



# SCIENCE

## Cracking the mystery of how the chemical origins of life formed

The Hindu Bureau

Heat flows through cracks in rocks, such as those found in volcanoes or geothermal systems, can purify molecules relevant to the chemical origins of life, laboratory experiments described in a study published in the journal *Nature* reveal. The study offers an explanation for how the first building blocks of life may have formed from complex chemical mixtures.

The formation of biopolymers and their components was a key moment in the origins of life on early Earth. However, these pathways are hard to replicate in the laboratory. Often, the number of by-products forming from these complex reactions means the formation of biologically relevant building blocks occurs in near-negligible amounts. Previous attempts to devise a purification method have been li-

imited by their specificity, being unable to isolate a wide range of molecules at once. Christof Mast from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany and others use geologically inspired chambers with minuscule cracks to separate over 50 molecules relevant to prebiotic life from complex mixtures of amino acids, nucleobases, nucleotides and other compounds. Vast networks of similar

cracks can be found in the Earth's crust and are thought to have been abundant on Earth before life formed. The mixture was filtered along a temperature gradient, which enables the isolation and enrichment of specific molecules, owing to slight differences in their molecular structure. The experimental results show that even a moderate temperature difference was sufficient to separate and purify several

types of prebiotic molecules, including 2-aminozoles and amino acids, increasing their concentrations by a factor of ten and three orders of magnitude, respectively. The concentration ratios could be improved further by increasing the size of the network of cracks and are shown to be successful across a variety of temperatures, solvents and pH values. The experimental conditions were shown to facil-

itate the coupling of two glycine molecules, a starting point in peptide synthesis, aided by forming concentrations five times higher than the starting mixture. The success of this method suggests that naturally occurring geothermal heat flows could have driven this separation in the early Earth and provided an efficient method for producing the compounds necessary to study the origins of life.

### SNAPSHOTS



#### Fiber coupled to the body enables textile electronics

A flexible electronic fiber that utilises the human body as part of the circuit enables textile-based electronics without the need for batteries or chips, a study report. According to the researchers, the approach is well-suited for scalable manufacture of comfortable fiber-based electronics for a wide range of applications, including "smart" clothing. The soft, thin fiber that enables wireless visual-digital interactions utilises the human body as part of the circuit. The approach harvests electromagnetic energy.



#### 'Tightening of muscles could destroy epithelial cells'

In asthma, the tightening of muscles around the bronchi causes damage to the airway by squeezing and destroying epithelial cells, which promotes the airway inflammation and mucus production often associated with an asthma attack, researchers report. The findings suggest that preventing the mechanical damage rather than treating only its downstream symptoms, could pave the way for therapies that stop the asthma inflammatory cycle. More than 300 million people worldwide suffer from asthma.



#### Antibody therapy protects large animals from Nipah

Scientists have developed a potent antibody treatment that can protect large and small animals from infections with the Nipah virus, a deadly emerging pathogen with mortality rates as high as 40% to 90% in humans. The antibody treatment named h1F5 targets the prefusion form of the Nipah virus F protein. In hamsters, the researchers found that administering the antibody one day after infection led to a 100% survival rate. It protected macaques.

## Influenza A H5N1 detected in dairy cows in 6 states in the U.S.

The exact extent of the spread of H5N1 in cows has not yet been ascertained since cattle are not routinely tested for avian influenza and the symptoms have been relatively mild

Bani Jolly  
Vinod Scaria

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a highly contagious viral infection that primarily affects birds. An emerging new lineage 2.3.4.4b of avian influenza has been spreading across the globe since late 2020, carried by migratory birds following specific routes. This panzootic has a significant effect on the avian population with disastrous consequences to the ecology and significant economic loss affecting poultry across the world. In rare instances, the virus can infect mammals from birds causing spillovers, and in recent years, several such instances of spillovers spanning over 200 species have been noted, the most recent being polar bears in Antarctica. Close contact with infected animals could mean the virus could spill over infecting humans and this comes with a significantly large fatality rate.

In late March 2024, a multistate outbreak of H5N1 in dairy cows was detected in the U.S. In what started as a mystery disease affecting dairy herds in Texas, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) detected the highly pathogenic strain of the virus in herds across the states of Texas and Kansas. The affected animals displayed symptoms including loss of appetite, low-grade fever, and reduced lactation. This marked the first time H5N1 had been detected in cattle, raising concerns about potential

### H5N1 outbreak in dairy cows

The H5N1 outbreak in dairy cows began in late March 2024 in Texas



**Symptoms:** The affected animals displayed symptoms including loss of appetite, low-grade fever, and reduced lactation. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

■ This is the first time that H5N1 has been detected in cattle. It raises concerns about potential transmission routes

■ So far, H5N1 has been detected in over 12 herds from six states — Texas, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, Idaho and Ohio

■ In Texas, wild birds and cats that were in proximity to the affected farms have tested positive for the virus

■ Transmission of the virus within cattle has not yet been ruled out

■ In April 2024, a human infection of H5N1 was

reported from Texas

■ In general, the risk of infections for humans remains low, but farm workers are at a higher risk of getting infected

■ H5N1 infections in humans can range from mild symptoms to severe illness and even death

■ So far, 800 sporadic human H5N1 cases have been reported from over 20 countries, with a case-fatality ratio of 53%

transmission routes and the broader impact on the dairy and meat industry. To date, H5N1 has been detected in over 12 herds from six states — Texas, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, Idaho and Ohio.

In Texas, other animals in proximity to the affected farms — wild birds and cats — also showed signs of illness and have tested positive for the virus. The exact extent of the spread of H5N1 in cows has not yet been ascertained since cattle are not routinely tested for avian influenza and the symptoms have been relatively mild, leaving possibilities that there may be other undetected infected herds. The initial detections in late March in Texas, Kansas, and Michigan have yet to show a definitive pattern of transmis-

sion. Given the pace of the spread of infection across herds, the transmission of the virus within cattle has not yet been ruled out. Investigations are ongoing to determine the exact source of the spread to cows.

#### Genomic insights

In April 2024, a human infection of H5N1 was reported from Texas. The infected individual had contact with cows presumed to be infected with the virus. Fortunately, the patient had mild illness, with symptoms like eye redness, and has recovered after being treated with antivirals. Following this case, the CDC has reiterated that the risk of infections for humans remains low, although people with prolonged or close exposure to H5N1-infected animals

such as farm workers, are at a higher risk. This is the second case of human H5N1 infection reported from the U.S. A previous case was reported in 2022 from Colorado. Human H5N1 infections are rare but have been sporadically reported in several countries.

H5N1 infections in humans can range from mild symptoms of eye infections to severe illness including pneumonia and death. Since 2003, more than 800 sporadic human H5N1 cases have been reported to the World Health Organization from over 20 countries, with a case-fatality ratio of 53%. In January 2024, concerns about H5N1 avian influenza rose in Southeast Asia when Cambodia reported two human cases, with tragical-

ly one resulting in death.

Researchers sequenced the H5N1 virus from both the infected Texas cows and the human case and found that both viruses belonged to clade 2.3.4.4b of H5N1, with the human strain having one minor mutation potentially linked to adaptation in mammals. However, this change has not led to increased transmissibility among humans, and the overall public health risk remains low according to the CDC. Since late 2021, H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has circulated in wild birds in the U.S.

Globally, 2023 also saw potential spillover events with H5N1 linked to the deaths of seals in Russia and infections in marine mammals in Peru. Early in 2023, dead seals in Russia and infected marine mammals in Peru suggested H5N1 might jump from birds to mammals. Additionally, the U.K. reported deaths of other animals including otters and foxes due to H5N1. These incidents underscore the need for further research to understand how H5N1 might evolve and potentially adapt to different species.

