviour found in all walks.

Asymmetrical power structures are vulnerable to exploitation. That's been the root cause of most sexual exploitation cases. It makes it hard for victims to fight back and ensu-

> to get away. Justice, a lonely pursuit | The power asymmetry also undermines efforts to secure justice. For example, it took the Supreme Court's intervention to get Delhi Police to file an FIR in the case of Brij Bhushan Singh. If not for an uncommon effort by wrestlers, including an Olympic medallist, it's unlikely that there would be enough popular pressure to reach the

stage where a chargesheet has been filed.

res a culture of silence that allows perpetrators

It's the obstacles placed at every step that make it hard for women to find the wherewithal to go through a process seeking justice.

Whose reputation? | Karnataka has appointed an SIT to investigate the complaints against Revanna, who has reportedly left the country. He last year convinced the judiciary to gag the media to protect his reputation. It's a cruel irony that the powerful can use reputation as a reason to prevent exposure, but it's the victims whose reputation is damaged by subsequent slander. At every stage they face a hostile system.

Focus on the present It's important that the SIT gets to the bottom of the matter and not get distracted by the inevitable politicisation of the complaint because of election season. Society too has a role here. To provide a safe environment for women, we don't need to look to a distant past and pat ourselves. What matters is the environment that women face now. As so many cases have shown, India's institutions have fallen short.

Drugs Disorder

SC unswayed by U'khand govt's action on Patanjali ads. Why did regulator need court orders to act?

Testerday, Supreme Court was unsparing in its takedown of Uttarakhand's state licensing authority over its inaction in cracking down on Patanjali and its associate ayurved factory Divya Pharmacy's malpractices. "It was only after our order that you realised that there is a law-Drugs and Magic Remedies Act," SC said.

Ban on ads | Yoga trainer-'activist'-businessman Ramdev's project Patanjali has for years advertised its full range of ayurved drugs, across every medium available. Indian law in very clear terms bans advertising, direct or indirect, in any form, for a range of diseases and conditions, regardless of (1) efficacy of drug (2) promise of cure or therapy. The Drugs and Magic Remedies

Act (Objectionable Ads) states that for 54 conditions/ diseases, advertising of any cure or therapy is banned.

The case | SC has been hearing Indian Medical Association's (IMA) writ petition against Patanjali's misleading ads, including its claim to have completely cured diabetes and asthma through medicine and yoga. Given Patanjali's dual business as a pharma company and FMCG, IMA's petition focused on

misleading ads of its drugs, under the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954. Given the case's gravity, and a defiant Patanjali, SC strongly criticised Patanjali for persisting in publishing deceptive claims and ads against modern medical systems, warning it in Nov 2023 of a fine of ₹1cr if Ramdev and his company persisted.

The upshot | Uttarakhand's licensing authority told SC that in mid-April it had suspended Patanjali's licences to manufacture 14 drugs, under Rule 159(1) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1945. SC remains unimpressed, as it should. State licensing bodies are drug inspectors of Indian medicine. The Uttarakhand body has failed the public it serves in not acting against Patanjali at the first appearance of an ad that's banned in law.

Up in arms

Escalating hostilities in the theatre of conflict have given rise to much suspense and speculation

Jug Suraiya



politics...

PATANJALI

I'wo Bhaisaaabs discussing the theatre of conflict and what it portends.

Bhaisaab 1: They're going at it hammer and tongs, and the whole world's watching.

Bhaisaab 2: And the media are all full of it, adding fuel to

B1: You can't blame the media. They have to report what's happening. And the most important thing happening right now is this fight to the finish, with each side vowing it'll wipe out the other side for good. B2: They've been daggers drawn since the beginning, but now it's become a

do-or-die Armageddon, never mind the collateral damage. And there's plenty of that. The market has already fallen thousands of points, and there are fears that it's going to fall even more. There are worries that supplies of essential items might also be affected and we might have to learn to live on love and fresh air.

B1: I don't know about that. Thanks to the ongoing battle, there's precious little love to be had, and thanks to pollution, even less fresh air. B2: The worst part is that neither of the sides is observing accep-

table norms of conduct. Anything and everything goes. B1: Which means that each all-out assault secondopinion provokes an even more extreme backlash resul-

B2: You're right. It's high time UN stepped in to put a stop to it. B1: UN? What's UN got to do with it? It's up to Election Commission to tone things down a bit.

ting in an escalating spiral of conflict.

