

# Heart failure is the common complication of atrial fibrillation

The Hindu Bureau

The lifetime risk of atrial fibrillation (a heart condition that causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate) has increased from one in four to one in three over the past two decades, as per a study published in *The BMJ*.

Among those with the condition, two in five are likely to develop heart failure over their remaining lifetime and one in five en-

counters a stroke, with little or no improvement in risk evident over the 20 year study period.

Once atrial fibrillation develops, patient care has primarily focused on the risk of stroke, but other complications such as heart failure and heart attack have yet to be fully explored. To address this knowledge gap, researchers analysed national data for 3.5 million Danish adults with no history of

atrial fibrillation at age 45 or older to see whether they developed atrial fibrillation over a 23 year period (2000-22).

### Lifetime risk

All 3,62,721 individuals with a new diagnosis of atrial fibrillation during this time (46% women and 54% men) but with no complications, were subsequently followed until a diagnosis of heart failure, stroke or heart attack. The

results show that the lifetime risk of atrial fibrillation increased from 24% in 2000-2010 to 31% in 2011-22. The increase was larger among men and individuals with a history of heart failure, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and chronic kidney disease. Among those with atrial fibrillation, the most common complication was heart failure (lifetime risk 41%). This was twice as large as the lifetime risk of

any stroke (21%) and four times greater than the lifetime risk of heart attack (12%).

Men showed a higher lifetime risk of complications after atrial fibrillation compared with women for heart failure (44% vs 33%) and heart attack (12% vs 10%), while the lifetime risk of stroke after atrial fibrillation was slightly lower in men than women (21% vs 23%).

Over the 23-year study

period, there was virtually no improvement in the lifetime risk of heart failure after atrial fibrillation (43% in 2000-10 vs 42% in 2011-22) and only slight (4-5%) decreases in the lifetime risks of any stroke, ischaemic stroke, and heart attack after atrial fibrillation, which were similar among men and women. This is an observational study, so no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect.

## SNAPSHOTS



### AI doubles detection rates for esophageal cancers

Scientists have developed an AI system that can boost detection rates for cancerous and precancerous lesions in the esophagus. Tested with more than 3,000 patients in China, the algorithm almost doubled detection rates for high-risk lesions during routine endoscopies. The new approach could enable earlier diagnosis and timelier treatment of early-stage esophageal cancer. Researchers harnessed the power of machine learning in real-time to allow doctors to detect high-risk esophageal lesions more reliably.



### Study answer why COVID-19 is more severe in older adults

A new multicenter clinical study helps answer a longstanding debate in the field of COVID-19 research – why older people are much more susceptible to severe disease. In the study of more than 1,000 unvaccinated patients, age correlated with both a diminished ability to clear the virus and increased disruptions to the body's inflammatory and immune defenses. Older patients expressed more of the gene for type 1 interferon, an inflammatory cytokine. They also displayed more active innate immune pathways.



### China's major cities show considerable subsidence

The land under nearly half of China's major cities is undergoing moderate to severe subsidence, affecting roughly one-third of the nation's urban population, as per a study. The findings suggest that within the next century, 22-26% of China's coastal land will have a relative elevation lower than sea level, putting hundreds of millions of people at elevated risk of flooding due to sea-level rise. The subsidence is associated with a range of anthropogenic factors.

# T.N. uses inexpensive method to treat rodenticide poisoning

Currently, 17 government hospitals across 15 districts in the State undertake plasma exchange to treat rodenticide-induced acute liver injury and acute liver failure cases

R. Prasad

Deaths caused by ingestion of rat poison containing yellow phosphorus is a major problem in a few States. A six-month survey carried out in six districts in Tamil Nadu in 2019 by the Tamil Nadu chapter of Indian Society of Gastroenterology (TN-ISG) found 450 people suffered from liver toxicity caused by ingestion of rat poison. Of them, 131 patients died while 28 were discharged in a moribund state. Extrapolating it for the entire State, researchers estimated 1,584 such cases in 2019 in just six months with about 554 deaths. Tamil Nadu has introduced a legislation to curb unrestricted access to rodenticide containing yellow phosphorus.

Until a few years ago, urgent liver transplantation was the only life saving option for such patients who developed acute liver failure. Beginning December 2017, a team of researchers from CMC Vellore has been using plasma exchange through a centrifugal method – a simple and less expensive treatment – to save the lives of such people. Impressed by the success of the plasma exchange treatment by CMC Vellore and following the identification of rat poison (rodenticide) ingestion as the cause of liver failure and deaths, the Tamil Nadu government through the Tamil Nadu Accident and Emergency Care Initiative of the National Health Mission (TAEI-NHM) programme started using plasma exchange in six apex government hospitals to treat these patients in March 2022.

## A simple, less expensive treatment

Researchers estimated 1,584 cases of rodenticide-induced liver toxicity and about 554 deaths in just six months in 2019

- 1 Since December 2017, CMC Vellore has been using plasma exchange through a centrifugal method to treat people for rodenticide poisoning
- 2 In March 2022, based on the success of the plasma exchange treatment by CMC Vellore, Tamil Nadu started using plasma exchange in six apex government hospitals. Currently, 17 government hospitals across 15 districts in the State treat rodenticide poisoning using plasma exchange
- 3 In 2022-2023, 1,237 acute liver toxicity patients were treated. Of them, 825 (63.9%) survived
- 4 Initially only patients with acute liver failure were treated with plasma exchange. Now, it is used for treating acute liver injury, which is one stage earlier than acute liver failure
- 5 Until a few years ago, urgent liver transplantation was the only lifesaving option for patients with acute liver failure
- 6 99% of patients cannot access urgent liver transplantation due to lack of a matched deceased donor or a live-related donor. Liver transplantation is also very expensive
- 7 Plasma exchange is a simple treatment and costs only one-tenth to one-twentieth of liver transplantation



Culprit: Ingestion of rat poison containing yellow phosphorus is a major problem in Tamil Nadu

Prior to this, Madras Medical College, Stanley Medical College in Chennai and Coimbatore Medical College were using plasma exchange to treat rodenticide hepatotoxicity.

Currently, 17 government hospitals across 15 districts in the State undertake plasma exchange to treat rodenticide-induced acute liver injury and acute liver failure cases.

"In 2022-2023, 1,237 acute liver toxicity patients due to rat poisoning in Tamil Nadu were treated with plasma exchange. Of them, 825 survived and were discharged. The survival rate was 63.9%," says Dr. Maruthu Thurai Sambandam, Tamil Nadu State Programme Manager, TAEI-NHM.

"Liver failure due to rat poison ingestion may be due to overactive immune

responses. We have found markers for innate immune responses turned on in patients with acute liver failure following ingestion of rat poison containing yellow phosphorus. Plasma exchange dampens these overactive immune responses, which helps save lives," says Dr. Uday Zachariah from the Department of Hepatology at CMC Vellore and a member of the team that initiated the plasma exchange programme for liver failure at CMC Vellore.

In a retrospective analysis of 32 children at CMC Vellore with acute liver injury or acute liver failure due to rodenticide ingestion, eight children were extremely sick and were eligible for plasma exchange. Of the eight, six children survived (75%). In another study at CMC Vellore

which included adults, of the 81 patients who were eligible for and underwent plasma exchange, 65 patients survived (80.2%). Of the 81 patients who underwent plasma exchange, 32 had acute liver failure and 22 of the 32 such patients were saved through plasma exchange.

"Initially only those who were severely sick – acute liver failure – were treated with plasma exchange. We now use plasma exchange even in patients with acute liver injury, which is one stage earlier than acute liver failure," says Dr. C.E. Eapen, from CMC Vellore and a senior member of the plasma exchange treatment team. Earlier initiation of plasma exchange treatment has saved more patients.

According to the TN-ISG study, currently over

99% of hepatotoxicity patients due to rodenticide ingestion in the State cannot access urgent liver transplantation. The major constraint is the lack of a matched deceased donor or a live-related donor. If liver transplantation is very expensive, patients are then required to remain on lifelong immuno-suppressants medications, which further increases the cost. In comparison, the plasma exchange treatment, which involves removal (pheresis) of patient plasma and replacement of healthy plasma from voluntary blood donors, costs only one-tenth to one-twentieth of liver transplantation.

Worldwide, regular dialysis has not been shown to improve survival in patients with acute liver failure. "This may be because standard dialysis technique removes only small- and medium-sized molecules, while plasma exchange helps remove macro molecules too," says Dr. Zachariah.

"A pilot study was undertaken seven years ago at the Madras Medical College to use plasma exchange to treat patients with yellow phosphorus poisoning," says Dr. Krishnasamy Narayanasamy, former Head of the Department of Hepatology, Madras Medical College and currently the Vice Chancellor, TN Dr. MGR Medical University. A field visit in and around Thanjavur and interaction with patients, their family members and other stakeholders helped in sensitising the Tamil Nadu government and finally the establishment of a programme for the care of patients with rat killer poison ingestion.

# Glycemic index of diets: importance beyond diabetes control

V. Mohan

The concept of 'Glycemic Index' was first proposed by Prof. David Jenkins of the University of Toronto in 1981. The glycemic index (GI) of a food refers to the property of the food to increase the blood glucose level and is a measure of the 'quality' of carbohydrates. Glucose or white bread is used as the comparator. The GI of glucose is taken as 100 and the GI of other foods is given as a percentage of this. Thus, the GI of foods is classified as low GI (less than 55), medium GI (56-69) and high GI (over 70). The GI multiplied by the amount of the carbohydrate consumed, determines the glycemic load (GL).

Many nutritionists strongly believe in the

deleterious effect of consuming diets with high GI and conversely the beneficial effects of taking diets with low GI. There are others who believe that this is too simplistic an approach. Their argument is that carbohydrate is only one of the macronutrients of food and the quality of protein and fat are ignored if only GI is used to assess the quality of a diet.

### Existing evidence

However, there is a lot of evidence to support the growing importance of the GI and GL of diets. The link between high GI and GL diets to the risk of type 2 diabetes has been established recently. However, what is less known is the association of high GI diets with cardiovascular disease and mortality.



Diets with high glycemic index are associated with major cardiovascular events, including deaths. ISTOCKPHOTO

The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study, of which we are also a part, involves 137,851 participants in 20 countries (including India) in five continents who have been followed for decades. In a paper published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2021, we looked at the association of

the GI and GL of diets with cardiovascular disease. We used country specific food frequency questionnaires to assess the GIs and GLs of various diets in different countries.

We reported that diets with high GI were associated with major cardiovascular events including deaths across all ethnicities. This

was an eye opener regarding the importance of the GI of foods because until this study was published, it was not known that the importance of GI extends beyond diabetes.

These findings are particularly relevant to India and South Asia where carbohydrate consumption in the form of high GI white rice or wheat, forms the bulk of calories, leading to very high GL of our diets.

Hence all attempts should be made to reduce the GI and GL of our diets. This could help, not only in the prevention and control of diabetes but also in reducing the incidence of cardiovascular disease which occurs at much younger ages in our country.

Examples of diets with low GI include brown rice,

steel cut oats, legumes, pulses and beans, fruits like apple and guava, and vegetables like spinach, lettuce, brinjal, broccoli, tomatoes, paneer, soya, nuts and seeds.

Diets with high GI include sugar and sweets, white rice, maida, potato, white bread, sweetened drinks, jaggery, cornflakes and cookies.

If diets with high GI, i.e., the 'bad' carbohydrates, are replaced with 'good' carbs which have low GI and this is combined with adequate physical activity (exercise), it could help to curb the growing incidence of premature cardiovascular disease in India. (V. Mohan is Chairman, Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre & Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, Chennai)



## Question Corner

### Teeth colour

#### What contributes to the orange-brown colour of rodent incisors?

Chattering squirrels, charming coypus, and tail-slapping beavers along with some other rodents have orange-brown front teeth. High-resolution images of rodent incisors published in *ACS Nano* provide an atomic-level view of the teeth's ingenious enamel and its coating. The researchers discovered tiny pockets of iron-rich materials in the enamel that form a protective shield for the teeth but, importantly, don't contribute to the orange-brown hue – new insights that could improve

human dentistry. To investigate, thin slices were taken from different sections of the teeth and prepared for imaging with optical microscopy, 3D focused ion beam tomography and scanning transmission electron microscopy. The micro- and nano-scale resolution images revealed that the intense orange-brown colour of rodent incisors doesn't come from the filled pockets in the enamel, as was previously thought, but from a thin surface layer composed of aromatic amino acids and inorganic minerals.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

## What are the new Green Credit Programme rules?

Who will carry out afforestation measures? What will States need to do? Can companies trade 'green credits'?

Jacob Koshy

### The story so far:

**O**n April 12, the Environment Ministry issued further guidelines on its Green Credit Programme (GCP), two months after it had prescribed rules governing the first initiative, afforestation. Modifying the rules, an official said, will prioritise the restoration of ecosystems over mere planting of trees.

### What is the Green Credit Programme?

This programme was officially unveiled in October 2023 and has its provenance in Mission Life, a principle frequently articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Its goal is to lay an emphasis on sustainability, reduce waste and improve the natural environment. The GCP programme presents itself as an "innovative, market-based mechanism" to incentivise "voluntary actions" for environmental conservation, according to a document of the Environment Ministry. Under this, individuals, organisations and companies – public and private – would be encouraged to invest in sectors ranging from afforestation, water conservation, stemming air-pollution, waste management, mangrove conservation and in return be eligible to receive 'green credits.' An autonomous body of the Ministry, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), is in charge of administering the

In fresh guidelines on how to restore a degraded forest landscape, the Environment Ministry has clarified that preference would be given to indigenous species

programme. They will define methodologies to calculate 'green credits' that result from the activities prescribed. They will also manage a trading platform whereby such credits could be traded.

In February, the Ministry prescribed the rules governing

the first of these initiatives – afforestation. Broadly, companies, organisation and individuals could offer to pay for afforestation projects in specific tracts of degraded forest and wasteland. It said, the actual tree planting would be carried out by the State forest departments. Two years after planting and following an evaluation by the ICFRE, each such planted tree could be worth one 'green credit.' So far, *The Hindu* has learnt that forest departments of 13 States have offered 387 land parcels of degraded forest land, worth nearly 10,983 hectares. Those who are successful in fulfilling the criteria will be given an estimate of the costs involved in afforestation. Public sector companies such as Indian Oil, Power Grid Corporation of India, the National Thermal Power Corporation, Oil India, Coal India, National Hydropower Corporation have reportedly registered to invest in the programme, a Ministry official confirmed.

### Why has the GCP stoked controversy?

The GCP has not become operational but critics have questioned multiple aspects of it. The first is that it makes a commodity out of environmental conservation. India's forest conservation laws oblige any industry, that is allowed to raze forests and use that land for non-forestry purposes, to provide an equivalent amount of non-forest land to forest authorities and pay them to afforest that land.

The GCP programme for afforestation says that companies can "exchange" their credits for "complying with compensatory afforestation". This could be a way, critics say, to ease forest diversion requirements for mining and infrastructure companies. Secondly, planting trees does not automatically boost ecosystems. India has about 200 types of forests. Some are grasslands, some are dominated by shrubs and there have been studies to show that planting the wrong types of trees could fester invasive species or prevent a sustainable ecosystem. There is also a threat that natural forests could be razed and invasive monocultures promoted. Finally, the GCP also says that green credits that result in storing carbon (from trees) may be used for carbon trading. This again is controversial as the math equating these activities is not clear.

### How has the government responded?

In its latest update, the Ministry has issued the guidelines that States must rely on to calculate what it would cost to restore a degraded forest landscape. The Ministry has tweaked an earlier requirement that there be a minimum of 1,100 trees per hectare to qualify as a reforested landscape and left it to States to specify them. "Not all degraded forests can support that kind of density. Thus, in some places shrubs, herbs and grasses may be suitable for restoring the ecosystem," Nameeta Prasad, Joint Secretary, in the Environment Ministry told *The Hindu*. Preference would be given to indigenous species. The programme was currently in a "pilot project" mode and questions such as how shrubs and grasses could be quantified in terms of green credits were still being worked out, she added. Moreover, companies would not be able to offset all their obligations under compensatory afforestation using green credits, but could claim a portion of it, she clarified.

## Why are sugary processed foods harmful?

How does the Food Standards and Safety Authority of India monitor sugar, salt and fat content in food items, particularly malt-based milk beverages and baby food? Why are experts calling for more stringent measures in labelling food items? What lies ahead?

Maitri Porecha

### The story so far:

**O**ver the past week, the spotlight has returned on high sugar content in flavoured malt-based milk powders and baby food. Government authorities are warning against branding such items as "healthy" and have called out the allegedly misleading promotion and marketing tactics while loading products with added sugar.

### Why is it problematic to label malt-based, sugary milk products as 'health' drinks?

On analysing the product in question, (a drink like Bournvita, for example,) it is observed that it contains 86.7g of carbohydrates per 100g, of which 49.8g is sugar content. Of the total sugars, 37.4g is sucrose or added sugar. For every recommended per serve of 20g chocolate powder, the consumer is downing nearly 10g of total sugar. "Apart from added sugar, the process of malting, which involves germinating cereals, drying, roasting and powdering them, also produces sugar. Malting was a process originally used to produce single malt whiskey, and is also used in making malt-based milk beverages," a scientific panel member of the Food Standards and Safety Authority of India (FSSAI) told *The Hindu*. Once you germinate a grain, the starch in the grain breaks down to sugar by the action of a group of enzymes called amylase. When you roast it, it develops a nice flavour as that sugar gets caramelised. "Maltose is nothing but two units of glucose, a form of sugar, bonded together. Apart from added sugar, the chocolate powder contains maltodextrin, liquid glucose, maltose generated from malting process of

The first step, say experts, would be to introduce a regulation to clearly define what is 'healthy,' and 'unhealthy,' encompassing all beverages and food products

cereals and so on," the member said.

### What is FSSAI's stand on sugar content?

In its Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations 2018, the FSSAI said that only if total sugar is less than 5g per 100g in a product, it can claim to be 'low on sugar.' Any product which is 'low on sugar,' can potentially be 'healthy.' But when products do not fulfil this requirement, and still advertise or market their products as 'health drinks,' it is problematic, the FSSAI scientific panel member added. "This is because if a child, for instance, takes four servings of this so-called drink, he or she will end up consuming 40 grams of sugar, which is higher than the World Health Organization's advised threshold of consuming 25 grams or six teaspoons of sugar per day. In Indian households, one often adds extra teaspoons of sugar to a chocolate-powder drink too," the member added.

### What is the controversy over baby food?

A closer look at the ingredients of Wheat Apple Cherry baby cereal for kids from eight months up to 24 months marketed by Nestlé under the brand name Cerelac in India reveals that it contains 24 grams per 100 grams of total sugars derived from milk solids, maltodextrin, dextrose and so on. For a one to two year old child, the company recommends feeding twelve scoops or 100 grams of baby food every day. This means the baby consumes 24 grams of sugar each day. This is a harmful practice, say experts. "A baby is only familiar with the taste of breast milk. Lactose, which is a naturally occurring form of sugar, is less sweet. When a child is shifted from breast milk to complementary foods, extra sugar is being fed. Extra sugar in a young baby's diet creates unnecessary pressure on the baby's pancreas, leading to production of excess insulin which may lead to diabetes and obesity in future," the member said. Addition of ingredients like maltodextrin to improve flavour and texture is harmful as the white starchy powder of maltodextrin has a higher glycemic index (GI) than table sugar. GI is a measure of how quickly a food causes blood sugar to rise. The member further added that excess sugar gets converted into triglycerides, a form of fat which gets stored in liver leading to fatty liver and insulin resistance that causes diabetes.

An estimated 101.3 million people in India could be diabetic, a study co-published by the Indian Council of Medical Research stated.

**Will an FSSAI probe be enough to curb the practice of misleading labels?**  
In September 2022, the FSSAI put out a draft

notification which stated that high fat, sugar, salt (HFSS) food means a processed food product which has high levels of saturated fat or total sugar or sodium.