In summary, while the current risk of H5N1 transmission to humans is considered low, a combined approach of disease surveillance and monitoring the virus's genetic makeup (genomic surveillance) will be crucial for managing the outbreak. (Bani Jolly is a senior scientist at Karkinos Healthcare and Vinod Scaria is a senior consultant at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation)

## Over-reliance on smear microscopy for TB detection

R. Prasad

The presumptive TB testing rate in the country increased from 1,352 per lakh population in 2022 to 1,710 per lakh population in 2023. However, even two years before the 2025 deadline that the government has set to "eliminate" TB in India, only 21% of presumptive TB testing in 2023 was upfront done using a rapid molecular diagnostic test.

According to the India TB Report 2024, which is yet to be made public, at 79%, the vast majority of presumptive TB testing was still carried out using the 100-year old sputum smear microscopy, which has low sensitivity. Ironically, compared with 2022, there has actually been a marginal decrease — from 23% to 21% — in the percentage of presumptive TB

testing offered upfront using a molecular test in 2023.

The number of molecular testing facilities in the country has increased from 5,090 in 2022 to 6,496 in 2023. Also, there was a small increase in the rate of molecular testing in 2023 compared with 2022; the number of rapid molecular tests offered for presumptive TB testing increased from 292.7 per lakh population in 2022 to 358 per lakh population in 2023.

However, this has not been reflected in an increase in the proportion of molecular testing last year compared with 2022. India has still a long way to go before it reaches the goal of offering a molecular test upfront to all presumptive TB patients, with nil reliance on smear microscopy.



**Grim choices:** The proportion of molecular testing in 2023 has not increased compared with 2022.

In 2023, 37.19 lakh patients were offered a CBNAAT test, of which 7.4 lakh people were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of 20%. In the case of TrueNat, of the 31.13 lakh patients who were tested using TrueNat, 3.3 lakh persons were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of 11%. For

smear microscopy, of the 1.89 crore persons tested, only 5.78 lakh were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of just 3%.

#### Smear microscopy

The National Strategic Plan 2017-2025 wanted to reduce the number of presumptive TB patients who are offered sputum smear

microscopy from over 9.1 million in 2015 to 5.1 million in 2023 while increasing the number of molecular tests from 40,000 in 2015 to over 14.7 million in 2023. However, as per the India TB report, in 2023, India was far from reaching the ambitious target set by NSP 2017-2025. The overreliance on smear microscopy has continued in 2023 with 79% of presumptive TB cases detected using smear microscopy and just 21% cases detected using a molecular test.

The revised National Strategic Plan 2020-2025 has raised the bar even higher for precision tests to be used for initial diagnosis.

Four years after the launch of the revised NSP, India is nowhere near meeting the targets. One of the main objectives of the revised NSP 2020-2025 is

the early detection of presumptive TB cases.

It clearly says there should be "prompt diagnosis" using highly sensitive diagnostic tests for detecting presumptive TB cases "at the first point of contact" both in the private and public sectors.

Universal drug-susceptibility testing in all drug-sensitive TB cases is crucial for early identification of drug-resistant TB. The revised NSP 2020-2025 clearly states that NTEP should provide "universal access" to drug resistance testing.

However, in 2023, the proportion of notified TB patients offered drug-susceptibility testing was just 58% as against the target of 98%. In the absence of drug-susceptibility testing, it is not possible to ascertain drug-resistant cases and offer them suitable MDR-TB medicines.



### Question Corner

#### Landslide alert

**Can large landslides be remotely detected in real-time?**

Now it is possible to remotely detect large landslides within minutes of occurrence and to quickly determine whether they are close to open water and present a tsunami hazard. Researchers at the University of Alaska Fairbanks have devised a way to determine a landslide's location, volume and potential impact. This might support the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's goal of issuing a tsunami warning within five minutes of a landslide. A prototype

system capable of real-time detection has been in place since August in the area of the Barry Arm of Prince William Sound, Alaska. It uses data from seismic stations already in the Alaska network. The method involves quickly identifying a landslide's long-period waves amid a seismic record busy with short-period waves created not only by a landslide but also by nearby earthquakes and glaciers and by human-caused activity.

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

## Will new solar power rules boost production?

### What is the Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules Order?

Jacob Koshy

#### The story so far:

To incentivise India's solar module manufacturing industry, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has brought into effect from April 1 an executive order, The Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirements for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019.

#### What is the context of the executive order?

This order was first issued by the MNRE in 2019 and requires makers of solar modules to voluntarily submit to an inspection of their manufacturing facilities by the National Institute of Solar Energy, a Ministry-affiliated body. Being on the list as an 'approved' manufacturing facility certifies a company as a legitimate manufacturer of solar panels and not a mere importer or assembler. This became necessary because India's solar industry, its claim of indigenously notwithstanding, is heavily reliant on imports of cheaper and comparable-quality solar modules from China.

Modules are multiple solar panels joined together. Solar panels are an assembly of solar cells. Despite being among the top manufacturers in the world and a commitment to scale solar installation four-fold by 2030, local production of these cells and modules is much below demand. India also has limited capacity to make the raw material of a cell – ingots, wafers – and is dependent on imported cells.

#### Why is India reliant on imports?

The creation of such a list was also aimed at restricting imports from China, which controls nearly 80% of the global supply, with the downturn in diplomatic relations between the countries also being a factor. India has ambitious plans of sourcing about 500 GW, nearly half its requirement of electricity, from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. This would mean at least 280 GW from solar power by that year or at least 40 GW of solar capacity being annually added until 2030. In the last five years, this has barely crossed 13 GW though the government has claimed that COVID-19 affected this trajectory. The difficulty is that meeting the targets require many more solar panels and component cells than India's domestic industry can supply.

#### If the list is voluntary why pay to be on it?

The major advantage of being on the list is eligibility to compete for tenders issued by the government for its flagship solar energy programmes. This includes among others the recently announced PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. The scheme envisages subsidising rooftop solar installations for nearly one crore households in the country involving an estimated subsidy of ₹75,000 crore. However, only domestic manufacturers, certified as part of the Approved Models and Manufacturers (AMM) list, would be eligible. There is also another scheme called the PM KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhijyaan) that aims to provide solar pumpsets and rural electrification. For manufacturers to be eligible to provide components under this scheme, they have to be certified as genuine local manufacturers. The government also has a ₹24,000 crore scheme, called the Production Linked Incentive Scheme, that is targeted at incentivising domestic manufacture of solar panels and their components. Eligibility for this scheme too requires one to be a bona fide local manufacturer. So far, 14 major companies have become eligible for incentives to manufacture solar modules worth 48 GW. However, these restrictions apply only to fresh projects and plants and facilities commissioned before March 2024 can rely on imported modules.

#### Is India's manufacturing capacity adequate?

Last year was a fortunate year for Indians in the solar business. China which supplies over 80% of solar components globally saw a curb in orders from the U.S. on the grounds that the former relied on "forced labour" by Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang province. Europe too scaled back imports from China and a beneficiary of this was India which exported nearly \$1 billion worth of modules in six months of 2023-24. However, reports suggest that the U.S. might roll back duties on China and this could again mean uncertainty for the future of Indian exports. It is estimated that nearly half of India's solar modules are imported from China and the demand-supply mismatch is expected to persist. The government, however, has claimed that beginning this year, there will be a significant rise in manufacturing capacity. While the list of certified manufacturers on the AMM list has grown to 82 according to the MNRE, there is yet no list of such manufacturers of solar cells, implying that India is still far away from achieving a comfortable degree of self-reliance.

## Why are Katchatheevu pacts being questioned?

What triggered the controversy? Who owns the island? How was the issue settled? What were India's gains? Will revisiting bilateral pacts solve the fishermen's issue? What has been the response in India, especially in Tamil Nadu? What about Sri Lanka?