B2: Election Commission? I don't think the Election Commission's writ extends to West Asia and the Israel-Palestine face-off.

B1: Israel? Palestine? Is *that* what you've been talking about? *I've* been

talking about the NDA-INDIA confrontation.

B2: The two do have one thing in common. They're both based on religion. B1: Yeah. One on a religion called faith. And the other on a religion called

'Elections, The World And Us'

GOI's foreign minister writes that the largest democratic exercise in history will be consequential far beyond India. What the world prizes is political stability and policy predictability, he argues

S Jaishankar



The world today is turbulent and unpredictable. Many countries have still to recover from the socio-economic damage of Covid. A conflict now in its third year in Ukraine has had serious impact on energy, food and fertiliser

security. Fighting in West Asia triggered by the Oct 2023 terror attack on Israel could escalate into something wider. Drone and missile attacks in Red Sea are disrupting global shipping, even as piracy in Gulf of Aden becomes more threatening.

In Asia, territorial claims and disregard for law and agreements have created new tensions. The longstanding challenge of terrorism remains, waxing and waning, but still, always there.

For India, these larger uncertainties are compounded by the pressure on LAC with China, the threat of crossborder terrorism and the instability on its Myanmar border. Each of these challenges has been met with an appropriate response. But the overall scenario only highlights the need for a strong, clear-headed and capable leadership in the days ahead.

Economic challenges, daunting | Covid era demonstrated the dangers of over-concentration, be it in manufacturing or technology. Critical and emerging technologies make this situation even more serious. The task consequently is to de-risk

both at national and global levels. This can only be done by accelerating 'Make in India' in different areas and joining resilient and reliable supply chains.

In the digital domain, India has to build on its record as a trusted and transparent player This means growing our semiconductor capabilities and adopting the right data policies. We have to prepare as well for an era of AI, electric mobility, drones, space and green tech. At the same time, the nation's health, food and energy security must be strengthened.

This requires a forwardlooking leadership that appreciates technology's transformational potential, plus is committed to strong growth. What obviously must be avoided at any cost

is a return to the failed policies of pre-reform era.

Reforms, to be continued | While the global outlook may be volatile, it nevertheless holds particular possibilities for India. We are today perceived as an attractive investment destination because of improved infra, better business environment and availability of talent. But underpinning all this is our political stability and policy predictability. Reforms and delivery on the ground of the last decade are the sources of our credibility abroad.

In many ways, globalisation has also created an international workplace that India can utilise to its benefit. Expanding our skills base, concluding mobility agreements and securing Indian citizens abroad are key elements in that regard. There is considerable interest in our start-ups, which have mushroomed in the last decade due to policy encouragement. The world's assessment of India's credentials will naturally be shaped by the continuation of a grounded leadership with a solid track record.

Foreign interest ok, interference not | It is natural that



world. Moreover, the rigour of our election practices and the quality of our election machinery hold out an example for others. But it is important that the line between interest and interference is clearly understood and respected.

There will be those who have vested interest in certain parties for ideological reasons. But while commenting on certain issues, they could also reflect on the implications for themselves. It is a fact of life that like so many other activities, politics has also got globalised. But we are not well served if those critical of the order of the day invite external forces to influence electoral outcomes at home.

Viksit Bharat, aspiration and foundation | This is the first general election of the Amrit Kaal and our youth must recognise its significance. The last decade has provided a foundation for us to aspire seriously for Viksit Bharat. The renewed pace of our growth is buttressed by its inclusive nature and the leapfrogging potential of technology.

Unlike the past, reform and modernisation are not narrowly defined but encompass a wide range of domains. Particular attention is being paid to nurturing human resources, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing ease of living. Opportunities are expanding in both the formal and informal economy, even as new focus areas and value additions emerge.

