



OPINION

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[OUR TAKE]

In the Maldives, a welcome reset

The island-nation seems to be realising the need to balance between China and India. Regaining its trust is imperative for India, too

In the wake of the maximalist position taken by Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu after his election last year, both Male and New Delhi have taken steps to restore relations to an even keel. Muizzu, who came to power on the back of an 'India Out' campaign, demanded the withdrawal of Indian personnel deputed to the Maldives to operate three aircraft used mainly for humanitarian missions. However, since he attended the swearing-in of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June, several signs have pointed to a thaw in relations between the two countries. This is underlined by a visit to India in May by Maldivian foreign minister Moosa Zameer, and external affairs minister S Jaishankar's visit last week to the Maldives. At his meeting with Jaishankar, Muizzu spoke of his administration's commitment to strengthening close connections with India, which he described as one of the island nation's closest allies and invaluable partners. Jaishankar too said the Maldives is at the "heart" of India's Neighborhood First policy and cooperation between the two countries has moved beyond the traditional role and aspires to be a modern partnership.

When the Maldives recently faced economic problems, it was India that agreed to the rollover of treasury bills worth \$50 million. New Delhi has also ensured the uninterrupted supply of critical items such as food despite the downturn in bilateral ties and Male's perceived tilt towards Beijing since last year, including measures to reduce its dependency on New Delhi. India's assistance, comprising a mix of grants, loans and budgetary support, is based completely on the developmental and infrastructure needs of the Maldives and has touched the lives of the people, with even Muizzu acknowledging that it leads to significant economic benefits and boosts the local economy.

All of this points to a realisation in the Maldives that there will always be a need to balance between India and China, and any policy to simply shut out New Delhi will not work in the long-run. For India, regaining trust will be slow but crucial, given the current situation across the neighbourhood. A new beginning has been made with India assuring it will continue to partner the Indian Ocean archipelago on development, and a perceived pro-China regime being appreciative of New Delhi's support. India too will do well to learn from its experiences in recent years by reaching out to all segments of the Maldivian political establishment.

Medals quest: Focus on a few core sports

On silver, five bronze, six fourth-place finishes and one medal lost to rules — that is the sum total of what India has achieved at the Paris Olympics. It may, at first glance, seem like a poor outcome given that India sent 117 athletes to the Games. But, if even a couple of those fourth-place finishes — the most for India at any Olympic Games — had come through, the country might have had its best-ever Games. The gold medal was missing, but very rarely can it be guaranteed, and it took a very special throw to beat Neeraj Chopra into second place. One reading of this is that Indian sports persons are definitely performing better than before and that, in turn, suggests the focus on sport will start to pay off sooner rather than later.

That focus, now, must be on how to execute these near misses to medals. And that requires a plan and professionalism. It also requires India to concentrate on a few core sports rather than spread the net too wide. China, with 40 gold medals, is sitting atop the medals table, with 23 of those medals having come in just four sports — diving, table tennis, shooting and weightlifting. The United States has 40 golds, with 22 coming from athletics and swimming. Seven of Australia's 18 golds came in swimming. Japan's 20 gold medals got a huge boost from three sports that earned 14 of them. The math is evident. India needs to double down on shooting, wrestling and boxing. It will take time, money and a sense of adventure to realise the country's dream but that is where it all begins.

A win-win for India & Indian Americans

Between the extremes of migration and reverse migration, is a tangible space for collaboration between India and the diaspora in the US

If you have watched the movie *Swades*, you might remember a scene where NASA scientist Mohan Bhargava, Shah Rukh Khan's character, is introduced to members of the village panchayat. In this delightful exchange, Mohan struggles to explain his work in the Global Precipitation Measurement project at NASA, which helps forecast extreme weather events and assess the global climate. When his nanny manages to simplify the explanation for the village elders, Mohan is told with a laugh and scoff that one of the villagers does this regularly. At which point, the said villager looks up at the sky, sees it is clear, and lets the village know that it will likely not rain that day. An amused Mohan agrees he does the same at NASA.

Eventually, Mohan decides to use his knowledge and skills to build a hydroelectric power generation facility for the village. This is not the typical Indian American story one sees play out routinely. One is more accustomed to hearing stories of brain drain, of those who leave to pursue the American Dream and never look back. Yes, Khan's character eventually decides to move back

to India, but between the extremes of migration and reverse migration is a tangible space of impact and influence that can and should be tapped into to the benefit of both countries.

The success of the 5.1-million-strong Indian American community perhaps belies its numerical strength. Despite representing 1.5% of the population of the United States (US), this community contributes 6% to its taxes. From politics, corporate leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation to cultural influence, the diaspora continues to impact the everyday lives of millions in the US. If you have been following the news on the US presidential elections, you would be aware of the Indian American moment it's been having recently. From Vivek Ramaswamy, Nikki Haley, Usha Vance, and now the presumptive Democratic party presidential nominee, Kamala Harris. Indian Americans are establishing themselves as influential administrative levels as senators, representatives, and mayors.

Indian-origin CEOs head 16 Fortune 500 companies that employ approximately 2.7 million Americans and generate more than \$1 trillion in revenue. The economic impact of Indian Americans extends beyond

big business to the startup world as well, co-founding 72 out of 648 US unicorns operating in 2024. Research, innovation, and academia in the US have provided a platform for the community to contribute further. Between 1975 and 2019, the share of US patents with Indian-origin innovators jumped from around 2% to 10%. Through art, food and festivals, Indian Americans have also fostered a greater understanding and appreciation of Indian culture in the US.



MR Rangaswami



Neeraj Aggarwal



Sesh Iyer

Indiapolis, a US-based nonprofit community of global Indian leaders, raised \$15 million to help fellow Indians. The US is the top source of global remittances to India, with nearly \$26 billion in remittances in 2022-23.



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It is apparent that the two countries share a strategic partnership based on shared values. They can therefore build on the solid foundation of collaboration that already exists between them to further advance their mutual interests. As India looks to become a developed nation, Viksit Bharat, by 2047, the 100th year of its Independence, the diaspora can play an important role in realising India's vision. Sustained engagement between this community and India is crucial for addressing the nation's challenges and driving inclusive growth. The Indian government's recent policy measures aim to ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach all sectors and all sections of society, and the Indian American community is uniquely positioned to complement

these efforts. Going back to *Swades* for a moment, the village elders' comical oversimplification of Mohan's job notwithstanding, throughout the movie his character tries to work with the community to make their lives better, in big and small ways. His worldview shifts from being patronising to empathetic and finally pragmatic about how he can bring about meaningful change from his vantage. The larger Indian community around the world embodies this Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam spirit.

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[GRAND STRATEGY]

Happyymon Jacob

Interests, not friendship, determine foreign policy

When former Bangladesh Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina fled to India last week, there was a strong sentiment in India that India must stand by its friends. Standing by our friends' meant two things here: As a humanitarian gesture towards Hasina, and as an Indian intervention in Bangladesh to set things right. The humanitarian argument stressed the importance of helping a friendly leader by giving asylum. The interventionist argument claimed that India, as the region's dominant power and an aspiring great power, must act when a key pro-India leader in the neighbourhood is ousted from power, as doing nothing would show India in poor light.

The great power argument is defensible. We are simply past that age in our neighbourhood. The humanitarian argument, while sound, is not sufficient to deal with the Bangladesh problem, today and going forward. But the underlying assumptions of both arguments — "We must help the India-friendly leader" — is problematic by itself. Thus, we must revisit some of our deeply-held assumptions about the utility of friendship and the friend vs foe binary in the conduct of foreign policy. Adversarial states tend to hinder each other's foreign policy pursuits because they primarily have conflicting interests, not because they dislike each other. Sometimes adversarial cooperate, especially when they think doing so helps their interests. Friendly States assist each other in their foreign policy pursuits when they perceive mutual value in each other's objectives. But even friends are unlikely to support each other if their interests clash. Cooperation among States is primarily a function of synergy in interest and not based on friendship or enmity. For sure, friendship does provide an environment of trust, but that alone is not enough for the pursuit of interests, as trust is also a function of common interests.

What forms friendship among States? Friendships are formed through common interests, threats, and priorities; however, friendship alone does not create common interests. Therefore, States that claim to be best friends with each other are primarily serving their national interests. For example, at the case, the United States (US) and India are not friends; they are States with overwhelming mutual interests. Japan and India work together because of common interests and threats, not just friendship.

There are inherent limits to the utility of friendship in the pursuit of foreign policy goals. For one, friendly countries don't do things for each other sacrificing their inter-

ests. Second, if you identify certain political leaders in another country as friendly and others as enemies, it is not advisable to be friends in that country; might see you as unfriendly. Third, friendship can also become a liability. Sometimes, friends can pressure you to do things that might not be in your national interest. Therefore, while friendship may be a virtue in domestic politics and social settings, it could become a liability in the pursuit of foreign policy goals.

While having friendly countries, or friendly leaders in difficult countries, is useful, there is an inherent hierarchy that a State's decision-makers must keep in mind — interest first, and friendship later. So, if the pursuit of interest requires a State to sacrifice friendships, it must do that. We must not forget what such friendships are for — to cater to our interests.

The transatlantic relationship, between the US and Europe, is often said to be one among friends — and yet, there too is an interest-driven relationship. The US needs Europe for the preservation of a US-led world order. Europe needs the US for security. They indeed share religious and cultural ties too. But, religious and cultural ties alone can't guarantee strong partnerships; geopolitics in West Asia or our region would testify to that.

In the early 2000s, the US and India started negotiating to stabilise their bilateral relationship after a difficult period not because they wanted to be friends, but because each had had powerful interests in developing a strong strategic partnership. India and the US may call each other friends, as would Australia and India, but at the end of the day, these relationships are based on interests. The more powerful the mutual interests, the stronger friendships among States would be.

So, what should be India's policy towards Bangladesh in the wake of Hasina's ouster? First of all, India must clearly identify its interests as opposed to getting caught in a self-defeating friend vs foe enemies formulation. India's interests vis-à-vis Bangladesh pertain to illegal immigration, safety of minorities in Bangladesh, security in states bordering the country, Indian businesses there, and the China factor. With this in mind, New Delhi should reach out to whoever is in power in Dhaka today and in future, and highlight how a stable relationship helps both sides. As a matter of fact, Bangladesh needs India more than India needs Bangladesh. Giving asylum to Hasina is a humanitarian gesture, but allowing the ousted PM to use India as a platform for political activity may hurt India's interests vis-à-vis Bangladesh, for States take precedence over individuals in international relations.

This logic applies to India's relationships with other states in the neighbourhood as well. This is not the age of regime change or interventions. So, focus on the pursuit of interests and not the cultivation of individuals because interests unlike friendships are transferable from one regime to another, and interests come with less baggage than friendships.

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VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY | PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

To really stop Russian terror, we need ... strong decisions from partners — decisions that will remove restrictions on our defensive actions



[STRAIGHTFORWARD]

Shashi Shekhar

This Independence Day, guard against radicalism

Three days from today, India will be celebrating its 78th Independence Day — the day the nation was born. Birthdays, they say, are days to reflect on one's life. The gains and losses; the mistakes one has made, and the ways and means to rectify them. On August 15, what should India, and we as Indians, be reflecting upon?

To begin with, let's look at things to be proud of. We remain a largely peaceful country despite the turmoil in our neighbourhood. Take Bangladesh for instance. Violence has claimed more than 450 lives in that country. The country deteriorated to the extent that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed had to leave her nation once again. Now an interim government is fighting to bring the situation under control.

However, those now labelling Hasina as a deluded dictator had once waited for her to return to power in Bangladesh with bated breath. These people forget that within four years of Bangladesh being liberated in 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whom that country titled "father of the nation", was assassinated at his official residence. Hasina was away from the country then; else, she would have met the same fate. Since then, fortunately, no head of government has been killed in Bangladesh, though it has seen many coups. Hasina herself returned to power in 2008 after a series of particularly violent demonstrations.

The next 15 years were hers. Though she helped strengthen the economy, she also metamorphosed into a dictator in the garb of democracy. Over time, the facade of democracy she put up has fallen apart. She won the last general election in June solely by suppression and subversion. The Bangladeshis hadn't expected this from her. They took to the streets and de-throned her.

2008, but a stable government has eluded that country since. Myanmar, in turn, has been under the thumb of the junta, while Sri Lanka saw a Bangladesh-like situation only a few months ago. As for the Maldives, president Mohamed Muizzu was elected democratically but has shown little inclination to uphold democratic values, evident from the fact that he removed and jailed two of his ministers on charges of "black magic".

Only India stands tall as a beacon of democracy in South Asia. We have had our share of instability. During the last seven-and-a-half decades, the country has been run by coalition governments for 39 years. Charan Singh, VP Singh, Chandrashekar, Inder Kumar Gujral, and HD Deve Gowda have all led coalitions for short stints. Still, we have held on to our belief in democracy. Is that adequate? Absolutely not. As we move towards another Independence Day, we must remain alert against subversive forces. As the events unfolded in Bangladesh, fly-by-night experts mushroomed on social media making a killing from doomsday predictions for India. They had done the same for Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Irresponsible statements by politicians embolden such elements. A few days ago, a former foreign minister shocked everyone when he claimed India, too, can witness violent demonstrations as in Bangladesh. We all know that India is not Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. Our size, diversity and tradition of co-existence stop us from going down a slippery slope. But some experts say: If our 'relative' Pakistan can lose its way, why can't we? What they forget is that on August 15, 1947, we shunned British slavery but not our legacy of Indian-ness.

Pakistan tried to create a new identity based on religion and ended up destroying itself. Bangladesh is dealing with the same malady. Even when the ambassadors of peace, the Buddhists, in Myanmar and Sri Lanka tried to conduct Bangladesh-like experiments, they fell flat. It's because we shouldn't forget religion is a part of culture and not the other way around.

Radicalism is poison for the subcontinent. Independence Day reminds us of this fact every year.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, *Hindustan*. The views expressed are personal

the hindu **businessline.**

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Right call

TRAI rules can ring in better telecom service quality

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has taken a bold step to improve the quality of telecom services in the country. Telecom services have been plagued by frequent call drops, network congestion, and a barrage of unwanted telemarketing calls. Despite the government's nudges and interventions, operators have failed to address these concerns, citing reasons such as inadequate spectrum and cumbersome right-of-way rules.



Outdated benchmarks, last revised in 2017, allowed operators to evade substantive action. TRAI's new rules, effective from October 1, mark a major shift in how telecom services will be regulated. They mandate that operators meet more rigorous benchmarks, particularly in areas such as network latency. For instance, telecom companies will now have to ensure that their wired network latency is less than 50 milliseconds, a substantial improvement from the current 120 milliseconds. Similarly, for wireless broadband, especially in 4G and 5G networks, latency must be reduced to less than 75 milliseconds, with a further reduction to 50 milliseconds by 2026, compared to the existing 250 milliseconds. These changes promise a better user experience, with faster load times for web pages and smoother live streams.

Additionally, the regulator has mandated that operators submit quality of service reports for mobile connections every month instead of every quarter. These reports must be collected at the district level rather than at the circle level. This change aims to ensure that operators address the actual network issues faced by users, rather than rely on aggregate data that might obscure localised problems. Telecom operators must report any network outage lasting over four hours to TRAI within 24 hours. Where an outage continues for more than 24 hours, operators are required to compensate affected users. While telecom companies have raised concerns about compliance costs, the reality is that consumer complaints have continued to rise over the years. In major telecom markets, independent agencies manage consumer complaints. For example, the UK's telecom ombudsman, Otelco, has been in operation since 2003. TRAI itself proposed the establishment of a similar agency in India as far back as 2004 but the plan was shelved by the Department of Telecom, which deemed it unfeasible.

It may be time to consider establishing a telecom ombudsman in India. Telecom operators must also invest in technologies that ensure better network performance. To assist operators, the Centre should expedite the implementation of the Telecom Act, 2023, which aims to simplify right-of-way norms. Obtaining permission to install towers and lay cables has been a challenge. The new law seeks to streamline infrastructure deployment and reduce disputes. The Act also requires telecom operators to obtain prior consent from subscribers for promotional messages. Combined with TRAI's new rules, these measures can align telecom services with India's digital ambitions.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

Don't shoot from the hip

Anjana PV

India is still reeling from wrestler Vinesh Phogat's disqualification from the women's 50 kg category at the Paris Olympics for being 100 grams overweight before the finals.