Meera Srinivasan

#### The story so far:

In March 31, Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on social media platform 'X' that he blamed the Congress for "callously" giving away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka. He cited a media report on documents received in response to a Right to Information Act application from K. Annamalai, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Tamil Nadu president. Soon after, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a media conference, in which he sought to elaborate on Mr. Modi's allegation. Calling for a "solution", he said the bilateral agreements signed by India and Sri Lanka in 1974 and 1976, when the Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) were in power respectively at the Centre and in Tamil Nadu, displayed indifference about Katchatheevu island, and compromised Indian fishermen's rights in the Palk Strait separating India and Sri Lanka.

#### Where is Katchatheevu?

Katchatheevu is an uninhabited island spanning some 285 acres in the Palk Strait that separates Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka. More precisely, it is located 14.5 km south of Delft Island and about 16 km to the northeast of Rameswaram. It is barren, has no drinking water or infrastructure, except a sole Catholic structure dedicated to St. Anthony.

#### What was the dispute?

The dispute was over who owns Katchatheevu. Negotiations began in 1921, between the British colonial governments of Madras and Ceylon, with both sides claiming territorial ownership.



Controversy again: A view of Katchatheevu. BALACHANDAR. L

When India agreed that Katchatheevu would be in Sri Lankan territory, New Delhi obtained sovereign rights over Wadge Bank and its rich marine resources

The matter was settled some five decades later, after the Governments of India and Sri Lanka, under Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, signed two bilateral agreements in 1974 and 1976. The governments agreed that Katchatheevu falls within Sri Lanka's territory, and on a maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal to define the two countries' exclusive economic zones. With the exclusive economic zones, India and Sri Lanka agreed to exercise sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources of their respective zone. The understanding was that fishing vessels and fishermen of India and Sri Lanka shall not fish in each other's waters, territorial sea and the exclusive zone.

However, despite the historic dispute over its territorial definition, fishermen from Tamil Nadu visit Katchatheevu every March, along with their Tamil-speaking counterparts of northern Sri Lanka, for the annual St. Anthony's festival. The Indian fishermen do not require a passport to visit the island in Sri Lankan territorial waters for this purpose, because the 1974 agreement expressly permitted them to access the island for rest, drying of nets, and the festival, while prohibiting any fishing activity.

#### What did India get?

Commentary and analysis from the time, including in *The Hindu*, shows New Delhi was seen as gaining some diplomatic mileage with its neighbour, which was tilting towards China then. A few years after the liberation of Bangladesh, and alongside the difficult question of citizenship for Indian-origin Tamils who were rendered stateless in Sri Lanka, New Delhi deemed strong and close ties with Sri Lanka important. Further, New Delhi got sovereign rights over Wadge Bank, located near Kanniyakumari, and its rich marine resources. Earlier this year, the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Directorate of Hydro-Carbon put out Notice Inviting Offers (NIO) for the exploration and development of oil and gas blocks in India, under the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP). The move drew flak from residents of Kanniyakumari and environmentalists who raised concerns over such activity impacting the marine ecosystem around Wadge Bank.

#### Are fishermen arrests related to the island?

No, they are not. Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been facing arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy for many years now, for fishing illegally in Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Invariably, the arrests are made well past Katchatheevu, very close to Sri Lanka's northern shores. Northern

Sri Lankan fishermen, also Tamil speaking, have been agitating since the end of the island nation's civil war in 2009, to assert their fishing rights. The Indian fishing boats are a major impediment to their post-war recovery.

In particular, they resist the use of the bottom-trawling fishing method used by their Indian counterparts, where trawl nets go down to the seabed, and scoop out all marine organisms, including small fishes and eggs. Eager to boost its marine exports, India began encouraging mechanised trawler fishing decades ago, when the Norwegian government invested millions of dollars into modernising India's fishing fleet from the 1950s and up to the early 1970s. Owing to the practice, marine resources along Tamil Nadu's coast have depleted, pushing Indian fishermen towards the Sri Lankan coast, rich in marine biodiversity, especially shrimps. Northern Sri Lankan fishermen are opposing the use of the fishing method that Indian fishermen stubbornly hold on to, despite the two governments in 2016 agreeing to expedite the "transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest". The fishermen's conflict is a contest between Tamil-speaking fishermen in India and Sri Lanka, with those from Tamil Nadu habitually fishing illegally in Sri Lankan waters, using bottom trawlers that are banned in Sri Lanka. Although many politicians in India often conflate the two issues, Katchatheevu is not the site of this struggle, and its "retrieval" cannot be a solution to it.

#### What has been the response?

Opposition parties led by the Congress have slammed the remarks, citing the government's own position in 2015 that the previous agreements did not "involve either acquiring or ceding of territory belonging to India". Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin asked if PM Modi raised the issue of the retrieval of the Katchatheevu island with Sri Lanka once during his 10-year rule. Senior diplomats, who have led Indian missions in Sri Lanka, said questioning past agreements could damage India's credibility and impair relations with our neighbour. Former National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon told *The Hindu* that reopening the 50-year-old agreement could prove to be a "self-goal".

In what some see as a muted response from the Sri Lankan government, the country's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry has said there is no need to resume talks on a matter resolved 50 years ago. Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda has accused India of acting in self-interest "to ensure Sri Lankan fishermen do not have access" around Katchatheevu. Fishermen on both sides have voiced concern over the remarks, while reminding the two governments that much needs to be done to resolve the actual fisheries conflict that is threatening both the region's marine ecosystem and livelihoods of fisher folk who depend on it.

## What is the outlook on women's employment?

What does the India Employment Report, 2024 state about key labour market indicators? Why is women's participation in the labour force low? What are the recommendations to bring about a change in women's job prospects?

Sudipta Datta

#### The story so far:

The authors of the India Employment Report, 2024, released recently by the Institute for Human Development and the International Labour Organization, point out that key labour market indicators have improved in recent years. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) and the Unemployment Rate (UR) showed long-term deterioration between 2000 and 2019 but improved thereafter, the authors note, saying that the improvement coincides with periods of economic distress, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of two peak pandemic quarters.

#### What about women's participation?

The female LFPR is very low compared to the male counterparts; in 2023, the male LFPR was pegged at 78.5; and the women LFPR was 37. The world women LFPR rate is 49, according to the World Bank figures. The female LFPR had been steadily declining since 2000 and touched 24.5 in 2019, before inching up, particularly in rural areas. But the writers point out that notwithstanding the modest improvements,



GETTY IMAGES

Nearly two-thirds of the employment after 2019 comprised self-employed workers, among whom unpaid (women) family workers predominate

employment conditions remain poor.

Amit Basole, who teaches Economics at Azim Premji University, and heads the Centre for Sustainable Employment, explains that the increase in labour force participation has come mostly in rural areas and mostly in self-employment, which means largely unpaid work. "This suggests that it is distress resulting from the economic slowdown prior to COVID and then the pandemic itself that has contributed to women entering the labour force," he says.

Prof. Basole adds that there are some other hypotheses out there, such as improvements in measuring women's work in the Periodic Labour Force Survey and increased non-farm employment for men that has led to women substituting for men in agriculture. "But this is less likely. However, definitive evidence on the cause(s) is lacking," he notes.

#### Where are women employed?

The India Employment Report shows that it is women who largely account for the increase in self-employment and unpaid family work. Nearly two-thirds of the incremental employment after 2019 comprised self-employed workers, among whom unpaid (women) family workers predominate. The share of regular work, which steadily increased after 2000, started declining after 2018.

The rate of youth not in employment, education or training globally has been consistently the highest in South Asia, at an average of 29.2% between 2010 and 2019 (ILO 2022a). India also has a large share of youth not in employment, education or training, and the rate is higher among young women than men.