The world notes that our digitally-enabled delivery has created a social welfare system on a scale that could not have been imagined earlier. Whether it is Covaxin or CoWin, 5G stack or UPI, Chandrayaan or Gaganyaan missions, we are increasingly matching global standards. Our civilisational heritage is also earning respect, after we ourselves regained the

> Your political choice, in the world | As India moves towards making decisions about its future, both near and long-term, it is essential that we all fully appreciate what is at stake. India is not only the most populous nation but the fifth largest economy, likely to be the third very soon. The world offers both challenges and opportunities and it takes a firm, confident and experienced leadership of PM Modi to comprehensively address them. As we express our political choice, we are also shaping the direction of the global order. The world is waiting and watching, expecting that the verdict would be

> > one made clearly and decisively.

'Congress manifesto is talking point on ground...Defections have made no dent on our party...BJP is desperate'

women's empowerment. Despite defeats in two elections,

Rajya Sabha member and Congress minority affairs chief, 36-year-old poet and party spokesperson Imran Pratapgarhi tells Subodh Ghildiyal that campaign language matters, how Congress pulled back the campaign to issues, and that 'polarising' speech has run its course. Edited excerpts:

What is this election's biggest issue?

BJP's Pramod Krishnam has loudly and publicly announced caste-based reservations will be terminated. What Anant Hegde, Jyoti Mirdha, Lallu Singh or BJP's posterboy Arun Govil earlier said on campaign trail that give BJP a large majority so it can change the Constitution. Their seniors' silence shows their support. People have to decide if they have to save the govt, or, save Ambedkar's Constitution.



What media shows is far from ground reality. Jobs, Agniveer, inflation, women's safety, caste census are big issues. Congress manifesto is subject of in-depth discussion among people. There's desperation in BJP, and it will reflect in their speeches.



But BJP is presumed to be winning its

There's no consensus BJP's winning. Two phases of voting are over. People have shown their anger against govt. Many BJP candidates and MPs have refused to contest elections: Gautam Gambhir, Jayant Sinha, VK Singh, Birender Singh. Attempts to create an atmosphere for '400 seats' failed. I've been to Kerala, UP, Uttarakhand, Thar, J&K, Karnataka, Maharashtra. BJP's losing on seats it considered safe – like Udhampur, Chandrapur (Maha). Even Nagpur was a tough fight. This is the mood on the ground. INDIA's got a tremendous boost.

So your campaign will stick to people's issues?

BJP has no achievement to show for 10 years in office. That is this govt's biggest failure. Congress as a secular party speaks about 'hissedari' and social justice, jobs,

Rahul Gandhi has stuck to people's and country's issues. He is a stubborn politician. It is Rahul's victory that Congress manifesto has forced BJP veterans on the backfoot. We pulled this election back to issues, which was a big defeat for them.

Many Congress seniors have joined BJP. That must hurt.

I make a distinction between those who leave Congress of their own will, and those who're forced to join BJP. But it's a victory of the Nehruvian school of thought that despite a decade in power, BJP could not establish its own leadership that is intellectually and politically strong.

They've had to take the Ashok Chavans and Milind Deoras, and drop their own ideological flag bearers like Sadhvi Pragya, Pratap Simha, Anand Hegde. But it has made no dent to Congress. Seniors have left but not the people. Shiv Sena and NCP split up, but situation is such that BJP had to drop Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar as star campaigners.

Do you find yourself doubly vulnerable?

You run that risk, you have to face it. In Parliament, a BJP MP hurled an innuendo by talking about a neighbouring country's prime minister, and I said, "Main Bharat ka Imran hun." This demolishes their campaign against me. The situation is dangerous. Statements like "identifying people by their clothes" and the silence on acts of hatred,

matter. But that ploy, tried even today, has run its course. Hatred has a shelf life.

One Bharat Jodo Yatra was enough to demolish BJP's caricature of Rahul Gandhi. What is BJP's USP if it doesn't fire from the Muslim's shoulders? Fear is always there, but you have to face it.

Are the crowds for the poet or the Congress campaigner?

Special Series on Elections I'm a Rajya Sabha member, and as head of Congress's minority department, I connect communities of Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Bauddh, Christians and Muslims with Congress organisationally. As a star campaigner, I amplify Congress's commitments. I use poetic

language, my trade, to connect with people. When in Banihal, Ghulam Nabi's home, I said politicians "ne apne bangle bachane ke liye tumhare khwabon ke gharonde bech diye" (to save their bungalows, they sold your dreams), the gathering concurred When you frame issues in poetry, people connect.