The draft notification was released to explain what a HFSS food would consist of and how to warn consumers against it on front-of-the-pack labelling of the food packet or beverage bottle. It implied that if a product derives more than 10% of total energy (kcal) from sugar and/or saturated fat, then the product was high on fat and/or sugar.

However, the FSSAI has kept the regulation open-ended on whether companies need to declare fat, sugar and salt content on the front of the pack or not. It has also batted for 'health rating stars,' and not warning labels.

"Warning labels are upfront and inform the consumers if a product is high on fat, salt or sugar. Health stars can be misleading. A consumer does not have the time or knowledge to calculate if a product is high on sugar, based on the FSSAI's definition," said Dr. Arun Gupta, Convener of the Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI) and former member of the PM's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges.

### What is the way forward?

According to Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2019, sugar is allowed in milk cereal-based complementary food, Dr. Gupta points out. The regulation says that lactose and glucose polymers shall be preferred carbohydrates for food and infant nutrition. Sucrose and/or fructose shall not be added, unless needed as a carbohydrate source, and provided the sum of these does not exceed 20% of total carbohydrate. "The regulation permits sugar, hence the regulation needs to be re-looked," he says.

Hence, the first step, Dr. Gupta explains, would be to bring about a comprehensive regulation to clearly define what is 'healthy,' and 'unhealthy,' which encompasses all beverages and food products. "There is a draft notification on front of pack labelling and high fat, sugar, salt foods which has received comments from all stake holders and after that has been put in cold storage," Dr. Gupta says. The underlying problem is marketing and pushing it to unsuspecting consumers.

A Hindustan Unilever Limited annual report of 2022 states that the company partnered with the Zilla Parishad of Pune in the midday meal programme to add Horlicks, cited as a 'health food drink,' to existing take-home rations, which were planned to be provided to children across 4,600 anganwadi centres covering 1.45 lakh children aged between three and six.

Also, under the Infant Milk Substitutes Act, infant foods cannot be promoted via advertisements. However, rules are flouted, and social media influencers often promote baby food, Dr. Gupta says. "Strong action needs to be taken against illegal ads," he adds.



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## What is the outlook on the global economy?

What are the risks and vulnerabilities the International Monetary Fund has warned about in its latest financial stability report? Is the threat of a global recession waning? Is the American economy doing well? Will it have a spillover effect on emerging markets?

Prashanth Perumal

### The story so far:

**T**he International Monetary Fund (IMF) released the latest global financial stability report on Tuesday warning about the risks to the global financial system from persistent high inflation, rising lending in the unregulated credit market, and increasing cyber-attacks on financial institutions.

### What is the IMF's worry about inflation?

The IMF has flagged rising enthusiasm among investors that the fight against high inflation over the last few years has almost come to an end. Investors have been pushing up the prices of financial assets such as stocks in recent months in the hope that central banks will soon begin lowering interest rates as inflation comes under control. It should be noted that central banks generally try to lower interest rates by injecting more into the economy when inflation falls in an attempt to boost economic growth. Although central banks are yet to lower interest rates,

An outflow of capital if western central banks fail to lower interest rates could cause further depreciation of the rupee

investors may take falling inflation as a cue that central banks will soon flush the markets with more money to lower interest rates. So they go ahead and purchase financial assets in anticipation of greater demand for these assets when banks actually lower interest rates, thus pushing up the prices of these assets right now.

The IMF, however, believes that investor enthusiasm about slowing inflation and a possible cut in interest rates by central banks may be quite premature. It has noted that the fall in inflation has probably stalled in some major advanced and emerging economies where core inflation in the most recent three months has been higher than in the previous three months. The IMF has also warned that geopolitical risks such as the ongoing war in West Asia and Ukraine could affect aggregate supply and lead to higher prices. This, it believes, might stop central banks from lowering rates anytime soon.

If these risks persist, the IMF believes, investors who have been bidding up asset prices expecting fresh money from central banks to push up asset prices in the near future may change their mind. This could cause a sharp correction in the prices of various assets and leave many investors with significant losses.

### What does it mean for India?

The IMF notes that fund flows into emerging markets have been strong till now due to optimism over central banks easing interest rates. In fact, in calendar year 2023, India was the second-largest recipient of foreign capital after the U.S., according to Elara Capital. But things could change quickly if western central banks signal that they could keep interest rates high for a long time. This could cause investors to pull money out of emerging markets like India and increase pressure on their currencies. The Indian rupee has already been depreciating and traded at a new low of 83.57 against the U.S. dollar last week despite likely intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). A severe outflow of capital if western central banks fail to lower interest rates could cause further depreciation of the rupee and have effects on the country's financial system. In such a

scenario, the RBI is likely to defend the rupee by curbing liquidity to raise interest rates, which could cause the economy to slow down.

### What about the private credit market?

The IMF in its report also noted that the growing unregulated private credit market, in which non-bank financial institutions lend to corporate borrowers, is a growing concern as troubles in the market might affect the broader financial system in the future. It estimates that the private credit market globally grew to \$2.1 trillion last year. The non-bank financial institutions lending to corporate borrowers include institutional investors such as pension funds and insurance companies. Institutional investors are investing in the private credit market because they offer higher returns than normal investments. Meanwhile, the borrowers benefit as they cannot get convenient long-term funds through other venues.

The IMF, however, is worried that the borrowers in the private credit market may not be financially sound and noted that many of them do not have current earnings that exceed even their interest costs. It also argues that since these loans rarely trade in an open, liquid market like many other securities do, it might be hard for investors to really gauge the risk involved in these loans. Thus private credit assets have significantly smaller markdowns in their mark-to-market value during times of stress, the IMF notes. In a highly liquid market where securities are traded frequently, the real risk behind a loan is priced in more immediately and also more accurately by investors. Nevertheless, it may be the case that institutional investors are fully willing to bear the risk in return for higher returns.

India has also seen the growth of a small private credit market with the rise of Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs). These funds lend money to high-risk borrowers who are not catered to by the traditional banking system and non-bank financial companies. They have also invested in distressed assets that have come up for sale under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code regime. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) notes that investments made through these funds, although still small, has more than tripled from ₹1.1 lakh crore in 2018-19 to ₹3.4 lakh crore in 2022-23. As financial regulators, both the RBI and SEBI have been noticing this trend and tried to increase scrutiny over these funds.



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# PROFILES

## Hand-holding Indian democracy

### Election Commission of India

From the first general election held in 1951-52, in which 17.5 crore Indians, largely illiterate, voted, to the elections to the 18th Lok Sabha that are under way, the constitutional body has evolved and matured along with Indian democracy over the decades

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” The year was 1951. On one hand was a nation basking in its newly independent status; on the other, a people ravaged by Partition.

The new nation, though, was ready for its first tryst with democracy and at the centre of it was a constitutional body called the Election Commission of India (ECI), established on January 25, 1950, which was then headed by a single person.

India's first Chief Election Commissioner Sukumar Sen possibly had the toughest task on his hand. An electorate largely illiterate, nascent voter rolls, people living in refugee camps without addresses, only letters and post cards as means of communication and, of course, no ballot boxes. But the new democracy, which decided to give universal suffrage to all above 21 years of age, held its first general election from October 1951 to February 1952, and 17.5 crore Indians exercised their franchise.

Fifty-three registered political parties slugged it out. The polls were held in 68 phases. “The best thing which happened was the first time,” is how former Chief Election Commissioner O.P. Rawat sums up the ECI's journey over the past 74 years.

As India began voting to elect its 18th Lok Sabha, there have been myriad questions on suitability of the decisions made by the ECI. But what cannot be debated is its position as the bedrock of the electoral system and the role it has played over the years as Indian democracy matured.

The journey of the poll body can be traced alongside the many electoral reforms that India incorporated in the more than seven decades after holding the first election. Possibly the most crucial one was the switching from individual coloured ballot boxes for each candidate to ballot papers and then the Electronic Voting Machines.

The EVMs, which have now become a contentious subject, had been hailed as a convenient and fast method for voting as well as an antidote to the phenomenon of “booth capturing”, which had emerged as a major



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

challenge during the late 1960s and early 1970s. “The ECI stepped in and then Chief Election Commissioner S.L. Shakkhar proposed the EVM in 1977. A Hyderabad-based PSU called the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), under the Department of Atomic Energy, developed a machine prototype in 1979”, says former CEC N. Gopalaswami. It was used for the first time in 1982, in the Assembly constituency of Paravur in Kerala in 50 out of 123 booths.

**Transparency and verifiability**  
As parties kept casting doubts over the security of the EVMs, the ECI started exploring the possibility of introducing a Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system to increase transparency and verifiability in the poll process. In 2011, a prototype was developed and demonstrated before the ECI and its expert committee.

After multiple field trials and fine tuning, in 2013, the ECI approved the design of the VVPAT and in August 2013, the Central government notified amended Conduct of Elections Rules,

1961, enabling the ECI to use VVPAT with EVMs. The VVPAT was used with EVMs for the first time in a bye-election from 51-Noksen Assembly Constituency of Nagaland.

Subsequently, the poll body through a manual stipulated that one randomly selected polling station in each Assembly segment or constituency shall undergo mandatory verification by tallying EVM votes with VVPAT slips. Later, in 2019, the Supreme Court ordered that the mandatory VVPAT verification be raised from one to five polling booths in each Assembly segment. Another significant event in the commission's history was the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years in 1989 as a result of which 3.57 crore citizens were added to the electoral rolls leading to a sizeable increase in the electorate.

However, the most defining phase of the ECI could be the tenure of T.N. Seshan as the CEC when he sought to give teeth to the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which was till then seen as a mere academic set of rules. The MCC originated in

Kerala in 1960 when a small set of ‘Dos and Don'ts’ for the Assembly election were circulated. A ‘Minimum Code of Conduct’ was circulated for the political parties for the first time under the signature of the Chief Election Commissioner on September 26, 1968, before the mid-term polls for various legislative Assemblies were held in February 1969, according to *Leap of Faith*, a book by the poll body on the journey of Indian elections.

In 1979, the ECI, in consultation with political parties, further amplified the code, adding a new section placing restrictions on the “party in power” to prevent cases of abuse of a position of power to get undue advantage over other parties and candidates.

Mr. Seshan started implementing the MCC effectively. Indian politicians, it was jokingly said then, “feared only God or Seshan”.

It was also during his tenure that electors' photo identity cards (EPICS) were introduced in 1993. The then CEC even threatened to cancel elections if State governments failed to distribute the EPICS before the polls, according

to the book. His tenure also saw the ECI becoming a multi-member body. On October 1, 1993, M.S. Gill and G.V.G. Krishnamoorthy were appointed as Election Commissioners by then President Shankar Dayal Sharma. The move was seen by many as a bid to “clip his wings”. Though Seshan had opposed the move, the Supreme Court upheld the government's decision to appoint the Election Commissioners.

#### Indelible mark

That Seshan left an indelible mark on the electoral reforms scene can be gauged by the fact that the same Supreme Court, while mooted the idea of including the Chief Justice in the appointment committee to select the Chief Election Commissioner to ensure “neutrality”, said in November 2022 that it wanted a CEC of strong character like the late T.N. Seshan who “does not allow himself to be bulldozed”. The top court's proposed panel, which would have included the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of Opposition, though, did not fructify with the government bringing in the ‘Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023’ last year, forming a selection committee, which did not include the CJI. Till then, the CEC and other ECs were appointed by the President of India.

Interestingly, the first appointments to be made under the new law were those of Gyanesh Kumar and S.S. Sandhu after the sudden resignation of Election Commissioner Arun Goel, who quit citing personal reasons in March. *The Hindu* had reported that he quit over apparent differences with CEC Rajiv Kumar. The other vacancy had been that of EC Anup Chandra Pandey who had retired.

Controversies, though, have not put a spanner in the works of the ECI's pursuance of keeping the poll process up to date and voter-friendly. The launch of electronic electoral photo identity card (e-EPIC) in 2021, photo electoral rolls and home voting for people with disabilities and those above 85 years of age are just some of the initiatives.

#### THE GIST

Among the most crucial reforms the CEC introduced were the switching from individual coloured ballot boxes for each candidate to ballot papers and then the Electronic Voting Machines

As parties raised doubts over the security of the EVMs, the ECI introduced a Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system to increase transparency and verifiability in the poll process

A significant event in the commission's history was the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years in 1989 as a result of which 3.57 crore citizens were added to the electoral rolls

## Universe's cartographer

### Priyamvada Natarajan

The Coimbatore-born astrophysicist, whose works on black holes won global recognition, is on TIME magazine's list of 100 most influential people in 2024

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



On April 17, *TIME* Magazine published the list of 100 most influential people in 2024 which featured a number of Indian artists, entrepreneurs and innovators. Among them was astrophysicist Priyamvada Natarajan.

Endorsed by the Director of the Event Horizon Telescope and her contemporary, Sheperd (Shep) S. Doeleman, the article highlights her most significant contribution – “In November, a novel approach developed years ago by Priyamvada Natarajan brought us closer to understanding a basic mystery in astronomy: How do the supermassive black holes form? She had speculated that they might have gotten a jump start in the very early universe if clouds of gas collapsed to form massive black-hole ‘seeds’ that then grew within their host galaxies over billions of years.”

On receiving the email from *TIME* editors, Ms. Natarajan suspected that it was spam. “I realise what an honour and privilege this is,” she said. “It sends a message that people working in science can be seen as influential, and that is very gratifying.”

Born in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, Ms. Natarajan grew up with her two si-

blings in Delhi. She earned her undergraduate degrees in Physics and Mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In 1998, she received her PhD based on her work in theoretical astrophysics from the Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge, England. While pursuing her PhD, she was elected for a research fellowship at Trinity College from 1997 to 2003. Currently, she is a faculty member at Yale.

Ms. Natarajan's genius has been recognised through a number of awards and accolades, including the Liberty Science Center ‘Genius Award’ in 2022. She was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship and the Emeline Conland Bigelow Fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Ms. Natarajan's research

primarily focuses on gravitational lensing, black hole physics and mapping dark matter. Her most significant work, as mentioned in the *TIME* article, is a research paper published in 2023, which confirmed one of her previous theories postulated in 2017 which suggested that black holes could also have been born from the ‘primordial gas’ that existed in the early stages of the Universe after the Big Bang.

#### New theory

This theory was a departure from the existing thesis that black holes are formed when giant stars collapse onto themselves and start sucking in everything including light into themselves.

This theory highlighted a new way of not only looking at the formation of black holes but also at the creation and evolution of the universe. Her theory was finally proven when in 2019, the James Webb Telescope photographed a tiny

pinprick of light, named UHZ-1, which was supposedly only a few hundred million years old (considered to be Universe's infancy). The speck of light was a quasar powered by a gigantic black hole thought to be 13.2 billion years old. Finding a black hole this huge so soon in the Universe was unusual to say the least. Already working as an astrophysicist at Yale, Ms. Natarajan suggested that the UHZ-1 was a new type of black hole which formed when the gas clouds in the early universe collapsed in on itself.

Apart from her work in astrophysics, Ms. Natarajan has written a book, *Mapping the Heavens: The Radical Scientific Ideas That Reveal the Cosmos*, published in 2016, which traces the most recent discoveries that have shaped humanity's understanding of the cosmos.

In a review, Prajval Shastri, former professor at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, writes, “Throughout the book, Natarajan debunks the popular understanding of scientific research as a systematic, entirely objective, and smooth path to new knowledge. With striking honesty, she demonstrates how the practice of science is a strongly human endeavour with its strengths, but also frailties and failings.”

## Designated successor

### Lawrence Wong

Singapore's new leader is now tasked with fortifying the ruling party's walls and earning back the trust of the public that took a hit by scandals before next year's general elections

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



#### Saumya Kalra

It so happens that succession stories are often scripted like thrillers. When Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew stepped down in 1990, after three decades in power, he picked Goh Chok Tong to be the “stopgap” Prime Minister until his son's time came. At times, the plot glitches, and the heir is chosen due to chance and circumstance. Take Lawrence Wong, the former Finance Minister who will succeed Lee Hsien Loong – the son who has been in power for 20 years – to become Singapore's fourth Prime Minister.

Mr. Wong was not the first and familiar choice. The 51-year-old former civil servant has not been trained in the way Mr. Lee or Mr. Goh have. In 2018, the first pick withdrew, and the smooth succession planning was crinkled with uncertainty. All eyes shifted to Mr. Wong during COVID. His was a steady voice guiding Singapore through the pandemic. Corruption and ethics scandals within the ruling People's Action Party have left Singaporeans yearning for accountability. Mr. Wong is now tasked with fortifying the party's walls, and earning back the lost trust, before next year's general elections.

Mr. Wong on April 15 accepted the leadership position with “humility and a deep sense of duty”.

He was raised in the Methodist tradition of Christianity. His mother was a teacher. His father is from China and travelled to the British-controlled Malaya to work with his grandfather. He later went to Singapore to work as a sales executive. If his mother passed along discipline, his father bequeathed him a love for music. At age eight, Mr. Wong received a guitar, sparking a love affair with rock, blues and soul. After high school, Mr. Wong pursued economics on a government scholarship in the U.S., because “all the guitarists and musicians I followed were largely American”, he told *The Straits Times*.

The young economist picked a job in the Ministry of Trade and Industry circa 1997, the start of the Asian financial crisis. Future stints included time at the Ministries of Finance and

Health, after which he shadowed PM Lee between 2005 and 2008.

#### Political entry

Mr. Wong's first test came during the pandemic when he “rose to the occasion without breaking under stress and pressure”, a colleague said in an interview. His calm handling of the pandemic helped him build trust within the PAP.

Over time, Mr. Wong has cultivated a professional reputation for being clear and persuasive; serious and sincere; attentive and amicable. Speaking of his work ethic, the politician said: “...in the Methodist tradition, you would say your work is your worship... [your work] is a testimony of how you as a person are an example... for the world.”

Mr. Lee had intended to step down before his 70th birthday, a plan upended because of the pandemic. The transition also overlaps with crises on the PAP's frontiers. Three

high-profile politicians resigned after a corruption and ethics case threatened to sully the reputation of the party. Mr. Wong said in July he would “work doubly hard” to earn Singaporeans' confidence.

In the successor's hands lies the dynasty's legacy. But what will be Mr. Wong's legacy? Some think he may uphold the status quo without ruffling many feathers. The opposition Singapore Democratic Party in 2022 said Mr. Wong is “substantively no different” from his colleague [PM]. Critics have censured him for increasing taxes. Others foresee more worker-friendly policies, devised through processes that engage citizens. Mr. Wong has also spoken about changing the “identity” of the island state to make it “a more middle-income society”.

Mr. Wong in a 2022 interview recollected a wisdom his mentor acquired when he worked with Goh Keng Swee, the deputy to Lee Kuan Yew. Dr. Goh's philosophy was to always know the answers to Lee's questions. If the deputy failed, he “would make it a point” to try and master the topic within hours. The designated successor is inheriting this advice. One month before the change of the guard, he said in a post: “I pledge to give my all in this undertaking.”



## REFLECTIONS

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

# Learning from China to save India's edge in ITes

While the ITes industry is likely to take a hit from generative AI, the potentially more threatening long-term trend is geopolitics. India must be prepared

The Information Technology enabled Services (ITes) industry is vital for the Indian economy. With revenues of \$253.9 billion (and exports of \$199 billion), it provides more than six million white-collar jobs and covers our import bill for petroleum crude and gas of \$208.5 billion. Thus, the growth compression from 8.4% last year to just 3.9% this year, has rightfully raised alarm bells.

One of the poster children of India's economic rise, the ITes industry grew at an astounding 28% per annum post the dotcom boom, during 2000-2010. Even though growth has moderated thereafter, the industry has helped create an Indian services brand. The other part of the industry, the Global Capability Centers (GCCs), saw a growth spike after Covid-19, with 150 new companies setting up their GCCs in India, employing 1.6 million people. Gratifyingly, the share of higher-end work is increasing and engineering research and development itself is forecasted to grow at 21% between 2023 and 2030. However, even the GCCs saw a slowdown in employment, which increased by only 50,000 to 1.65 million people last year.