#### What are some of the reasons for low women's participation in the labour force?

Economists and women's rights experts point at various barriers women face in terms of a careers or a job. They list factors from a lack of jobs, women being made responsible for all care-giving duties at home plus cooking and cleaning to low wages, patriarchal mindsets and safety issues. In her 2022 book, *The Making of a Catastrophe: The Disastrous Economic Fallout of*

*the COVID-19 Pandemic in India*, Jayati Ghosh, observing the sharp decline in women's labour participation between 2004 and 2018, writes that only some part of the phenomenon of women moving out of the labour market could be explained by greater involvement in education, especially for the age cohort 15 to 19. But with participation rates falling for women across all ages, "clearly, there was a process in operation, which has also been noted globally, of women being squeezed out of employment because of overall scarcity of paid work."

Prof. Basole feels there are both supply and demand side reasons for the decline in women's LFPR. On the labour demand side, in general, India's growth pattern has not been job intensive. This combined with social norms that restrict women's mobility and make them primary caregivers at home, means that women are not free to take up available opportunities. In addition, concerns over public safety and lack of transport also confine women to looking for work close to home, further limiting their options, a point Prof. Ghosh too makes.

The 2023 Economics Nobel Laureate Claudia Goldin's research showed that several factors have influenced the supply of and demand for female labour. "These include women's opportunities for combining paid work and a family, decisions relating to education and childrearing, technical innovations, laws and norms, and the structural transformation of the economy." In a paper about her research, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, pointed out that at the heart of Golden's analysis is the fact that women's choices have often been, and remain, limited by marriage and responsibility for the home and family. Her research may have been conducted in the U.S., going back 200 years, but her insights hold true in many other countries, including India as well.

#### What needs to change?

Economists say interventions are needed on both the demand and supply side of the labour market. On the demand side, says Prof. Basole, policies that promote labour intensive sectors (in both manufacturing and relatively higher productivity services) are needed. Public investment in safety and transport is also critical as is public investment in affordable child and elderly care. "All of these types of support can enable women to work outside the home and take advantage of relatively better paying opportunities," he adds.





Opinion

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2024



Hardik Pandya plays a shot during the Indian Premier League

MI captain Hardik Pandya booed at home

This shows IPL fans want their voice heard

RINGSIDE VIEW

Tushar Bhaduri

MUMBAI INDIANS PLAY their fourth match of the IPL season today, and it will be interesting to see if a few days' gap will cool down the emotions of the fans, who have been giving new captain Hardik Pandya a tough time.

know that his body may let him down anytime, so may find it prudent to make hay while the sun shines. However, looking at the bigger picture, the founding fathers of the IPL may allow themselves a little smile, even if commentator Sanjay Manjrekar asking the Wankhede crowd booing Hardik at the toss to 'behave'.

Fans care

But the whole Pandya episode shows that after more than a decade and a half of its existence, people now care and don't consider IPL as mere entertainment. People care about who is the captain of the team they follow.

The cardinal sin

But, what really explains this rude behaviour towards Hardik? It can be explained in one word: Ambition. Mumbai Indians wanted him back, with some sort of succession planning in mind, and were ready to reward him handsomely for it.

The biggest football clubs in the world are global entities, but have their foundations in a defined physical area where they were founded and which they represent.

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



What will happen if the roles are reversed? Suppose a state government charges the Prime Minister of committing an offence within its territorial jurisdiction and arrests him, and the magistrate remands the PM to police or judicial custody.

THE ARREST OF a serving chief minister on an alleged charge of corruption is a legal issue, a political issue and a Constitutional issue.

Let me clear the way of so-called 'facts'. The allegations in the cases against chief ministers are that they received 'bribes' in order to do favours to the bribe-giver(s).

Let's, therefore, start with the presumption of innocence (the legal aspect). A person is a member of a political party. The political party contests an election, its candidates win a majority of seats in the legislative assembly, the legislature party elects the person as leader, the governor swears in the person as the chief minister, the CM and his ministers assume office, and the new government is in place.

Unseating a CM

It is self-evident that a chief minister must be a free person to perform his duties. He must advise the governor; he must hold cabinet meetings; he must listen to the views and grievances of the people; he must speak and listen in the legislative assembly; he must vote on motions and Bills; and, above all, since our system of government is based on records or files, everything has to be in writing and signed.



BJP workers protest, demanding the resignation of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal over his arrest by the ED

Constitutional morality is at stake

a chief minister.

There are many ways to defeat and unseat a chief minister. The electoral way is to defeat a CM and his party at an election that will be held once in five years, or sooner.

Operation Lotus is one such invention under which a certain number of legislators are persuaded to resign from the ruling party or defect to another party, and reduce the ruling party to a minority in the Assembly.

Destabilising a government

Are there other ways to unseat a chief minister? I cannot find another way to do so, but there are cleverer men and women. They have discovered an apparently legal way to un-free a chief minister: register an FIR or ECIR against him, summon him for questioning, and arrest him.

any other accused, must go through the process of production before the Court, application for bail, police remand, judicial remand, appeals against orders, and finally an order from the Supreme Court granting or refusing bail.

Meanwhile, the government is vulnerable. It teeters on the edge and, sooner than later, it will collapse. If an interim leader takes the place of the arrested chief minister, he may face the same threat of arrest.

All this is apparently legal. From the political angle, it may be outrageous; from the Constitutional angle, the matter is debatable; but my question has a larger dimension. Is the arrest and detention of a serving chief minister consistent with Constitutional morality in a country that has adopted the Westminster model of government?

Protecting parliamentary democracy

Some countries realised the grave dangers of malicious political rivalries, obliging investigative agencies and conflicting judgements of courts (in the mat-

ter of bail). Hence, they incorporated a clause on immunity to the President or chief executive of the government during his term of office.

In the cases of judges in India, the Supreme Court has ruled that no investigation may be conducted against a judge without the previous consent of the CJI or the CJ of the High Court, and there is an implied immunity.

What will happen if the roles are reversed? Suppose a state government charges the Prime Minister of committing an offence within its territorial jurisdiction and arrests him, and the magistrate remands the PM to police or judicial custody.

Absent an immunity clause, should the Courts read into the Constitution an implied immunity from arrest to a Prime Minister and a Chief Minister as long as he enjoyed the confidence (majority support) in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly? That is the real issue.

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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



Straight shooting

NSA Ajit Doval has indicated to friends that at 79 it may be time to hang up his boots and play with his grandchildren. Although his son Shaurya Doval was not given a BJP ticket from Uttarakhnad, it is wrong to assume that the veteran sleuth in the James Bond mould is out of favour.

Doval was largely responsible for India adopting a more offensive foreign policy, refusing to turn a blind eye towards anti-nationals operating from outside the country. Over a dozen avowed enemies of the Indian state have been killed in safe havens abroad under murky circumstances during the last three years.

US Ambassador Eric Garcetti's recent stern message to countries crossing the red line is seen as an implied reference to the assassination plot on American citizen and Khalistani separatist Gurbatwant Singh Panun. Doval's remark in Kazakhstan last week about "shunning double standards in combating terror" appeared to be a counter.

The US authorities, fighting a legal battle in Czechoslovakia to extradite

Nikhil Gupta, accused of involvement in Pannun's attempted murder, are hopeful of the trial against Gupta in a US court beginning by May.

American sleuths suspect that the government official who conveyed the shoot suggestion telephonically has been transferred out of RAW to the BSF. The Canadians, meanwhile, hope that court records of the Panun case in the US bolster Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau's claim of "credible allegations" against India in the Nijjar case.

Star-crossed search

A few union ministers and a Maharashtra leader were deputed by the BJP high command to recruit some Bollywood faces for the 2024 polls. Their mission was largely unsuccessful, with Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Madhuri Dixit, Jackie Shroff, Dimple Kapadia and Urmila Matondkar turning down their request to be involved.