This incident has brought a wave of support for Phogat from politicians, celebrities, and fans alike. However, Mathura Lok Sabha MP and actress Hema Malini's comments on the issue drew significant backlash. Malini remarked, "It is very surprising, and it feels strange that she was disqualified for being 100 grams overweight. It is important to keep the weight in check. It is a lesson for all of us." This statement sparked negative reaction on social media, with many criticising her response as insensitive and ill-informed. This situation highlights the importance of public figures being well-informed before commenting on sensitive issues, particularly those involving

athletes and high-stakes competitions.

Athletes at every level carefully monitor their diets, exercise routines, and even minor physical changes to meet strict competition requirements.

Dr Dinshaw Paudwal, the chief medical officer of the Indian contingent, noted that Phogat made significant efforts to lose the excess weight. Her attempts included cutting down on water and food, using the sauna, exercising rigorously, and even cutting her hair to stay within the 50 kg limit.

Given the nation's emotional investment in this incident, it is crucial for politicians and public figures to respond with empathy. As social media continues to amplify voices and reactions, public figures must offer thoughtful and considerate of the circumstances. Such an approach will not only resonate better with the public but also help avoid turning sensitive incidents into fodder for trolls and critics.

Political succession:
the common
problem

In the case of both BJP and Congress, orchestration of support can't be a substitute for a proper process of succession

LINE & LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Businesses and political parties face a well-known problem: succession. Neither always manages to fix it smoothly but businesses do a much better job than political parties. This is particularly true of post-colonial countries. They are still very young politically. India is not an exception. It's not very surprising, therefore, that when you sit down to think about it, the Congress and the BJP, not to mention all the regional parties, are faced with identical succession issues today.

Indeed, the BJP and the Congress both have to start thinking about who will succeed Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, respectively. Modi wins elections but is ageing. Rahul Gandhi is much younger but loses elections. After Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964, the Congress managed its succession by copying monarchies or what a British historian once described as "one rotten egg after another". The BJP hasn't faced the problem so far but will have to face it when Modi decides to retire. Congress supporters, or more

accurately family retainers, will say there's no immediate problem because Rahul Gandhi is still in his mid-50s. But he is also politically incompetent and the least likely to lead the Congress to a parliamentary election victory.

This limitation makes it imperative that the party replaces him. It won't be assuming that it does, it will look no further than his sister. That's what it's become: a monarchy.

But will that solve the post-1989 problem of losing parliamentary elections? After all, it has been unable to win 273 seats in 1989, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024. That's nine general elections. What more proof is needed that it needs to replace the Gandhi family?

But can it be different from will it? And that's the problem: there's no mechanism to replace it. The party's own constitution makes it impossible.

Another unanswered question is

After Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964, the Congress managed its succession by copying monarchies or what a British historian once described as "one rotten egg after another".

whether the party, for whatever reason, is loyal to Sonia Gandhi or her children and is that loyalty transferable. Time will tell.

AFTER MODI WHO?

The BJP was formed in 1953 as the Jana Sangh and then renamed Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. Two men, AB Vajpayee and LK Advani ran it till 2014 when Modi took it over.

Once again two men are running it — Modi and his close friend, Amit Shah. There's nothing to suggest that they have put in place a credible, formal structure for succession. Orchestration of support can't be a substitute for a proper process of succession. It's a recipe for ineffectiveness.

As things stand, it looks as if Shah has the wind in his sails. But he may not be as acceptable to the rank and file as Modi was. Nomination may not work to the party's advantage.

The Congress has faced this problem many times in its 139 years and thrice in the last 65 years — in 1966, 1978 and 1998. It split twice as a result, once in 1969 and again in 1978. In 1998, it locked up its president in the bathroom to make way for Sonia Gandhi. It was a succession by coup.

It's unlikely that the BJP will split if there are two contenders for leadership after Modi hangs up his boots. But the party must at least consider the possibility.

That would be the prudent thing to do.

In such matters, the past isn't always a good guide to the future. This is true not just of India but many other countries as well, especially in South Asia.

A HERETICAL THOUGHT

I have always been of the view that the country will benefit if the Congress and the BJP merge. In a way this process has already started with lots of Congress politicians switching over to the BJP.

On its part, as so many people have pointed out, most of the BJP's policies have resembled Congress policies and are edging closer. Thus, policies-wise, it's a case of Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Where they differ is on the political use to which the Muslims can be put. The Congress uses them in a certain way and the BJP uses them in a certain way. That's all the difference between them.

A large number of ordinary Congress politicians privately agree with the BJP and a large number of BJP politicians privately agree with the Congress. This kind of convergence is actually a sign of the maturity of our democracy.

These are two parties no longer divided by ideology but by leaders. That's ok, too, provided the leaders are chosen, and not either nominated or inherited.

In politics, the process is more important than the outcome.

A strategy for securing critical minerals

Apart from skilling, tech upgrade and proactive regulation, India must tie up with other countries to ensure stable supply

Chandrajit Banerjee

Advanced materials, critical minerals and metals are revolutionising nations' progress as they are widely employed in both industrial and strategic sectors. From renewable energy to electronics and healthcare, these materials are essential for innovation and play a crucial role in addressing key socio-economic challenges, such as climate change and improved resource efficiency.

The global demand for such materials is steadily increasing due to the rapid pace of technological development. For example, materials like rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt, indium, and many others are being extensively used in high-tech devices, electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, and advanced healthcare technologies.

However, only a few countries are leading the production and supply of critical minerals and metals, thereby controlling a significant portion of the global market. This dependency raises concerns about supply chain vulnerabilities and geopolitical risks. As a result, countries worldwide are now actively seeking to diversify their sources and reduce dependencies.

India is one of the world's largest consumers of critical minerals, materials and metals, with a rapidly growing demand driven by its expanding manufacturing and technology ecosystem.

Through industry consultations, CII has identified 10 critical areas in advanced materials, critical materials, and metals for focused collaboration to fast track their commercial development and utilisation.

These include biomaterials, ceramics, composites, graphene, rare earths, recycling materials, titanium, semiconductor materials, aluminium, and steel. While these materials are extensively worked upon and often are exploited commercially, large-scale production to meet the increasing future demand is lagging.

Among the most important challenges in this regard relate to the unavailability of raw materials. For example, India has limited resources of rare earth elements. For metals also, high quality metallurgical coke concentrates are mostly imported.

Another challenge is the shortage of skilled manpower in the materials, minerals and metals sectors. This is primarily because of gaps in specialised training, advanced skills, and collaborations. Regulations, standards, and environmental concerns are other challenges to be addressed.

India has recognised the need to develop a robust domestic supply chain for critical minerals and metals. The government has initiated pioneering measures to promote exploration, mining, and processing of these resources within the country.

Budget 2024-25 announced the Critical Minerals Mission to boost the domestic production and recycling of



IN HIGH DEMAND. For tech products

critical minerals like copper and lithium. This is a significant step towards securing the supply chains of essential minerals vital for modern technologies.

LOOKING AHEAD

Going forward, there's a need for several actions:

First, regular updates to regulatory guidelines by incorporating insights from research and academic experts, will be essential. This iterative process ensures that new materials or techniques are appropriately regulated, thereby potentially reducing entry barriers for indigenous technologies.

Two, it is important that artificial intelligence, machine learning, and various advanced manufacturing technologies be adopted to solve problems related to materials and manufacturing.

Three, enhanced skilling through integrating practical training into technical education programmes,

establishing skill development centres specific to advanced materials manufacturing and encouraging summer training for technology students in core engineering industries would be useful.

Four, industry academia collaboration projects, setting up state of the art testing and validation centres, duplicate efforts in academia and industry compliances, and knowledge of international standards should be incorporated in the course curriculum.

Five, facilitation of technology transfer from academic and national laboratories to startups or MSMEs is vital. Implementing policies to curb duplicate efforts in academia and industrial R&D further optimises resource utilisation and fosters innovation.

Finally, India has been actively engaging in collaborations with other countries to secure a diversified and sustainable supply of these materials. We need to continue focus on enhancing collaborations with other countries to ensure a stable supply of critical minerals and metals. Bilateral and multilateral agreements and strategic alliances can help in developing sustainable supply chains.

Adopting sustainable mining would also ensure responsible extraction of critical minerals and metals. This includes promoting environmental protection, social responsibility, and ethical sourcing practices.

The writer is Director-General, CII

BELOW THE LINE



Silent diplomacy

The government is maintaining a heavy silence over future plans of ousted Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has currently taken refuge in India after being forced to flee her country by anti-government protesters. The only fact that has been officially revealed by the MEA is that India was given an extremely short notice

before she arrived. This would obviously mean that the government had very little time to weigh the consequences of sheltering the Bangladesh leader, although refusing her entry would have been an unambiguously thing to do. But what no one in the MEA seems to have an answer to is for how long Hasina be sheltered. With reports coming in that some student leaders want her to face trial in Bangladesh things seem to be getting more complicated. If any of the European and Middle East countries where the former FM has reportedly sought asylum do not respond soon, what would India's course of action be? The answers at the moment seem to be blowing in the wind.

Uff Jaya ji

In a heated showdown that had everyone talking, veteran actor and Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan locked horns with Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar in Parliament this week. The flashpoint? Jaya's sharp critique of the Chairman's "unacceptable tone", which she claimed disrespected not only her but also the decorum of the House. "I may be a celebrity, but I understand body language, and your tone is not acceptable," Jaya boldly declared, only to be cut off mid-speech by a visibly irate Dhankhar, who insisted, "You may be anybody... you have to understand the decorum... Every actor is subject to director!" The fiery exchange led to an

Opposition walkout, with senior leaders, including Sonia Gandhi, rallying behind Jaya. Meanwhile, BJP leaders wasted no time in slamming the protest, calling it "indecent and irresponsible." The drama has left Rajya Sabha chamber buzzing, proving that in Indian politics, the stage is never without its stars. **Crash course for investors** In an amusing twist of investor anxiety, the SEBI chairperson and top officials found themselves in the spotlight this past week after receiving an intriguing email from a concerned investor. The investor demanded to know why the Indian stock market was plummeting just because Japan's Nikkei index was falling due to carry trade unwinding. But it didn't stop there — the

investor insisted that SEBI take swift action to ensure the Indian market bounces back to its all-time highs by the week's end! This curious request has sparked a mix of humour and concerns within SEBI. "When we get emails like this, we start to worry if people are adequately informed about the securities market ecosystem," remarked a SEBI 'Whole-Time Member. While such cases might be rare, it does highlight a larger issue — too many investors who have only seen the market's sunny side and are unprepared for the inevitable corrections. As the market moves unpredictably, one thing is clear: some investors could use a crash course in market dynamics! **Our Bureaus**

When ED Does What It Should Do Best

An attempt to restore trust has begun

Life is not always grim. More than a decade after 22 lakh small depositors in West Bengal, Assam and Bihar lost their hard-earned savings in the Rose Valley Ponzi scheme, there was heartening news last week. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) will reportedly disburse close to ₹12 cr from attached fixed deposits to bona fide depositors on a pro-rata basis. The process began on July 24 in Kolkata when a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court directed ED to transfer the 14 attached FDs, valued at ₹11.99 cr, to a court-monitored Asset Disposal Committee (ADC) for restitution. This development—a first in India—is, as the court order stated, 'appropriate and rational', and the money must be utilised to compensate bankrupt investors and depositors rather than remaining idle as NPA until the long-drawn case is resolved. An attempt to restore trust has begun.

The Rose Valley Group was accused of duping investors of about ₹17 cr across different states, offering plans with interest rates ranging from 11.2% to 17.65%. Other reports allege that the impact on small investors was between ₹40k cr and ₹60k cr. The group's modus operandi was watertight: depositors could not cancel their subscriptions, and investors could not retrieve their money before the end of the tenure. It didn't only affect those who deposited money—an umbrella organisation safeguarding the interests of duped investors, Investors (Amanatkar) & Agents Suraksha Manch, alleges that 220 agents who worked for these schemes committed suicide after the scam was reported.

While the restitution move will certainly bring relief to affected individuals and restore some trust in the system, such cases highlight the need to institute and run basic financial literacy programmes for citizens and make safe access to investment instruments for all a priority. ED must also remain focused on its original remit: to nip financial scams in the bud. A growing economy such as India can't afford to have frauds undermining its reputation or terrorising its people.

If Looks Could Skill, India Can Get Global

Companies are widening their leadership funnel by investing in CXO training to deliver on India's growth prospects and reduce management churn. This is good business. Indian companies will have to grow much faster to make India a global manufacturing base. Critically, as markets for Indian goods and services expand, managers must be brought up to speed on skills that are required in the global marketplace. This has two positive effects. First, it widens the managerial bandwidth for entrepreneurship. Second, it allows companies to attain the necessary managerial diversity.

Since companies are proactive about attaining competitiveness, their skilling initiatives are unlikely to be restricted to top brass. The requirements are more intense at the bottom entry layer, and GoI has begun incentivising them. If India Inc. acquires a global scale, its manpower requirements should grow in step. Companies need to implement more aggressive skilling programmes to compensate for the gaps in educational outcomes. Industry must work closer with academic institutions to make the young workforce more employable. This is predicated on the growth the current managerial talent pool can deliver in a global marketplace.

Pushing employment ahead of scale is a bit like redistributing wealth before it is created. It leads to a loss of competitiveness, and companies are best placed to decide on their manpower and skill requirements. Incentives can play a limited and time-bound role here. The sustainable solution to India's employment issue is faster business growth. Since employment is more intensive in small enterprises, policy should prioritise their growth. This segment also needs external assistance to close the skills gap.

JUST IN JEST
Breakdancing as an Olympic sport—kathak, soon if we lobby?

Breaking News, A Sport For a While

So, breakdancing became an Olympic sport over Friday to Sunday for some 30 hours for the first (and possibly last) time. Perhaps, because it required the gravitas of the Olympics, it was referred to as 'breaking' instead of breakdancing. Which brings us to the question: by virtue of it requiring extreme physical virtuosity, is it a sport? As Aussie standup Benjamin French, a.k.a. Frenchy put it, 'Having breakdancing in the Olympics is like having a trans Mexican woman at a Trump rally. Like, yeah, you can be there. But, WHY?' Japan's Ami Yusa, a.k.a. B-Girl Ami and Canada's Philip 'Wizarr' Kim, a.k.a. B-boy won gold. The 'sport' has both street dancers and Olympic aficionados wondering why the breaking needed Olympic branding certification. What next? Disco, ballet as an Olympic sport? Don't get us wrong. The more inclusionary the Olympics get the better. Antakshari or Lu do being included could even get India a medal. Plus, breaking, one supposes, is ice-skating of Winter Olympics without the rink and blades. So... One wonders what the likes of great dancers like MC Hammer and Michael Jackson would have reckoned if they had breakdancing as an Olympic sport during their heydays. Not to push matters, kathak, in its gymnast's way, could well be included as an Olympic discipline if lobbied enough. And soon, some worthy video games, too.

Hindenburg's latest exploit could mean a hurried, incomplete closure to a complex saga

Much Ado About SEBI



Sugata Ghosh

Senior advisers and loyal colleagues of Madhabi Puri Buch—she doesn't have many—probably believe that SEBI hasn't done a particularly stellar job in tracking the Adani group's investments in verifying Hindenburg's damaging allegations against one of the country's most influential business groups. At the same time, the American short-seller, whose professed business is exploiting the cracks in corporate armours, comes across as a wounded wolf whose wild howls are slowing down their fury.

Stung by a rebuff from the Indian market regulator, Hindenburg has cobbled together a sensational report that could only have a limited collateral damage. If it is as desperate, though understandable, attempt by the Wall St firm to link SEBI's supposed inaction to certain past 'associations' between the Adani and the SEBI chairperson and her husband, Dhaval Buch, a senior corporate chief, while these links traced by Hindenburg on the basis of whistleblowers' reports are legally tenuous, they may not go unnoticed.

The Buchs had invested in offshore funds allegedly used by the Adanis to move around money. But they had redeemed their investments in early 2018. However, these were public funds, and the exits happened before SEBI began its probe on Adani. And, if the Buchs were residing abroad at the time of investment, it should not necessarily arouse any suspicion as NRIs freely invest in overseas funds having predominant exposure to Indian securities. A fortnight after her appointment as SEBI chairperson, Madhabi Puri

Buch transferred her stake in a Singapore consulting outfit to her husband, but continued to own an eponymous unlisted advisory firm in Mumbai. A legitimate foreign consulting business owned by an NRI power couple is perfectly normal while a large ownership in an unlisted local firm, which is outside the domain of SEBI, is no violation of rules.