Is there any underlying trend that suggests a reason for India to worry?

We believe there are at least two factors we need to keep a close watch on. The first is the arrival of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) and its transformative potential. The second trend is the rise of protectionism and dependence anathema in the disturbed geopolitical environment of the world today.

Fareed Zakaria insightfully distinguishes between the "industrial revolution", an energy revolution where living energy sources (horses) were replaced by inanimate energy generated by the steam engine from the current "information revolution (especially developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence)", of bits and bytes using data, that has the potential of being able to replace the work of thousands of people by computers working through massive data sets in minutes. Developments in Gen AI have within them the potential to fundamentally transform industries much more powerfully than the steam engine.

The full impact will get clear over the coming decade and so it is too early to assess its net impact on the ITes industry. The other question that AI has re-sparked is the eternal debate between "outsourced" and "inhouse". The logic for "inhouse" revolved around control, transparency, intellectual property, and risk. Outsourced providers, over the past decades, had largely convinced client company CXOs about the

robustness of their firewalls, data segregation, Chinese walls, and storage protocols to allay concerns. Just when it appeared that outsourced had won the argument versus inhouse (as measured by the scale of the respective vectors in India or globally), Gen AI is raising questions on data security, privacy, and ownership risks and the sharp rise in GCCs being set up, reveals the strength of such concerns. However this plays out ultimately, it does not challenge the India location advantage, nor does it threaten domestic employment or Gross Domestic Production (GDP) contribution. It only impacts Indian exports and Indian ITes companies' revenues.

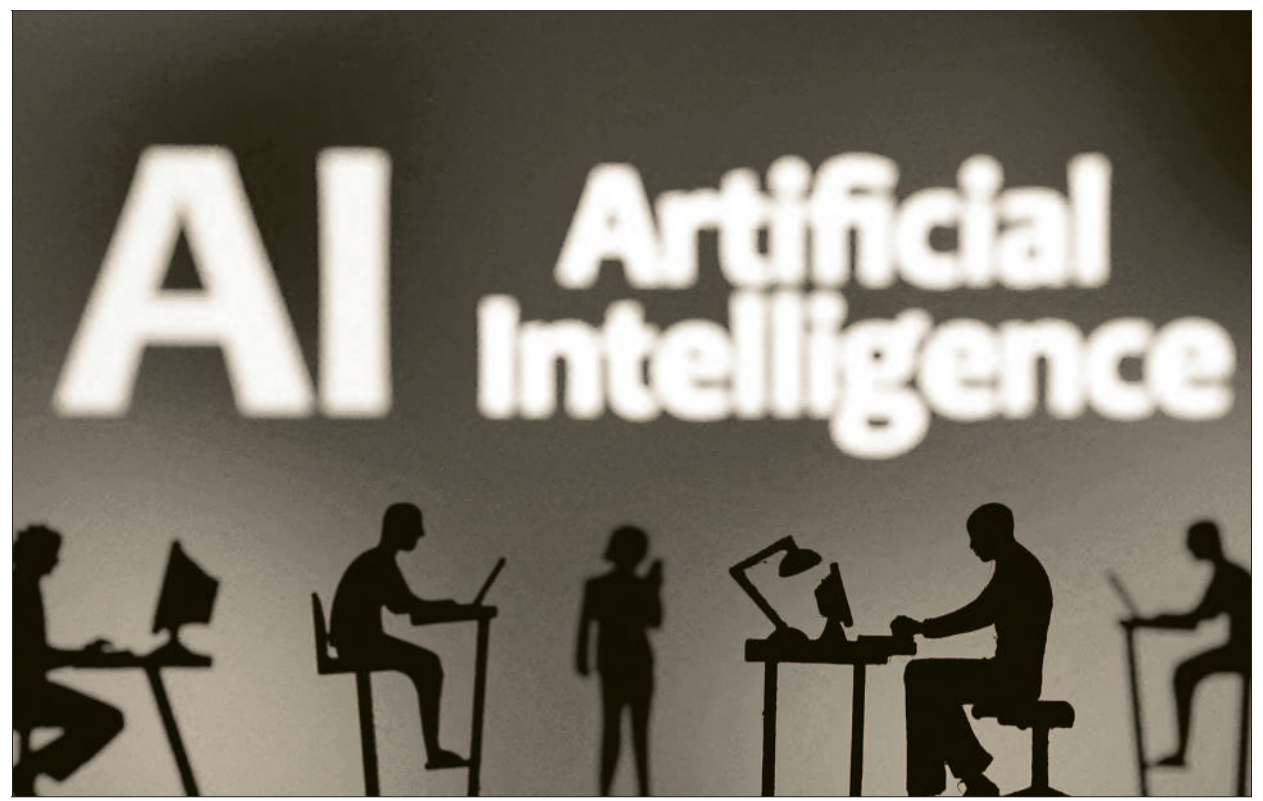


Janmejaya Sinha



Rajiv Gupta

The potentially more threatening, long-term trend for the ITes industry is geopolitics. Is there a lesson worth learning from the China experience? The rise of China began with its entry into the WTO, facilitated by the United States in 2001. The US supported China to obtain concessions for not fully complying with WTO standards and encouraged US companies to move their supply chains to China. China became the best country for scale manufacturing. American consumers and, in fact, the world over, benefited from the low prices at which Chinese goods became available. By 2010, China had become the global manufacturing powerhouse of the world and today accounts for 31% of total global manufacturing. The Chinese GDP rose from \$1.2 trillion to \$6.5 trillion by



India must undertake in mission mode a reskilling drive for its science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates REUTERS

2010. By Obama's second term in 2012, signs of tension with China started to appear. With the election of Donald Trump as the US president, the tension boiled into a major trade conflict. So much so that the only bilateral issue on which today, there is total consensus in the US Congress is containing China. China's decision to challenge the US's supremacy as a competing global superpower and the adoption of a muscular foreign policy towards other important countries was possibly mistimed and has proved costly to its economy but has provided a significant opportunity for India.

What lessons must India learn and what actions should it take? India's economic rise given its size does not offer any room for complacency. India must anticipate the challenges its rise may create. Thus, it must

act with alacrity on four fronts to take advantage of the current global animosity towards China:

One, India must build on its current geopolitical advantage and retain its strategic autonomy to pursue its interests while ensuring strong relations with the US to prevent any potential US backlash.

Two, it must reassure western companies of the integrity of its data standards and the ability to find legal recourse with speed in case of conflict.

Three, it must create and fund research facilities and encourage partnerships with top US universities to move up the research and development ladder with AI and engineering skills so that it cannot be shut out from technological advancements.

Four, it must undertake in mission mode

a reskilling drive for its STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) graduates. Only about a million of India's 12 million STEM graduates seem to secure jobs of any quality. The others need upskilling in partnership with the industry. A national STEM exam to sort and categorise STEM graduates by skill level would be enormously helpful. It will allow the creation of a differentiated skill market for STEM graduates.

We cannot be complacent and assume India's economic rise will not cause concern to the existing world order. The Boy Scout motto "Be Prepared" should be our mantra.

Janmejaya Sinha is chairman, India BCG, and Rajiv Gupta is senior partner and managing director, BCG. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



## In election season, saving politics from politicians

Perhaps because it's election time I've received a collection of aphorisms and quotations pertinently drawing my attention to a range of thoughts and concerns swirling around us. They puncture and deflate some of the dubious concepts thrust at us from a variety of different corners. In the belief it might make you sit up and think or, at least, smile, let me share them with you. Apparently, Isaac Asimov once said: "When stupidity is considered patriotism, it is unsafe to be intelligent." To which Bertrand Russell adds an important point. "The fundamental cause of the trouble in the modern world is the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt." Mark Twain goes a step further. He asks: "What's patriotism? Loyalty to the country

always. Loyalty to the government only when it deserves it." Perhaps Carl Schurz, a former US Senator, got the balance right when he said: "My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong to be set right."

But are we today prepared to accept that my country can be wrong? Or does prejudice—another word for stupidity—determine patriotism? And do we conflate and mistake the government of the day for the country we love? Is that why the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt?

Yuval Noah Harari answered these questions most pithily of all. "I am more scared of natural stupidity than artificial intelligence!" Being election time there's an awful lot of the former and precious little

of the latter.

So what does this tell us about politics? That, of course, is what this is all about. Here's a selection of quotations for you to choose from: "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies." (Groucho Marx). "Politics is the gentle art of getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich, by promising to protect each from the other." (Oscar Ameringer). "I have come to the conclusion that politics is too serious a matter to be left to politicians." (Charles de Gaulle).

And what does that tell us of politicians, who are after all the prime practitioners of the art of politics? Again, choose the description you prefer. "Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river." (Nikita Khrushchev). "Politicians are people who, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, go out and buy some more tunnel." (John Quinton). "A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country." (Texas Guinan). "Instead of giving a politician the keys to the city, it might be better to change the locks." (Doug Larson). "When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become President; I am beginning to believe it." (Irving Stone).

If you are still with me—and I hope you are—you won't be surprised by Joseph Heller's description of "the President". There are quite a few leaders it perfectly fits. Here it is: "This President will back you all the way until he has to. We want to move ahead with this as speedily as possible, although we will have to go slowly. This President doesn't want yes-men. What we want is independent men of integrity who will agree with all our decisions after we make them."

Adlai Stevenson, in a speech in 1952, offered the best explanation of how politicians deal with each other. Again, they're all the same. "I offered my opponent a deal. If they stop telling lies about me, I will stop telling the truth about them."

Isn't all of this reminiscent of what's happening around us? The people I've quoted are not Indian but don't they also speak for our politicians and our country? If the answer is yes, can we take comfort from the discomfort they so eloquently express?

People may change and countries may differ but politicians and politics remain the same.

Karan Thapar is the author of *Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story*. The views expressed are personal

## Interpol experience in combating crime

Where did you last hear about Interpol? For most, the answer is likely from a film or TV show. Interpol is often portrayed in popular culture as an elite global police force jumping out of helicopters to catch international criminal masterminds. The reality is nowhere near as glamorous but the impact of Interpol's work with key partners such as India on dismantling criminal networks is no less dramatic.

National borders and jurisdictions present opportunities for increasingly sophisticated criminals to commit crime and evade capture. The tools that Interpol provides support members to close that net and bring criminals to justice. Interpol is a network of police forces and law enforcement agencies which work closely together—sharing data, expertise and criminal profiles—to keep its 196 member countries safe. It is less about kicking down doors as spotting patterns in data and intelligence to track down the proverbial needle in the haystack.

India's recent G20 presidency was instrumental in reminding the world how the ancient Indian philosophy of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* is an astute observation of the importance of working together to tackle shared challenges and global threats. Police forces globally can learn much from how India has worked with Interpol to reach across borders and stop organised crime in its tracks. India, an important Interpol member which sits on its 13-country executive committee, is a critical partner in this endeavour and it is a pleasure for me at Interpol to work so closely with Indian law enforcement to tackle drug smuggling, people trafficking and cybercrime.

India's geographical location between the Golden Crescent and Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle, which account for 90% of the world's opium supply, present numerous challenges and foreign gangs seek to use sea routes through the west coast of India to ply their poisonous trade. The rise of synthetic drugs, such as fentanyl, threatens to compound this situation.

But Indian law enforcement agencies are leading the way in using technology to stop

drug trafficking in its tracks. Anti-narcotics bureau investigators recently arrested a foreign national sent to Goa to peddle drugs, but upon examination of the eight mobile phones in his possession, they detected and detained a bigger criminal responsible for no less than an estimated 30% of India's drug trade. Technological expertise is vital to get to the root of this complex issue and Indian law enforcement is delivering operational success through deploying that alongside international partners. Similarly, Indian agencies have worked closely with Interpol to protect the country's tech infrastructure against cyber criminals, who, through ransomware attacks, attempt to cripple banks, schools, and government agencies.

Last year, India was at the heart of a multinational effort coordinated by Interpol under Operation Synergia, which took down more than 1,300 malicious IP addresses and URLs, and disconnected over 70 servers. India also participated in Operation HAECHI, which led to authorities blocking more than 82,000 suspicious bank accounts and seizing over \$300 million. India's law enforcement makes a huge contribution to the world's response to tech crime.

Even more heinous than drug crime, cybercrime and financial crime, are those which exploit vulnerable people as a commodity to trade for profit. Human trafficking remains an appalling scourge and India's Central Bureau of Investigation has led efforts, alongside Interpol, to break the business model of human traffickers. Operation Storm Makers II in December 2023 saw India and 26 other countries work with Interpol to arrest more than 280 people and rescue 149 victims of trafficking.

These are the real success stories of the everyday heroes in India who work with Interpol and other member countries to make India safer. Their work is vital and Interpol will be there for them as the world faces even more complex criminal challenges in the future.

Stephen Kavanagh is Interpol's executive director of police services. The views expressed are personal

## What Baltimore tragedy says about ocean trade

On March 26, a cargo ship crewed by Indian seafarers headed for Sri Lanka collided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge as it was departing the Port of Baltimore, a major shipping hub on the United States (US) East Coast. Nearly three weeks after the incident, US authorities are still in the process of determining the causes behind the power failure aboard the Singapore-flagged "Dali," which apparently caused the ship to strike the bridge.

The incident rendered one of the largest ports in the US inaccessible leading to a catastrophic disruption in the flow of goods. As reported by the Associated Press, the port handled over 52 million tons of foreign cargo valued at \$80 billion last year.

For more than a decade, the Port of Baltimore has been the primary US port for automobile and light truck cargo, managing more than 847,000 vehicles last year. (This volume exceeds a fifth of all vehicles sold in India last year.) The port also ranks as the second largest in the US for coal shipments.

The shipwreck has brought attention to the vulnerabilities within the global trade infrastructure, where goods traverse vast distances and supply chains span continents.

Despite significant growth in air and road transportation over the past century, ships remain the primary mode of transportation for global trade. According to the Review of Maritime Transport, a publication of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), more than 80% of the global trade volume in goods is transported by sea.

For the US, the accident comes at a critical juncture, coinciding with two signifi-



Frank F Islam

cant global supply chain disruptions in the past five years. The first was the Covid-19 pandemic which caused countries to implement lockdowns and restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. This resulted in supply shortages, price fluctuations, and widespread economic uncertainty worldwide.

The second was the Russia-Ukraine war, which started in February 2022. That war coupled with the extensive Western sanctions led by the US and heightened geopolitical instability triggered a new wave of disruption of global supply chains, particularly in the energy sector. While the magnitude of disruptions like Covid-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war is unparalleled, they are not without precedent. Throughout history, factors such as pandemics, natural disasters, and conflicts including maritime piracy, have frequently contributed to disruptions.

Today, there are additional new challenges and threats such as cyberattacks targeting shipping networks and others precipitated by the implementation of new technologies which have the potential to seriously damage the efficiency and safety of shipping routes.

Another vulnerability in the coming years will be associated with the climate crisis. Rising sea levels, shifting weather patterns, and the increased frequency of extreme weather events will all affect maritime transportation infrastructure, elevate navigational risks, and alter shipping routes.

The pandemic prompted a fundamental reassessment of supply chain strategies and dependencies by major economies, including the US. Since 2020, nations have explored various diversification and localisation strategies. This reevaluation has led



On March 26, a cargo ship collided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge AFP

to a reconsideration of the heavy reliance on China for manufacturing, as countries seek to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance supply chain resilience.

Given this context and in light of accidents such as that at the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, it is imperative to take action to mitigate the risks they promote. First, strict adherence to safety protocols and continuous maintenance work must be prioritised to prevent accidents like the one involving Dali. It has been reported that the vessel experienced apparent electrical issues while still docked, highlighting potential lapses in safety procedures. In contrast, aircraft, whether cargo or passenger, would not be cleared for takeoff if any electrical or mechanical issues were detected.

Second, developing robust contingency plans is crucial for maintaining the resilience of global trade networks. These plans should include measures to address various scenarios, such as natural disasters, conflicts, and technological disruptions. Having backup routes and alternative modes of transportation can help reduce the impact of disruptions on supply chains.

Third, from New Delhi's standpoint, another challenge emerges with Indian

seamen increasingly becoming a significant part of the global shipping industry, trailing only behind the Chinese and Filipinos in numbers. This rise in the participation of Indian seafarers, while a good thing, brings with it the risk of future accidents and potential legal entanglements.

For example, in Baltimore, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has initiated a criminal investigation into the crew of Dali. The Indian crew members remain aboard the vessel during the investigation. Time will tell how this will play out and its impact on the relations between India and the US.

The ship accident causing the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in the Port of Baltimore was a tragedy, costing the lives of six workers on the bridge, layoffs of thousands of port workers, and serious financial problems for small businesses around the port. Failure to address the serious global trade issues exposed by that accident could lead to even more tragic human, economic, and relationship consequences around the world in the future.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur and civic leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed are personal



{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

### Take mental health seriously

This is with reference to "Is there an Indian approach to ageing?" by Shoba Narayan (Apr 14). Now, at a time when we are expected to have longer lifespans, the most essential thing to do is to treat mental health as any other physical ailment and focus on addressing those issues.

Bal Govind

### Adieu to a giant of particle physics

This is with reference to "The atheist scientist who discovered God particle" by Shobhit Mahajan (Apr 14). The world has bade adieu to a rare scientist, who was instrumental in transforming particle physics.

Vijay Singh Adhikari

### A sacred duty to the country

This is with reference to "Ink that protects the sanctity of elections" by Gopalkrishna Gandhi (Apr 14). Even with all the efforts, the voting turnout is disappointing. We must remember that voting is a sacred duty.

Anil Sharma

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*Modi Ki Guarantee* packs a lot of firepower of the wrong kind. At the forefront are Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and One Nation One Election (ONOE). Both, or at least one, will require major constitutional amendments; but the BJP leadership seems to be undeterred...

IN LAST week's column (*Indian Express, Sunday, April 14, 2024*), I had rued the fact that I was unable to compare the manifestos of the Congress and the BJP. At 8.30 am on that Sunday, the BJP released its manifesto called *Modi Ki Guarantee*. It is now abundantly clear that BJP is no longer a political party, it is the name of a cult and, with the release of the document, *cult* worship has been entrenched as the 'core' principle of the erstwhile political party.

The document is a collection of the actions taken by the BJP-NDA government in the last 5-10 years. The BJP has re-dressed the on-going programmes with all their faults and inequities, and has vowed to press on unmindful of the social and economic situation.

*Modi Ki Guarantee* packs a lot of firepower of the wrong kind. At the forefront are Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and One Nation One Election (ONOE). Both, or at least one, will require major constitutional amendments; but the BJP leadership seems to be undeterred. Their first objective is to construct a political and administrative model that will vest all powers in the central government and the prime minister. The second is to homogenize the population, as far as possible, in terms of social and political behaviour. The third objective is to implement the prime minister's 'personal commitment' to the so-called anti-corruption crusade that is targeted against Opposition parties and political leaders.

The rest of *Modi Ki Guarantee* is a tiresome repetition of the claims and boasts of the last 10 years. Old slogans have been cast aside and new slogans invented. For

example, it is no longer *acche din aane wale hai*, it is *Viksit Bharat* as if a magical transformation from a developing country to a developed country had taken place in 10 years. It is a laughable claim. Let's turn to the main promises in *Modi Ki Guarantee, 2024*:

## UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

There are multiple civil codes in India that are legally recognized as 'custom'. The differences in the codes of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and Jews are well-known. The different communities have different religious festivals; different rules and customs of marriage, divorce and adoption; different rules of inheritance and succession; and different customs observed at birth and death. There are differences in family structure, food, dress and social behaviour. What is not so well-known is that *within each religious group*, there are numerous differences among different sections of the group.