Not biting bait

Varun Gandhi had the opportunity to fight the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket, if he had consented to contest against cousin Priyanka Gandhi in the event she fought the polls from the family bastion of Rae Bareilly. He declined.

If the BJP permitted Maneka Gandhi to stand from Sultanpur again, despite Varun's rebellious remarks on the farmers' agitation or youth unemployment, it was because the BJP calculated it was wiser to have the two Gandhis on its side rather than them being propped up by the joint Opposition.

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, at a closed-door party meet of senior leaders, uncharacteristically lost his cool with his deemed successor, VK Pandian. He made clear that no one was indispensable

In December, Varun had conveyed his unhappiness to the PM over his political role. Earlier this month, at a fairly cordial meeting, Varun reiterated his sentiments politely, explaining that it was best he took time off to contemplate his political future since he was not to contest from Pilibhit.

No one indispensable

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, at a closed-door party meet of senior leaders, uncharacteristically lost his cool with his deemed successor, VK Pandian. He made clear that no one was indispensable. When he first came to Odisha, AU Singh Deo assumed he could call the shots, then it was his one-time aide Pyarimohan Mohapatra. Jay Panda and Pinaki

Mishra had similar delusions. Pandian had wrongly assumed he had carte blanche to work out an electoral alliance with the BJP, Patnaik said.

Dais full, not grounds

The entire Opposition leadership responded to the call to attend last Sunday's rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan. While the dais was filled to capacity, the crowds on the ground left much to be desired. A leading newspaper put the figure at 10,000.

The only state which contributed a large contingent was Punjab. Haryana Congress leader Bhupinder Hooda, known for his ability to mobilise Jat crowds, clearly did not exert himself. Nor did other Opposition leaders from neighbouring states.

The mystery was why AAP could not put up a more impressive show on its home ground. AAP is feeling the absence of its top leaders and the lack of an organised cadre.

There was a slight show of one-upmanship between the allies. AAP put up a large poster of Kejriwal behind bars, overshadowing the main INDIA rally steamer, to which the Delhi Congress objected.

Only after the AAP poster was removed, did the three Gandhis walk up to the dais.

Sonia Gandhi was given premiere placement, next to the wives of two jailed politicians — a current CM and a former CM.

ODD & EVEN

ROHNIT PHORE



"So long as you have food in your mouth, you have solved all questions for the time being"  
— Franz Kafka



## HOW ABOUT BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S?

Renowned for its lavishness and extravagance, Dubai unveils yet another culinary treasure in its illustrious array. Presenting a dining oasis exuding sheer opulence, the distinguished Dubai Mall now hosts a luminous addition - the prestigious Blue Box Cafe by iconic jewellery brand Tiffany & Co



BY RUPALI DEAN

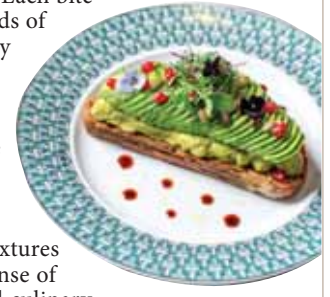
Although Truman Capote's 1958 novella and the famous 1961 movie featuring Audrey Hepburn implied a fancy event called 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' this didn't become a real thing until Blue Box Café first opened its doors in 2017. For those who do not know, the title refers to Holly Golightly, a lively Texan woman in the story, enjoying pastries while looking through the windows of the famous Tiffany & Co. store on Fifth Avenue, making this scene well-known. Bid adieu to your routine coffee pit stops and embrace a decadent experience sipping from the renowned 1837 Blue cups at the Blue Box Café, overseen by the talented French chef Marion Lefebvre. Outside, the café maintains the House's enchanting tradition of creating captivating window displays, a legacy immortalized in the cinematic masterpiece 'Breakfast at Tiffany's.' The café's interior reflects the ambiance of Landmark while drawing inspiration from Tiffany & Co.'s renowned Fifth Avenue store. It's like stepping into a magical place filled with blue and white colours that mirror the elegance, promising a chic and refined rendezvous that is simply unparalleled. An exclusive chandelier crafted from the signature blue-coloured boxes is a visual delight. The menu presents three distinct culinary experiences inspired by French influences on traditional New York fare: 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' 'Afternoon Tea at Tiffany's,' and A La Carte all-day dining. Imagine enjoying a royal breakfast and pretending to be Audrey Hepburn. I get to have Breakfast at Tiffany's and taste Holly's



favourite dishes counting enjoying a delicious scrambled egg dish - the star of the prestigious Blue Box breakfast menu. Effortlessly blending global culinary influences, this establishment meticulously crafts a gastronomic journey that delves into the intricate textures and flavours of daily produce. The breakfast menu goes beyond Ms. Golightly's simple coffee and croissant, celebrating the flavours of both Paris and New York. I enjoy scrumptious pancakes, avocado toast, and a variety of pastries. With an unwavering passion for baking, the chef prides themselves on creating what could arguably be the finest croissants in the Middle East. Hand-crafted with pure



butter, these croissants are not only visually captivating but also transport one to the essence of French culinary tradition. A labour of love spanning three meticulous days, the croissant-making process unfolds in stages of initiation, lamination for layering, and proofing to achieve a golden-brown, caramelized spiral exterior. Each bite reveals hundreds of delicate, buttery layers meticulously formed as the croissants bake to perfection, exuding a symphony of flavours and textures that evoke a sense of indulgence and culinary excellence. I must admit, indulging in this was quite a lavish treat for myself. I truly loved the luxurious experience and would definitely suggest it to anyone who loves the movie, the song, or the brand. Or maybe you just want to feel like Audrey Hepburn for a bit. If you happen to be in Dubai and seek something truly unique to do, I highly recommend booking a table for breakfast (or afternoon tea!) at The Tiffany Blue Box Café.



The author is a travel, lifestyle and food writer and photographer

**FACT BOX**  
**Blue Box Café Dubai**  
Located at Tiffany & Co. flagship store, Grand Atrium, Dubai Mall  
Tel: 04 250 4935  
Email: reservations@blueboxcafedubai.com  
Hours of Operation: Monday - Sunday: 10:00 AM - 12:00 AM

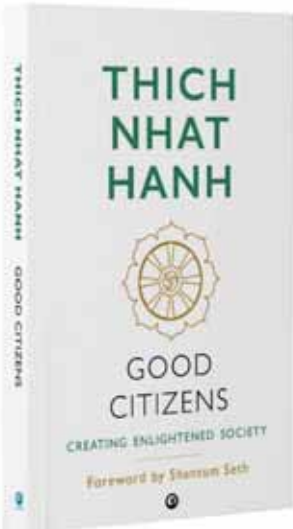
Through his life, his books, and his teachings, he continues to illuminate the path towards a world suffused with love, understanding, and mindfulness

# THICH NHAT HANH

## A GUIDE TO MINDFUL CITIZENSHIP, PEACE, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

In the midst of escalating stress and uncertainty, mindfulness emerges as an indispensable tool for navigating the complexities of modern life. The relentless pace of society, coupled with incessant demands and pressures, often leaves individuals feeling overwhelmed and disconnected. In such turbulent times, mindfulness offers a lifeline, providing a refuge amidst the chaos. By cultivating a present-centered awareness and cultivating an attitude of acceptance, individuals can develop resilience in the face of adversity. Mindfulness stands as a timeless practice with profound implications for modern living. In a world inundated with distractions and incessant stimuli, cultivating mindfulness offers a sanctuary of clarity and presence. By fostering a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, mindfulness enables individuals to navigate life's challenges with grace and equanimity. It serves as a



powerful tool for managing stress, anxiety, and emotional turmoil, allowing practitioners to cultivate resilience and inner peace amidst adversity. Moreover, mindfulness fosters deeper connections with oneself and others, fostering empathy, compassion, and understanding. As we

embrace mindfulness, we unlock the profound potential to live more fully, authentically, and harmoniously in a world that often pulls us away from the essence of our being. Mindfulness is the essence of Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching. He taught just that and what is most amazing. He did it so

effortlessly and calmly that even before one realised one was already drawn into it. Renowned globally as Thay, meaning "teacher" in Vietnamese, Thich Nhat Hanh embodies the essence of tranquility and wisdom. His journey, from the serene landscapes of central Vietnam to the bustling cities of the