While Madhabi Puri Buch was a whole-time SEBI member, her husband Daval Daval owned the private equity biggie Blackstone as a senior adviser. The high profile hire, according to Hindenburg, benefited Blackstone as SEBI changed the rules of REITs (real estate investment trusts)—entitles mana-

ges portfolios of high-value realties and mortgages.

Here again, it would be unfair to conclude anything. The real estate and financial markets had been long lobbying for freer REIT regulations, and it's normal for a large PE house to hire a domain expert like Dhaval, an engineer who was executive director and chief procurement officer at Unilever.

Even a law undergraduate would pick holes in Hindenburg's recent report of charges. The question, however, may have little to do with laws. It's about standards of probity. Disclosure matters. Did the chairperson and SEBI tell the Supreme Court and the apex court appointed panel that looked into the Adani matter about her family's earlier investments in offshore funds that were allegedly connected to the same group that was under the lens? Just as a lawyer or judge is expected to put the cards on the table to disclose any perceived conflict. If it was not, it was probably out of fear that information of investments



Whose disaster is it anyway?

old long ago were no longer relevant, and such details could only muddy the waters in a hostile political environment. But if she did share the details, she would be Caesar's wife, and thus beyond reproach.

Notwithstanding the present political arithmetic, New Delhi is unlikely to attach much significance to Hindenburg's claims. Doing so could mean giving credence to the short-seller's original January 2023 report where it accused the Adani group of share price manipulation and accounting chicanery.

SEBI, which has received settlement applications from certain parties and was, perhaps, hoping for the Adani story to fizzle out, had apparently hit walls of secrecy during the probe with multiple jurisdictions refusing to part with identities of real owners of the overseas funds that had acquired Adani stocks. This could well be true, though many may find it a bit rich in times where countries, including tax havens,

exchange information on tax evaders and money launderers.

Now, chances are that an emboldened opposition, baying for blood and simply looking for a scalp to prove the point, would turn the focus on the personal and sensational nature of Hindenburg's allegations. Politicians know more than others that such allegations—even if they lack legal legs—can colour the optics. But that would be barking up the wrong tree.

Hindenburg, of course, has no choice. A nasty counterattack and casting aspersions on Madhabi Puri Buch is a reckless strategy to protect its currency as a fearless short-seller and defend the 2023 Adani report.

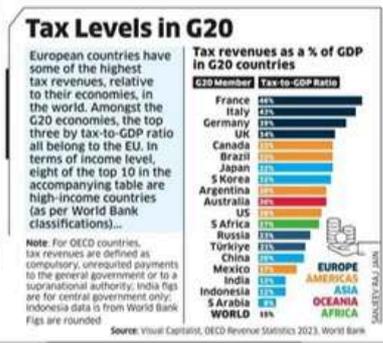
From time to time, it could kick up dirt to assert itself. Such stunts would only sporadically annoy and embarrass authorities, relegate the opposition and thrill the media. But it won't take us to the truth.

Indeed, Hindenburg's latest exploit and the opposition's clamour could mean a hurried, incomplete closure to a complex saga that tangles on multiple levels. Today, we run the risk where the Hindenburg-Adani story may die before it ends.

sugata.ghosh@timesgroup.com

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

There once was a group called SEBI,
Who said, 'Short reports make us edgy',
When Hindenburg came,
With a fiery claim,
SEBI said, 'We'll investigate... eventually'.



Bell Curves by R Prasad

It's time to elevate this partnership into a subsidiary alliance.

-Com is New E-Com



Jaideep S Mehta

On August 1, Zomato declared its quarterly results. Blinkit is now on a ₹500 annual revenue run rate and is growing at 150% annually. At ₹6k cr, Swiggy's Instamart and Zepto at ₹7.5k cr are also of significant scale. The former is on the verge of an IPO, looking for a valuation of between ₹12 bn and ₹15 bn. Zepto just raised ₹665 mn to fuel its growth, with its valuation crossing the \$1 bn mark. Blinkit's powerhouse performance is driving Zomato's stock to all-time highs, and the company's valuation has crossed ₹22 bn.

What started as a somewhat gimmicky business is now turning into a tsunami that threatens to engulf conventional e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart. Schumpeter is at work. The retail sector's disruptors, e-commerce giants, are being disrupted by the next-gen startups that have created a new category of consumer desire.

The first pillar of this disruption is human imagination. A creative mind dreamt that a '10 min' delivery model for consumer products is the way forward while the rest of the world was wrestling with the challenges associated with next-day delivery.

Fundamental concepts were borrowed from the Amazon play-book—convenience and speed. Amazon Prime's value proposition, marked by same-day or next-day deliveries, had already habituated customers to fast gratification. Quick commerce companies moved this from fast to instant gratification, reducing the desire-to-consumption cycle to 10 mins.

To realise this dream, changes were made:

- Logistics and warehousing were reimagined.
- Mini warehouses, or dark stores, were introduced.

New software is written to operate them efficiently as conventional warehouse management systems were too complex and, thus, unfit for purpose.

- Locations had to be chosen with different variables in mind—intersection of densely populated urban areas and where low-cost real estate was available.
- Logistics and delivery infrastructure also required a fresh approach. Rider concentration is much denser in quick commerce, with delivery zones typically within a 1-2 km radius of the dark store. This is a sharp contrast to the hub-and-spoke systems adopted by e-commerce, where delivery centres were the core of gravity being their mega distribution centres, typically found in out-of-town locations.

Now thinking around merchandising was evident in the make-up of the product catalogues. Convenience and quick consumption products such as snacks, soft drinks, beauty products and other everyday items were the mainstay; a radical departure from the core e-commerce categories of fashion, beauty and telephones. Revenue took off, and a new business model was born.

The next stage of evolution sees them expanding their product range into higher-value products. For example, today you can order ear pods from Blinkit or even mobile phones. Over time, the value per order has increased significantly with zero change in supply chain, logistics and delivery costs, dramatically improving unit economics and driving these businesses towards sustainable profitability in order values, too. Blinkit leads with ₹85 per order; Instamart is at around ₹60.

The stakes are high. According to Redusee, e-commerce in India clocked a gross merchandise value of ₹60 bn in 2023, and is growing at more than 20% a year. It won't be long before quick commerce comes to the largest e-commerce category, fashion, which accounts for 27% of revenues, or drives deeper into the high-order-value consumer electronics and telecom category.

A competitive response from Flipkart and Amazon has been forced. The former has launched its quick commerce arm while the latter is rumoured to be on the acquisition hunt for Instamart, possibly Swiggy. The two giants understand that quick commerce can disrupt them in a very damaging way, though it may not eat up their entire business. It is showing the potential to allow the most frequent and profitable customers who buy the highest value products.

Tata Group's Big Basket and Reliance's Durozo are playing in the same ballpark. Though they are niche players, their deep-pocketed parents can provide massive funding should they decide. It will be interesting to watch their moves, given both conglomerates' public commitment to the retail and e-commerce sector.

Months later, Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal visualises that their quick commerce business will grow to rival the e-commerce business. He's quietly retooling his company to exploit the opportunity.

The e-commerce industry is, thus, in the throes of disruption. It is anybody's guess who wins. But it's all around good news for the Indian consumer.

These titanic battles have resulted in a fresh wave of deep discounting even as instant gratification has become the norm. To think that the inflection point came due to the '10 min' imagination of the 17-year-olds who founded Zepto.



Fast is the Furious The writer is MD, RIZOLT

MELODY FOR MONDAY

The Man-Machine
Kraftwerk

The sound of today's—and tomorrow's—AI was created way back. Kraftwerk's 'The Man-Machine'—from their iconic 1978 album of the same name—is a mesmerising blend of electronic music and philosophical musings, encapsulating a world that is yet to come.

This track is a testament to Kraftwerk's ability to merge technology with art, creating a soundscape that is both futuristic and timeless. From the very first ticking notes to the synth breaking through and joined by the harmonics, we are entering a tunnel of sound. The beauty of the lyrics—minimal yet profound—is based on the power of repetition of the word 'ma-chine'. Repetition here is the alga-rhythm.

This juxtaposition of man and machine is not just a commentary on the technological advancements of the time but also a prophetic vision of the future, where the lines between human and machine blur.

It's a masterpiece of electronic composition. The use of synthesizers and vocoders creates a robotic yet classical sound that is quintessentially Kraftwerk. The track is a wind, warm paws to the human element that lies in the machine—and the organic machine that the human is.



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THE SPEAKING TREE

Two Steps To Compassion

Compassion is a sublime virtue and meditative practice. Compassion distinguishes itself from loving kindness because it extends beyond feelings of warmth and goodwill toward others. It is the process of permitting ourselves to be profoundly affected by the pain and vulnerability that all living things share. Being truly compassionate entails being aware of pain and acting appropriately in response to it. It includes a sincere attempt to lessen suffering and improve the lives of others around us.

The cultivation of compassion involves two essential steps. Normally, we strive to distance ourselves from misery to avoid dealing with it directly. The first step is overcoming our innate tendency to run away from or isolate ourselves from sorrow. Rather, we deliberately decide to confront it head-on and let it impact us. It necessitates a shift in our mindset and a readiness to accept and relate to both our suffering and that of others. We grow in empathy for people who are suffering by turning towards their suffering, including our own.

Responding with compassion to suffering is the second step. Acting to alleviate or treat the pain rather than just expressing empathy. It entails proactively looking for solutions to deal with or lessen suffering—for us as well as for others. It is equally vital that we show ourselves compassion and kindness, acknowledge our frailties, and offer ourselves forgiveness and understanding.

Chat Room

Keep Staff Motivated

Apropos the Report 'India Inc Goes All Out to Retain Top Talent Amid Rising Attrition' (Aug 13). Attrition is an inescapable part of the corporate ecosystem, which can be reduced but not eliminated. Companies should initiate succession planning and decide on the talent resources they want to retain for growth. Better employee engagement practices, a conducive working environment, transparent career progression plans and compensation packages above industry standards will motivate performers to remain. Talent retention plans should be aligned with the long-term needs of the company.

RAJARAJ KUMAR

Looking Under The Hood

Apropos 'Not Everything, But Something' by Boris Majumdar (Aug 11). While not bettering the medals tally, India's performance in the Tokyo Olympics is disappointing. The improvement in the general level of performance of our sportspeople, higher level of participation and competition should be seen as a positive.

BIJU CHERIAN

A Pragmatist Above All

Apropos the Edit 'A Mutating Marxist's Lesson For India Inc' (Aug 10). The passing away of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, a Marxist with a difference known for his intellectual rigour and literary acumen, marks the end of an era for West Bengal's political and cultural landscape. He goes down in history as the pragmatic communist who was willing to keep aside his ideological convictions and embrace capitalism for the industrialisation of his state. Critics derided him for this, but his approach was not at the cost of economic and social justice.

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editor@timesofindia.com

GLOBAL FINTECH FEST

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION



Either-or taxation could go down a slippery slope

Choice is usually heartening, but in the case of taxes, joy dissipates fast if we're left staring at a maze of mathematics. Beware forked levies, lest we slide further into legal complexity

Once upon a time, only storytellers took it upon themselves to challenge Mark Twain's quip that death and taxes were the two certainties of life. They came up with zombies, neither dead nor alive. Policymakers might be relatively new to the task, but did not take long to sap the certainty of taxation. Among other devices, they invented the oddity of either-or gateways to comply with the law. In India, of course, the stated purpose is to offer taxpayers choice. This has a certain ring of liberty to it, the kind that consumers learnt to relish after Indian markets were liberated from the Licence Raj. Paying taxes, however, is not the same as buying a household durable. Confronted with a liability that differs by which of two options is exercised, taxpayers are easily confounded by the math involved in weighing one versus the other.

The ground for forked taxes was laid more than half a decade ago, sprung on us, ironically, by that great simplifier of indirect levies: the goods and services tax (GST). Take the case of pre-built homes that don't count as 'affordable' in the taxman's lexicon: larger than 646-sq-ft in carpet area, i.e., and priced above ₹45 lakh. Before 1 April 2019, their sales were charged GST at a rate of 12% with the burden lowered by input tax credit (ITC) for levies on inputs. In response to a plea that much of what went into flats was sourced from the informal sector, with no trail of tax bills for respite, that rate was slashed to 5%, but without any ITC granted. Apart from cost confusion among builders with partly built residential projects, which sell by and by, the upshot in some cases was differing prices of identical flats within the same housing complex. Such an uneven pitch can tempt a

googly, and India's pre-covid budget delivered one soon for a far larger group: Assessee of income tax. We could either go by the old tax regime, with its rates rising in slabs from 5% to 30% on earnings after claiming tax relief for a clutch of investments, insurance premiums, housing outflows, etc, or forgo deductions to opt for a simplified new regime with lower slab charges. For folks uneasy about making annual allotments of money just for tax savings, this was a bold display of fiscal justice. Many others, though, got caught between the two options, unsure which works out more favourably. If the privilege that lets salaried earners switch back and forth hasn't eased the dilemma, nor has the low interest tax-consultants apparently have in freeing clients of complexity. Authorities can hardly profess surprise that some taxpayers got pushed to the end of their wits. Any choice (barring a Hobson's) constitutes a 'Pareto' gain over none at all, since it favours at least somebody without making anyone else worse off. This theory is behind last week's bifurcation of capital-gains tax on secondary sales of long-held homes into a choice of paying either 20% of one's gains with 'indexation' or 12.5% without using this deflator to lessen the effect of inflation. This reprieve spans more than two decades, but it's not as if the 'money illusion' of a weakening currency can't be seen through for homes held for fewer years. Post-budget home buyers will get no choice, but for many homeowners, it's yet another puzzle to reckon with. 'Positive for AI,' sums up the snarky reviews.

Mark Twain was either impressed or amused by the multiplicity of everything in India. But when it comes to tax liabilities, it's far from costless. Either-or taxation mustn't multiply, lest we go down a slippery slope to complexity.

What, if anything, compels us to spend public money on sports?

National glory, public health or other gains? Indian policy needs clarity on what we're aiming for



NITIN PAI is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy.

Now that the 2024 Olympics have come to an end, it is a good time to reflect on India's sports policy. The most important question is usually left unasked: why should the Union and state governments spend public funds on sports? Specifically, why should the Indian exchequer finance participation in the Olympic Games? Let me report on an animated discussion we had at Takshashila last week. There were multiple points of view and I isolated a few ways of answering these questions.

The zeroth response came from my libertarian colleagues. It says that the government should not spend public funds on sports. Doing so would both be a violation of individual liberty and an undue state intervention in society. This does not mean sports is unimportant, only that government should keep out of it. Leave it to society. Most citizens consider religion important, but we keep the state out of it, right? Right?

The public health argument, in my mind, successfully makes the case for government involvement in promoting sports. The more people engage in sports, the fitter and healthier they will be. This will contribute both to public health and reduce healthcare expenditure. There are big positive externalities from sports and hence there is a case for a government role. From this angle, the administration must ensure there are playgrounds, sports facilities, gyms, sta-

diums and swimming pools within easy access to citizens. It could require sports to be included as part of school curricula, with kids getting enough time and opportunities to engage in sporting activities. However, the public health argument does not require the government to finance sportspeople to compete in the Olympics, world cups or other international championships.

The social psychology argument contends that competitive sports is essentially a substitute for warfare and offers a way to create higher-level unity in a diverse, fractious and polarized society. External competition provides a superordinate incentive for internal unity. One of the few occasions when Indians in India identify as Indians is when we cheer for our national sports teams. Ergo, the government must invest in winning international championships to strengthen the sense of nationhood and unity. Playgrounds and facilities for common citizens are nice to have, and important to the extent that they contribute towards the quest for gold medals and championship trophies.

There are two variants to the social psychology argument. The first is that the Olympic medals tally demonstrates national achievement and power to the world, although countries like North Korea and those in the former communist bloc take this too far. The second is that seeking medals despite low per capita income is a statement of national aspiration, much like how Nehru supported nuclear, space and aerospace research in the 1950s despite India being desperately poor. We remind ourselves and the world of where we think we belong, regardless of where we are right now.

Beyond public health and national glory, there is the utilitarian argument. Sports can be a source of economic activity, growth and development. Around the world, many cities have invested in massive sports facilities and Formula One circuits to attract visitors who spend on hotels, shopping and

tourist attractions. Odisha's investments in sports facilities have the potential of becoming a growth vector to the state. The success of premier league cricket, football and kabaddi point to the economic potential of sports. Utilitarians argue that the government must invest in infrastructure, facilities and training for the sports economy to flourish.