UCC is a euphemism for homogenization. Why should the State step in and homogenize the communities? Who or which group of men and women will be entrusted with the task of writing the uniform rules? Will such group be sufficiently representative to reflect the myriad differences among the people? Homogenization is a mischievous attempt to cast every person in a single mould and control the lives of citizens — much the same way as China did during the Cultural Revolution and spectacularly failed. UCC is an affront to the free spirit of a human

and will wipe out the celebrated 'unity in diversity' of India.

Reform of personal laws is necessary but the spark that will light reforms must come from within the community. State-made law can only recognize the reforms accepted or tacitly acknowledged by the community. UCC will trigger bitter debates among different communities and cultures, the debates will lead to acrimony, anger and resentment, and the resentment will turn into conflict that may become violent.

## ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

ONOE is a veiled attempt to wipe out regional differences, preferences and cultures. India's democratic structure was inspired by the institutions of the United States. The United States is a federation and holds elections to the House of Representatives every two years, to the Presidency every four years, and to the Senate every six years. Simultaneous elections are not held in federal parliamentary systems such as Australia and Canada. ONOE is antithetical to the principle that the Executive government is accountable every day to the Legislature. ONOE is the government's attempt to wrest control of the election calendar from the ECI.

## ANTI-CORRUPTION CRUSADE

The objective of the so-called crusade

against corruption is to destroy all Opposition parties and to put Opposition leaders out of political action. The fatal embrace of the BJP has already reduced several regional (single-state) parties to insignificance. The laws have been weaponised to deal with the Congress and the ruling regional parties. I am confident that the procedure of arrest and custody followed by the ED, NIA and NCB will be struck down some day. The crusade is not *against* corruption, it is *for* hegemony.

Why is the BJP determined to press ahead with UCC and ONOE? Because, after the construction of the Temple at Ayodhya, the BJP is in search of issues that have the potential to satisfy the majoritarian aspirations of the Hindi-speaking, conservative, tradition-bound, caste-conscious and hierarchical Hindu community in the states of Northern India. These states are the source of the political support that the RSS and BJP have gained in the last 30 years. UCC and ONOE are strategies to consolidate that political base. If the regional parties or the religious, racial and linguistic groups of India assert their linguistic or cultural identity, they will be out-voted by the electoral weight of the states of Northern India.

The *Modi Ki Guarantee* of UCC and ONOE has sparked furious debate in the elections. I can predict what the verdict of the people of Tamil Nadu (April 19) and Kerala (April 26) will be. Of the other states, especially the Hindi-speaking, conservative and caste-conscious states of Northern India, I shall keep my fingers crossed.

Fifth  
COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

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Change  
beyond  
elections

MANY THINGS have changed in India since Narendra Modi first became prime minister. But one change that has gone almost unnoticed is that a process of real decolonisation has transpired. And because of this the old, colonised ruling class has been swept away. This is a very good thing. It should have happened long, long ago. As someone who belonged to that ruling class, I consider myself well qualified to explain why this process of decolonisation was overdue and how we failed India as its ruling class.

The truth is we were an effete, hopeless bunch. We spoke no Indian language well, but this did not matter to us. We were proud of speaking English well. In our drawing rooms we sneered at those who dared enter without speaking good English. And at those whose table manners were not embellished with western refinement. In short, those who fumbled with forks and knives and preferred eating with their hands and without cutlery.

When we travelled to foreign lands, we made a good pretence of being Indian, but we never cared to understand what it meant to be Indian. We pretended to know everything about India's ancient culture and civilisation, but we knew almost nothing. In the schools and colleges we attended, we learned more about western civilisation, history, and literature than about our own, so it was not totally our fault.

When it came to politics and elections, we stuck loyally by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and its various heirs because they were people like us. We did not care that Parliament had been turned into a private members club. It was our club. Nor did we care that the Congress Party under Sonia Gandhi's stewardship had also become a private club. It was our club. In our drawing rooms we talked endlessly of democracy and secularism and saw ourselves as ordained to protect these ideas.

Then along came Narendra Modi and the earth shifted beneath our feet. He may not have been personally responsible for everything that changed but he was a vital part of the political change that happened, and this somehow became an essential element of the bigger changes that were happening. Suddenly, almost overnight, after Modi first became prime minister, we became not just powerless but irrelevant. A new breed of Indians who spoke Hindi well and English not at all started replacing us in the high offices of government, as political analysts, and anchors in TV studios, in journalism, in Bollywood movies and TV series. They were not impressed with our skills in English, and we were so impressed by how Indian they were that we tried to emulate them just to belong. Some of us have succeeded, most of us have not.

Those who have not but wish to continue being relevant cling these days to Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi and hope that somehow, they will be able to defeat Modi. Some act as advisors to the current heirs of the Dynasty and fill their heads with grandiose ideas like saving the Constitution and saving democracy. But the truth is that Rahul Gandhi's main message remains the same as it was in the last general election. This is that Modi is corrupt and that he works only for a handful of rich Indians. He steals your money, he shrieks at his political rallies, and he gives it to his rich friends. How exactly does this work?

As leader of the Congress Party, he is seen, especially by foreign correspondents, as the only man who can defeat Modi. It is bad luck for him that he seems so incapable of convincing Indian voters of this, despite trying hard to prove that he is one of them. He has worked with farmers in rice fields, transported coal on bicycles with miners, listened to the woes of vegetable sellers and spent long hours with mechanics in dingy shops to show how much he cares about the 'common man'. So why is the common man not impressed? Could it be because these gestures come across somehow as nobleless oblige and not genuine acts of sympathy?

What is it about 'autocratic', 'dictatorial' Modi that attracts ordinary Indian voters more? The answer that I got to this question on my recent travels in rural India is that people have seen changes in their lives, and they believe that these changes have happened because of Modi. These are not remarkable changes. They are simple things like roads, drinking water, electricity, and Internet services but because they were not there before, they seem remarkable.

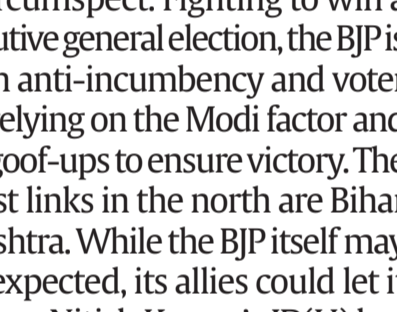
Many of these things should have happened long ago. But because we were so colonised a ruling class, we did not notice that ordinary Indians were forced to endure the worst public services. In our drawing rooms and in our entitlement, we did not care about such things because in our privileged cocoon it would have been unthinkable to go to a government hospital or a government school. Modi's advent burst the bubble in which we lived, and the truth is that most of us have no idea why this happened. We continue to hope that he will be defeated this time and hope that the message that democracy is in danger will resonate with voters. When the results come, we are likely to be disappointed again. I met nobody in rural India who saw Modi as corrupt and autocratic.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

## Cult worship and consequences

inside  
TRACK

COOMIKAPOOR



in favour of the outsider. Incidentally, two elderly Congress leaders called at 10 Janpath recently to urge the Gandhis not to abdicate their responsibility, by failing to contest from the family bastion of Rae Bareilly. They warned that it could send out a wrong signal throughout UP.

## CLIPPED WINGS

When the BJP was in power in Karnataka, general secretary (organisation) B. L. Santosh was projected as the man who called the shots in his home state. It was even speculated that the RSS pracharak loaned to the BJP might one day end up as CM. After the BJP lost the 2023 Assembly polls, the leadership had reservations about his policy of hard-core Hindutva and rejection of caste-based politics. By humiliating Lingayat leader B. S. Yediyurappa, the BJP alienated its caste vote bank. Santosh's wings were drastically clipped in this poll and three of his four Hindutva protégés, Anant Kumar Hegde, Pratap Simha and Nalin Kateel, were not re-nominated. Though Tejasvi Surya was given a ticket, his name was removed from the list of BJP's star campaigners. The BJP, which has long targeted Deve Gowda for his purely caste-driven politics, has even given a BJP ticket to his son-in-law cardiologist C. N. Manjunath.

## SUSPECT JUDGEMENT

Arvind Kejriwal's curious choices for RS seats was evident when seven of the AAP's 10 MPs failed to join protests following his arrest. Instead of rewarding long-time loyalists who had worked on the ground, the Upper House honours were bestowed largely on apolitical businessmen and well-known faces who were new recruits to the party. They were absent during the early years of the infant party's struggles. In fact, five of the MPs joined the AAP only in 2022. The absence of Raghav Chadha, who hastily left the country recently for a relatively minor eye operation, reportedly without the knowledge of his long-time Delhi ophthalmologist, is being talked about. The disappearance of Kejriwal's favourite, who helped plan AAP's successful strategy in Punjab, is suspicious and it is rumoured that he fears the long hand of the ED. Swati Maliwal was the only missing MP who was with the AAP since the Anna Hazare movement. AAP's original leadership, whether Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhusan, Kumar Vishwas or Shazia Ilmi, as well as loyal foot soldiers such as Commander Suresh and Binny left because they were either thrown out or felt suffocated in an atmosphere of suspicion and rivalry.

History  
HEADLINEHITA UNNIKRISHNAN  
& HARINI NAGENDRAHow Bengaluru's  
lakes disappeared

Ullal Lake in the south-western part of Bengaluru. Jithendra M

ONCE AGAIN, the summer of 2024 finds Bengaluru in the grip of an acute water crisis, accompanied by intense, relentless heat. Some estimates even say the city will run out of water by 2025. Yet, the city is no stranger to water scarcity, as older residents of the city will remember. Because of its position within the rain shadow of the Deccan Hills, and the fact that no major river flows directly through it, the city is geographically prone to water scarcity. Over the decades and centuries, there has been a drastic shift in the city's relationship to water.

Early settlers worked with the natural lay of the land to conserve natural resources in precolonial and early colonial times. Later, during the late colonial period, the city moved towards a reliance on large technological solutions, modifying and reshaping nature to suit the needs of the city. Built to sustain a largely agrarian economy, the city's tanks (now called lakes) date back to well before the 9th century CE. They were engineered by making use of the natural elevation gradient of the city. Natural depressions within the landscape were connected by means of stormwater channels, allowing water to flow from one lake into the next. Shallow aquifers recharged by these lakes provided a secondary source of water, accessed in the form of large community managed open wells, especially during the drier months of the year. These tanks were managed as commons, supporting irrigation, fishing, farming and pottery. More intangibly, they also supported the cultural and spiritual practices of communities dependent upon them. Lakes and their associated wetlands were critical biodiversity refuges and were important in flood control — acting as sponges in the monsoon to soak up excess water — and in drought relief in the summer, releasing the excess ground water via open wells.

After 1799, Britain in the region transformed the governance of the city's waterscape. From collective ownership, lakes came under state control. Their association with livelihoods began to dwindle, along with their sacred and cultural importance, and they began to be viewed as recreational accessories to the city. Especially in the British dominated Cantonment, lakes were appreciated primarily for their aesthetic and recreational values. As the city grew, they also became

receptacles and conduits for sewage, leading to outbreaks of cholera and other epidemics, resulting in the perception of open water bodies being unsanitary and unhygienic.

By 1892, after a succession of low rainfall years, piped water was introduced to Bengaluru, transported from the Arkavathy basin. After this, the importance of lakes rapidly dwindled. Many lakes and their associated stormwater channels were filled over to make way for the construction of bus stadiums, residential layouts, malls and sports stadiums.

Our research has shown how the death of one lake, Dharmabudhi (now the Majestic bus stand), led to the decline of an entire sub-system of waterbodies connected by this stormwater channel network. We have also documented the loss of open wells — from about 1,800 wells in the city centre in 1885 to less than 50 wells by 2014, of which only a fraction were functional. The loss of the wetlands and grasslands around the lakes that also served as ground water recharge sites has also impacted the city, collectively leading to seasonal crises of flash floods and droughts in the very areas where lakes and wetlands once thrived.

In an era of looming climate change, what does this mean for the resilience of dry Bengaluru? It is challenging to revive the old network in the heart of the city, some of which have been lost for well over 50 years. However, the lakes in the

periphery of the city can still be restored, along with their wetlands. From an ecological standpoint, they sustain critical biodiversity and function as lung spaces for a rapidly growing city. From a social standpoint, they continue to sustain lives, livelihoods and cultures and remain integral to the most vulnerable people in the city. From the perspective of water resilience, they continue to hold relevance as secondary water resources for the city — one that can enhance the long-term water security of the landscape, together with other forms of sustainable water management and use such as practices of rainwater harvesting or recycling grey water for purposes such as washing, cleaning, gardening, or irrigation.

Bengaluru was once a kalyananganagara, a city of lakes that functioned as the community centre of local neighbourhoods, critical for local economies, sacred cosmologies, biodiversity and human wellbeing. We need to recover this lost imagination of Bengaluru, to re-imagine it once again as a city of water, for the resilience of the city — as well as the many millions who call this city home.

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On the  
LOOSE

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## Don't call it a sellout

dismissing the pitying narrative of a struggling artist desperate for a break propagated by a kinder-than-usual Internet, was forced to respond, amid widespread interest to view the employee's art: "We did not receive any positive feedback on the addition from visitors to the gallery," said a spokesperson, firmly.

Indeed, this employee's behaviour was shockingly inappropriate; society would fall apart if everyone prioritised their own lofty ambitions over the jobs they're hired to do. Yet, it's hard not to admire such chutzpah. Inherently, we know there's nothing wrong with ambition. Besides, this wannabe artist's frustration was totally relatable because the art world is notoriously hard to infiltrate. Can one really fault anyone languishing unseen for attempting a harmless if slightly underhand way, for a shot at the limelight? The world we live in

demands a certain degree of narcissistic self-promotion. Nowadays, even the artists who've made it devote time to networking and painstakingly thinking up innovative posts to boost their algorithmic attractiveness. The sad fact is anyone who's work delves into the human condition, a filmmaker, a writer, a musician or an artist, also needs shrewd business acumen or some other shameless, new age tactic up their sleeve, to succeed.

Alas, market forces have ensured the romantic ideal of the artist as an authentic dreamer, unconcerned with the business side of things, is a relic from the past. Take budding novelists, for instance. YouTube is full of cottagecore-esque videos of aspiring fiction writers detailing the minutiae of their day. Since on film, the act of writing comes across as singularly uninteresting, a running commentary of their random

thoughts plays in the background, highlighting their solitary existence, while they shuffle around making tea or talking about famous books. Perhaps, the idea is to evoke nostalgia for the time when searching for originality for originality's sake, was still considered a worthy aim. Currently, in public perception, the lack of money in writing has relegated it to a self-indulgent hobby, more than a career. Pertinently, these "shorts" on social media about artistic process reveal that its one's value within the attention economy that decides success. It's heartbreaking that instead of working on their craft, writers have to work harder on packaging themselves.

Generational comparisons are tedious because we're all products of the times we emerged from but it's worth recalling the ethos of the late 1990s where the term "sellout" (spoken of with withering scorn)

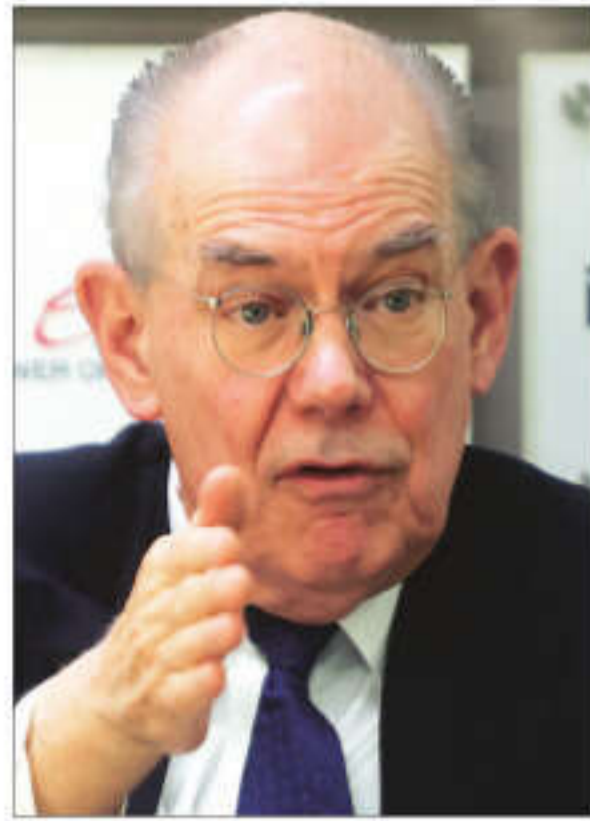
was still a thing. It was the worst insult in the world, to be willing to diverge so far from your roots that you became virtually unrecognisable. We may mourn the passing of an era when life was about hanging out, talking and listening to music, or simply learning — not being plugged in and competing 24/7 with everyone about everything. People didn't go around talking about themselves, or their accomplishments, incessantly. Now, as any young person will attest, they can't afford not to blow their own trumpets. In fact, point out a megalomaniac at your own peril because they're likely to accuse you of being outdated and privileged, and they'd be right. The museum employee recognised that subtleties dried out with digitisation and streaming; we all have to stage our own artistic interventions now.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

# Idea Exchange

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

**The balance of power has shifted decisively in Russia's favour, they are likely to win the war either by the end of this year or sometime in 2025... They will take somewhere between 20% and 40% of Ukrainian territory**



### WHY JOHN J MEARSHEIMER

Prof John Mearsheimer is a professor of political science at the University of Chicago and is considered one of the most respected voices on international relations theory. His book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) is one of the most-recommended books for international relations scholars. Belonging to the realist school of

thought in international relations theory, Mearsheimer's views on Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict are perceived as controversial and contrarian. His books, *Israel Lobby and the US Foreign Policy* (2007), and *Why Leaders Lie* (2010) challenge conventional thinking in international relations



**You don't want to provoke the Chinese unnecessarily, but that does not mean that India should do whatever China wants. India is much more powerful relative to China, than Ukraine is relative to Russia**

Shubhajit Roy: In your book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, you write about how great powers are deeply suspicious of each other. Can you contextualise this in 2024?

My argument about how international politics works is that states operate in a world in which there is no higher authority, if you get into trouble. We call this, in the international relations world: anarchy. In such a system, where you can never be certain about the intentions of other states, where there may be powerful states that can hurt you... you have no choice but to fear other states. So you want to make sure that you have as much power as possible... If you could become a hegemon, that is the ideal situation. The problem is that all the states in the system understand that basic logic. And that's why, states compete with each other for security and why they worry about the balance of power.

India has, for several decades, been warning about China's rise not being a peaceful one. Do you think that an India-China conflict is inevitable?

Inevitable is too strong a word. A competition between India and China already exists, and if China continues to grow economically at an impressive pace, and China becomes even more powerful, relative to India than it is today, that competition will heat up. China will be deeply interested in making sure that its lines of communication from the east coast of China, through the Straits of Malacca, through the Indian Ocean into the Persian Gulf, are secure... this will upset the Indians and the Americans... The rise of China is a serious threat to the US. So, the more powerful China grows, the more India and the US will move closer.

India has so far made coalitions with like-minded countries like the US, Japan and Australia, to take on this Chinese threat. Will these coalitions last?

Relations between the US and India over time will be profoundly affected by just how powerful China is. If the Chinese threat were to disappear, then the US and India would not be anywhere near as friendly... Alliances are marriages of convenience... They are designed to deal with specific threats. When those threats go away, the alliances usually disappear.

What do you think China is thinking about India?

From a Chinese point of view, one main concern is the border between China and India. The Chinese want to grow very powerful relative to India. And they would then like to settle the border dispute on their terms... the best way to do that is to be really powerful. The Chinese understand what happens when you're weak in international politics. They call it the century of national humiliation. The Chinese were once weak and other great powers took advantage of them. They do not intend to ever be weak again. And therefore, if they do become more powerful than they are now, they will push hard to resolve the border dispute in their favour.

Do you think India is on track to be a great power?

The two principal ingredients of power are population size and wealth. During the Cold War, we had two great powers in the system, the US and the Soviet Union. It was a bipolar world. China was not a great power... But in the early 1990s, the Chinese economy began to grow... India is an aspiring great power in my lexicon. It certainly has the population size but not the requisite wealth. India is growing economically, and it could, eventually, become a great power. There's no question about it. But at this point, India is not considered wealthy enough to be ranked among the great powers.