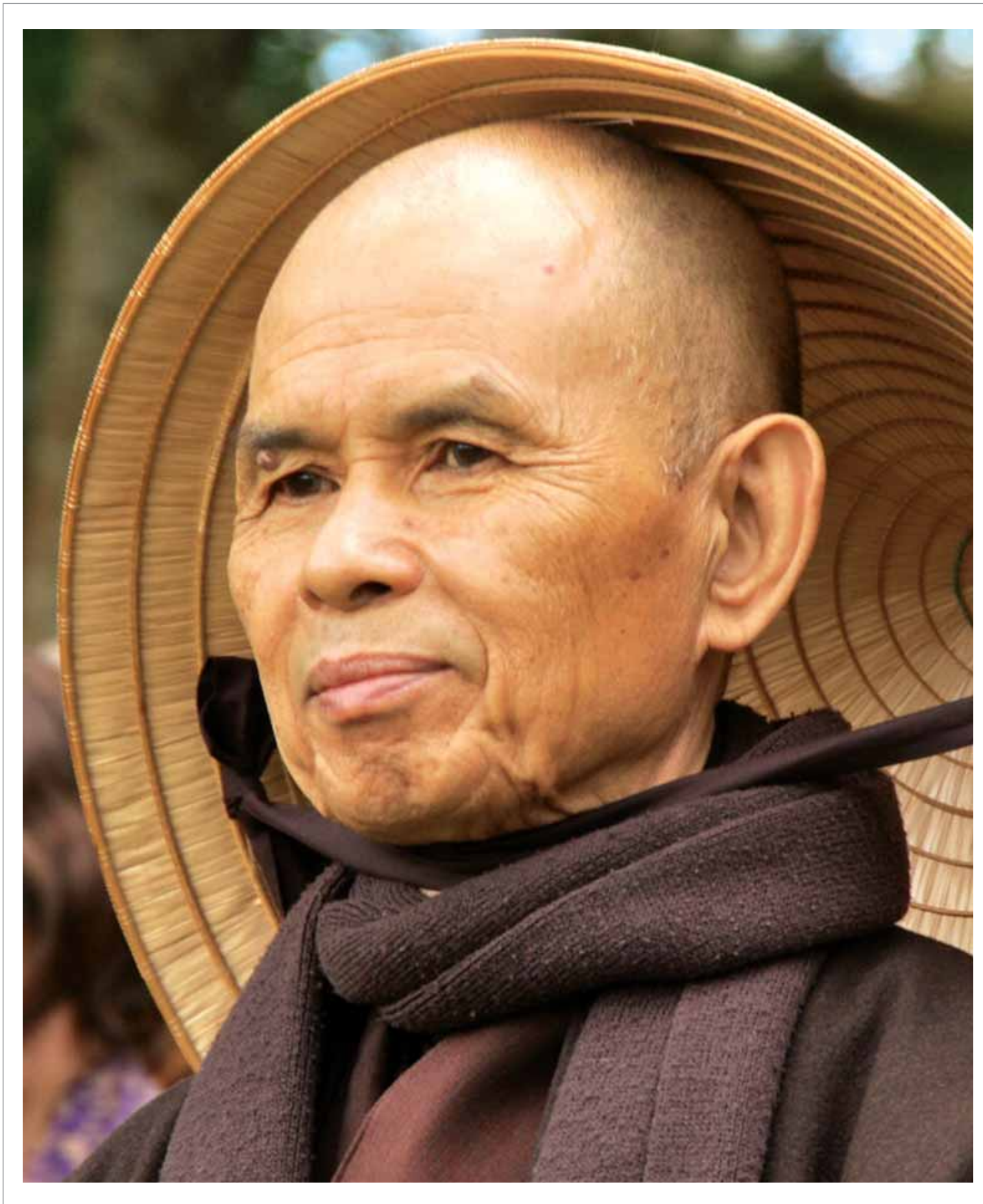
West, has been marked by a profound commitment to peace, compassion, and mindfulness. Ahimsa Trust recently organised a session of meditation and lectures to promote his teaching in New Delhi. The occasion was the launch of his book 'Good citizens.' In this book Thich

Nhat Hanh addresses citizens of every tradition, culture and religion to lay the foundations of a renewed ethic capable of leading humanity towards a world of peace and sharing of wealth, capable of overcoming divisions to live in total harmony. Through practical mindfulness exercises and examples taken from the life

of the Buddha, the Vietnamese monk indicates a path entirely based on the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: through awareness of the existence of pain and the search for the roots of evil, we proceed to understand its causes to finally be able to embark on a path towards

happiness and found a global ethic based on mutual respect. Born in 1926, Nhat Hanh's spiritual odyssey began at the tender age of sixteen when he was ordained as a Buddhist monk. His early years were shaped by the tumultuous backdrop of war-torn Vietnam. Amidst the chaos, he co-founded the An Quang Buddhist Institute, a beacon of Buddhist studies amidst the strife. Embracing the teachings of Gandhi, he spearheaded nonviolent resistance movements, embodying the principles of Engaged Buddhism. In 1967 Martin Luther King Jr won the Nobel peace prize. In the crucible of war, Nhat Hanh faced a profound dilemma – whether to retreat into contemplation or to engage actively in alleviating suffering. Choosing the path of compassionate action, he founded the Engaged Buddhism movement, advocating for inner transformation as a catalyst for societal change. Throughout the 1960s, Nhat Hanh's endeavours blossomed, from founding the Van Hanh Buddhist University to establishing the Order of Interbeing, a testament to his commitment to peace and enlightenment. His tireless advocacy earned him a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 1967, a recognition of his unwavering dedication to nonviolence. Despite exile from his homeland, Nhat Hanh's message of peace resonated globally. His pilgrimage took him to the far corners of the earth, where he tirelessly advocated for harmony and compassion. It was during this time that Plum Village, a sanctuary of mindfulness, took root in France, blossoming into a vibrant community dedicated to mindful living. Nhat Hanh's teachings transcend boundaries, resonating across cultures and continents. His literary legacy, spanning over a hundred titles, serves as a beacon of enlightenment, guiding readers on the path to inner peace and understanding. Translated into myriad languages, his works continue to inspire and uplift souls worldwide.

In India, the seeds of Nhat Hanh's wisdom find fertile ground, with Ahimsa Trust leading the charge in disseminating his teachings. Publishers like Full Circle, Aleph, and Harper Collins have brought his works to Indian readers, fostering a culture of mindfulness and compassion. As Thich Nhat Hanh's legacy continues to flourish, his message of peace and enlightenment remains as vital as ever.