Here's the thing, though: While we have three different reasons for public expenditure on sports, each suggests a different goal with a different strategy. Public health calls for the government to promote a sporting lifestyle by providing infrastructure. National glory recommends host-housing world champions by directing resources towards our best bets. Economic benefits will come if we attract celebrity sportspeople and franchises. India must therefore choose why it must invest taxpayer money in sports. Else, we will spread our efforts and budgets too thin to make a serious impact towards any one goal.

In practice, government expenditure tends to be driven by bureaucratic incrementalism, both in goals and budgetary allocations. The answer to why public money is spent on sports is "because we did so last year." The Union sports ministry's budget this year is practically the same as the previous year's. Our public expenditure on sports in general, and on Olympics in particular, is much smaller than that of countries that top the medals tally. This strengthens the case for clarity of purpose. Unless there is a substantive policy review that clarifies basic public goals, we will do more of the same.

Finally, a note of caution to those who argue for boosting the medals tally. There is a correlation between Olympic medals and per capita income. It is reasonable to impute causality: As we get richer, we will have more resources for competitive sports. No harm then in focusing on good old economic growth. The medals will come, as will better public health and national glory.



JUST A THOUGHT

It's income tax time again: time to gather up those receipts, get out those tax forms, sharpen up that pencil, and stab yourself in the aorta.

DAVE BARRY

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why there's a clash over classifying an athlete as female

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

Who is a female athlete? The attempt at an answer has created confusion and rage in top sporting competitions. As we saw at the Olympics few weeks ago when Algerian boxer Inane Khelif was at the centre of a storm after an Italian boxer quit in less than a minute of a bout, and later gave fear of death as the reason because Khelif's blows were too strong, Khelif's gender came under question, once again.

The people who run global sports and those who frame mainstream decency have since defended Khelif vehemently. As far as the Olympics are concerned, Khelif is a woman because she says she is one and her passport says so. On her part, she has never revealed details that can put the matter to rest. For instance, if she has XX chromosomes, there can be no further argument.

Almost all humans have 46 chromosomes in every cell and they exist as 23 pairs. The 23rd pair is of sex chromosomes. Depending on your age, you may or may not have learnt in school that a woman is considered a per-

son whose 23rd pairing of sex chromosomes are XX and a man is one whose are XY. But this is not the scientific opinion anymore.

For clarity, I will refer to humans who have XX pairing as 'XX' and those with XY pairing as 'XY'. This is how things stand today: All men are XY but not all XY are men; and all XX are women but not all women are XX.

This means there are XY women, they have many attributes of most women, even reproductive structures. Also, they consider themselves women. But their condition may give them high testosterone levels that are in the range observed in men. Testosterone greatly contributes to muscle size and strength, and create other features that help in sports. How much the hormone contributes to sporting prowess and in which sport is a matter of debate, but there is no doubt that its high level is useful.

So there has for long been a debate around whether women who have XY chromosomes should be allowed to compete against 'normal' women. There are powerful arguments on both sides.

A sporting contest is primarily a measure of physical inequalities. When seen that way, all great sporting geniuses are physical freaks. Why shouldn't the Y chromosome in a woman and her high testosterone be con-

sidered ingredients of genius? Sports are also a measure of economic disparity. The boxer who surrendered to Khelif was from Italy, which is many times richer than Algeria, where Khelif was raised by a family of modest means. Who is to tell which is a greater unfair advantage—the backing of an advanced European nation or a Y chromosome?

The Olympics are also a moral festival. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) gives precedence to freedom of participation and the framing of the world as a decent place that does not discriminate based on who you are.

In any case, the IOC has tried hard to be fair to XX women, those who are widely considered 'normal women'. For instance, it requires XY women to have low testosterone levels or to medicate themselves to bring down those levels. But women with XX chromosomes do not have a cap on testosterone levels. However, I don't think the world knows of a single XX woman who has male-range testosterone levels.

Also, in athletics, apart from requiring XY women to have low testosterone, transgendered women who went through puberty as males are not allowed to compete. So, it is not as though the IOC has not tried hard to be fair to XX women.

There are equally powerful arguments against the decency of the Olympics, why it's important to define women, and why the world should stop pretending that there is no such thing as a 'normal woman'. In pursuit of decency, the mainstream tends to go overboard in denying normality, ending up putting a majority at a disadvantage. This is happening with XY women. Ten years ago, anecdotally, the biggest champions of transgendered XY women, or women with differences in sex development, or simply women who didn't look like women, were 'normal' XX women. But now I see a shift.

When a minority grows stronger, easy compassion for them dries up. There can be no moral argument in favour of the view

that XY women should not be considered women. Only practical.

For instance, consider the nature of influence. Why are there separate tournaments and grading systems for women in chess? Isn't that an insult in a mental sport? But if you have a daughter, you will understand why it makes a lot of sense. The sport's organizers are trying to create female chess icons and encourage more girls to play. We are inspired by people who look like us, or who are us. Girls are inspired women.

In physical sports, there is already a feeling among gifted XX girls, in their formative years of athleticism, that they don't stand a chance against women whose chromosomes differ. In many physical sports, XY women are set to change how future female sporting icons are going to look. This can create a scarcity of 'normal women' in some sports. People can say decent things, and maybe they should, but people do feel a lot of things that may not be decent yet are human nature. And I do believe that XX girls are more inspired by XX women than XY.

On many turfs of women, what creeps in and colonizes is not the ploys of patriarchy, but a certain soft maleness.



MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

MINT CURATOR

Our geopolitical balancing beam has suddenly become bumpier

As events in Bangladesh complicate India's strategic regional interests, New Delhi requires a new South Asia master-plan



RAJRISHI SINGHAL
is a senior journalist and author of the recently released book 'Slip, Stitch and Stumble: The Untold Story of India's Financial Sector Reforms' @rajrishisinghal

The balancing beam in India's geopolitical gymnasium has got narrower and harder to handle. The resignation of Bangladesh's leader Sheikh Hasina and her subsequent flight to India from Dhaka, capping a month of unrest and street violence, has injected fresh instability in the South Asian neighbourhood. Security issues have arisen from the governance vacuum in Bangladesh, including apprehensions of increasing encroachment, adding to India's existing geopolitical headaches. This is expected to have repercussions on India's domestic economy as well.

This is the latest addition to a series of tough geopolitical challenges for India which began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and got muddier with the Israel-Palestine conflict. Both wars, unnecessary and unending, have adversely affected India's economy by disrupting established global trade and supply routes, and introducing imported inflation through elevated commodity prices. India has chosen a strategic neutral position, criticizing war but steering clear of condemning Russia. India's dependence on Russia for military hardware—and the availability of Russian crude at discount rates—has necessitated this 'balanced' response. New Delhi's dependence on Tel Aviv for critical aviation technology and crucial intelligence inputs has resulted in the noticeable absence of an official response to Israel's wanton violence in Gaza.

But this balanced outlook has limited shelf life. Threats in the immediate neighbourhood are likely to demand a completely different response from India's foreign policy desk and security apparatus. Dominos have been falling one after another, with Bangladesh merely the latest casualty.

The chronology of developments in Bangladesh makes for interesting reading. On 13 July, Sheikh Hasina returned from Beijing, cutting short her trip by a day, ostensibly miffed over China's extension of \$100 million in aid against the \$5 billion expected. She also reportedly may have felt slighted by the treatment meted out to her. To make matters worse, she had completed two trips to New Delhi before flying to Beijing. Before travelling to China, Hasina had encouraged a bidding war between India and China for the expansion and modernization of Bangladesh's Mongla port on Rupsa river and for its operating rights. Once she got back to Dhaka, media reports claimed India had bagged Mongla port's operational rights. This followed the 2018 decision to allow India access to both Chittagong and Mongla ports for transporting goods to the Northeast.

An India Today story on her balancing act between India and China had quoted professor Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University as saying, "There



will be a point in time when India-Bangladesh and China-Bangladesh relations will come to a head." The port deal seems to have become that point, with trouble that had been simmering in the background suddenly acquiring critical mass.

On 1 July, students in Bangladesh had gone on protest asking for reforms of the country's job quota system. So far, so peaceful. On 14 July, a day after Sheikh Hasina returned from Beijing, the protests suddenly changed complexion: they became generalized, acquired a violent streak, and spilled on to the streets. On 16 July, police firing killed six students, further inflaming protests.

India's Mongla port deal was struck somewhere around 18 July. By 20 July, as protests and violence claimed over 260 lives, military curfew was imposed. Finally, on 5 August, Sheikh Hasina was forced to resign and flee the country as the military confessed its inability to resist waves of marauding mobs, speculated to be controlled by the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is known to be close to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and, by extension, subject to Beijing's imprimatur.

Apart from losing an ally in the neighbourhood, India faces other challenges; Bangladesh's new regime is bound to re-examine all past deals. So, not only does the Mongla deal now appear in jeopardy, even as India's access to the Northeast through Mongla and Chittagong stands disrupted, it is also quite likely that the new regime will favour other powers by granting them access to critical Bay of Bengal springboards.

Developments in Bangladesh could be viewed as

part of a broader trend in the South Asian jigsaw puzzle. Pakistan, facing near bankruptcy and eardrum-deep domestic instability, finally has a government in place. With elected leader Imran Khan in jail, the Pakistani army—and its cat's paw, the ISI—has also managed to regain control over the country's political system. It is well known that debt-servicing problems have Pakistan over a barrel, forcing Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to huff out to Beijing and make all kinds of security promises to Xi Jinping in return for Chinese largesse, both in terms of restructuring old debt as well as appealing for fresh funds.

Down south, Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis has left it partially vulnerable, though baleful Chinese influence through crippling infrastructure debt seems to have receded momentarily. Further south in the Indian Ocean, the 2023 elections in the Maldives threw up President Mohammed Muizzu, who has perceptibly increased the distance between Male and New Delhi. Whether the archipelago will truly get warmer towards China is yet to be seen.

On India's north-eastern borders, the ever-revolving political carousel in Nepal has settled on K.P. Sharma Oli as the prime minister for a fourth time. Oli is seen as more favourable to Beijing than to New Delhi. Even Bhutan is now seeking to thaw ties with China, ostensibly to reduce security threats and settle pending border disputes.

Clearly, India's new gymnastics routine will now have to include a new set of somersaults and cartwheels.

Like Biden, Boeing's new CEO should only be a bridge leader

The plane-maker ought to work on a succession plan right away



BETH KOWITZ
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Boeing's incoming CEO Kelly Ortberg is expected to end its turbulence.

Boeing Company has gotten a lot very wrong over the last few years, at times with devastating consequences. But when its board announced its new pick for CEO, the market seemed to think it had finally gotten something right. Investors sent the stock up 2% on the news that Kelly Ortberg would be its next chief.

Ortberg seems to check all the boxes: a company outsider untainted by past Boeing scandals, industry experience, a background in mechanical engineering, and, perhaps most important to the board and Wall Street, he's been a CEO before. He ran Rockwell Collins, a maker of cockpit controls, beginning in 2013 and sold it to what was then United Technologies in 2018.

The Boeing board's logic is that Ortberg's past CEO experience means he can jump into the job without the learning curve that first-time big boss often experience. That's especially important right now for Boeing, which faces challenges that would be daunting for even the most seasoned executive: cratering sales and profits, a much-needed cultural overhaul, upgrading union negotiations, completing and integrating its acquisition of Spirit AeroSystems, and managing an incensed public and Washington.

This kind of turmoil is unique to Boeing, but the chaos of the global economy right now is not. The CEO job has never been more complicated, as companies grapple with everything from geopolitical tensions to an uncertain economic environment to the war on "woke capitalism." Hiring someone with a realistic grasp of what the job entails seems like it would be a real advantage, and boards are embracing that line of thinking. Last year, 22% of incoming S&P 500 CEOs had previously held the job at another public company, up from just 4% in 1997, according to executive search firm Spencer Stuart. As it has noted, "For some, prior experience becomes a seemingly logical proxy for future performance."

But the data indicates that's just not true. In a 2020 study of 855 S&P 500 CEOs over a 20-year period, Spencer Stuart found that while 97% of repeat CEOs had outperformed the market in their first CEO role, only 38% did so in their next roles. In fact, first-time CEOs have higher total shareholder returns and less volatility in performance than experienced CEOs. We need only look to Boeing for evidence that prior CEO experience isn't the safe bet that boards hope it will be; two of its last three previous chiefs, David Calhoun and Jim McNerney, were both repeaters—and we all saw how that worked out.

Spencer Stuart found that repeat CEOs have an advantage in the early years of their tenure when they can rely on their old playbook, one that often focuses on short-term goals like improving efficiency and profitability. But around year four, that playbook tends to stop working, and problems compound when an executive refuses to deviate from it. Meanwhile, first-timers generally have a longer-term focus, in part because they tend to have a longer tenure in the job.

Boeing has specific needs right now, and Ortberg may in fact be the right CEO at this point in the game. At Rockwell, he was known for being a regular presence on the factory floor and for having strong relationships with customers and regulators—a boon for Boeing as it rebuilds an engineering-first culture and its reputation.

But that doesn't mean Ortberg is the perfect person to lead for the long term—a point the company seems to have recognized. The board waived its mandatory retirement age to hire the 64-year-old, and unless it waives it again, Ortberg will depart before his 71st birthday in April 2031. That would give him a 6.5-year tenure, below the average for an S&P 500 CEO. Just as President Joe Biden once referred to himself as a "bridge" to the next generation of leaders, the company should be thinking of Ortberg as a bridge CEO, and start its succession planning now.

At one time, Stephanie Pope, the company's chief operating officer and head of its commercial aeroplane unit, was considered a top CEO contender. Her background as both a Boeing insider and finance person made her the wrong person for the moment. But the board's decision to pass her over is also representative of what happens when companies look to hire a repeater. The vast majority of CEOs are male and Caucasian—which means the pool of candidates looks more or less the same. As Spencer Stuart writes, "Reliance on prior experience as an indicator of future success thus perpetuates the status quo and represents yet another barrier to underrepresented groups."

Now Boeing's board has the chance to use these next six-plus years under Ortberg to prepare to make a different—and hopefully more out-of-the-box—choice the next time around. —GLOOMBERG

THEIR VIEW

India's small current account deficit has a flip side to it

DHIRAJ NIM



is an economist at ANZ Research.

India's sharply narrowed current account deficit is undoubtedly a marker of improved external stability, but it also reflects rising investment gap in the economy, largely due to under-investment by businesses amid a service-sector boom and external competition. There is no easy fix. A decade ago, India was one of the 'fragile five' economies, with excessive reliance on foreign capital to sustain growth. Its high vulnerability to foreign capital flight and sudden stops had caused excessive foreign exchange volatility as the current account deficit hit nearly 3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012-13. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then.

The current account deficit has narrowed to around 1% of GDP in recent years, and occasionally even lower. Notably, India posted a rare \$5.7 billion current account surplus in the first quarter of 2024, the largest since early 2004 in a non-crisis year. While this is good on an external-stability gauge, such low deficit levels have a flip side,

but its negative savings-investment (SD) gap is now improving from pandemic lows, thanks to fiscal deficit consolidation alongside a massive capital expenditure programme. While its SI gap is still below the pre-pandemic level, further improvement is likely. In other words, the government is rightly creating space for other sectors to increase their investments.

Households are net savers in India, and their SI gap is now reducing, given their focus on building assets such as housing amid limited income growth and rising debt. Companies used to be net borrowers, but have gradually turned into net savers over the last decade. Their SI gap used to be around -2% of GDP, but has gradually risen into positive territory. It may not just be a pandemic-related aberration that companies in India are not undertaking enough capital expenditure. There are structural and cyclical reasons to consider, such as the strong rise of the services sector.

Over the last decade, India has added close to \$2 trillion to its nominal GDP, 52% of which came from the services sector, compared to 1% from manufacturing. Services are far less capital intensive, as they do not require heavy machinery and large factories. Thus, the capital intensity of Indian growth has fallen in tandem.

Even cyclically, the post-pandemic demand for services, both domestic and external, has been much stronger than for manufacturing. There has been a significant growth dividend from the rise of e-commerce, tourism, fintech and global capability centres in recent years.

A booming services sector also leads to a concentration of the economic surplus. The backward linkages of this sector happen to be relatively weak. For each additional dollar worth of output by it, only 30 cents reflects the inputs it absorbs from other sectors in the economy. For the manufacturing sector, in contrast, this proportion is much higher at 73 cents.

Two other intertwined issues behind lacklustre business capital expenditure are the post-pandemic weakness in low-end manufacturing and excess foreign capacity, which has resulted in stiff competition.