Your views on the Russia-Ukraine war have been controversial. Why do you think the West provoked Russia?

I believe that the principal cause of the Ukraine war is NATO expansion. The West was determined to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders... You want to remember that the US decided, in the mid-1990s, to expand NATO eastward, despite the fact that it had promised Gorbachev that there would be no NATO expansion... And then in January 2021, President Biden moves into the White House. He has a longstanding reputation as a Ukraine hawk... It's no accident that a year and a month after Biden moves into the White House, the war breaks out... Two months before that, on December 17, 2021, Putin writes a letter to Jens

## 'If the Chinese threat were to disappear, then US and India wouldn't be nearly as friendly'

Political scientist John J Mearsheimer on US-India ties, why China wants to be powerful, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the power of the Israel lobby in the US. This conversation was moderated by Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*



Political scientist and theorist John Mearsheimer (right) in a discussion with Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*, Noida

PRAVEEN KHANNA

Stoltenberg, head of NATO, and Biden proposing a possible solution to putting an end to this crisis and preventing a major war. What does the US do? It basically tells Putin that it has no interest in working out any diplomatic arrangement. If you go back and look, it's quite remarkable how little interest the US had in solving the problem diplomatically. And it's because we thought we could push NATO expansion down Russia's throat. If that did not work and a war broke out, we thought we could defeat the Russians.

Many would argue that this is exactly what Putin's argument has been. How do you counter that argument?

I don't view myself as Putin's puppet. I'm not interested in defending Putin. What I've always been interested in are facts and logic. Putin's explanation for what caused this war is correct... one argument against me is that Ukraine is a sovereign state and has the right to join the alliance and choose its own foreign policy. The problem with that argument is the Russians don't agree... because the Russians care about their own security... If you're a smaller country and you live next door to a great power, you have to be very careful in terms of choosing your foreign policy... Do you think any country in the Western Hemisphere has the right to choose its own foreign policy, if the US doesn't like what it's doing? Do you think that we thought that Cuba had the right to invite the Soviet Union to put missiles in Cuba in 1962? If Mexico or Canada, 10 years from now, decide that they want to invite China to build a military base on their territory, do you think the US is going to say, no problem? I can guarantee you the United States will go ballistic. The US has a Monroe Doctrine which says that the Western Hemisphere is our backyard... The same logic applies to the Russians... The Russians had no interest in conquering Ukraine before 2014, when the crisis first broke out. Michael McFaul, then-US ambassador to Moscow and a major critic of Putin, had said that Russians had no interest in conquering Ukraine or Crimea, before 2014.

If I take your logic to project it on India and China, India should also be careful about how it formulates its foreign policy so that it doesn't upset Beijing, and, therefore, Beijing is in its full right to do whatever it wants to do with India.

No, I agree with the first part of your statement, not the second part. The first part is that India should be very careful in

dealing with China. There's no question about that... You don't want to provoke the Chinese unnecessarily, but that certainly does not mean that India should do whatever China wants. India is much more powerful relative to China, than Ukraine is relative to Russia. India is in a much better position to stand up to China, but at the same time, you want to be very careful in how you deal with China because China is a powerful country and it's in India's interest to avoid a war with China.

Putin has just been re-elected for another six years at least, and we don't see an end to the war. What is your prognosis of the war?

I actually think that the balance of power has shifted decisively in Russia's favour, and that Russia is likely to win the war either by the end of this year or sometime in 2025. When the war first started, it looked for most of 2022 like the Russians were going to lose the war, that Ukraine was going to win. But in 2023, the balance began to shift. The Russians mobilised huge numbers of troops. Their industrial base was spun up and began to produce huge numbers of weapons, and the Ukrainians began to run into trouble in 2023... So, what you essentially have here in Ukraine is a war of attrition, where two sides are fighting each other, and each side is trying to bleed the other white. And the side that is likely to win that war is the side that has greater manpower and has more artillery... There's little that Ukraine can do... So, I think the Ukrainians are going to end up losing this war. My argument is that the Russians will win an ugly victory, and they will end up taking somewhere between 20% and 40% of Ukrainian territory.



- Envy

What's your sense of Putin's power? Do you think there will be a vacuum after he's gone?

First of all, the Wagner group has been eliminated as a possible threat to his rule. Secondly, because economic sanctions have not hurt the Russian economy in any meaningful way, and because the Russians are winning on the battlefield, Putin's public standing is very high... To use an American phrase, he's in the catbird's seat at this point in time... He knows that Russia is in excellent shape economically and militarily. Now what happens after he leaves, I have no idea. Putin has gone to great lengths to make sure that he has no competitor... So, if he were to disappear from the scene, the Russians would have serious difficulties replacing him.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has been on since October 7. What are the reasons for the US administration's support to Israel?

The US has a remarkably close relationship with Israel... Why is this? The answer is the Israel lobby. You have this group of institutions and individuals in the US who work overtime to make sure that it supports Israel no matter what. If you look at what's happening in Gaza today, it's very clear that President Biden is deeply upset with Israel's behaviour... His administration has been trying to get (Benjamin) Netanyahu not to invade Rafah, and Netanyahu has just told the President, in no uncertain terms, that he's going to invade Rafah. He doesn't care what President Biden thinks... The Israelis know full well they can do whatever they want, and the Israel lobby will protect them on the American home front.

I was in Israel after the October 7 attacks, and I asked the same question to some of

Netanyahu doesn't care what President Biden thinks... The Israelis know full well they can do whatever they want, and the Israel lobby will protect them on the American home front

the Israeli scholars. The uniform response was that you overestimate our influence, our lobby. If we were that strong in the US administration, in the US Congress, Hamas wouldn't exist. You think that's a valid argument?

I don't understand what that means, that Hamas wouldn't exist. Hamas exists because the Israelis have created an apartheid state. There's no way that you can subjugate the Palestinians the way the Israelis do and not expect them to resist... and if Israel persists in maintaining an apartheid state in greater Israel, you'll have more resistance down the road. The Israelis are not going to defeat Hamas. Even if I'm wrong and they do defeat Hamas, there will be a new group that will come to replace Hamas. Every American president since Jimmy Carter has been committed to a two-state solution, and that involves giving the Palestinians a sovereign state of their own... The Israelis are adamantly opposed to it. In fact, Benjamin Netanyahu worked with Hamas to prevent it... The Israelis don't want to go down that road. But as long as there's no two-state solution, as long as the Palestinians in Gaza are in the longest open-air prison in the world, they're going to look for opportunities to resist.

Many Americans, especially in the Democratic Party, believe that Vladimir Putin is the equivalent of Adolf Hitler. These are not serious arguments... but you hear them all the time in the US.

Harish Damodaran: From the 1990s to the 2000s, we had two decades of hyper-globalisation, where everybody just focused on the economy. What actually broke this compact?

From 1991 to 2017, we lived in a unipolar world. There was only one great power on the planet, the United States... What we saw with regard to China was a country that presented a large market to us. It could help facilitate American prosperity. China, of course, looked at other countries through the same lens. It was a way to get rich. Globalisation was talked about all the time as the great panacea for solving the world's problems, but that world has gone away... Great power politics is back on the table, and in that world, security will always trump prosperity.

Aakash Joshi: One of the arguments is that Russia will come out of this conflict greatly diminished, because countries like Germany are diversifying energy sources and because China is a greater power. What do you make of this analysis?

Regardless of the war in Ukraine, China was always going to be a much more powerful state than Russia. China has a much bigger population than Russia, and it has much more wealth than Russia has... Actually, one could argue that as a result of this war, the Russians have rationalised their economy in smart ways, and they are actually doing quite well economically... This is not to say that Russia is going to catch up with China.

Shubhajit Roy: There are arguments that because of the sanctions, Russia's access to technology has diminished, and in the longer term, will diminish its potential for military industrial cooperation. You think that argument holds water?

No, I think evidence shows that the Russians are getting sophisticated technology from the Chinese and through other sources. I don't see any evidence that their military is suffering... How this plays out over time, I don't know... One of the principal consequences of this war is that the Chinese and the Russians have been pushed together. They have a deep-seated interest in helping each other economically and militarily, and, I think, the Chinese will do everything they can.

Shubhajit Roy: In the US, Russia has been portrayed as a rival right now... Oh, it's worse than that. Russia is the fount of all evil in the American story...

# Opinion

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024



The T20 World Cup will immediately follow the ongoing Indian Premier League season

## Selectors face tough task to pick World Cup squad

**RINGSIDE VIEW**  
Tushar Bhaduri

'INSANITY IS DOING the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.'

There are no guarantees in top-level sport. But it goes without saying that if one doesn't learn from the past, the chances of success in the future diminish greatly.

The T20 World Cup will immediately follow the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) season. A lot of the interest around the IPL is centred around who will get on the plane to the Caribbean and the United States later in the summer. What significance does that leave for the IPL as a tournament in its own right is a discussion for another day.

The national selectors will finalise the World Cup squad in a few days, and performances in the IPL are bound to have an impact on their choices, even though there may be some disparity between the level of cricket in the 10-team franchise league and what one is expected to face against the top international teams at a marquee ICC event.

There are certain non-negotiables, or certainties, in selection if one goes by what is being speculated. Rohit Sharma will be leading the team and Virat Kohli's spot is confirmed, even though both didn't play any T20 Internationals between the last World Cup in the format in late 2022 and the last series India played in January this year.

Kohli is the current leading scorer in the IPL, but his team is rooted to the bottom of the points table after only one win in seven games. Rohit has also been among the runs, but his team is also languishing in the bottom half. But the selectors have made the call to have him as the captain, which is understandable based on how well he led the team in the 50-over World Cup six months ago.

But with two places in the batting order set in stone and Suryakumar Yadav — the No. 1 batsman in the format confirmed to return to the line-up after recovering from injury — the jostling for the remaining spots becomes even more intense. There have been several players who have performed with distinction for India when the two senior statesmen were away. What happens to the likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Shivam Dube, Rituraj Gaikwad, and Tilak Varma who have impressed in T20I colours over the last 18 months?

Then there are the likes of Riyan Parag, Abhishek Sharma, Shashank Singh, and Ashutosh Sharma, who haven't played for the country yet but have caught the eye this IPL. Sanju Samson may not have set the international stage on fire, but has been in rich form of late and can also keep wicket. The likes of KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan, and Dinesh Karthik also come into the picture as options behind the stumps. As far as all-rounders go, the selectors seem to be betting on Hardik Pandya again, despite the Mumbai Indians captain

not having a great time on and off the field. Ravindra Jadeja seems to be a banker as the spin-bowling all-rounder.

**Courage vs conservatism**

The point being made here is that with so much talent to choose from, most of whom are capable of playing according to the modern T20 template — where the onus is more on strike rates rather than batting averages — several deserving candidates will be left disappointed once the squad is announced. India has gone with Kohli and Rohit as their main players for the last few T20 World Cups without getting the desired results. The playbook of getting one's eye in, playing a long innings while others bat aggressively around them before a final explosion seems antiquated.

In the 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal, India huffed and puffed to 168/6, a total overhauled by England in 16 overs without the loss of a wicket. Alex Hales and Jos Buttler gave a glimpse of how the modern version of the format had to be played, and to be fair, India seemed to have learned the lessons with young dynamic batsmen showing a no-fear approach and targeting a benchmark score of 200 from 20 overs and chasing lower targets with overs to spare. But as a big ICC event approached, the selectors seem to have leaned on the conservative side.

India's only T20 world title came when the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, and Sourav Ganguly opted out saying it was a youngster's format. So as long as the likes of Kohli and Rohit don't do something similar — and the seriousness with which they approach the IPL signifying they won't — the selectors would have to go with them.

Going by the Indian batting talent on display in the IPL, one can field three Indian teams in the upcoming World Cup. The bigger question is the combination of players to get the optimum result.

The problem on the bowling front is quite the opposite. Even if Kuldeep Yadav and Jadeja could take care of the spin-bowling duties, with the likes of Ravi Bishnoi or Yuzvendra Chahal (or even Axar Patel) providing solid options, the pace-bowling stocks seem depleted with Mohammed Shami out injured and Mohammed Siraj woefully out of form.

Jasprit Bumrah is bowling probably better than ever, but as Mumbai Indians' recent travails show, if the opposition manage to play him out without taking too many risks, the rest of the bowling may not hold too much threat.

Mayank Yadav's express pace had everyone excited before he got injured. But even if fit, taking him to a World Cup would be a big punt.

It leaves India with options such as Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar, Khaleel Ahmed, and Shardul Thakur, none of whom will give opposition teams sleepless nights. Whether the selectors go for them or choose someone with extra pace remains to be seen. Either way, pace bowling resources seem nowhere as rich as they were in the 50-over showpiece event just a few months ago. Those making the decisions have an unenviable task.

**ACROSS THE AISLE**  
P Chidambaram

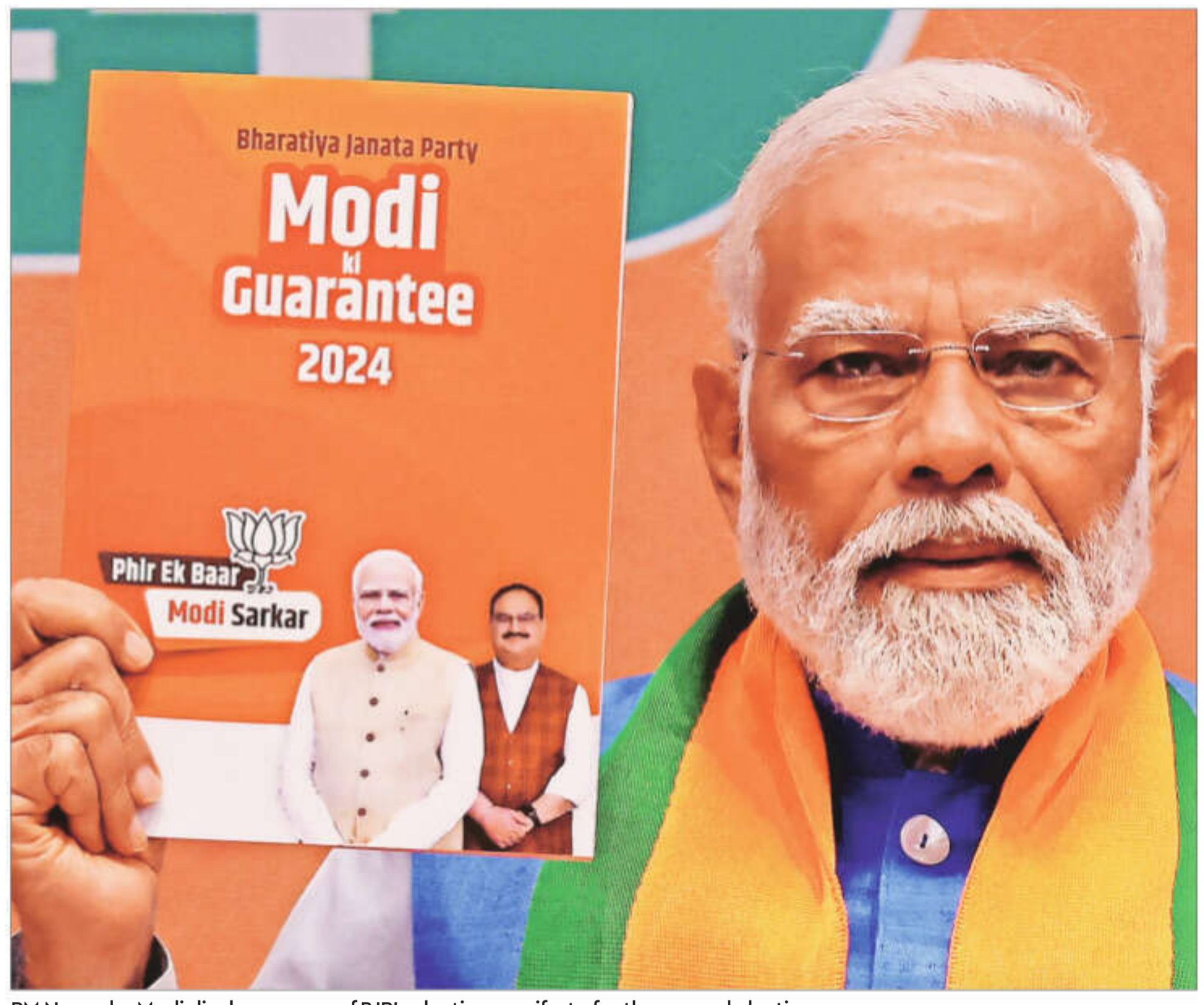
**Modi Ki Guarantee** packs a lot of firepower of the wrong kind. At the forefront are Uniform Civil Code and One Nation One Election. Both, or at least one, will require major constitutional amendments; but the BJP leadership seems to be undeterred...

**IN LAST WEEK'S** column (*Indian Express*, Sunday, April 14, 2024), I had rued the fact that I was unable to compare the manifestos of the Congress and the BJP. At 8.30 am on that Sunday, the BJP released its manifesto called *Modi Ki Guarantee*. It is now abundantly clear that BJP is no longer a political party, it is the name of a cult and, with the release of the document, *cult* worship has been entrenched as the 'core' principle of the erstwhile political party.

The document is a collection of the actions taken by the BJP-NDA government in the last 5-10 years. The BJP has re-dressed the on-going programmes with all their faults and inequities, and has vowed to press on unmindful of the social and economic situation.

*Modi Ki Guarantee* packs a lot of firepower of the wrong kind. At the forefront are Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and One Nation One Election (ONOE). Both, or at least one, will require major constitutional amendments; but the BJP leadership seems to be undeterred. Their first objective is to construct a political and administrative model that will vest all powers in the central government and the prime minister. The second is to homogenise the population, as far as possible, in terms of social and political behaviour. The third objective is to implement the prime minister's 'personal commitment' to the so-called anti-corruption crusade that is targeted against Opposition parties and political leaders.

The rest of *Modi Ki Guarantee* is a tiresome repetition of the claims and boasts of the last 10 years. Old slogans have been cast aside and new slogans invented. For example, it is no longer *acche din aane wale hai*, it is *Viksit Bharat* as if a magical transformation from a developing country to a developed country had taken place in 10 years. It is a laughable claim. Let's turn to the main promises in *Modi Ki Guarantee*, 2024:



PM Narendra Modi displays a copy of BJP's election manifesto for the general election

# Cult worship and consequences

**Uniform civil code**

There are multiple civil codes in India that are legally recognised as 'custom'. The differences in the codes of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and Jews are well-known. The different communities have different religious festivals; different rules and customs of marriage, divorce and adoption; different rules of inheritance and succession; and different customs observed at birth and death. There are differences in family structure, food, dress and social behaviour. What is not so well-known is that *within each religious group*, there are numerous differences among different sections of the group.

UCC is a euphemism for homogenisation. Why should the State step in and homogenise the communities? Who or which group of men and women will be entrusted with the task of writing the uniform rules? Will such group be sufficiently representative to reflect the myriad differences among the people? Homogenisation is a mischievous attempt to cast every person in a single mould and control the lives of citizens — much the same way as China did during the Cultural Revolution and spectacularly failed. UCC is an affront to the free spirit of a human and will wipe out the celebrated 'unity in diversity' of India.

Reform of personal laws is necessary but the spark that will light reforms must come from within the community. State-

made law can only recognise the reforms accepted or tacitly acknowledged by the community. UCC will trigger bitter debates among different communities and cultures, the debates will lead to acrimony, anger and resentment, and the resentment will turn into conflict that may become violent.

**One nation one election**

ONOE is a veiled attempt to wipe out regional differences, preferences and cultures. India's democratic structure was inspired by the institutions of the United States. The United States is a federation and holds elections to the House of Representatives every *two* years, to the Presidency every *four* years, and to the Senate every *six* years. Simultaneous elections are not held in federal parliamentary systems such as Australia and Canada. ONOE is antithetical to the principle that the Executive government is accountable *every day* to the Legislature. ONOE is the government's attempt to wrest control of the election calendar from the ECJ.