GURUSPEAK



SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR Spiritual Guru

# SHIVA THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ASPECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS



The auspicious night of Shivaratri represents the enlivening of the Shiva tattva (principle) — the most beautiful aspect of Consciousness

LORD Shiva is not a person or a figure. Shiva is the eternal tattva (principle) that is the essence of everything. It is the principle from which everything has come, which sustains everything and in which everything dissolves. How does one capture and express this tattva that is so subtle yet palpable? One of the expressions that encapsulate this most exquisite and unfathomable substratum of existence in its near totality, is the depiction of Shiva as Nataraja or the Cosmic Dancer. Nataraja is a fascinating symbol of the interplay between the material and the spiritual realms of creation. Of the 108 postures of the Nataraja the most adored and beautiful is the Ananda Tandava — the dance of bliss. The beauty, elegance and grace with which the Shiva Tandava is represented here is unparalleled. When one has access to mystical realms through deep sadhana and detachment to the material world, one is able to experience the Ananda Tandava. There are multiple dimensions of existence. One who has gained entry to the subtle realms of creation will find that the dance of Shiva is happening in a ceaseless continuum. This blissful dance of the cosmic rhythm can be enjoyed only after transcending the body, mind, intellect and ego complex. Though it is mistakenly



believed that Shiva took a human form and walked this planet, Shiva is Anadi — birthless, and Ananta — deathless. To limit Shiva to a form confined to time and space would be undermining the omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience of this Eternal Principle. The damaru in the upper right hand of the Dancing Shiva is in the shape of



protection and assurance of orderliness. The other hand pointing to the feet is indicative of infinite possibilities. Underneath the feet is Apasmara, the demon that symbolizes ignorance and denotes the epileptic state in which there is absolutely no control over the body and the life force. When human consciousness is able to free itself from the shackles of ignorance and gains mastery over the body-mind complex, the dance of ecstasy starts dawning in life. The Ananda Tandava of Nataraja symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction. The whole world is nothing but a rhythm of energy, rising and contracting again and again. Devas can only be perceived in the subtle realms or the sukshma jagat. Those who have gone deep in meditation have discovered this phenomenon. It is said that Deva Apraakrata Divya Manusha Rupa meaning the devas have non-material bodies of light which are

perceived in human form by human beings. The different forms of divinity that we see are the outer projections of what the sages observed in deep meditation. These inner experiences of the sages have found beautiful expressions in temples and the artistic landscape of India. The Chidambaram temple in Tamil Nadu is a magnificent representation of the cosmic stage of Nataraja. Chidambaram — 'Chit' meaning Consciousness and 'Ambar' meaning space — refers to the scintillating consciousness. The eternal dance of Shiva never occurred on earth. It is happening perpetually on the stage of consciousness. The central roof of the Chidambaram temple is adorned with 21,600 gold tiles, denoting the number of breaths taken by a human being in a day. The scriptures extol the Shiva Principle as being all-pervasive — Sarvam Shivamayam Jagat — everything in this world is an expression of Shiva. Shivaratri is the most unique time to rise above the mundane and bask in the supreme glory of the infinite, innocent and blissful Shiva tattva. Though the external worship to Shiva seems elaborate with numerous offerings, it is said the finest flowers used in Shiva's worship are knowledge, equanimity, and peace. Celebrating the Shiva tattva in oneself is real Shivaratri.





MANAN DWIVEDI

# Immigration takes centre stage in US President primaries

President Biden faces Republican criticism over his policies, especially concerning Mexican migration. The issue gains momentum amid global observations of Trump's immigration clampdown and domestic instability in Mexico. These factors shape crucial debates in the upcoming elections

lections in any nation tend to be hotly and keenly contested occasions, whether it is the campaign utilising roaring tigers in Pakistan by the PML(N) or the whistle-stop tours of the American Presidential Elections. For a long time in the United States, immigration of aliens has been a theme that has drawn both strategic and political traction. In the contemporary context of the US Presidential primaries, before the elections heat up to a crescendo, President Joe Biden is being attacked by the Republicans for his stance and policies on immigration. Mexico stars in the debates and discussions wherein, once the migration of Mexican settlers increases to 5,000 people per day, then the American checkpoints close down.

Donald Trump and the Republicans do not intend to be seen as weak or soft on the theme of Mexican influx, so they assail President Biden whenever the opportunity arises.

According to one American survey, undocumented aliens account for around 11 million in the American homeland. They enter the nation and dissipate into the realm of unorganised vocations and the resultant economy, which has been a difficult challenge for investigative and law enforcement agencies. If one refers to the Hollywood flick, "Scarface," the entire American nation's mafia emigrated from Italy and other European nations and began to rule the political

and economic roost in the US, consistent with one assessment of the dark economy and societal nature.

The domestic situation in the nation-state of Mexico is also in a state of instability and flux as controversies cast a pall of despondency over the country. Reuters reported in one of its articles: "Huge crowds filled Mexico City's main square on Sunday in support of the nation's electoral authority, accusing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of trying to weaken the body ahead of a presidential election in June. The protests, one of several in recent years, meant to 'protect' the National Electoral Institute (INE), come after Lopez Obrador sent a sweeping package of constitutional reforms to Congress, which would include an overhaul of the INE."

One can hark back to the issue of illegal migration into the US from Mexico and South America. The Darien Gap is a stretch of densely forested land that serves as a conduit for illicit migration into the US territory. Depending on what they can pay, people trudge through the Darien swamp and walk for five to ten days at the mercy of criminal gangs who, after demanding a lump sum amount, often maim, mutilate, and rape the migrants in the Darien Gap. These are a few of the issues being debated in the US Presidential Election deliberations for November 2024.

In March 2024, a report



succinctly states that a highly anticipated bipartisan immigration and foreign aid bill was recently defeated by former President Trump, a staunch opponent of a border deal. He actively lobbied Republicans to vote against the bill, despite its inclusion of many provisions they had initially supported. Even Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell succumbed to Trump's influence, voting against the bill despite his role in its development and his prior efforts to garner support

within his party. This action by McConnell has further intensified the electoral confrontation between the two presidential candidates. With some Americans advocating strongly for immigration reforms, President Biden could leverage Republican intransigence on immigration to lay blame on Trump for obstructing progress on immigration policy. The rhetoric surrounding immigration policy remains highly divisive, potentially leading

to further recriminations from both presidential candidates. Further north in the United States of America, Republicans have seized upon illegal immigration as a pivotal issue in the 2024 Presidential primaries. While it might be considered hyperbolic, one cannot ignore the significant role immigration plays as an electoral issue that could sway the outcome of the US Presidential Elections. The notion of aliens posing a threat to national and

homeland security in the US has gained considerable political and popular traction. Republicans have intensified their criticism of President Biden's lenient approach towards the steady and unlawful influx of immigrants from South America through Mexico. This has emerged as a central electoral theme, eliciting considerable criticism and political upheaval. It has been argued that American immigration policies are failing. Recently, it's been contended that the

system is broken and could potentially harm President Biden's re-election prospects. In Latin America, for example, countries like Venezuela are suffering under the grip of kleptocracy, which adversely affects both the nation and its people. So, what is the solution? The pertinent question arises: do people migrate to the United States of America to escape repression and hardships, seeking the promise of a brighter future despite the perceived decline in America's fortunes?

Immigration laws are under scrutiny as Capitol Hill debates intensify. There are concerted efforts to amend immigration laws within the American homeland. Efforts to overhaul the nation's immigration laws, for the first time in decades, have gained sudden momentum. Additionally, the upcoming US Presidential election will likely revolve around the dilemma of whether citizenship or permanent resident status, signified by a green card, will become the prevailing norm, and how much emphasis the twin candidates will place on this issue.

There was a global impact of Trump's immigration clampdown, which was observed by IR experts and the legal fraternity.

The first executive order signed by President Trump disallowed migrants from seven West Asian nations to enter the American homeland.

One of the initial executive orders signed by President Joe Biden revoked these bans on migrants from Islamic

countries. These nations included Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan. However, one cannot overlook the fact that the agencies responsible for monitoring and tracking terrorist outfits such as Boko Haram, ISIS, the Taliban, and Al-Shabaab are the worst affected when deals occur between political leaders. Trump's bravado, premised upon the theme of immigration, resulted in a plethora of economic costs and was fraught with political risks.