Industrial production data shows sectors (mostly low-tech) that account for 13% of manufacturing output have still not reclaimed their pre-pandemic output. In some of these, such as leather and apparel, production is still down by more a fifth from their pre-pandemic levels.

Excess capacity, such as in China, could also be restraining manufacturing-sector capex. India's trade deficit with China has widened to around \$100 billion, with \$40 billion added over the last three years. This coincides with the yuan depreciating on a real effective basis due to relatively low inflation in China and a weakening exchange rate. Chinese goods have become cheaper, especially in low-tech categories.

To sum up, a complex demand problem underlies India's weak business capital expenditure, which has kept the current account deficit much below the sustainable level. There is no single solution, but the need for a higher investment rate is undeniable. India's capital stock per capita is lower than that of its peer economies.

It's a sign of stability on the external front but also reflects insufficient investment in India's economy

Strategic outcomes of 1971 war must not be jettisoned



ASOKE MUKERJI
INDIA'S FORMER PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN

DO the recent events in Bangladesh require the jettisoning of the strategic outcomes of the December 1971 war that led to the emergence of an independent nation? What are India's broader strategic incentives in the light of these changes? At least four major strategic outcomes of the war remain relevant for India at a time when international relations are in a period of unpredictable churn.

First, the war proved the hollowness of the two-nation theory on the basis of which the British government partitioned India in August 1947. The war was triggered by the refusal of Pakistan to accept the outcome of its 1970 national elections, which had given the mandate to the Awami League, a political party based on linguistic rather than religious identity. The refusal of the Pakistan army to accept the swearing-in of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Muslim leader of the Awami League, as the Prime Minister

of Pakistan, led to the political dismemberment of Pakistan through the war.

The strategic outcome for India's interests in independent Bangladesh that emerged from East Pakistan has been acknowledged. The dramatic transformation of the India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship is credited to the 'forward-looking vision' of ousted Bangladesh Prime Minister and Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina. It is this vision that needs to be 'tied down' by India now to ensure that the genie of religion-based politics or terror does not derail India-Bangladesh relations. India has assiduously built up a range of interlocutors in Bangladesh, particularly during the past 15 years that Hasina was in power, to calibrate this effort in a coherent manner.

Second, the war proved that India could act to intervene militarily in the former East Pakistan to create 'conditions of stability and wellbeing which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations' (Article 56 of the UN Charter) between India and Bangladesh. India concluded its armed campaign on December 16, 1971, and withdrew its military forces from Bangladesh by March 12, 1972, illustrating how humanitarian intervention can work in practice in international relations.

This strategic outcome has provided the foundation for



PARTNERSHIP: India has extended \$8 bn in lines of credit to Bangladesh for connectivity projects. PTI

the sustainable development of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations, particularly in the economic and security spheres. Major outcomes in recent years, apart from frequent high-level political exchanges which have been of mutual benefit to the people of both countries, illustrate this well.

Connectivity projects have made Bangladesh an important strategic partner for India's links with its north-eastern states through Bangladesh. This has had an impact on India's East Act Policy as well. About \$8 billion in three lines of credit have been extended by India to Bangladesh in recent years for specific connectivity projects. These include the construction of the Akhaura-Agartala rail link,

the dredging of inland waterways in Bangladesh and the construction of an India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline for the carriage of high-speed diesel from India into Bangladesh, which was inaugurated in March 2023. As many as six pre-1965 rail links between India and Bangladesh have been re-activated, while Bangladesh's ports of Chittagong and Mongla have been made available for Indian transit cargo to North-East India.

The India-Bangladesh border, covering 4,095.7 km, is the longest land border that India shares with any of its neighbours. On the midnight of July 31, 2015, India and Bangladesh implemented their historic Land Boundary Agreement to transfer 51

erstwhile Bangladeshi enclaves in India and 111 erstwhile Indian enclaves in Bangladesh to the other country. This laid the groundwork for operationalising appropriate border management systems on both sides, including for border fencing, joint inspection of boundary pillar and joint boundary demarcation, including of riverine boundaries, which impact on security and migration issues.

In July 2014, the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) had awarded Bangladesh an area of 19,467 sq km, four-fifth of the total area of 25,802 sq km disputed maritime boundary with India in the Bay of Bengal. India's swift acceptance of the award provided the impetus for generating mutual trust and confidence with Bangladesh. It also led to the dynamic growth of regional cooperation, with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) establishing its Secretariat in Dhaka.

Third, following the unconditional surrender of the Pakistan army on December 16, 1971, to India, strategic conditions were created in South Asia for asserting the primacy of resolving disputes through bilateral treaty-based negotiations. The Simla Agreement, signed in July 1972 as a bilateral treaty, was negotiated

and signed by the elected governments of India and Pakistan. It was registered with the United Nations as a legal framework that can be invoked 'before any organ of the United Nations' under Article 102 of the UN Charter.

This strategic outcome has served India's interests well. It has ensured that an undemocratic and unformed UN Security Council has not succeeded in reopening the Kashmir issue after the war. India has prioritised applying bilateral frameworks to address its disputes with its neighbours rather than taking such issues into ineffective multilateral frameworks.

Fourth, the war established India's ability to act invoking the principle of 'strategic autonomy'. India put its national interests above international attempts to dictate terms to India through the UN in December 1971. The most striking illustration of this was the refusal to the display of a nuclear-armed maritime force by the USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal to try and prevent India from achieving its objectives in the war.

At a time when international relations are being increasingly subjected to the dictates of major military powers, including the imposition of unilateral sanctions, 'strategic autonomy' is a strategic outcome of the 1971 war that India has a strong incentive to build upon as it transitions into a major power.

Ousted Bangladesh PM Hasina's 'forward-looking vision' needs to be 'tied down' by India so that the genie of religion-based politics does not derail bilateral ties.

Time running out to preserve cultural heritage of Punjab



MAJINDER BAHWINDER SINGH (RETD)
CONVENER, PUNJAB STATE CHAPTER, INTACH

WHAT has Punjab not been able to use its cultural heritage to its advantage and boost its economy? Is it because of our disconnect with our heritage or a lack of vision on the part of successive governments?

Punjab's heritage can become a major source of attraction for tourists from all over the world if the right steps are taken at the right time. Several invaders passed through Punjab to reach the rest of India. Many wars were fought on this land. This is the land of the Sikh Gurus, who made sacrifices for the cause of humanity. Regarded as the food bowl of India, the state made a significant contribution to the struggle for Independence and suffered the most during Partition.

The cultural heritage of Punjab is so rich that many of its gems are yet to be studied by scholars and historians. Unfortunately, several heritage structures in the state are in a pathetic state. And if efforts are not initiated

immediately to conserve or restore them, they may be irretrievably damaged.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and globalisation, the preservation of cultural heritage has become both more challenging and more crucial than ever. Cultural heritage — encompassing tangible assets like monuments, artefacts and sites as well as intangible aspects such as traditions and languages — forms the bedrock of our collective identity. It connects us to our past, enriches our present and influences our future. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt contemporary advancements to ensure the preservation of heritage for future generations.

Cultural heritage is not just a repository of history but a living embodiment of community values, beliefs and experiences. It fosters a sense of belonging and serves as a source of inspiration. Further, it significantly contributes to economic development through tourism and mass media, enhancing social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

The integration of contemporary advancements in cultural heritage is not just about adopting new technologies but also promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and inclusive practices. By bringing together experts from various fields, such as archaeology, material science and digital technology, we can develop a holistic approach to preservation.



STATE OF NEGLECT: Maharaja Ranjit Singh's summer palace at Dinanagar, Gurdaspur. It is imperative to identify and protect key historical sites. RAJ PHOTO

Besides, it is crucial to address ethical considerations to make sure that digital and technological interventions respect the authenticity and significance of cultural heritage. By balancing innovations with traditions, we can create sustainable strategies that honour our past while embracing the future.

The need of the hour is to integrate modern elements thoughtfully into traditional settings. Modern architecture can be designed to complement historical landmarks without overshadowing them. Incorporate modern amenities and infrastructure into historical areas in a way that suits the existing architecture and ambiance. This could be done using traditional building materials or designs in a new

construction. Besides, we must preserve and restore our older buildings, which facilitate natural cooling in the humid heat of the northern plains.

It is imperative to identify and protect key historical sites that represent the legacy of our past. There is a need to restore and maintain them by using modern techniques. Further, we should consider the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for contemporary purposes, such as museums, cultural centres or boutique hotels. This can breathe new life into historical structures while preserving their heritage value.

We need to have a sense of pride in our culture and heritage. And we should acknowledge the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Traditions, customs,

languages and historical sites often embody the identity and values of a community or society. Punjab has the grit to overcome all the challenges and bring about a positive change.

Societies evolve, and modernisation often brings progress in terms of technology, infrastructure, healthcare and education facilities. We should embrace these advancements to improve the quality of life and meet the current challenges. Prudent policies that balance development goals with heritage preservation. This might take the form of zoning laws, heritage protection regulations and incentives for the adaptive reuse of historical buildings. Implement modernisation projects that are sustainable and environment-friendly. And use green technologies and practices to minimise the impact on heritage sites and their surroundings.

Letting local communities have a say in decisions related to the development of these sites will be a step in the right direction. Their inputs can ensure that modernisation efforts are made while taking into consideration our cultural values and traditions. The impact of modernisation on heritage sites and traditions will have to be regularly assessed. Policies and practices must be adapted to maintain balance. It can help society make sure that modernisation enhances

our cultural heritage instead of diminishing it. Notably, the originality of the Jallianwala Bagh got compromised to an extent during the restoration of the memorial three years ago.

The government must come up with an awareness campaign that targets students in schools and colleges. Organising events that celebrate local traditions and culture at educational institutions will not only help preserve our heritage but also encourage tourism and economic development.

By taking these measures, society can navigate the complex interplay between heritage and modernisation, so that both aspects contribute to a vibrant and sustainable future. Maintaining a balance is crucial for preserving cultural identity while progressing with the times.

Volunteers of INTACH, working at the state and district levels, possess expertise in preservation and conservation. The government must take full advantage of it.

Preserving our cultural heritage in the face of modern challenges requires a forward-thinking approach that harnesses contemporary advancements. By embracing digital technologies, data analytics, material science and community engagement, we can protect and celebrate our shared heritage. It is our collective responsibility to safeguard the cultural treasures that define us.

Cultural heritage forms the bedrock of our collective identity. It connects us to our past, enriches our present and influences our future.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Mass meeting of supporters (5)
- An anticlimactic happening (3-5)
- Extreme suffering (5)
- An subsidiary activity (8)
- Assurance of manner (5)
- Wine (3)
- No abundance (6)
- Snoobish (6)
- To chatter (3)
- A limbless reptile (5)
- Reactionary minority (4,4)
- Obstinately incoherent believer (5)
- Justice (4,4)
- Landing pier (5)

DOWN

- Practically (2,4,2)
- Remote chance of success (4,4)
- Submissive (6)
- Nervous excitement (5)
- Worth (3)
- Preception (5)
- Fix at predetermined rate (3)
- Clot (3)
- Start shooting (4,4)
- Place under surveillance (5, 3)
- In foreign committee (6)
- Make sore by rubbing (5)
- In weak health (5)
- Opportunity for action (5)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Spell it out, 6 Mars, 10 Fatal, 11 Credulity, 12 Perceive, 13 Tough, 15 Raincoat, 17 Somehow, 19 Tempted, 21 Matner, 22 Eight, 24 Contrast, 27 Obstinate, 28 Fight, 29 Fool, 30 Dead letter.

Down: 1 Soft, 2 Extremism, 3 Liar, 4 Tactics, 5 Useless, 7 Adieu, 8 Say the word, 9 Customer, 14 Written off, 16 Outstrip, 18 Hindstrip, 20 Dictate, 21 Moneyed, 23 Gumbo, 25 Rite, 26 Star.

SU DO KU

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

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 12, 2024, MONDAY

- Shukla Sarnat 19:46
- Shravan Shukla 21
- Shravan Parvati 28
- Hijab 14:40
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 7, up to 7:56 am
- Shukla Yoga up to 4:26 pm
- Swati Nakshatra up to 8:33 am
- Moon enters Scorpio sign 4:15 am

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	33	26
New Delhi	33	26
Amritsar	33	27
Bathinda	33	27
Jalandhar	33	27
Ludhiana	33	27
Bhawal	31	27
Hisar	33	27
Sirsa	34	28
Dharamsala	27	19
Manali	25	16
Shimla	24	17
Srinagar	30	18
Jammu	32	24
Kargil	35	19
Lah	30	13
Dehradun	32	23
Mussoorie	21	17

The Tribune ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Hindenburg at it again Market regulator SEBI's credibility at stake

OVER a year and a half after it stirred up hot air by accusing the Adani Group of pulling off 'the largest con in corporate history', US short-seller Hindenburg Research has trained its guns on the chairperson of SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India), Madhabi Buch, and her husband. Flouting conflict of interest, Hindenburg has alleged that the couple had stakes in obscure offshore funds used in the financial scandal. The institution is that the country's market regulator, tasked with protecting the interests of investors in securities, took its foot off the probe pedal in view of a presumably commercial relationship between the Buchs and the Adanis. The accusation — trashed by the couple as well as the conglomerate — is provocative as the Supreme Court had in January backed SEBI to the hilt, stating that the latter was conducting a 'comprehensive investigation' into alleged manipulation of stock prices and there was no need to transfer the case to a special investigation team. The faith reposed in SEBI by the apex court had raised eyebrows; after all, had the court trusted the board unquestioningly all along, why would it have set up a separate expert panel to look into regulatory lapses in the wake of Hindenburg's January 2023 report? At stake here is SEBI's credibility; even as knives are again out in the political arena. The Congress has reiterated its demand for a joint parliamentary committee to investigate the scam in its entirety. Repeatedly accused of going the extra mile for leading corporates, the government needs to do much better than to just allege that the main Opposition party and Hindenburg are in cahoots. Transparency is a must to clear the air; the impression that SEBI is reluctant to complete its probe in all respects ought to be dispelled. Hindenburg might not be completely above board itself, but its claims cannot be conveniently brushed aside; they need to be countered with indisputable facts. The sooner the better, failing which the government's pro-investor push will suffer a big jolt.

A nuanced approach SC ruling on hijab balances faith, education

THE Supreme Court's decision to partially stay the Mumbai college circular banning the hijab, while upholding restrictions on the niqab and burqa, strikes a commendable balance between respecting religious sentiments and addressing the pragmatic needs of modern education. It is a nuanced attempt to reconcile cultural traditions with the demands of contemporary academic environment. This decision underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive atmosphere while maintaining discipline and uniformity within institutions. By allowing the hijab but restricting face-covering attire like the niqab and burqa, the SC has set a precedent that other institutions with similar issues would do well to follow. The court's approach recognises that education is not just about imparting knowledge but also about ensuring that students can participate fully in the academic experience. Rove coverings can inhibit interaction, an essential component of the learning process. The order supports the idea that while religious freedom is fundamental, it should not come at the expense of the educational milieu. This decision offers a template for resolving similar disputes across the country. The Karnataka hijab case, for example, could benefit from this balanced perspective, avoiding the polarising outcomes seen in other states. Countries like Turkey, which have historically grappled with the role of religious symbols in secular institutions, might find the Indian approach instructive. This ruling emphasises that educational institutions should focus on empowering students rather than on imposing restrictive dress codes. By navigating the fine line between tradition and modernity, the SC has taken a significant step towards ensuring that educational institutions remain inclusive, respectful and progressive spaces for all students.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO The Tribune. LAHORE, TUESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1924

Mahatmaj and the floods THE statement which Mahatma Gandhi has made on the subject of the South Indian floods both in the course of a press interview and of a letter addressed by him to N. Katarangan is at once an absolutely just and correct estimate of the situation created by this awful calamity, and an illuminating commentary upon the mistaken notions which so many people entertain regarding the Mahatma's attitude towards the Government. A newspaper reporter with nether more than his share of the gift of imagination and rather less than his share of the sense of truth, justice and fairness had attributed to the Mahatma the cruel and heartless statement that all that the situation demanded was that the afflicted men and women should sip, and a correspondent had improved upon the report by making the imaginary statement the subject of taunting comment. When the Mahatma's attention was drawn to the matter he said: "I never said any such thing. I have sent several telegrams to the afflicted Presidency, but in not one of them I even mentioned the word spinning or khaddar. I must, however, adhere to the opinion I have given that the relief is beyond the capacity of any private agency. The State alone can do it efficiently. Private aid will come in to supplement the work done by the State agency." In his letter to Natarajan, the Mahatma went a step further and humorously said that he felt like shooting the reporter when he saw the report, but as it was against his creed he subsided and believed that no sane man or woman would credit him with any such absurd remarks. "There is no mention of the wheel," he added, "in any of my wires."