**Anti-corruption crusade**

The objective of the so-called crusade against corruption is to destroy all Opposition parties and to put Opposition leaders out of political action. The fatal embrace of the BJP has already reduced several regional (single-state) parties to insignificance. The laws have been weaponised to deal with the Congress and

the ruling regional parties. I am confident that the procedure of arrest and custody followed by the ED, NIA and NCB will be struck down some day. The crusade is not *against* corruption, it is *for* hegemony.

Why is the BJP determined to press ahead with UCC and ONOE? Because, after the construction of the Temple at Ayodhya, the BJP is in search of issues that have the potential to satisfy the majoritarian aspirations of the Hindi-speaking, conservative, tradition-bound, caste-conscious and hierarchical Hindu community in the states of Northern India. These states are the source of the political support that the RSS and BJP have gained in the last 30 years. UCC and ONOE are strategies to consolidate that political base. If the regional parties or the religious, racial and linguistic groups of India assert their linguistic or cultural identity, they will be out-voted by the electoral weight of the states of Northern India.

The *Modi Ki Guarantee* of UCC and ONOE has sparked furious debate in the elections. I can predict what the verdict of the people of Tamil Nadu (April 19) and Kerala (April 26) will be. Of the other states, especially the Hindi-speaking, conservative and caste-conscious states of Northern India, I shall keep my fingers crossed.

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**ODD & EVEN** ROHNIT PHORE

**INSIDE TRACK**  
COOMI KAPOOR

**Apathetic voters**

**WHILE THE BJP** has in a show of bravado proclaimed hyped-up numbers — 370 and '400 paar' — as its projected tally, in private, it is more circumspect. Fighting to win a third consecutive general election, the BJP is battling both anti-incumbency and voter apathy. It is relying on the Modi factor and Opposition goof-ups to ensure victory. The BJP's weakest links in the north are Bihar and Maharashtra. While the BJP itself may perform as expected, its allies could let it down. In Bihar, Nitish Kumar's JD(U) has been allotted 16 seats, but its prospects appear bleak since its caste-based vote base is shrinking with Nitish's declining stature. Most JD(U) candidates are elderly sitting MPs affected by anti-incumbency and BJP workers are reluctant to campaign for them.

In Maharashtra too, the BJP is likely to fare better than its allies, Shinde's Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP. The MVA has not collapsed after the BJP split the Sena and NCP, taking

along a majority of their leaders. There is unease in Maharashtra at the BJP's efforts to gobble up regional parties. At 83, Pawar is leaving no stone unturned to ensure that his daughter Supriya retains his bastion of Baramati, even though nephew Ajit may hold many levers of powers in the constituency's powerful cooperatives. The Pawar clan, including Ajit's brothers, are backing Supriya and not his wife Sunetra. Recently, Pawar drove to the residence of his old political foe, the late Sambhajirao Kakade, to meet his kin and mend a 55-year-old enmity. Earlier, he had smoked the peace pipe with another long-time rival in the Pune belt, Anantrao Thopte. Pawar, who has been campaigning relentlessly in his strongholds, is in fact displaying more vigour than Uddhav Thackeray, who is encumbered by a chronic back problem. In the MVA, the weakest link is the Congress, with its allies bullying it even in seat distribution.

In the Congress, there are doubts about the soundness of some of Rahul Gandhi's decisions. His choice of Kanhaiya Kumar, the former Communist student activist from JNU who accompanied Gandhi on his Bharat Jodo Yatra, as the candidate from Delhi North East, being an example. Sandeep Dikshit, a former Delhi MP who enjoys much goodwill as the son of the popular CM, the late Sheila Dikshit, was

ignored in favour of the outsider. Incidentally, two elderly Congress leaders called at 10 Janpath recently to urge the Gandhis not to abdicate their responsibility, by failing to contest from the family bastion of Rae Bareilly. They warned that it could send out a wrong signal throughout UP.

**Clipped wings**

When the BJP was in power in Karnataka, general secretary (organisation) B L Santosh was projected as the man who called the shots in his home state. It was even speculated that the RSS *pracharak* loaned to the BJP might one day end up as CM. After the BJP lost the 2023 Assembly polls, the leadership had reservations about his policy of hard-core Hindutva and rejection of caste-based politics. By humiliating Lingayat leader B S Yediyurappa, the BJP alienated its caste vote bank. Santosh's wings were drastically clipped in this poll and three of his four Hindutva protégés, Anant Kumar Hegde, Pratap Simha and Nalin Kateel, were not re-nominated. Though Tejasvi Surya was given a ticket, his name was removed from the list of BJP's star campaigners. The BJP, which has long targeted Deve Gowda for his purely caste-driven politics, has even given a BJP ticket to his son-in-law cardiologist C N Manjunath.

**Suspect judgment**

Arvind Kejriwal's curious choices for RS seats was evident when seven of the AAP's 10 MPs failed to join protests following his arrest. Instead of rewarding long-time loyalists who had worked on the ground, the Upper House honours were bestowed largely on apolitical businessmen and well-known faces who were new recruits to the party. They were absent during the early years of the infant party's struggles. In fact, five of the MPs joined the AAP only in 2022. The absence of Raghav Chadha, who hastily left the country recently for a relatively minor eye operation, reportedly without the knowledge of his long-time Delhi ophthalmologist, is being talked about. The disappearance of Kejriwal's favourite, who helped plan AAP's successful strategy in Punjab, is suspicious and it is rumoured that he fears the long hand of the ED. Swati Maliwal was the only missing MP who was with the AAP since the Anna Hazare movement. AAP's original leadership, whether Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhusan, Kumar Vishwas or Shazia Ilmi, as well as loyal foot soldiers such as Commander Suresh and Binny left because they were either thrown out or felt suffocated in an atmosphere of suspicion and rivalry.

EARTH DAY: WARS, PLASTICS, NOTIONS AND NON SEQUITURS

THIS Monday, the world will observe Earth Day for the 55th time. In 1971, the then UN Secretary General U Thant unveiled the idea, observing, "An earth day has suddenly become necessary to remind us of the fact that our small planet is perishable."

There is little to suggest that 55 Earth Days or 28 COP (Conference of Parties) meetings on climate change have engineered or even influenced human behaviour.

THE THIRD EYE SHANKKAR AIYAR

The planet is unmistakably trapped amid notions and non sequiturs—between vague conceptions about what must be done and competing conflicts in intent and action.

The theme for Earth Day 55 is Planet v Plastics. How has the world fared? The data is mind-numbing. Consider single-use plastics. The UNEP estimates that around the world, a million plastic bottles are bought every minute and five trillion plastic bags are used every year.

There is the spectrum of debatable issues during times of peace and then there is the lethal cost and consequences of inaction to end conflicts. In 1971, UN Secretary General Thant hoped "humanity will be united when the common dangers we all face, the armaments race and its inherent risks of obliterating all life on earth".

Just take the two wars—in Europe between Russia and Ukraine since 2022, and in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas, and now Iran. The people and the planet are paying the price of inattention.

The planet suffers both in the production and use of weaponry. Take missiles—the production and use of these projectiles causes significant emission of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide and hydrofluorocarbons.

The cause of climate change demands that nations come together as Thant had hoped. The fact is geopolitics is thwarting cooperation and resolution. The unravelling of the rule-based world order extends conflicts beyond the theatre of war.

FOR CONGRESS, MINIMUM IS MAXIMUM NOW



POWER & POLITICS PRABHU CHAWLA

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure."

— Mark Twain

IT WAIN should know. He was a professional gambler on a Mississippi steamboat he captained, and tried to invent a children's game which he was confident would make him rich.

Now, the Grand Old Party sports a new philosophy: minimum is the new maximum. Its new electoral algorithm is 'fighting for less with confidence and score a better strike rate'.

Today, its genome has been corrupted by dynasty, defeats, defections and denial. The consequence is a talent fam-

ine, and organisational paralysis and ideological infirmity. Until a few decades ago, there were more than 25 aspirants per Lok Sabha seat who wanted a place on the Congress list.

The puzzle is its cockiness about its future. While dising Narendra Modi's "Aachhe Din" slogan, the shrinking Congress cabal at the top is expecting 'aachhe din' for itself by clinging to their faithful fiefdoms.



But the Congress was humiliated in 1996. Of the 529 candidates, only 140 won. Rao was unceremoniously ousted as Congress president and replaced by Gandhi faithful Sitaram Kesri who led the party to a disastrous debacle in 1998 with the Congress scoring only 141 seats.

for fewer seats in 2024 could be 'No charismatic neta, nara and niti'. For the past four decades, the party leadership manufacturing system has been decaying; not one marketable leader who can connect successfully with an inclusive India made of numerous castes, beliefs and social communities has surfaced.

Indira's assassination generated a sweeping sympathy wave for Rajiv in 1984 that gave the Congress a record 400-plus seats in the Lok Sabha. But Rajiv was the first Gandhi who couldn't get a second consecutive mandate.

But the Congress was humiliated in 1996. Of the 529 candidates, only 140 won. Rao was unceremoniously ousted as Congress president and replaced by Gandhi faithful Sitaram Kesri who led the party to a disastrous debacle in 1998 with the Congress scoring only 141 seats.

114 contestants out of 453 won. However, Sonia's hidden talent as a coalition metallurgist who could forge incompatible elements into the semblance of a shape led to the ouster of the Vajpayee-led NDA government.

But since then, the party has been going downhill, losing senior leaders in most states. The arrival of a determined, focused and aggressive Modi made life miserable for both the party and the Gandhis.

It is obvious the Congress isn't fighting this election to make magic, since it lacks the manpower, muscle power and money moxie. The government has frozen its accounts. Its committed donors are vanishing faster than its leaders.

WHY WE MUST SEE RED ON COLOURISM



OPINION GEETHA RAVICHANDRAN

HERE was a recent report of a prominent classical dancer declaring that a male colleague should not be dancing, as he was black as a crow. This, according to her, was not aesthetically pleasing.

There is a deep-rooted prejudice in our country against dark skin. This has given rise to a flourishing and exploitative cosmetic industry. From infamous chemical bleaches and fairness creams to the glutathione promise, there is an endeavour to sell an illusory standard of beauty as being light-skinned.

monial ads, the lack of acceptance of dark-skinned models in the fashion industry or as female leads in the film industry shows the extent of bias. This is surprising in a country where we worship the dark-skinned Krishna and Draupadi, the dusky wife of the Pandavas, is celebrated for her beauty and valour.

The history of colourism in India is often linked to caste. There is a theory that the light-skinned invaders subjugated the dark-skinned indigenous population and introduced the Varna system based on colour.

The global prevalence of colourism among non-white races points to colonialism as a major cause for this malaise. Colonialism projected the image of a white-skinned master lording over dark-skinned natives, with the attendant prejudice and social discrimination gaining traction.

Skin whitening products are big business worldwide. A WHO study has estimated the size of the global skin-whitening industry at \$31.2 billion in 2024.

which is around \$500 million annually. For many users, chiefly women, turning light-skinned is touted as a passport to privilege. However, the ingredients in these products have come under scrutiny for potential adverse effects.

The deep-rooted prejudice in our country against dark skin sustains an exploitative cosmetic industry. It makes profit by changing dark skin to light and white hair to black. Thankfully, the movement against colourism is gaining ground

spending adequate time in the sun for producing vitamin D and kickstarting metabolism is overlooked.

The rebranding of a face cream by a multinational by a name change is an outstanding example of marketing duplicity. This was a response to the protest that the brand was perpetrating unhealthy biases. The ingredients in the tube have not changed and exploitation of vulnerabilities to increase profits still

continues to be the game. There is, thankfully, a growing awareness against colourism both in India and other countries. Counter-movements like Dark is Beautiful are beginning to have an impact.

It is necessary to educate children at homes and schools against colourism, bullying and body shaming. There is an interesting story worth retelling in this context. Sage Ashtavakra was born with eight deformities. Once when he entered the court of King Janaka, his contorted appearance was greeted with derisive laughter.

Ashtavakra's courage holds a valuable lesson. To be bound by appearances and opinions of others is a folly. There are sufficient red flags on the damage that perverse societal attitudes can inflict. It is important to teach children that standards of beauty may change, but basic human values like acceptance of others will never go out of fashion.

(ravichandran.geetha@gmail.com)

QUOTE CORNER I swear as a former British ambassador and a 22-year career diplomat: almost every US or British Embassy hosts a CIA or Mi6 station. All house military personnel. Many service special forces. That the Iranian diplomatic premises were qualitatively different is rubbish. Craig Murray, former British ambassador, reacting to Israel's explanation of its bombing of an Iranian consulate in Syria linking it to the presence of Iranian military leaders. I knew they had fabricated a false narrative, because I know all of the cases that they cherry-picked their text fragments from. They stitched together excerpts. Estela Aranha, former secretary of digital rights in the Brazilian justice ministry, on Elon Musk and some far right operatives' effort to spread fake news about a Brazilian judge. Go out there and give your best. I try to relay messages from wherever I am on the field. You don't want to live too many messages. Jasprit Bumrah, on his on-field role for Mumbai Indians, whose new captain Hardik Pandya has been booed by the home crowd after taking over from Rohit Sharma

MAILBAG WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com EVM ambiguity Ref: Onus lies with EC to prove EVM reliability (Apr 20). We have a lengthy Constitution that guarantees the due process of law. The purpose of creating the constitutional body of the Election Commission was to provide free and fair elections, so that we can govern ourselves. We are no longer under colonial reign, where people didn't have the right to express opinions freely. As responsible constitutional bodies, the EC and Supreme Court should solve this ambiguity over voting machines. K Palaniswami, Salem Compulsory voting Ref: 69.46% TN voters ink fingers (Apr 20). It is heartening to read that a group of tribals walked more than 10 km after skipping breakfast to vote near Udumalpet in Tamil Nadu. At the same time, voters in urban areas are still hesitant. A law should be enacted for compulsory voting. Those who fail to

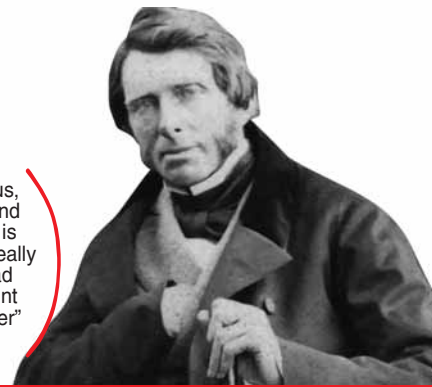
vote should be warned the first time and punished the second time, as is done in some countries. P Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai Political rhetoric It's good to note that despite the scorching heat the first phase of elections has finished with a 60 per cent turnout. The majority are keeping their faith in democracy. They don't seem to give much priority to the rhetoric of politicians. But the standard of political exchanges is on a slippery slope. In AP, when the chief minister was injured, opposition leaders took no time to ridicule the incident rather than condemn it. The statesmanship shown by leaders can pave the way for a better society. D V G Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram Unrelated remark Narendra Modi's remark while campaigning in Madhya Pradesh—that Pakistan, a supplier of aatank (terror), is now struggling for ata (wheat)—is ridiculous. It is not related to the elections. It only reveals a hunger for cheap publicity and political

gain in attracting the majority community's voters towards the BJP for the ongoing elections. Syed Amjad Ali, Secunderabad Sub-par institutes On the column expressing concerns about UGC's new guidelines for PhD admission, I wonder what the author thinks about the substandard private universities that hold fake exams and admit students to earn huge fees even in science subjects. The theses are at times written by agents; supervisors are hired for paltry sums. I think the test proposed by UGC will at least control such malpractice. Sunil Dutta Purohit, email Double threat Ref: Breast cancer deaths to double by 2040, says Lancet (Apr 20). The projection of doubled breast cancer deaths by 2040 necessitates immediate government action, including the prohibition of alcohol sales. Supporting initiatives like the Global Breast Cancer Initiative would be crucial. Empowering women to prioritise self-care and screenings is es-

sential. Let us raise awareness and act decisively to prevent this crisis. Dr V Parameswari, Tiruchirappalli Internecine fight It is rather interesting that the CPM and the Congress, which are allies in other states, are acting like sworn enemies in Kerala. Pinarayi Vijayan has taken exception to Rahul Gandhi's jibe that the CPM is playing the role of BJP's B team. Neither seems embarrassed that this dual stance can cause harm to their electoral prospects. K R Jayaprakash Rao, Mysuru H5N1 menace The World Health Organization has expressed deep concern regarding the increasing transmission of H5N1 bird flu to other species, including humans. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare should be cautious. Measures need to be taken to prevent human transmission of infections before an epidemic takes shape. Nabnit Panigrahi, Rayagada



"Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather"  
— John Ruskin



Abrupt shifts in weather, as exemplified last week in Delhi swaying from moderate cold conditions one day followed by record-breaking warmth the next, underscore the unpredictability and volatility of regional climates, says ARCHANA JYOTI

# INDIA BATTLES VOLATILE AND UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER

The recent forecast by the Indian Meteorological Department predicting above-normal monsoon rainfall brings a glimmer of hope, particularly for agriculture and water resources. However, beneath this layer of optimism lies a stark reality: erratic weather patterns are wreaking havoc across the nation, presenting formidable challenges.

India's climate has become akin to a rollercoaster ride, with unpredictable twists and turns affecting lives from Uttar Pradesh to Gujarat and Kerala to West Bengal. The abrupt shifts in weather, as exemplified by last week's Delhi's experience of moderate cold conditions one day followed by record-breaking warmth the next, underscore the unpredictability and volatility of regional climates.

Reflecting on her eight decades of life, 80-year-old Rambha Devi confronts a bitter truth: humanity's reckless treatment of Mother Nature is returning to haunt us. "For too long," she laments, "we've exploited the Earth without considering the consequences of our actions. We've depleted natural resources, polluted the air and waterways, and recklessly disrupted delicate ecosystems around the globe."

Now, as Devi observes, nature is fighting back. The once predictable and reliable weather now seems to operate on capricious whims. Extreme heat waves scorch the land one day, only to be followed by torrential rains and floods the next.

Unpredictable storms lash coastlines, leaving devastation in their wake. The rhythm of seasons blurs, leaving farmers like Devi's family uncertain about sowing and reaping times.

Throughout her lifetime, Devi has witnessed the consequences of humanity's disregard for the natural world. Once-vibrant forests were reduced to barren wastelands, rivers choked with pollution, and species pushed to the brink of extinction. Now, as the impacts of climate change intensify, she fears for future generations.

As she gazes upon the world she's known for eight decades, Devi knows the road ahead will be arduous.

These fluctuations not only threaten agricultural patterns but also have profound implications for public health and well-being.

Ramesh Tiwari, a farmer from Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad, shares how sudden rain and hail storms destroyed his crops, leaving him struggling to support his family. "I've toiled day and night," he says, "only to see it all washed away in minutes." The state saw as many as 7,020 farmers from 50 districts seeking compensation for the damage till March 2. Similar tales emerge from across the nation.

In Maharashtra, Priya, a resident of a drought-prone Vidarbha village, recounts how scorching heatwaves and heavy rainfall disrupt water access and damage local crops, exacerbating food insecurity.

Similarly, Raju Vashaya, a farmer in Rajasthan, describes the challenges of coping with unpredictable weather, making it difficult to predict crop yields and threatening his family's livelihood.

Further, whether it is Assam in the Northeast or down South Kerala, locals face displacement from floods triggered by heavy rainfall and landslides.

Their stories reflect the widespread devastation and loss in these regions. Meanwhile, along Gujarat's coastline, Sanjay Joshi, a fisherman, expresses concern about the increasing frequency of cyclones and floods, threatening his livelihood and community safety.

Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of the IMD, explains about the visible trends in extreme weather events. "Globally, temperatures have risen by about 1.2 degrees Celsius compared to 100 years ago. Over India, the rise has been about 0.6 degrees Celsius. The rise has been more in the northern, central, and eastern parts, and less over peninsular India.