Several European nations, similar to the United States of America, are facing the menace of migration from conflict zones such as Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, thereby initiating talks of fencing and walling the frontiers and borders, which is exactly what former President Trump also advocated on the global stage, specifically in America. As a telling fact, the cost of managing the Oresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden is a significant amount. Additionally, apart from Mexican human outages, gun running, and drug trafficking pose a perilous threat to the homeland security of the United States of America.

In the Hollywood film "The Mule," released in 2018, Clint Eastwood's character, Earl Stone, indulges in drug trafficking after his flower farming business goes bankrupt.

(The writer teaches International Relations and International Organisations, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi)

## PERSPECTIVE

# CAA: Why the hullabaloo?



MAKHAN SAIKIA

**The CAA is not anti-Muslim; it just prioritises citizenship for persecuted minorities, not others, from three neighbouring countries. Future legislation may address concerns for Tamils and Rohingyas. Recognising historical context, it aims to assist six religious groups seeking refuge in India. Importantly, the CAA doesn't prevent Muslims from these countries from applying for Indian citizenship**

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) marks a watershed moment in India's electoral system. The government amended the Citizenship Amendment Act 1955 to facilitate citizenship acquisition for religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, reducing the qualification period from 11 years to 5 years under the new law.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was initially introduced in Parliament in the Lok Sabha in 2016 by amending the existing Citizenship Act 1955. Subsequently, the Bill was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which submitted its report on January 7, 2019. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill the following day, but with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha, the Bill lapsed.

By December 9, the Bill was reintroduced by Home Minister Amit Shah in the 17th Lok Sabha and passed on December 10. The Upper House, Rajya Sabha, also passed the Bill on December 11, 2019. This outlines the journey of the present CAA through both houses of Parliament, culminating in its establishment as a crucial piece of legislation.

The Act is drawing both national and international attention for three main reasons: First, it offers citizenship to six persecuted religious and undocumented groups who arrived in India from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014. These groups include Hindus, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians. Second, it excludes Muslims from these countries from applying for citizenship in India.

Third, the Narendra Modi Government introduced the Act just one month before parliamentary and assembly polls in some states. Now, the critical question arises: why is the Act sparking Opposition ire and protests in some States?

The central point of controversy is its alleged discrimination against Muslims, as it does not offer citizenship to Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Critics argue that Muslim minorities such as the Baloch, Shia, Ahmadiyya of Pakistan, Hazras from Afghanistan, Rohingyas from Myanmar, and Tamils from Sri Lanka face religious persecution in their homelands, yet they are not covered by the Act. Second, critics contend that the CAA violates Article 14 (Right to Equality), the first Fundamental Right mentioned in Part III of our Constitution, by providing a classification of citizens based on religion, which is prohibited under this Article. Third, it allegedly seriously violates the historic Assam Accord signed between the All Assam Students Association (AASU) and the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress Government in 1985. This accord set the cutoff date for entry of illegal migrants to Assam as March 24, 1971, whereas the current Act pushes this cutoff date to December 31, 2014. Moreover, there is widespread fear that once these illegal migrants from six religious groups become citizens, they will have access to all other rights and facilities like the locals, thus burdening Assam's limited economic resources.

Meanwhile, the matter has reached the Supreme Court, with nearly 237 petitioners approaching the top court to stall the immediate implementation of the CAA. Under this Act, the Government can fast-track the grant of Indian citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. The lead petitioner in the case is the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). During an oral mention of the case last week by a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, efforts were made to calm the



apprehensions of all petitioners regarding the fast-tracking of the citizenship acquisition process by the Union Government. Again, the Supreme Court has agreed to consider the question of staying the operation of the new Citizenship Amendment Rules of 2024 on April 9. However, so far, there is no official statement from the Government indicating that it would not grant fast-track citizenship to the aforementioned groups of people. Today, the main arguments emerging in the Supreme Court include: the rules governing the CAA are based solely on religious grounds; once citizenship is granted, it cannot be reversed; and the Act has eliminated the scrutiny of new citizenship applications by District Collectors and the recommendations of respective State Governments. Opposition parties and various petitioners are also arguing that if the Government could wait for the last five years, it should be willing to wait for a few more months to implement the CAA.

Now, the irony lies in why countries like America are so concerned about an internal issue of India. India is a democratic country, and its Constitution provides equal rights

and opportunities to all its citizens, including religious minorities, since its independence and the very inception of the Constitution itself. American Senator Ben Cardin is raising the seriousness of the issue by branding this Act as controversial and also questioning the intentions of the Indian Government as it deeply impacts Muslims, especially during their holy month of Ramzan. He speaks about the Indo-US relationship, based on shared values, where we need to be concerned about the protection of human rights for every person regardless of religion. It is true, we need to respect the human rights of all minorities, including Muslims.

But sadly, the people of India in general and the Government of India in particular do not need to learn lessons on human rights from any foreign parliamentarian like Cardin. India's long history and cultural traditions have displayed enough of our tolerance and mutual co-existence, demonstrating how this land has accepted people from various civilisational roots. Instead, Cardin should focus on how his own country is engaged in wars after wars in many Muslim nations, especially in the West Asia, leaving

behind a trail of human rights violations for years now.

By now, the US should have been able to stop its closest ally Israel from carrying out bloodshed against the Palestinians, a war conducted in the name of fighting Hamas militants. Before pointing fingers at Vladimir Putin (for the Ukraine invasion) and Xi Jinping (for the alleged genocide of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang), America should introspect and assess its actions worldwide.

The Ministry of External Affairs has already termed the American statement on the CAA as "misplaced, misinformed, and unwarranted". It has categorically said: "The CAA 2019 is an internal matter of India, showcasing the inclusiveness of Indian society. The CAA is an act of granting citizenship, not of revoking it."

For the Opposition parties in the country (INDIA Bloc), their aim is not simply to oppose the NDA Government at the centre, but specifically the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. With the CAA, they have yet another issue to raise concerns about the Muslim minority in the country. Frankly speaking, for decades, the Congress ruled this country and many of the States. The grand old party, with its visionaries on board, should have already addressed the plight of persecuted minorities, including the Tamils from Sri Lanka, in India.

It is clear that the CAA is not against Muslims. This Act is designed to offer expedited citizenship only to persecuted minorities as mentioned in it, not to others. Therefore, a new legislation can be considered by the Government in the future for Tamils and Rohingyas. In fact, this new law acknowledges the historical background of partition and aims to address the plight of these six religious groups who sought refuge in India. The CAA does not prohibit Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan from applying for

Indian citizenship.

The CAA does not violate Article 14. In the 1997 case of David John Hopkins vs Union of India, the Madras High Court clarified that the Union Government's right to refuse citizenship is absolute and not fettered by equal protection under Article 14.

Similarly, in the 1991 case of Louis De Raedt vs Union of India, the Supreme Court held that the right of a foreigner in India is confined to Article 21, and they cannot seek citizenship as a matter of right. These judgments make it clear that citizenship is not a matter of right for any foreign citizen in this country. It must be emphasised that the Union Government has the final power to decide the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters under Article 11. Additionally, the CAA has been implemented under the Seventh Schedule, which includes citizenship in the Union List, making Parliament the sole authority to decide on this matter. State governments, currently refusing to implement it (such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala), have no final say in this matter.

Also, the CAA does not change or dilute the Assam Accord, as it is applicable throughout India. It does not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, nor to areas under the Inner Line Permit prescribed by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873.

Lastly, the Opposition and the hundreds of petitioners should have enough faith in the apex court of this country, as the matter has already been brought before it. The court will decide the fate of this Act, determining whether it violates the basic tenets of the Constitution, including secularism, and other pertinent issues raised by the petitioners so far.

(The writer is currently President of the Global Research Foundation.)