How democracy collapsed in Bangladesh

Political intolerance, corruption and violence against opponents led to Hasina's downfall



GURBACHAN JAGAT FORMER GOVERNOR, MANIPUR, AND EX-DGP, JAMMU & KASHMIR

IN a statement made under the aegis of a group called 'VCs for Kamala', some prominent leaders of the tech industry (LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak and Sun Microsystems co-founder Vinod Khosla) said they were united in their support for Kamala Harris in this 'pivotal moment'. "We are pro-business, pro-American dream, pro-entrepreneurship and pro-technological progress. We believe in democracy as the backbone of our nation. We believe that strong, trustworthy institutions are a feature, not a bug, and that our industry — and every other industry — would collapse without them," the group said in the statement, signed by over 700 tech leaders. This enunciates the two foundational principles on the basis of which developed countries have progressed — democracy and institutions. These are the two principles enforced strongly by men and women of courage who have fought and defeated the forces of autocracy, chaos, fascism and violence. The fight is still on and the forces of autocracy and chaos are pitted against democracy and the rule of law. Most of the institutions mandated by the constitution and parliament have stood steadfast in their duties in most of Europe and North America, although they are opposed by strong determined forces. The 'Magna Carta Libertatum' (Latin for great charters of freedom) declared the sovereign to be subject to the 'rule of law' and documented the liberties held by 'free men', providing the foundation for individual rights in Anglo-American jurisprudence.



CHAOS: What began as student unrest was politically and administratively mishandled.

Subsequently, the 'divine right of kings' was gradually taken away, leading to the establishment of democracy. It was this transition in society, where the rule of law and the empowerment of the common citizen were established, that paved the way for the creation of the great democracies. To quote former British PM Margaret Thatcher, "A country is not rich just because of its natural resources. If this were so, your country (Russia) would already be one of the richest in the world. But countries are prosperous only in so far as the system of government encourages the enterprise which creates wealth... The capitalism which I support is not a free-for-all in which the powerful are able to exploit their position at the expense of fairness, decency and the common good. Capitalism can only function when there is a strong and just rule of law, to which everyone, including the government, is answerable." To take the argument further, it can be seen that most of the developed countries have evolved over a period of time through institutions, as mandated by their constitution and parliament. They withstood the onslaught of the two world

Democratic institutions were emasculated and could not or would not perform their duties. The streets were taken over by the cadres of the ruling party.

was and their institutions did not flinch in the face of adversity but gained in strength and emerged victorious. On the other hand, less developed and recently independent countries might have started with the right intentions and institutions, but soon caved in to the lust for power and money, besides bigotry, and in the bargain gradually destroyed their institutions. Democracy gave way to autocracy and the dictatorship of a party or a coterie or a person so much so that the armed forces came to be looked upon as a beacon of hope and justice. The judiciary, the elected bodies, the political entities — all fell like nincompoops in the face of the onslaught by the anti-democratic forces opposed to the rule of

law, forces opposed to the development of the poor and downtrodden, forces favouring the ruling party coterie or individual. Now coming to the context of which the above has been written, Bangladesh or East Pakistan — as it was then known — had all the ingredients necessary to be a state on its own. Politically, culturally and historically, it had nothing in common with Pakistan except religion that also was not total. However, it continued to be trampled under the iron heel of the Pakistani army, which let loose a reign of terror and massacres. The army was the court of first and last resort; all other institutions had been emasculated. The people rose and formed the Multi Bahini and a credible leader rose in the form of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Backed by the sage and courageous leadership of Indira Gandhi, Bangladesh was born. Tragically struck at the very beginning with the assassination of the Sheikh and most of his family members in 1975. The army and the forces of autocracy began to call the shots again. Bangladesh returned to square one. However, Sheikh Hasina, with the support of her people, became the popular leader of Bangladesh. Elections were held, parliament came into

being, an elected government was formed and with this and the formation of democratic institutions, the entrepreneurial genie was released. Bangladesh started to grow economically and so did the people's standard of living. The nation started improving on most parameters of development — human and financial. At the same time, the external and internal forces of destabilisation were at work under the guidance of Pakistani intelligence agencies and extremist Islamic organisations. In order to face the onslaught of these forces, the ruling party cadres and the administrative structure also began to resort to extra-judicial measures. Gradually, a realisation set in — political intolerance, corruption, violence against opponents. More and more Opposition leaders and activists were laced up. Charges of rigging elections were levelled against the ruling party, and Opposition parties were not allowed to function freely. Democratic institutions were emasculated and could not or would not perform their duties. The streets were taken over by the cadres of the ruling party.

When the crisis came, Bangladesh had become a dictatorship bereft of independent and strong institutions. What began as student unrest was politically and administratively mishandled. Finally, Hasina ordered the police and the army to shoot down her own citizens — hundreds died, and the blood will stain her hands forever. She had to flee the country which had brought back her father to an independent Bangladesh and she waits alone in some obscure corner of Delhi for asylum somewhere. Coming back to the statement at the beginning, "we believe in democracy as the backbone of our nation. We believe that strong, trustworthy institutions are a feature, not a bug, and that our industry — and every other industry — would collapse without them..." One would just add that not just the industry, the whole nation could collapse.

The author is a member of the Tribune Trust

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A great democracy must be progressive or it will soon cease to be a great democracy. — Theodore Roosevelt

Mr Rooster's death stare

RASHMI OBEROI

MY summer vacation was spent at our family bungalow, Ahmednagar, in Kolhapur, my mother's home town. Many relatives who had nowhere to go were given refuge by my grandmother in that huge cottage, which was built in 1927. In those times, homes were built in the centre of a large walled garden, with space for children to play, families to relax and estates overflowing with flowers, fruit trees and vegetable gardens. These striking old buildings are reminiscent of a bygone era — large, single-storied homes with red tiled roofs, whitewashed walls, wrap-around verandahs and large manicured gardens with abundant flowers displaying a riot of colour. I was particularly fond of the mango and jamun trees and the mogru shrub growing near the front door.

These places had toilets outside the house. You could call it the outhouse, the privy, the kybo or something more. Of course, most homes had the squat toilet or the 'Indian toilet', not liked by many.

In 1967, when my parents got married, my grandmother's priority was to install the 'Western-style' toilet for my father, an Army officer. During the 1965 India-Pakistan War he had been severely wounded in a skirmish with Pakistani soldiers in Kashmir and was taken to the Command Hospital at Pune, where the 'love in the times of war' story began with my mother. Dad had been wounded in the right leg, which had to be amputated. After a long period of recuperation and treatment, including the fitting of an artificial limb, he was presented with a choice of what to do next. He chose to remain with the infantry, determined to overcome his handicap.

Bearing this in mind, grandmother had set forth on her quest to find the perfect room and place for the Western-style pot. The longish room that was largely used as a store and also housed the chickens was the chosen place. With a great flourish, the pot was installed and put to use.

Those were exciting times for a child to share her privacy with a bunch of hens clucking around or laying a few 'golden' eggs on straw that had been placed conveniently around. But in all this mayhem, we had an issue: the problem lay with Mr Rooster, who thought he was the 'King of the Barn'. His piercing stare and loud crowing were enough to scare many to exit the barn faster than the speed of light and never return.

Mr Rooster would crow whenever he saw any kind of movement anywhere near what he considered its territory. Well, he didn't scare me a bit, and we kept up a perpetual battle of territorial claims.

Thanks to him, I learnt the 'death stare' — I have perfected the art of giving someone the same treatment: an angry look that shows them the intensity of my annoyance and keeps the unwanted at bay!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

B'desh haunted by ghosts of past

Refer to 'Dacca-Dhaka/1975-2024' (The Great Game); one couldn't help but feel a sense of déjà vu as Sheikh Hasina stepped down as the PM and fled Bangladesh in the face of growing protests. After all, who can forget the 1971 Liberation War or the coup of 1975? But those who ousted Sheikh Hasina from power do not have a clear and coherent vision for the future of Bangladesh. The group of protesters is made up of people with disparate ideologies. Now that Muhammad Yunus, a scholar of international repute and Nobel laureate, is at the helm of affairs in Dhaka, there is hope that members of minority communities will be shielded from mob violence and vandalism.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Regional stability at stake

Apropos of 'Dacca-Dhaka/1975-2024'; the column has rightly underscored the need for India to tweak its strategy in the wake of the formation of a new interim government in Bangladesh. Now that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been ousted, New Delhi's focus should be on engaging deftly with the new regime. India continued to express support for the Awami League government even when the US called into question the credibility of the general elections held earlier this year that had handed Hasina another term. So, it should actively seek dialogue with the new government and offer diplomatic and economic support to the neighbour to ensure that bilateral relations do not suffer. Ensuring regional stability is the need of the hour.

CHIANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Misuse of probe agencies

The grant of bail to former Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia marks a triumph of justice over political vendetta. His release from prison after 17 months is a reminder that bail should be the norm, not jail. The SC verdict is in line with a position that the court has reiterated several times — that bail should not be withheld as a form of punishment. Since the beginning, the case has raised questions about the misuse of inves-

tigative agencies, highlighting the complex interplay of politics and the judicial process. It is imperative to ensure that the law is not weaponised to target the Opposition. Sisodia's release gives hope to other AAP leaders embroiled in legal woes.

SEWA SINGH, AMRITSAR

Neeraj does it again

Javelin thrower Arshad Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra have both created history at the Olympics by winning gold and silver, respectively. This marks a high for South Asian athletes. Neeraj, who has once again won over a billion hearts, has now made it to the pantheon of the greatest athletes in the world. By clinching the silver medal this time, Neeraj has proved that his stellar performance at the Tokyo Olympics was no fluke. His success at the Games has inspired millions of budding sports persons.

POOJA, BY MAIL

No country for girls

Refer to the story 'Jind school principal rapes Class IV student'; it is a matter of shame that in Haryana girls are not even safe in school. The incident scars the sacred relationship between a teacher and a student. When even school principals prey on vulnerable children, the much-loved government slogan of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' rings hollow. Haryana has sadly become one of the most dangerous states for women. The perpetrator must face stringent punishment.

RAJ KUMAR KOOPUR, ROPAR

Rapist must get harsh punishment

Apropos of Jind school principal rapes Class IV student; the incident is a blot on the position that the culprit holds. The heinous act will shatter the faith that students have in their school authorities. Sending the disgraced principal to jail will not suffice. He deserves exemplary punishment. The incident has struck fear in the minds of youngsters. The onus is on the authorities besides to assure the students of their safety. Besides, there is a need to overhaul the procedure to appoint headmasters or principals of schools in rural areas.

COL. RES. NARULA (RETD), PATIALA

A REFRESHING TWIST ON PROBIOTIC HEALTH

Yakult Light Mango Flavour combines the benefits of probiotics with the delicious taste of mango. This new variant supports gut health and boosts immunity with every sip.

Enjoy a tasty and healthy addition to your daily routine, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



mango flavour adds a refreshing twist, making it an enjoyable choice for those who love the fruit and want to incorporate probiotics into their daily routine. Dr. Neeraja Hajela, Head of Science and Regulatory Affairs at Yakult Danone India Pvt Ltd, emphasises the importance of probiotics in daily life: "Lactobacillus casei Shirota is backed by more than 100 human studies conducted across the globe, including India. Probiotics increase the good bacteria in the gut, reducing the harmful ones. This balance ensures better digestion, proper absorption of nutrients, and stronger immunity, reducing the risk of infections." In today's environment, where factors like pollution, stress and poor diet can easily disrupt gut health, incorporating probiotics into your diet is a proactive step toward better health. A decrease in probiotic bacteria, coupled with unhealthy lifestyle choices, can lead to poor gut health and weak immunity, manifesting as fatigue, poor growth, malnutrition, and repeated infections.

Therefore, introducing scientifically validated probiotic products like Yakult into your daily routine is essential for maintaining a healthy gut and a strong immune system. Yakult Light Mango Flavour is more than just a tasty drink; it's a step toward better health. By incorporating this probiotic-rich beverage into your daily routine, you can support your gut health and boost your immunity. As Yakult Danone India continues to innovate and expand its offerings, the new mango flavour is an attestation to its commitment to improving the health and well-being of its consumers. Whether you're a longtime fan of Yakult or new to probiotics, Yakult Light Mango Flavour is a refreshing way to support your health goals.

In today's fast-paced world, maintaining good health is a top priority, especially with increasing lifestyle disorders linked to poor nutrition, stress and inadequate sleep. A robust immune system is essential for combating these challenges and ensuring overall well-being. One effective way to support immunity is through probiotics, which are known for their ability to enhance gut health. Recognising this, Yakult Danone India Pvt Ltd, a leader in the probiotic industry, has launched an exciting new product Yakult Light Mango Flavour. Probiotics are live bacteria that are beneficial for gut health. They work by increasing the population of good bacteria in the gut, which helps reduce harmful, disease-causing

bacteria. This balance is crucial for proper digestion, nutrient absorption and overall immune function. A healthy gut is often linked to a strong immune system, which is essential for fighting off infections and maintaining overall well-being. Yakult has long been a trusted name in probiotics and its latest offering, Yakult Light Mango Flavour, continues this legacy. The new product contains the same unique probiotic strain, Lactobacillus casei Shirota (SHIROTA strain), as the original Yakult. This strain is scientifically proven to survive the journey through the digestive tract and reach the intestines alive, where it can impart its health benefits. The story of Yakult begins with Dr. Minoru Shirota, a Japanese medical doctor who was

Revolutionising Fitness and Wellness

Renowned fitness expert **SUMAYA DALMIA** highlights the importance of balanced lifestyle habits, emphasising nutrition, exercise and daily activity for sustainable health

At the recent FDCI Manifest Wedding Weekend, renowned fitness and wellness expert Sumaya Dalmia delivered a masterclass focused on practical health and fitness advice. The session, designed for brides, grooms and wellness enthusiasts, aimed to promote sustainable fitness habits rather than quick fixes or superficial transformations. Sumaya's approach emphasised the importance of a balanced lifestyle, combining nutrition, exercise and daily physical activity for long-term health benefits. Sumaya began the masterclass by addressing common fitness myths that often misled people. She debunked the idea that weightlifting leads to unwanted bulk, especially for women. Instead, she encouraged attendees to embrace strength training, highlighting its role in building muscle, improving metabolism and boosting confidence. Sumaya stressed that fitness is not an instant achievement but a lifelong journey requiring consistency and dedication. She pointed out that while exercise is crucial, nutrition is equally vital in achieving fitness goals, stating, "99.9% of anything to do with gut health, losing weight or aesthetics is about nutrition." The masterclass delved into the importance of understanding individual dietary needs, focusing on protein intake. Sumaya explained how to calculate daily protein requirements and stressed the significance of distributing protein consumption throughout the day for optimal absorption. Rather than categorising foods as "good" or "bad," Sumaya advocated for balanced eating, integrating proteins, healthy fats and carbohydrates based on personal needs. This approach, which promotes moderation and mindful eating, resonated well with the audience.



Sumaya also addressed the role of daily physical activity beyond structured workouts. She acknowledged that modern lifestyles often involve less natural movement, contrasting this with the more active routines observed in other cultures. By encouraging simple activities like walking, taking the stairs and doing housework, Sumaya illustrated that even basic physical engagement significantly contributes to overall health. Her message was clear, while structured workouts remain essential, daily physical activities are equally important for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The masterclass provided valuable insights into

creating a balanced fitness routine that includes strength, flexibility, mobility, cardiovascular and core exercises. Sumaya's approach to fitness reflects the lessons learned during the pandemic, emphasising that effective workouts can be achieved at home with minimal equipment. This perspective encourages individuals to find ways to stay active, regardless of their environment or access to gym facilities. Another significant aspect of Sumaya's masterclass was the discussion on diet, nutrition and lifestyle adjustments tailored for specific needs, such as PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome). She stressed the importance of mindful eating and clean eating, especially as one ages. For those following vegetarian diets, she recommended high-quality protein sources like nuts, seeds, quinoa, paneer, soya and sprouts. Proper cooking methods and using spices like hing and ginger were suggested to aid digestion. For individuals with PCOS, she recommended a diet high in protein, healthy fats and fibre-rich vegetables to help regulate hormones. Sumaya also touched on the topic of supplementation,

explaining the difference between Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) and Optimum Daily Allowance (ODA). She highlighted the importance of tailoring supplement intake to individual needs, considering factors such as menopause, perimenopause and specific conditions like PCOS. Essential supplements like Vitamin D3, magnesium glycinate and B12 were recommended, noting that even with sun exposure, many people, including Indians, often require D3 supplementation. She cited studies showing a link between low D3 levels and severe COVID-19 cases, underscoring its importance for overall health. Sumaya Dalmia's masterclass offered attendees a comprehensive guide to achieving and maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Her focus on debunking fitness myths, promoting sustainable habits and encouraging a holistic approach to health and wellness inspired participants to adopt practices that support long-term well-being. Sumaya's insights serve as a reminder that true fitness is about balance, consistency and personalisation, empowering individuals to take control of their health journey.