Are rally crowds converting into votes for Congress? I have a personal fan base and

Congress has an organisation and workers. It's a double advantage. I try to convince audiences on social issues, which are also central ideas of my poetry. I've never done shayari of 'zulfoshaam' (adulatory/ romantic). I have spoken about farmers' issues, lynching, about Najeeb, Pehlu Khan. So, my political speeches tie in with my poetry. It is a plus for the party.

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That deed is not well done, which, being done, brings regret; and whose fruit is received weeping and with tearful

countenance. That deed is well done, which, being done, brings no regret; and whose fruit is received with happiness and delight.

Dhammapada

Don't Resist, Embrace The Natural Flow Of Life

Harvinder Pal Singh

or a spiritual seeker, attainment of → the Divine is the ultimate goal. For him, God is not a concept or an outcome of the mind. In the Divine he sees an omnipresent truth that pervades the universe. 'Kiv sachyara hoeye, kiv koorhe totey par' - how can that truth dawn? How does one pierce the veil of falsehood to get to the truth? Guru Nanak poses this question right in the beginning of the Adi Granth.

In our quest for an answer, we have over the ages devised numerous techniques. In the process, people go to holy places to bathe and wash their sins, observe silence, and keep fasts. While many follow the path of renunciation or ascetic austerities, others take the opposite course of letting the mind indulge in whatever it wants, hoping

that it will finally come to rest. Some believe that acquiring knowledge is the key, while some take the route of prayers and meditation. The Sikh Gurus have commented on these practices.

Guru Arjan says in Sukhmani Sahib: 'Soch kare dinas ar raat, man ki mail na tan te jaat', you may bathe day and night, but the filth of your mind doesn't go. And when the mind is unclean, everything else is dirty. In Japuji Sahib, Guru Nanak says: 'Chuppe chup na hovai, je layi rahan liv taar', by enforcing silence

you will gain little, even if you sit in meditative pose. The cacophony of the mind doesn't stop. Remaining hungry, abstaining, or running away from the world, too,

can one live that way, at some point your responsibilities will compel you to return. Similarly, 'bhukhya bhukh na utari, je banna pooriya bhar', the mind's desires cannot be dispelled even if we collect all the world's possessions. 'Sehaj syanapa lakh hove, ta ik na

chale naal', the Guru further contends that hundreds of thousands of wise thoughts, ideas or arguments aren't going to be useful. Knowing all the intelligent things to say won't take you much THE SPEAKING TREE closer to the Divine.

While these endeavours do have their own relevance, they are not the ultimate route to the truth. Contrarily, they let ego get the better of you – 'i pray daily; i have kept maun vrat, vow of silence, for so long; i can doesn't lead to enlightenment. How long recite the sacred hymns by the rote; i

have done isnaan, holy bath; there'these only end up feeding your ego. This very 'i am the doer' syndrome gets in your way to the truth. Nanak then provides the answer at the end of the same verse, 'Hukam rajai chalna, Nanak likhya naal', obey the Divine's command O Nanak, and walk in the way of his will.

First close all the doors on ego and then submit to the Divine Order. Just go with the flow of the river; any other action is like swimming against the current will take you nowhere. When you realise that you don't need to do all those things in your quest and instead just surrender to His grand scheme of things, you will experience tranquillity. Then, nothing remains to be done. This is the quintessence of Gurus' teachings.

May 1 is the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Canadian laxity

Anti-India elements continue to have a field day

HE 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

MID 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 supplyuing 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

NDIA's compelling reality is its immense diversity. No political dispensation, no matter how powerful and Lideologically 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. Fratemity 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. PTI

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

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 de-legitimise 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 jihwa bawari; Kah gai sarag paatal Aapu toh kahi bhitar rahi;

Aapu toh kahi bhitar rahi Jooti khaat kapaal.

(My wayward 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.