"This temperature rise has an impact on extreme weather events. It's getting hotter not just on the surface, but also in the troposphere, increasing its water-holding capacity. Studies show that with a rise of 1 degree Celsius, moisture-holding capacity increases by about 7 per cent. If the atmosphere can hold more moisture, it will have the capacity to cause more rainfall."



**This temperature rise has an impact on extreme weather events. It's getting hotter not just on the surface, but also in the troposphere, increasing its water-holding capacity. Studies show that with a rise of 1 degree Celsius, moisture-holding capacity increases by about 7 per cent. If the atmosphere can hold more moisture, it will have the capacity to cause more rainfall**

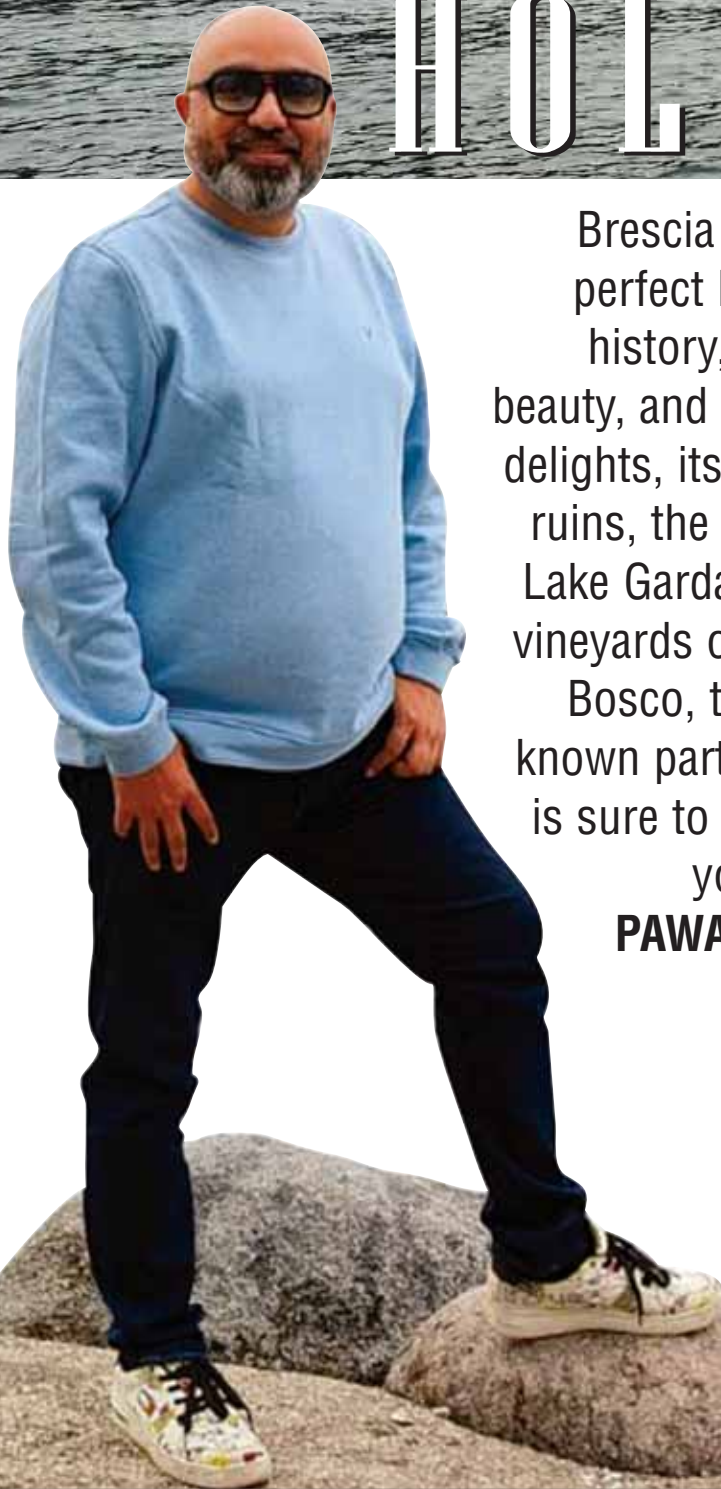
So, the probability of the occurrence of heavy rainfall has increased. Studies also show an increase in the frequency of heavy rainfall events. These are events when 24-hour cumulative rainfall on a particular day is more than 15 cm. Such events are increasing over the tropical belt as a whole, including in India. This trend is more evident in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, and West Bengal, he says. The rise in the average global temperature has hit various countries of the world too. Like the United States of America, all European countries, including China, Japan, Indonesia, Canada, and others are reporting now and then extreme heat waves, droughts, wildfires, record rains, and floods. A recent example has been Dubai in UAE which was caught off guard, as heavy rainfall deluged it. The sixth IPCC report released in August 2021, revealed in detail that in the coming decades, winters will get shorter and summers will get longer. Some places will

experience an increase in the incidents of drought as a result of heat waves and some places will face floods due to heavy rains. India has already felt the impact, with rising temperatures affecting 75% of its districts, with heat wave records breaking every year. "We were expecting these changes possibly after 2025, leading on to 2030. But they are happening now, and are likely to get intense and possibly more frequent in coming years," warns Dr K J Ramesh, former Director General of Meteorology at IMD. In agricultural regions, these see-sawing weather patterns have started impacting crop cycles, leading to reduced yields, crop failures, and economic losses for farmers. Erratic weather, including unseasonal frosts or heat waves, can disrupt planting and harvesting schedules, affecting food production and livelihoods, says who was at the IMD helm when the country reported several extreme weather events, including Cyclone Fani, the most intense storm over the Bay of Bengal to make landfall on India's east coast since 1999.

To address erratic and extreme weather challenges, proactive measures are needed at both the local and national levels. This includes investing in climate-resilient agriculture practices, improving weather forecasting and early warning systems, enhancing infrastructure resilience, and implementing measures to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events on public health, he suggests. Marginalized communities too are all set to face health and income strains amid climate challenges. Vaibhav Chaturvedi, a fellow at Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), summarises the looming challenges ahead, stating, "Globally, India is the fifth-most vulnerable country. While the frequency and intensity of extreme events are increasing, we are left with less than a decade to adhere to the Sendai Framework; course correction needs to have a razor-sharp focus on curtailing the compounded impacts of climate extremes. There is no denying that the climate is changing and it is changing fast."



# AN ITALIAN HOLIDAY



Brescia offers a perfect blend of history, natural beauty, and culinary delights, its ancient ruins, the relaxing Lake Garda, or the vineyards of Ca'del Bosco, this little known part of Italy is sure to enchant you, says **PAWAN SONI**

We have long known Milan as the fashion capital of the world. The city's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, a luxury shopping complex, is home to many big designer brands. However, Northern Italy offers much more than just Milan's Duomo. Boasting a history dating back to 753 BC and inhabited for over 850,000 years, Italy is a destination known for its museums, cathedrals, churches, and more. On this trip, I ventured to the Brescia province near Milan, an ancestral town less touristy than Milan. In fact, most Italians I spoke with had yet to explore Brescia, which is also part of the Lombardy region. To reach Brescia, I boarded a local train from Milan Centrale railway station. This station is a sight to behold, with its beautiful and elegant architecture rivaling many tourist attractions worldwide. The 70-minute train ride cost just ₹7.5 and offered a glimpse into local life. Amidst reading, chatting, and enjoying the ride, I hardly noticed any tourists. The view outside was breathtaking, overlooking farms, factories, canals, and the elegant Alps mountains. Nestled in Lombardy, Brescia is the region's second-largest city, often overshadowed by its more famous neighbours. However, this hidden gem has much to offer, including a rich history and picturesque surroundings. It has been a major industrial hub since pre-Roman times. History enthusiasts will be thrilled by Brescia's well-preserved Roman ruins, such as the Capitolium and the Teatro Romano. The Capitolium, a temple dedicated to the Capitoline Triad of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, stands as a testament to the city's ancient past. The Teatro Romano, an ancient Roman theatre, provides a glimpse into Brescia's theatrical traditions. Capriano del Colle, a small commune known for its wineries, houses the municipal department in Palazzo Bocca, a



building with rich heritage dating back to the late 17th century. I had the pleasure of enjoying a meal, courtesy of the Italian Trade Agency, in this beautiful landmark building. A highlight of visiting Brescia is a trip to Lake Garda, a short drive away. Italy's largest lake, Lake Garda, is renowned for its crystal-clear waters and picturesque towns. Sirmione, with its medieval castle and natural hot springs, is a popular destination for those seeking relaxation. For wine lovers, a visit to Ca'del Bosco is a must. This renowned winery produces Franciacorta sparkling wines using the traditional Champagne method. Visitors can tour the vineyards and cellars and enjoy a tasting of the winery's exquisite wines. The vineyard's beauty rivals that of any tourist destination, with the bottling plant and cellar areas artistically designed. This destination deserves at least half a day of your time and is one of the most beautiful vineyards I have visited. No visit to Brescia is complete without exploring



the iconic Vittoria Alata, or Winged Victory, a stunning marble statue dating back to the Roman era. This masterpiece, depicting the goddess Nike, is a symbol of Brescia's rich history and is housed in the city's Santa Giulia Museum, located in a former monastery with roots tracing back to the 8th century. Just a short distance from Brescia lies the serene beauty of the Iseo Lake area, surrounded by picturesque towns like Iseo and Sarnico. This area offers a peaceful retreat from city life, with leisurely walks along the lake, exploration of charming villages, and savouring of delicious local cuisine. Monte Isola, Italy's largest lake island, is a must-visit, offering stunning views and a tranquil atmosphere. Brescia offers a perfect blend of history, natural beauty, and culinary delights. Whether exploring ancient ruins, relaxing by Lake Garda, or sipping fine wine at Ca'del Bosco, Brescia is sure to enchant you.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

## JOYFUL GOAN NOSTALGIA IN A BOUTIQUE SETTING

Once a humble 125-room budget haven, now transformed into a sophisticated 135-room Joie de Vivre by Hyatt, Ronil Goa marks a significant milestone as the first of its kind in India and Southwest Asia, says **RUPALI DEAN**

During a weekend journey to Goa, there is lots to revel in, like vibrant takeovers at popular bars while navigating traffic warnings amidst local insights. Grateful for tranquillity amid burgeoning tourism, the allure of undiscovered venues fuels a persistent fear of missing out. Today's Goa contrasts starkly with the nostalgic reminiscences of the 1990s and early 2000s, as stories of a quieter, untouched era blend with the vibrant, bustling present. Ronil Goa, a Joie de Vivre by Hyatt in Calangute, intriguingly connects these divergent facets of Goa's evolving narrative. At Ronil's cherished gem with a legacy spanning over 35 years, I discovered a captivating fusion of past and present. Tucked away along the Calangute-Baga Road, the resort's unassuming facade belies the vibrant haven that unfolds beyond its doors — two distinct blocks flanking serene pools and an inviting on-site restaurant. My journey began with a warm welcome in true Goan style — a delightful coffee-rum shot that set the stage for the energetic vibe of the resort. Straying from convention, the check-in process eschewed the traditional reception in favour of the lively ambience at Patrão's, the round-the-



clock lobby bar where tantalizing cocktails and local bites awaited. The unique touch came as DJ Maria greeted me with an iPad in hand, ready to customize the property's musical offerings based on my preferences, ensuring a personalized soundtrack for my entire stay.

### JOIE DE VIVRE

JdV, short for *joie de vivre*, epitomizes the essence of simple joy in living. At this property, 'the hub' reigns as the focal point, boasting a vibrant pool, complete with a swim-up bar, cosy cabanas, sunken beds perfect for unwinding with cocktails, and a wood-fired oven for delectable pizzas and poolside barbecues. Ideal for those seeking a dynamic holiday experience, the rooms in this block exude a high-energy ambience. With the pool remaining open until 2 am, spontaneous midnight swims are just a PJ change away, accompanied by a soundtrack that shifts gears



post-10 pm. For a more serene retreat, opt for accommodations in the second block to escape into tranquillity and escape. Here, a peaceful pool awaits, providing a relaxing atmosphere for a leisurely dip until 10 pm. Whether craving lively vibes

or seeking calm repose, JdV offers a tailored experience to suit your holiday preferences. In my Deluxe room, overlooking the tranquillity pool, thoughtful design elevates the stay experience to a new level of sophistication. Unveiling smart design touches that exude practical

luxury, a sliding mirror serves as an elegant door to the wardrobe, while textures adorn the walls in lieu of conventional artwork typically found in hotel rooms. A generously sized bathroom mirror accented with a border LED light offer both functionality and style.

### FACT BOX

#### WHERE?

Calangute - Baga Rd, Saunta Vaddo, Goa, Baga, Goa: 403516  
TEL: 08326941234

(The author, an acclaimed lifestyle and travel writer, has been awarded the Best Food Writer in the country by the Indian Culinary Forum, WACS and the Ministry of Tourism)

For tea enthusiasts, a selection of Tea Trunk blends awaits, sourced from the locally renowned Goa-based brand that boasts a tea room in Fontainhas. Additionally, a French Press stands ready, showcasing the exclusive Ronil special sunrise and sunset coffee blends. Opening the balcony doors during the day allowed the melodies from outside to mingle with my sanctuary — though as night fell, the desire for tranquillity surfaced, and the music lingering until 1 am required a gradual adjustment.

#### CHILL ZONE

Indulging in a culinary adventure at the Ronil Bistro led by head chef Karan Kohli quickly became a delightful ritual during my stay. For lunch, the fish curry, rice, *kismoor*, and *tindli* pickle effortlessly stole the show, showcasing Chef Kohli's culinary prowess. Come dinnertime, the poolside ambience paired perfectly

with the fresh, pillowy sourdough pizzas and the BBQ a true highlight of the evening. While the house made churros come highly recommended by the team for dessert, I found the ice cream equally captivating. Sourced from Goa's renowned Cream Choc, the pistachio gelato stood out as a refreshing conclusion to lunch and a comforting midnight snack in the quiet of my room. Night owls are in for a treat with the complimentary lager tucked away in the minibar, a perfect companion for those late-night moments of relaxation. The property's bespoke experiences, from bonfires to barbecues, floating breakfasts, and poolside picnics, are meticulously curated to foster unforgettable moments to relish. While the property gleams with modernity, it intertwines a subtle thread of yesteryears, evoking tales of Goa's bygone charm that now linger in whispers. Amidst the staff's offerings for lively bar crawls and exploratory visits to Chapora Fort lies a unique opportunity to embrace the cocoon of nostalgia within Ronil Goa's embrace — a place where cherished memories are reincarnated, fostering an ambience that transcends mere tourist trappings.

RUPALI DEAN absorbs an enticing feast at Burma Burma on the occasion of a festival that cultivates the spirit of togetherness and connection

# CELEBRATE BURMA'S THINGYAN FESTIVAL OF HARVEST

At the core of the Thingyan Festival celebrations at Burma Burma resides the "Village Set", a harmonious dining experience for two that unites individuals through a delightful assortment of authentic Burmese delicacies presented artfully on a flat, woven tray, cultivating a spirit of togetherness and connection amongst guests. For aficionados of Burmese cuisine, an enticing dining celebration awaits from April 11 to May 19, with a curated menu celebrating Thingyan — the harvest festival; a cultural jubilation steeped in tradition, epitomizing renewal and transformation through symbolic water splashing. Extending well beyond Burma's realms, this festivity harmonizes with New Year and harvest revelries across Asia. The native Burmese *Padauk* flower, blossoming during this auspicious occasion, adorns the landscape, mirroring the festival's infectious spirit. Experience a culinary voyage in Yangon this season, where diners are enveloped in a celebration of flavours through a specially-crafted menu that highlights the diverse and rich tapestry of Burmese cuisine. Groups of loved ones come together to enjoy an array of small plates bursting with authentic tastes, complemented by sweet indulgences that leave a lingering desire for another visit. Immerse yourself in an array of traditional Burmese home-style dishes and invigorating beverages exclusive to this limited-time offering at Burma Burma, available not only in Delhi NCR but also in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad. My dining experience was truly remarkable. Each sip of Twilight, a vibrant blend of mango puree, coconut, Yakult, and fizz, was a delightful prelude to the Plum Sour, a refreshing mix of plum puree, lime, ginger ale, and black grass jelly that tingled my taste buds. El Dragon, with its exotic mix of dragon fruit, coconut water, litchi water, and elderflower syrup, was a light and refreshing choice. Exploring Yangon's culinary scene, the Sweet Lime & Shallot Salad intrigued with its tangy mix. Each bite evoked market flavours, setting the tone for the



## FAST FACTS

Enjoy festive menus across multiple locations in Delhi NCR (DLF Cyber Hub-Gurgaon, DLF Mall of India Noida and Select City Walk, from April 11 to May 19 2024.

(The author, an acclaimed lifestyle and travel writer, has been awarded the Best Food Writer in the country by the Indian Culinary Forum, WACS and the Ministry of Tourism)



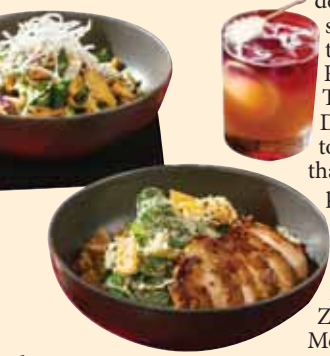
showcasing the rich flavours of Burmese produce. The Roselle & Mushroom Stir Fry, a Chin tribe specialty, featured sour roselle leaves and mushrooms stir-fried with garlic, bird's eye chili, and turmeric, offering a tangy twist typical of Burmese cuisine. Wrapping up my meal was the Banana Sanwin Makin, a traditional semolina cake with banana, strawberry, coconut cream, and poppy seeds — a sweet conclusion. To top it off, the Lemon Poppy Seed Ice Cream, with zesty lemon and black poppy seeds, and the complimentary *Mont Lone Yay Paw*, a festive treat of glutinous rice flour dumplings filled with palm jaggery and coconut, added a perfect finishing touch to my culinary journey. And Musk, a fragrant blend of muskmelon, honey, lavender white tea cold brew, and poppy seeds, was a perfect finale to my meal. The culinary journey beautifully intertwined Burmese traditions with the diversity of Asian flavours, making the Thingyan celebration a memorable experience filled with joy, camaraderie, and delectable dishes.

# PF CHANG'S NOW IN GURUGRAM

You may have indulged in chicken lettuce wraps at various Asian eateries, yet the pioneering credit belongs to P.F. Chang's. Established by Paul Flemming and Philip Chiang, the inaugural establishment debuted in 1993 in Scottsdale, Arizona, and has since grown exponentially - boasting over 300 locations worldwide. Now, the Asian dining spot taps the Delhi NCR market with Chang's first outlet opening at DLF Cyberhub in Gurugram

BY RUPALI DEAN

What can guests look forward to? 'A joyful experience centered on life, family, and delicious food,' as described by Ramit Mittal, Executive Chairman & Director of Gourmet Investments Pvt Ltd, who brought this renowned Asian dining destination to the country first in Mumbai this year, complete with all its distinctive features, be it in the ambiance or the cuisine. As you enter P.F. Chang's, you're greeted by the iconic statue of a horse, symbolizing strength and loyalty. Once inside, you'll be surrounded by the classic red and gold décor, featuring a dragon, katana, and a cherry blossom tree. The open kitchen allows you to witness the chefs skillfully working at the woks, while the lively bar area offers an array of colourful and inviting beverages to explore. Indulge in the culinary delights with their iconic 'OG' Chang's Lettuce Wraps and a tantalizing array of signature dishes like Dynamite Prawns, Chang's Spicy Chicken and Kung Pao Chicken, all paying homage to Cecelia Chiang's culinary legacy. Setting a new standard for Indian diners, P.F. Chang's in India stands out by offering a range of vegetarian and Jain options besides an entire new range of sushi delights, steamed dumplings and entrees. I was particularly impressed by the exquisite flavours of the Asparagus and Peas Dumplings, the boldness of the Singaporean street-style noodles, and the unique twist of the Samba Roll. Noteworthy is the brand's dedication to healthy dining by abstaining from MSG in their dishes. Complete your gastronomic journey with



demonstrated through signature dishes such as the Spicy Kimchi Fried Rice, and Mongolian Tenderloin. Describing the process akin to a graceful dance rather than mere cooking, the precision and skill involved make it a culinary poetry in motion. Teetotalers should go for the interesting carafes like the Zen Garden Passion Fruit Mojito. However, for those seeking a lift in spirits, the restaurant will be offering an enticing cocktail menu. Featuring a range of classics like Margaritas, and innovative mixes of gin and whiskey, there's a libation to delight every taste bud and complement the Asian cuisine perfectly. Standout options include the likes of Midnight in Shanghai and Japanese Old Fashioned. Mittal highlights that the experience transcends typical Asian dining; it's a hub for memorable celebrations. Whether it's a milestone like a 50th birthday or a simple gathering to honour a friend's career move, the restaurant elevates every occasion with a touch of elegance. Expect golden table mats, specialized chopsticks, and unique candle holders that add a luxurious flair to your dining experience.