No one is immune to antimicrobial resistance

SHOBHA SHUKLA

"Even the healthiest amongst us could face a life-threatening situation through a minor injury, routine surgery or common lung infection, if antimicrobials fail," said Dr. Rajesh Sambhraj Pandav, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Nepal. "For those with pre-existing conditions like cancers, HIV, or diabetes, an untreated infection can become an unexpected and deadly adversary."

Why do infections become difficult to treat or untreatable?

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites change over time and become resistant to (or no longer respond to) medicines, making infections harder (or impossible) to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death. Misuse and overuse of medicines fuels AMR. It is important to remember that it is the disease-causing microbe (and not the human being, animal or plant which is being treated) that becomes resistant to medicines. Therefore, even if a person uses antimicrobial medicines responsibly, they are still at risk of acquiring a drug-resistant infection. Resistant microbes can pass between animals, plants and food, and in the environment. A "One Health" approach which recognises that the health of animals, humans, plants and the environment are interlinked is therefore essential to respond to AMR.

No one is immune to AMR

AMR threatens to unravel a century of medical progress, turning once treatable infections into untreatable life-threatening conditions, said Dr. Pandav. "AMR is identified by the WHO as one of the top 10 global health threats facing humanity. AMR is making infections harder to treat, leading to prolonged hospital stays, higher medical costs, and increased disability, morbidity, and mortality. AMR has a real and devastating impact on individuals,

families, environmental health, agricultural and food productions, and livelihoods," Dr. Pandav was speaking as a Guest of Honour at the South Asia Sub-Regional Medical Workshop to Tackle Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) held in Kathmandu, Nepal. The workshop was organised by Health TV Online along with co-hosts, including the Ministry of Health and Population of government of Nepal, Nepal Health Research Council of government of Nepal, Global AMR Media Alliance (GAMA), and partners.

Almost 5 million people died of AMR in a year
"In 2019 it was estimated that almost 5 million deaths were associated with bacterial AMR including 1.27 million deaths being directly caused by it. Raising awareness is our first line of defence against AMR. It is a collective responsibility, and the media plays a crucial role to shape public opinion, influence policy, and dispel myths and misinformation. Public messaging on AMR in the media needs to be simple, consistent, and clear," said Dr. Pandav.

"Four quadripartite agencies that have joined hands to combat AMR globally include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WHO, World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In a meeting in 2022, it had identified working with the media as one of the top four priorities. South Asia Media Workshop to prevent AMR was organised to raise awareness among media personnel and increase their active engagement on AMR and addressing it with One Health approach," said Kalpana Acharya, Organising Chairperson of South Asia Media Workshop to prevent AMR, Editor-in-Chief of Health TV Online, and founding Board Member of Global AMR Media Alliance (GAMA).
"Nepal's response to AMR challenge. I would like to commend Nepal government's Ministry of Health and Population for their leadership and



initiatives already taken to tackle the AMR challenge. Nepal has successfully endorsed the National Action Plan on AMR. At the 77th World Health Assembly two months back, governments, including that of Nepal, endorsed the resolution to accelerate national and global responses to AMR," informed Dr. Pandav.
"In Nepal in 2019, there were 6400 deaths attributable to AMR and 232000 deaths associated with AMR. Nepal has the 153rd highest death rate per 100,000 population associated with AMR across 204 countries. AMR was the third biggest cause of death in 2019 in Nepal (after cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases). The number of AMR deaths in Nepal is higher than deaths from neoplasms, respiratory infections and TB, digestive diseases, maternal and neonatal disorders and diabetes and kidney diseases," said Dr

Madan Kumar Upadhyaya, Chief of Quality Standards and Regulation Division, Ministry of Health and Population of Nepal. He also Chairs AMR National Technical Working Committee and serves as a Member Secretary of AMR National Steering Committee of government of Nepal. Discovery of penicillin was a breakthrough moment in 1928 but resistance against penicillin was reported in the 1940s - soon after it came into the market. Methicillin resistant *S.aureus* (MRSA) was reported in 1961. Microbes are becoming resistant to the medicines we have - due to their misuse or overuse. And now it is 30 years since a new class of antibiotics was last introduced, shared Dr Upadhyaya.
Nepal is a signatory to Jaipur Ministerial Declaration on AMR 2011 when the South-East Asia region of the WHO became the first WHO region to adopt it.

Dr Upadhyaya shared that Nepal's National Action Plan on AMR (2024-2028) is currently awaiting the endorsement from the cabinet. It has already been endorsed by the National Technical Working Group on AMR, Finance Ministry of Nepal, National Planning Commission of Nepal, and the Social Committee of Nepal's cabinet. The National Action Plan on AMR (2024-2028) of Nepal has five strategic priorities, each with its time-bound activities, managed by a government agency (focal point) with supporting partners.

- Improve awareness and understanding of AMR through effective communication, education and training
- Strengthen the knowledge and evidence through surveillance and research
- Reduce the incidence of infection through effective infection prevention and control
- Optimise the use of antimicrobial agents in human, animal and food, and
- Promote investments for AMR activities, research and innovations.

The Ministry of Health and Population of Nepal is the national focal point for AMR. Nepal's Department of Drug Administration is the national focal point for antimicrobial consumption. Nepal's Veterinary Standards and Regulatory Laboratory is the national focal point for antimicrobial use in the animal health sector. Nepal's National Public Health Laboratory is the national focal point for AMR surveillance in human health. Nepal's Central Veterinary Laboratory serves as the focal point for AMR Surveillance in animal health. Nepal's Department of Food Technology and Quality Control serves as a focal point for AMR surveillance in the food sector, and the Department of Environment is the focal point for AMR in the environment, said Dr. Madan Kumar Upadhyaya.

challenging with limited technical capacity and budgetary resources. Limited access to diagnostic microbiology facilities (at subnational level) and access to antimicrobials is another challenge," said Dr Upadhyaya.

Right and timely diagnosis and right treatment is key

Good plan has to be followed by a greater implementation on the ground. "We have to find an effective strategy to implement the National Action Plan on AMR. More importantly, we have to take it to the local level and ensure that the right antimicrobials are prescribed, the right amount of medicines are taken and for the right disease," said Dr. Roshan Pokhrel, Health Secretary, Ministry of Health and Population of Nepal. "We need to make progress in combating AMR and measure the progress too (with right data) to ensure that we are preventing AMR."

World leaders will convene on 26th September 2024 at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AMR. This is the second such meeting. The first UN High-Level Meeting on AMR was held in 2016 which resulted in significant global and national actions to address AMR with One Health approach. Participants in Nepal called upon the world leaders for stronger commitments matched with concrete actions to prevent AMR. Later this year, the World AMR Awareness Week (18-24 November 2024) will be observed worldwide on the theme: Educate, Advocate and Act Now. (Shobha Shukla is the award-winning founding Managing Editor and Executive Director of CNS (Citizen News Service) and is a feminist, health and development justice advocate. She is a former senior Physics faculty of prestigious Loreto Convent College and current Coordinator of Asia Pacific Regional Media Alliance for Health and Development (APCAT Media) and Chairperson of Global AMR Media Alliance (GAMA).

FIRST COLUMN

HAVE A INTREPID AND ROBUST MINDSET

Through spiritual practices, one can find strength to continue the journey of life



RAVI VALLURI

Always be associated with people who are good at heart. This was what Swami Vivekananda said. My mother shares her birthday with Swami Vivekananda who was born on 12th January 1863. Association, Sangha, and Satsang were her strong points. She nurtured strong bonds with all religious faiths and spiritually inclined people. She wanted to pursue medicine but life did not take that trajectory instead she became a qualified medical social worker. She used to tell patients and their children, 'Fear is only as deep as the mind allows'. Thus, patients afflicted with TB, but not bedridden, participated in the projects. This was what she called 'Diversionary Therapy'.

The TB Hospital became a unique template for the methods adopted by doctors, para-medical staff, social workers, government bodies and NGOs, all to contribute to the rehabilitation of the patients. Climate changes, civilizations collapse, governments change political affiliations alter and even the best possible model collapses. This is inevitable. As Buddha says, 'The only permanent thing in life is impermanence'. The lofty objectives were not approved by a new set of hospital administrators and the beacon of hope collapsed but she tried hard with a robust mindset. This was extremely traumatic for my mother and she became a patient of Paroxysmal Atrial Tachycardia (PAT). This is a type of arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat).

Paroxysmal means that the episode of arrhythmia originates and terminates abruptly. Atrial implies the arrhythmia starts with the atria or in the upper chambers of the heart. The tachycardia results in a significant



increase in the heartbeat per minute. It abnormally increases the pace, like in an athlete on a treadmill. PAT significantly increases the heartbeat of an adult from the normal 60 to 100 to 130 to 230 and among infants and children, it shoots up from 100 to 130 to 220 beats per minute. It is accompanied by sweating, dizziness, palpitations, angina and acute breathlessness.

Normally, a patient suffers from such a condition owing to emotional upheavals, physical exhaustion, deep anxiety, and consumption of caffeine or alcohol. I saw my mother suffering from this condition on several occasions and being admitted to the ICU. It was a distressing and disturbing sight. While it is not a life-threatening affliction, it certainly disorients the psychology and attitude of the patient. During her suffering, we saw her clutching onto her rosary as a lifesaver, while we prayed fervently for her recovery. She was administered medication but it worked only to an extent. The real help came in the form of a pentagon-shaped talisman. That is through Siddha Healing, Pranik Healing, the ten-day Vipassana Course and the Part 1 and Part 2 Art of Living courses. This is the unique, amazing and scientific power of the breath.

Breathing techniques, meditation, medication, and proper diet changed the trajectory of the life of the patient and brought back the mojo in her life. 'When you take a breath in, let it become your meditation that all the suffering of all the beings in the world is riding on that incoming breath and reaching your heart, and see a miracle happen,' says Osho. Till her final days, she continued with these practices. Senior citizens, those in pain and agony and even the able-bodied should undertake the courses mentioned. Swami Vivekananda took Yoga to America and spread the Ramakrishna Mission. He was the Arjuna of Shri Rama Krishna Paramhansa. My mother imbibed the trait of service to mankind by reading extensively about Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda and the Almighty God blessed her with an intrepid mind.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Populism will not let food subsidy reforms take off



UTTAM GUPTA

Leakages can be curbed if the subsidy is given directly to the beneficiaries using 'direct benefit transfer' mode. The potential for reducing food subsidies is immense



In the full Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23, 2024, the government has pegged the budget estimate (BE) food subsidy for FY 2024-25 at Rs 205,250 crore which is no different from the estimate given in the interim Budget. Though slightly lower than the revised estimate (RE) of Rs 211,394 crores for FY 2023-24, this is no consolation as invariably, the RE for any financial year turns out to be higher than the BE. For instance, while presenting the budget for FY 2023-24, Sitharaman kept the BE for food subsidy at Rs 197,000 crore. Against this, RE has turned out to be Rs 14,394 crore more. The moot point is that the expenditure incurred by the Central government during the last five years under this head has been consistently over Rs 200,000 crore mark every year: 2020-21: Rs 529,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 372,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 287,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 211,394 crores and 2024-25: Rs 205,250 crore (BE). During 2024-25, food subsidy will account for 4.2 per cent of its budget (Rs 482,000 crore), 5.5 per cent of its revenue expenditure (Rs 3709,000 crore) and consume nearly 8 per cent of its estimated net tax receipts (Rs 2583,000 crore). Reining in food subsidy is no less important than the goal it seeks to achieve namely providing 'food security'. The uncontrolled rise in the former leads to an unsustainable increase in fiscal deficit (excess of total receipts over total expenditure) which can injure the economy in multiple ways through high inflation, high interest rates, a slowdown in growth, fewer jobs, low incomes and so on. This, in turn, can lead to a demand for higher financial assistance including food subsidies from the government thereby exacerbating the vicious cycle.

There exists a huge scope for reducing food subsidies. To assess this, at the outset, let us see how it is administered. Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), the Centre asks the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and organize its distribution to around 820 million people for free.



REINING IN FOOD SUBSIDY IS NO LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE GOAL IT SEEKS TO ACHIEVE NAMEDLY PROVIDING 'FOOD SECURITY'. THE UNCONTROLLED RISE IN THE FORMER LEADS TO AN UNSUSTAINABLE INCREASE IN FISCAL DEFICIT (EXCESS OF TOTAL RECEIPTS OVER TOTAL EXPENDITURE) WHICH CAN INJURE THE ECONOMY IN MULTIPLE WAYS

The entire cost i.e. MSP paid to farmers plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) is reimbursed to the FCI/other state agencies as a subsidy. The money comes from the Union Budget's allocation for 'food subsidy'. While, the PMGKAY has been in force since January 1, 2023, before that, the Centre was giving food to 820 million persons (7 kg of cereals per person per month) to 120 million poorest of the poor persons covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana or AAY families and five kg of cereals per person per month to the remaining 700 million) at a heavily subsidized price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat/ricce/coarse cereals under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). In addition, since April 2020, it has given 5 kg of food per person per month for 'free' to all 820 million beneficiaries under PMGKAY to mitigate the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic. From January 1, 2023, it merged the free part of PMGKAY with the regular food security schemes under NFSA.

Now, food is available to all 820 million beneficiaries for free under the new incarnation of NFSA namely the PMGKAY. This arrangement will continue for five years till the end of CY 2028 as per the announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2023. Avenues for saving in subsidyFirst, fundamentally, subsidized food is meant for the poor. The number of poor isn't more than 15-20 per cent of India's population. Yet, the number of beneficiaries under the PMGKAY at 820 million works out to nearly 59 per cent of the population. Even as per the Shanta Kumar Committee (2015), the number of people eligible for subsidized food under NFSA shouldn't be more than 40 per cent. The excess of 19 per cent comes to around 270 million.

Further, during the last nine-and-a-half years of the incumbent government, 250 million persons have come out of poverty (as per a recent report by NITI Aayog). These persons can be excluded from the list of beneficiaries. Doing a back-of-the-envelope calculation, giving free food to a million persons entails a subsidy of Rs 200 crore per annum. Excluding 250 million will help save Rs 50,000 crore. The existing beneficiaries list of 820 million is based on 2011 Census estimates while the Supreme Court (SC) has directed that the Centre should take into account the population during 2021. On this basis, it needs to give free food to an additional 100 million.

That will cost Rs 20,000 crore. Even after providing for this, it will save Rs 30,000 crore annually. Second, why every beneficiary should get free food? The Shanta Kumar Committee had recommended that non-AAY persons should pay 50 per cent of the MSP. Other than AAY are 700 million persons, Minus 250 million (who shouldn't get a subsidy at all) and adding 100 million (as per SC order), we get 550 million. Making them pay 50 per cent of MSP or Rs 11.4 per kg (wheat), will save Rs 37,600 crore annually. Third, the NFSA legislation enacted in 2013 required beneficiaries to pay Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat/ricce/coarse cereals. If these rates for three years. Since 2016, there has been no legal bar on increasing the price. Yet, far from increasing, the Modi government has reduced the price to zero. Are they all (read: 820 million persons) so poor that they can't pay even a fraction of the cost (in the case of wheat at Rs 2 per kg, it is 1/15th)? Even if you make them pay a notional Rs 1 per kg, this will yield savings of Rs 5000 crore per annum. Fourth, the initial idea under the

Scheme was that FCI et al would buy only the quantity needed for meeting beneficiaries' requirements under NFSA plus maintain some 'strategic' buffer to meet emergencies.

It was never meant to be an 'open-ended' procurement which it has become today. This has also contributed to the avoidable increase in subsidy besides stocking problems. Shunning 'open-ended' purchases can yield significant savings. Fifth, currently, FCI/state agencies are paid HDC on an actual basis. This leads to payment for inefficiencies in the system and even cost padding.