-99

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision. - George Fliot

"

When we waged a war over water

NJ RAVI CHANDER

T'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 Lingaraja puram 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

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.

narrow the trade gap.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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 selfperception 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

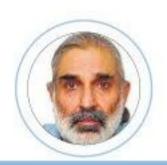
Refer to the article 'The abominable stigma of failure'; the arguments made by the author are on point. He has aptly dissected the burgeoning racket of coaching. The proliferation of private coaching institutions starkly highlights the shortcomings of the government education system, which fails to deliver 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

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Lack of a National Security Strategy disquieting



RAHUL BEDI SENIOR JOURNALIST

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 tom-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 (SPG), revamped some six responsibility that trans-

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



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. PTI

The absence of an

NSS is believed to

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reorganisation of

the country's

military into

integrated theatre

commands.

months later the same year as the first level of the threetiered 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 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 larg-

ferred itself to the CDS in

er 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 secre-

tary. But after its refurbish-

ment and expansion, the secretary now reports to the NSA.

In short, both the DPC and the SPG were more than qualified to construct an NSS and the attendant national defence strategy. But senior service veterans and security officials concurred that both these organisations had little or no output to show for themselves over the past eight years, with little of policy import forthcoming from either. Their meetings, too, had been infrequent.

Furthermore, these two bodies are supplemented by a host of think tanks backed by either the Ministry of Defence or handheld by the individual services. These include the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in Delhi, the country's foremost think tank whose founding charter advanced encompasses research in defence, strategic and security issues and other related matters.

Also, there are three servicesponsored think tanks, the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, the National Maritime Foundation and the Centre for Air Power Studies, all operating out of Delhi. Complementing them is the high-maintenance-but low-performance Centre for Joint Warfare Studies created in 2007 in Delhi to "rise above sectoral and departmental legacies and to examine joint warfare and

ty" to provide inputs for an NSS.

However, these bodies that, from time to time, are involved in organising seminars and discussions on national security and India's exalted but elusive role as a major player in global strategic matters, remain mum publicly on anything to do with an NSS, as was flagged by former Army Chief Gen MM Naravane in late 2022.

At a lecture in New Delhi, Gen Naravane recommended the establishment of a higher defence organisation (HDO) with representation from all ministries for a comprehensive approach to theaterisation, which would serve as the 'interface' between the government and the ITC commanders on the ground.

"Once these two pillars -NSS and HDO - are in place, we can start thinking about theatre commands," said the former Army Chief, who retired in April 2022, adding that all talk of theaterisation was simply putting the cart before the horse. But once framed, the NSS, he stated, would make it clear whether the military's role was just to defend the country's land borders and territorial waters or if it extended to the wider primary strategic arc stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait. Hopefully, the proposed HDO will not end up being another non-persynergy issues in their entire- forming asset.

Palestinian knowledge ecosystem under Israeli attack



AMARJIT BHULLAR EX-PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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 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



SOLDARITY: Students at a pro-Palestine encampment at the University of California in Los Angeles, REUTERS

Epistemicide

silencing,

annihilation or

devaluation of a

knowledge system.

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

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

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 life, and infringement on human rights in the name of the protection of rights. means the killing,

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

SU DO KU

scholars moved to Gaza from different places with the hope of making it a place of meaningful cultural exchange, scientific advancements, standing 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".

Academicians 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 govcontinuous ernment's 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.

OUICK CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
- 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

- 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

19 Wiliness (5)

against evil (6) 17 Inequitable (6)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

assignment (4,5)

Across: 1 Modicum, 4 Banjo, 7 Carp, 8 Stand out, 10 Walk of life, 12 Beckon, 13 Schism, 15 Ablebodied, 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.

8 7 6 8 5 3 8 9 5 2 6 8 3 EASY

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 7 2 3 9 5 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 3 6 2 8 4 7 1 9 4 9 5 1 7 6 2 3 8 4 3 2 1 6 5 8 5 9 2 3 7 3 2 5 6 7 1 4 CALENDAR MAY 1ST 2024, WEDNESDAY Shaka Samvat 8 Vaishakh Shaka 11 W Vaishakh Parvishte 9 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 WEDNESDAY 19:00 HRS CITY MAX MIN Chandigarh 35 19 New Delhi 35 21 14 Amritsar Bathinda 35 15 Jalandhar 34 15 34 Ludhiana 16 Bhiwani 39 24 35 18 Hisar Sirsa 35 19 15 Dharamsala 27 Manali 22 06 25 Shimla 14 Srinagar 19 05 33 15 Jammu Kargil 16 06 13 03 Leh 32 19 Dehradun 20 12 Mussoorie TEMPERATURE IN C.