## FACT BOX

P.F. Chang's, Gurgaon Where? P.F. Chang's, Unit No. 6, Ground Floor, DLF Cyber City, DLF Phase 2, Sector 24, Gurugram  
Timings: 12 pm to 1 am  
Reservations: +918655894667 or +918655894668



# Capo Pizza Opens Cloud Kitchens in Delhi and Gurugram



Capo Pizza, renowned for its commitment to crafting authentic gourmet pizzas with a modern twist, is proud to announce the launch of its cloud kitchens in Delhi and Gurgaon. As the demand for high-quality and convenient dining experiences continues to grow, Capo Pizza is poised to deliver the true taste of Italy directly to the doorsteps of pizza enthusiasts across the region. The new cloud kitchens in Delhi and Gurgaon mark an exciting milestone for Capo Pizza, further expanding its reach and accessibility to urban professionals, families, and food enthusiasts who appreciate the finest in Italian cuisine. With a focus on premium ingredients, expert craftsmanship, and exceptional customer service, Capo Pizza aims to redefine the pizza delivery experience in the region.

eco-friendly packaging and practices to minimize its environmental footprint and contribute to a healthier planet. To celebrate the launch of its cloud kitchens in Delhi and Gurgaon, Capo Pizza is offering special promotions and discounts for a limited time. Customers can place their orders conveniently through the Capo Pizza website or popular food delivery platforms. ABOUT CAPO PIZZA Capo Pizza is all about crafting authentic gourmet pizzas with a modern twist. Their cloud kitchens are situated in Delhi and Gurgaon, bringing the true taste of Italy directly to pizza enthusiasts' doorsteps. Their menu features a diverse selection of pizzas, from classic Margherita to gourmet options like Pesto margherita pizza. Each pizza is carefully crafted by skilled chefs who are dedicated to delivering a gastronomic experience that delights the senses and leaves a lasting impression. In addition to its commitment to quality and authenticity, Capo Pizza is also focused on sustainability, employing



# Deep, Delicious Dive into Old Delhi Delights



By PAWAN SONI

Old Delhi is a foodie paradise, especially in areas like Chandni Chowk and Jama Masjid, where hidden gems await. I have been exploring food walks in the area long before it became popular. During Navratras, my friend Rajesh Tara led us to some vegetarian places, and I blindly followed. When you frequent a place, you tend to stick to your favourites. Each bylane in Old Delhi offers something new; you just need to be open-minded.



Here are some places we tried: **Omni Kachodi Waala:** An old shop claiming almost 70 years of history. Open only on Sundays, the crispy kachodi with delicious *aloo sabji* is a must-try. Priced at ₹15 per kachodi, they offer Aloo and Dal varieties as well. **Lotan ke Choley Kulche:** Long queues for its spicy choley served with soft kulcha. Adjust spice levels wisely, as it can be intense. They offer *choley ka paani* at an additional cost of ₹10 per glass, or with butter at ₹20, which adds the required flavour.

**Standard Sweets:** A proper restaurant serving small *bhatura-sized pooris* with *aloo-choley sabji* mix. Unique for adding a kofta in the sabji, priced at ₹130, it is a delicious treat, albeit a bit expensive compared to the others. **Ram Swaroop Halwai:** Known for *bedmi poori* and *nagori-halwa*, this shop may be popular for pricing but less for taste. Priced at ₹20 for 2 *pooris* or ₹15 for 2 pieces of *nagori-halwa*, the *pooris* might taste a bit off with the burnt oil and the quality is not as good as Shyam Sweets. **Jain Sandwich:** Closed on Sundays, this shop serves fruit sandwiches, perfect for the summer with sliced bread loaded with butter, mango chunks, and dry fruits. There are many more shops like *Kuremal ki Kulfi*, *Ashok ki Chaat*, and *Bade Miyan ki Kheer*, among others. These are just the vegetarian options. Email me your favorite places, and I'll include them in the next article, along with some non-vegetarian outlets in the area.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

## Fear of the other



**GOOD SPORT**  
**ROHIT MAHAJAN**

**A**S democracy begins its dance, xenophobia begins to peak — as do various other phobias of distrust of the 'other'. The fear of the stranger can be explained in evolutionary terms. In his book *'Snakes, Sunsets, and Shakespeare'*, evolutionary biologist Gordon Orians says: "Throughout human history, we have distrusted people outside our clan, our tribe... We believe strangers will do us harm. Why? In deep time, hominids outside the family group were likely to be a raiding party."

We're not living in ancient times now, of course, and wars and raids across the borders are very, very rare; we now know meetings with strangers often go very well — in foreign lands, two persons, each a stranger to the other, are often at their best behaviour because they believe themselves to be representatives of their tribe/country. We also know that danger often lurks at home, in the shape of predators who may sexually exploit the young, or relatives who may covet property or other possessions. It's not the stranger who's the biggest danger when you're seemingly safe.

Sport, the celebration of extreme athleticism and teamwork, chips at xenophobia and racism of an athlete, reducing it to dust; but the fans, roused by tribal feelings for their team, often turn despicable bigots.

This writer has heard chants of 'go back to your country' — peppered with unprintable expletives — spat by home team fans at Indian and Pakistani fans in cricket grounds of England and Australia; or horrible exchanges between Brazilian and Argentinean football fans in Rio de Janeiro; West Indian players called 'kahi' by fans in Indian grounds — and

a black England player called 'kaliya' in an England ground! During the IPL, Indian teammates of Daren Sammy, the former West Indies captain, used to call him 'kahu', and he believed it to be a term of endearment.

Indian sportspersons have spoken about racism — colourism, rather — in sport. Abhinav Mukund, the Tamil Nadu cricketer who has played for India, spoke of being stigmatised for his dark skin: "Over the years, it has become normal to be called 'blacky'." Bhaskar Pillay, possibly the last genius of Indian hockey, said a few years ago: "I was in a team of beautiful players... I saw that I didn't look like them, I was dark. I felt even worse when we travelled away, to Australia and

against the SC community; in 2022, during a Test between India and Bangladesh, an Indian player was heard calling a teammate 'chhapri' — a derogatory term for persons from an oppressed caste, Chhappaband.

Ending the notion of strangeness of strangers is the antidote to xenophobia. Sport, and travelling to follow sport, helps that — exiting echo chambers is a privilege that must not be missed, for it emancipates the mind.

The first Pakistanis I met were teenaged tennis players who were in Chandigarh to play in a tournament over three decades ago; they were affable and funny and it was easy to chat with them in Hindi or Punjabi — but it was practically impossible to talk with our own Leander Paes because of the language barrier. The realisation dawned early, then — the stranger from an enemy country wasn't such a stranger, after all.

Chatting with Bangladesh cricket fans during a World Cup match in Melbourne in 2015, this writer was urged by them to pray for their country's win; they were visibly shocked to learn that they were dealing with an atheist, who last prayed some 25 years previously. They were able to absorb the shock, however, and their friendliness didn't turn to disgust. Strangers with diametrically opposite worldviews can get along well.

Religion and nationalism and sport can make a dangerous brew, and people often go to stadia not to enjoy the contest, but to let out the rage and toxicity work, family, society — life — create in them.

In representative democracy, leaders symbolise society's infirmities and strengths, but do the 88% crorepati MPs (2019 Lok Sabha) truly represent our society in which 90% population earns less than Rs 3 lakh a year? That Lok Sabha had 22% MPs facing serious criminal charges — it seems politics attracts and rewards individuals of a certain kind, who stop at nothing in pursuit of power and money.

As happens often in sport, during elections there's an outpouring of toxicity, with parties stoking fear — fear of being swamped, robbed, dispossessed, displaced by the 'other'.

But do vote, for in it lies our only hope.

**People often go to watch sport not to enjoy the contest, but to let out the rage and toxicity family, work, society — life — create in them**

Europe, because everyone is so fair. You feel inferior in a social situation... Even now, at red-carpet events, people treat you differently, the organisers, the media."

Religious tribalism drives hatred, too. In October 2021, Mohammed Shami was horribly trolled after India's defeat to Pakistan in the T20 World Cup; unsurprisingly, then captain Virat Kohli denounced the "spineless" trolls in the strongest possible language for "attacking someone over their religion".

Casteism, another sickness of Indian society and, thus, democracy, afflicts sport, too. Cricketer Suresh Raina has spoken about how his (high) caste made it easier for him to embrace Chennai's culture; Yuvraj Singh was arrested briefly in 2021 after making offensive remarks

## Memories that food triggers



**RAAJA BHASIN**

**T**RAVELLING around, one has had good food, terrible food, excellent food and strange food. Also, 'food' that should not be called food. Years ago, when Hong Kong had just gone back to China, tired after travel, we searched high and we searched low for a vegetarian meal. None seemed to be forthcoming and we settled for bread and jam. At least that was available. That was a far-off place. Let's come closer home and to some other minor forays into uncharted gastronomic territory. Places that are relatively free of the 'edible menace'. At a small *dhaba* in Spiti, one asked for *thupka*, which was something that one was familiar with and fond of. The soup was a generous dose of red chilli powder stirred in tepid water with an afterthought of noodles. At another time, in the village of Janjheli, tucked in the inner hills around Mandi, another *dhaba* offered meat in *rajma*. The thought of mutton cooked in kidney beans sounded deliciously exotic, but the result that arrived in a steel bowl was a disappointment — the flavour of both had been lost. This was no fusion, this was more like culinary fission.

Janjheli, home of that rare meal of *rajma*-meat, like other parts of the Mandi parliamentary constituency, is going to see a fair bit of activity in the coming weeks. There is another place in another district that also witnesses its share of action, and is one where election hopefuls go to seek blessings of the divine.

The temple of Baglamata lies near the little village of Bankhandi in the district of Kangra. It is nestled in a dip by an ancient *peepal* tree and the highway takes a long sweeping bend around it. Symbolic of the colour associated with the goddess, this is painted a bright yellow. Enshrined at various places around India, Baglamukhi is considered the eighth of the 10 Mahavidyas, the 'Great Goddesses of Wisdom'. In belief, she holds the cudgel that dispels and destroys a believer's illusions — this great power can also destroy enmity. It is widely believed that Baglamata's blessings bring victory in elections and without them, there is no mandate.

It was three decades ago in an old Ambassador car that a driver, who seemed to know every cow and goat in every village, took us to Bankhandi. My sister and I were taking what would perhaps be the last trip of just the two of us. After this, there would be spouses, children, the roll call of responsibility and a separation of several thousand miles. We would be lucky if we met once a year and talked about the weather and compared the noses and teeth of children who were now cousins; discussed whose jaw had originated with which grandfather. As we knew then, our parents would soon be gone and the bonds of the time when we were inseparable could loosen. We



**At home, we have eaten the last of the season's makki ki roti and sarson ka saag, rekindling an unforgettable trip**

knew and did not speak of it, but this trip was to be the last chapter of what remained of childhood.

We rattled past the earth and stone walls covered with bright bracts of bougainvillea; we walked by banyans that proclaimed sacred domains. Karam Singh, the driver, had worked everything out for us; we were friends now. Ten days of companionship had taken care of that. He was the older one and he decided whom we would meet and where we would eat. Apart from a brief and passing delusion, one has had no plans of entering politics. Going to the temple of Baglamata was simply for *darshan* and lunch at this temple, that lies on the road between the village of Dehra and the town of Dharamsala.

In belief, Baglamata, the goddess at Bankhandi, is a Vaishnavi who shuns meat and animal sacrifices. We had been to the main temple and to the smaller one that enshrined a large Shivalinga. By the side is the temple's *bhandara* or storeroom. Smoke was wafting out of the windows and in the darkened haze of the room, a wood fire burned. We took our shoes off outside and were given our places on low wooden stools. Partly squatting and partly sitting, we watched in silence as the fresh corn flour was kneaded and the ball flattened by hand to make a small *roti*, which was then whirled into position to join the other half a dozen over the large griddle. The meal was eaten in concentrated silence, with just the crackle of the fire and the occasional clatter of clang of a dish. Before and since, I've never seen or tasted *makki rotis* that have been whiter or sweeter. The corn had been ground slowly in a watermill and every fragment of flavour had been extracted and preserved; the corn, too, had come from the fields that belonged to the temple and had been sun-dried. For measure, a large steel bowl with white butter stood by for hefty dollops over the *rotis*. With this was the *saag*, leaves of the mustard plant that had been painstakingly cooked over a slow fire and then ground to a fine consistency. The meal ended with a glass of *lassi*.

At home, we have eaten the last of the season's *makki ki roti* and *sarson ka saag* and another little memory has been triggered by a morsel of food.

## Magic moments of India's first election



**LT GEN BALJIT SINGH (RETD)**

**I** WAS at home on winter vacation in a mofussil town of Punjab, where my father was posted as the Deputy Commissioner, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was scheduled to address an election rally in the last week of December 1951. Here I was to witness the diligent administrator, criss-crossing his district from dawn to dusk, ensuring that all his subordinate revenue functionaries down to the *patwari* and the police constabulary at each *thana* understood the import of the historic change-in-the-making, and their onerous responsibility to maintain peace for free and fair polling.

The PM's motor cavalcade was late by an hour and the crowd of several thousand peasants was becoming restive. However, the moment Nehru, in a brown woollen *achkan* and white *churidar*, mounted the podium, the audience fell into instant reverential silence. Though I was privileged to sit on one of the few chairs upon the ros-

trum, I too was so mesmerised in the shadow of the great man that I registered not a word of his speech.

He concluded, asking the audience to arise and join him in a full-throated chorus of *'Bharat Mata Ki Jai Ho'*, three times over! And that chant persisted for at least the next half hour, till the last of the gathering had dispersed!

Perhaps an unparalleled episode which captures the magic moments of India's first election comes from the book *'The Vanishing Indian Tiger: Diary of a Forest Officer'*, edited and gifted to us by the late Vice Admiral MP Awati. A Divisional Forest Officer posted in the interiors of Madhya Pradesh had set out on a 106-km-long bumpy ride over a dirt track to establish a polling booth in Pathera village, along with one clerk, two unarmed

police constables and a sealed ballot box.

The district revenue authorities had alerted the headman of the village to expect the DFO's party. So, all the 20 huts had been given a fresh coat of mud and lime-wash for the big day. At the weekly market in their vicinity, the villagers had even acquired three national flags which were already aflutter, one each atop the hut of the headman and over the two huts vacated for the election party and the election booth!

By 10 am the next morning, the entire village of about 60 persons of all ages had gathered outside the election booth. With utter humility and solemnity, the womenfolk first applied *kum-kum* on the ballot box and then garlanded it! The DFO then called out the 12 eligible listed voters and explained the object of the election, who the candidates were, what they stood for and the significance of their vote.

Of course, we shall never know what passed through their minds but when the last ballot was cast by 11.30 am, they all arose in unison and led by the headman returned to their huts, cheerfully chorusing aloud, *'Bharat Mata Ki Jai Ho'*.

Two days later, the sealed ballot box was matter-of-factly deposited at the district headquarters' treasury.

Have we frittered away that wealth of civilised innocence of a nation for the mockery of hustings as they have come to pass?

**Have we frittered away the wealth of civilised innocence of a nation for the mockery of hustings as they have come to pass?**

## How Shakespeare speaks to us about us



**GJV PRASAD**

**W**HEN this column celebrates birth anniversaries of famous writers, how can April go by without a column on William Shakespeare (April 23, 1564 — April 23, 1616), on his 460th birth anniversary. It is true that Shakespeare came to us with colonialism, may even have been introduced to India as part of a 'civilising mission', may have been seen as a good foundation for an education meant to turn out officials working for the white rulers, but Shakespeare came to occupy a different place in the theatrical (and later cinematic) world and was also seen as a playwright who could be approached and read from

various Indian points of view. It is very often said that after the blackout of Shakespeare during the high nationalist phase, we got back to his plays only after Independence with a new confidence, beginning with translations and productions by Utpal Dutt in Bengali.

While this may be true, early productions and translations of Shakespeare constantly Indianised his plays. While visiting troupes performed Shakespeare in Bombay (Mumbai) and Calcutta (Kolkata) from the second half of the 18th century, his plays began to be performed by Indians in the 19th century. In Mysore, the Maharaja was the patron of the Palace Company which was formed in 1881. They performed Shakespeare's plays in Kannada and the translations changed the settings and the names of characters so as to not alienate the audiences. This resulted in interesting changes. Ananda Rao, who translated *'Romeo and Juliet'*, writes that many parts of the play would appeal to only an English audience and had to be changed. Most significantly, he changes the ending of *'Ramavarma-Lilavati'*

(1889) by adding a short scene where the friar prays to God that the lovers be saved, and God obliges. The lovers come back alive and live happily ever after. Ananda Rao felt that according to Indian conventions, plays should have a happy ending. You can see such changes in many Indian languages.

While changing names and settings is almost to be expected, it is this imposition of Indian theatrical conventions that

make late 19th century translations/performance interesting. Girish Chandra Ghosh, one of the major figures in Bengali theatre, translated *'Macbeth'* in 1893. The changes he effects in the play start right at the beginning! While he kept close to Shakespeare otherwise, the structure he adopts is of Sanskrit plays. Sanskrit plays begin with *naandi*, a prayer or benedictory verse, followed by a prologue that speaks about the play to be performed. Ghosh says here that this play of his is his token of appreciation to the great playwright Shakespeare. There are other ways in which Ghosh Indianises the play, making it speak to the Bengali audience.

All this is to point out that we have a history of appropriating Shakespeare's plays, enriching our theatres, while our conventions and worldview had an impact on the plays. So, while it is true that Utpal Dutt brought insouciance to the translation and performance of Shakespeare, which could be seen later in Habib Tanvir's versions as well, it is only a renewed attempt by a resurgent Independent India. So Shakespeare was per-

formed not just in different languages, but also in different performance traditions like Kathakali.

Shakespeare has had such an impact that we see echoes of his plays in many of our movies made in India. However, I want to highlight the adaptations of Shakespeare by Hindi cinema which I have seen and liked. Gulzar's *'Angoor'* (1982), which is based on *'Comedy of Errors'*, is a brilliant adaptation. I recommend that you should watch it if you haven't or even if you did a long time ago! Jumping to this century, I will recommend Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy — *'Maqbool'* (2003), *'Omkaara'* (2006) and *'Haider'* (2014). They are based on *'Macbeth'*, *'Othello'* and *'Hamlet'*, respectively. *'Macbeth'* becomes a gangster film set in the Bombay underworld, *'Omkaara'* about the political system in Uttar Pradesh, and *'Haider'* about the Kashmir conflict in the mid-1990s. Thus, the colonial imposition Shakespeare still inspires and entertains us, nor have his plays lost their political edge under a different sky! He can speak to us about us!

**We have a history of appropriating his plays, enriching our theatres and cinema, with our conventions & worldview impacting the works**