The stories of loaders being paid hefty salaries by the FCI are still fresh in memory. A shift from 'actual' to reimbursement of cost to agencies on a 'normative' basis can save a lot of subsidy. Finally, the availability of a mammoth of around 60 million tons (the quantity distributed under the PMGKAY) in the supply chain with zero price tag is an open invitation to dubious operators to siphon off and sell in the open market raking in a moolah.

The PDS scam in West Bengal involving the diversion of subsidized food grains worth tens of thousands of crore currently under investigation by the central agencies provides a classic example. This can be curbed if the subsidy is given directly to the beneficiaries using DBT (direct benefit transfer) mode. The potential for reducing food subsidies is immense. The government can go for any of the above measures or all of them depending on how much savings it targets. But, ALAS under the current political scenario, Modi won't dare to take even a baby step like charging a notional price of Rs 1 per kg.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Implications of upheaval in Bangladesh on its trade relations with India

The sudden turn of events have raised concerns about the potential impact on trade, economic stability, and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region

Since Sheikh Hasina assumed office as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2009, the country has been a key ally of India. Her leadership has seen significant progress in bilateral relations, with a focus on infrastructure, connectivity and trade. However, the recent political crisis in Bangladesh has raised concerns about the future of this partnership. On January 8, 2024, Sheikh Hasina declared that boosting the country's economy would be her top priority for the next five years. Yet, by August 2024, the nation was engulfed in violent demonstrations over a quota system for government positions, leading to a deepening domestic political crisis. As tensions escalated, Sheikh Hasina resigned and sought



ADITYA PRATAP SINGH

refuge in India, raising concerns about the stability of Bangladesh and its impact on Indo-Bangladesh relations. The Evolution of Indo-Bangladesh Relations Over the past decade, India and Bangladesh have fostered strong economic ties, with infrastructure and connectivity projects playing a crucial role in strengthening their relationship. Since 2016, India has extended \$8 billion in

credit to Bangladesh for the development of road, rail, shipping, and port infrastructure. The two nations have also engaged in various areas of commerce, including medical tourism, business expansion, and the international garment trade. Bangladesh, a major player in the global garment industry, relies heavily on cotton imports from India. The textile and garment sectors account for 56% of Bangladesh's total exports to India, making it a vital trading partner in South Asia. In the financial year 2023-24, bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$13 billion, according to the Union Ministry of Commerce. The Impact on Trade Sheikh Hasina's leadership saw a flourishing of com-



merce between India and Bangladesh, leading to a significant trade surplus for India. However, the ongoing political turmoil in Bangladesh threatens to disrupt this economic partnership. The civil unrest and worsening economic situation have created security concerns that could impact Indian exports, commerce, and infrastructure projects in the neighboring nation. One of the major challenges will be on the bilateral trade front. After reaching \$12.21 billion in 2022-23, India's exports to Bangladesh dropped to \$11 billion in 2023-24. Similarly, Bangladesh's imports decreased from \$2 billion in the previous year to \$1.84 billion in the most recent fiscal year. Indian exporters have

In October 2023, India and Bangladesh discussed the possibility of a free trade agreement (FTA) during a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Trade meeting in Dhaka. An FTA could streamline regulations, encourage investment and commerce, and potentially remove customs tariffs, boosting trade between the two countries. According to a 2012 World Bank working paper, a full-product FTA could enhance Bangladesh's exports to India by 182%, while a partial FTA might grow them by 134%. This would contribute to strengthening Bangladesh's trade transport infrastructure and commerce links, leading to a significant rise in exports. However, the current political crisis has cast doubt on the

future of the FTA proposals. Sheikh Hasina's exit might slow or pause this development, affecting the expansion of commerce and trade in new areas between the two nations. Challenges for the Textile and Garment Industry The ongoing crisis in Bangladesh could also have a negative impact on other sectors, particularly the textile and garment industry. In the fiscal year 2021-2022, Bangladesh exported garments worth \$42.613 billion, solidifying its position as the second-largest apparel exporter globally. However, the recent incidents of factories being set on fire have raised concerns about the future of this industry. Many of these textile units are owned by traders associated with the

Awami League Party, making them particularly vulnerable in the current political climate. While India has the potential to step in and provide garments to developed economies, there are certain drawbacks to this shift. Bangladesh, as a Least Developed Country, benefits from zero-duty advantages, while Indian goods face tariff barriers. If borders remain closed and duty-free export-import activities are suspended, there is a possibility of increased demand for Indian garments. However, it is still too early to make definitive predictions about the opportunities and gains that might arise from this situation. (The author is a PhD scholar at HBTU, Kanpur; views are personal)

10 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
THIS ABILITY TO CONQUER ONESELF IS
NO DOUBT THE MOST PRECIOUS OF ALL THINGS
SPORTS BESTOWS. — OLGA KORUBT

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Three neighbourhood questions



VIVEK KATJU

Why was India taken by surprise by swiftness of final changes in Afghanistan, Maldives and Bangladesh?

IN LESS THAN three years, Indian foreign and security interests have suffered severe setbacks in three countries in India's immediate neighbourhood. On August 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the mainstay of India's Bangladesh policy, had to resign at short notice amid widespread and violent protests and flee to this country. On November 17, 2023, Mohamed Muizzu was sworn in as President of Maldives after winning the presidential election. He is committed to diminishing India's role in the island country while enhancing China's presence. His predecessor, Ibrahim Solih, had the opposite approach. And, on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani, in whom India had invested so much diplomatic capital, had to fly out of the country even as the Taliban took over. Were these grave reverses the consequence of misjudgements of those in charge of the country's foreign and security policies or do the reasons lie in the structures of policy making in these critical areas?

It is essential that the political and security classes introspect on these issues, avoiding political point scoring. The nation is facing such significant security challenges that it cannot afford the luxury of politics as usual on these matters. Indeed, it was encouraging that the government called an all-party meeting on August 6 to brief the Opposition on the developments in Bangladesh and the Opposition leaders have responded, as yet, by not raising the temperature on the government's handling of Bangladesh. This government-Opposition dialogue should continue in the coming weeks and months and extend also to a consideration of policy-making structures — ultimately, the government, apart from the judgement and instinct of its top leadership, has to rely on the professional advice given by the various ministries, organisations and agencies which handle India's external interests. It has to be ensured that they work harmoniously. A brief consideration of this is so would not be out of place in view of the ad-

verse impact to India's interests in the cited cases of regime change.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is in charge of managing the foreign policy of the country. It is manned by the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) whose mandate is to look after India's external interests. In the neighbourhood countries, India's embassies are helmed by diplomats who are carefully chosen for their competence and understanding of regional and global affairs. They have insights not only into the thinking, inclinations and compulsions of the political leaders of their countries of posting, but of the country's social, economic and political trends. The top management of MEA has similar capabilities to appropriately advise the country's political leadership.

In 1968, India created its external intelligence service with the mandate to ensure that it develops the skills to explore and bring forth the subterranean which impacts India's interests. It has a special role to play in the neighbourhood. Diplomats and officers of the external intelligence, MEA, other concerned ministries and the external intelligence agency have different but complementary roles and methods to safeguard and promote national interest. They have to avoid the temptation to tread into the others' mandate. In this context, it needs to be examined how far the original idea regarding the constitution of the external service has been adhered to.

In a paper published in 2019 in the *Journal of Defence Studies* of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, P S Raghavan, a distinguished diplomat who, after his retirement, chaired the National Security Advisory Board, examined the additions made to India's National Security Structure after its nuclear tests of 1998. As India became a nuclear weapons state and in the quarter century since, naturally, new security structures had to be put in place to meet new and growing challenges. These emanated from changing global power equation, technological changes in the cyber and space fields — to mention only two. They had

a direct bearing on the country's defence and internal and external security. In addition, concerns in the neighbourhood have only increased with China's rise and its continuing hostility towards India.

The formation of new structures began in 1999 with the creation of the National Security Council chaired by the Prime Minister, a Strategic Policy Group, and, most significantly, the creation of the post of National Security Advisor (NSA). A National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) was established to service these new structures.

Within a relatively short period it became clear, as Raghavan notes, "the NSA was to assist the Prime Minister on foreign policy, defence, atomic energy and space issues (besides internal and external security)". Raghavan also writes "the quickest and most effective means to reach a foreign government in times of crises is through the NSA". Along with the importance of the NSA, the NSCS has also proportionately grown. After 2018, it consists of four officials: Deputy NSA rank dealing with different areas of foreign and security issues. Following this year's elections, an officer of Additional NSA status has been added. There is, therefore, an elaborate security structure now, in addition, to the line ministries and the intelligence agencies. The ultimate purpose of the NSA and NSCS is to coordinate strategic and security related work but, as Raghavan writes, "turf" issues arise.

The overriding question in considering the foreign policy failures in Afghanistan, Maldives and Bangladesh is why should the Indian system have been taken by surprise by the swiftness of the final changes, even if it had an inkling that all was not well in these countries in the context of Indian interests. These surprises occurred despite the large structures that are now in place. Are "turf" issues responsible and, if so, how high do they reach? Or were there a series of misjudgements and, if so, by whom?

The writer is a former diplomat

SEBI AND A CLOUD

Allegations about conflict of interest related to chairperson need to be investigated. Denial doesn't work, more disclosure does

EIGHTEEN-ODD MONTHS after Hindenburg Research accused the Adani group of "brazen stock market manipulation" and "accounting fraud", allegations that the court denied and the Supreme Court said don't need any CBI or court-monitored probe, the firm, facing a show-cause notice from Sebi, the stock market regulator, is back. It claims it's connecting the dots between what it sees as inaction on the issue by the regulator and its chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch's investments. A series of revelations, based on whistleblower papers, made by the US-based firm raise questions for SEBI, and turn the spotlight, specifically, on the regulator's disclosure norms. The outright denial by all parties is hardly an answer.

Hindenburg has alleged that Buch and her husband "had hidden stakes in the exact same obscure offshore Bermuda and Mauritius funds, found in the same complex nested structure, used by Vinod Adani". During her tenure as a whole-time member of SEBI, it says, Buch was in communication with the managers of the offshore fund, and wrote to India Infoline to redeem the units in the fund. And that during this time she had an interest in an offshore Singapore consulting firm, Agora, and it was only two weeks after she was appointed as SEBI chairperson that she transferred the shares to her husband. In her defence, Buch has said that "all disclosures as required have already been furnished to SEBI". The SEBI code for board members asks that they disclose their interests which may conflict with their duties, along with transactions of family members. However, in light of the latest controversy, it must be asked: When the regulator was investigating the allegations surrounding the Adani Group, why were the disclosures not made available to the wider public? After all, members of Parliament openly declare their assets. Any connection between the regulator and the regulated must be publicly disclosed. It is especially odd considering that the same stock market regulator had, in the words of the Supreme Court-appointed expert committee, "drawn a blank" in its inquiry to determine the contributors to the foreign portfolio investors who had invested in the Adani Group. It must be asked whether the regulator's associations with parties who themselves are key players in private investment firms should also have been disclosed.

A blunt denial will not work. This matter needs to be investigated and every disclosure made — or not made — shared. Not doing so undermines the integrity and independence of the regulator. Given that Buch is the chairperson of SEBI, there will be a question mark over any process initiated by the market regulator to get to the bottom of these revelations. There is also a risk that this will get caught in a political sluffest. Larger issues of propriety and conflict of interest are at stake, and the aim of any such exercise is to strengthen the market regulator in a time of rising market penetration. Quite simply, when the market regulator is under a cloud, all stakeholders, from SEBI to the government, need to act urgently to clear it, fully protecting its institutional autonomy. A short-seller may play fast and loose — an Indian market, the world's fourth largest by market cap, needs to ring-fence its regulator with a stronger firewall — and a higher bar.

AFTER THE OLYMPICS

As the curtains come down in Paris, Indian sports needs to go into a huddle. Stakeholders need to pull in the same direction

FINISHING WITH SIX medals, India couldn't improve on its last Olympics medal haul of seven. On the medals tally, it slipped from 48th to 70th place. With defending javelin champion Neeraj Chopra settling for silver, the lack of a gold medal cost the country a good 100 places this time. So how will a cold-hearted reviewer — who treats Vinesh Phogat's tragic 100 grams miss with hard objectivity — see the performance of India's biggest-ever Olympic contingent in 2024? Paris will be remembered for the lessons it taught a nation with grand sporting dreams of producing world-class athletes and hosting mega international events. As the curtains come down in Paris, Indian sports needs to go into a huddle. The important stake-holders — federations, Sports Authority of India, Sports Ministry and other non-government organisations — need to pull in the same direction.

The spending on elite athletes was generous, but at times it was celebrity-driven and without foresight. Badminton legend Prakash Padukone raised valid questions on the need for athletes to be far more accountable and deliver when it matters. The federations also need to correct course. Phogat's weight category confusion and Nidhat Zareen's lack of match-day training and subsequent tough draw point to the mess the national wrestling and boxing bodies find themselves in. India can dream of broad-basing into swimming and athletics, but not without ensuring badminton, weightlifting, wrestling, and boxing keep up with their medal marks. The country also shouldn't see the many fourth-place finishes as the speck of morning light that promises a sparkling dawn. These near-misses will need to be minutely analysed for meltdowns under pressure. Being on the threshold of the podium is no guarantee of reaching the much-celebrated Top 3 perch in a matter of four years.

The real bright spot has been the men's hockey team. Back-to-back Olympic bronze medals is an exceptional achievement. Captain Harmanpreet Singh, leading the team both at Tokyo and Paris, had a reliable core group that the selectors didn't disturb. In coach Craig Fulton, the team had a committed coach with an international reputation of building champion international sides. The government and federation also gave both Harmanpreet and Fulton a free hand. Olympic medals need a process and persistence with top names at least over a couple of cycles. Double medalist shooter Manu Bhaker wanted Jaspal Rana as her coach. After a lot of reluctance, the decision-makers relented and Bhaker had her way. So at the Paris review meeting for Indian sports stake-holders, there needs to be a white-board with a message written in bold — "Identify the champions wisely and honestly. And listen to them".



LEHER KALA

NOT MADE IN INDIA

Would Kamala Harris have succeeded here? It's unlikely

A WOMAN OF Indian origin is on the cusp of making history by breaking one of the highest glass ceilings of political life. In a few months, Kamala Devi Harris might be the US president but she isn't the only enigmatic Indian female in the limelight this election. Former President Donald Trump's running mate J D Vance is married to an accomplished woman from South India, Usha Chilukuri. The potential Second Lady is a daughter of first-generation immigrants and a graduate of elite academic institutions such as Yale Law School and Cambridge University and who has also served as a clerk in the US Supreme Court. They may be on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum but what Harris and Mrs Vance seem to have in common is that they grew up with traditional Indian values — to stay grounded and work tirelessly in the pursuit of achievement.

We Indians take great pride in the success of our own, overseas. Recently, when Sidhar Ramaswamy was appointed as CEO of Snowflake, a US-based data cloud company, it made headlines in all the newspapers. It's old news that several tech companies in Silicon Valley have CEOs of Indian origin like Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai, who are greatly feted by industry whenever they are here. Indian immigrants make up about 1 per cent of the US foreign-born population, second after Mexico, but top the charts in income. Clearly, Indians are far from mediocre but it appears equally clear that they need to leave India to flourish and realise their potential. The unexpected tra-

jectory of Kamala Harris's life from a California neighbourhood to this political pinnacle is a classic example of what might be acquired by immigrants in pursuit of the American dream.

It is worth asking, where would Harris and Usha Vance be if their parents hadn't taken the fortuitous decision to build a future in America? (And in all likelihood (and if they were extremely lucky), they'd be slaving away at a respectable level at a company like Infosys, since it would have been drilled into their heads from childhood that the best that can be hoped for is a reliable job. At the ripe old age of 25, some nosy relative would have trotted out a dull and eligible man from the same caste. Instinctively, they would have internalised that being too educated and ambitious might create problems in their personal lives. To protect the fragile ego of Indian men, they would automatically have taken a step back to ensure a smooth family transition.

However emancipated and driven we might be, cultural pressures wear us down. Indeed, women know that success is an ongoing responsibility, dependent, in large measure, on how much they are willing to sacrifice. Not to knock talent and effort which are critical to success but there's something to be said for being in the right place at the right time — to take advantage of the right opportunities when they come along.

There is something tragic about the fact that generational hardships and a negative, autocratic atmosphere have killed the innovative spirit of many Indians here, while some of their counterparts in the US with exactly the same qualifications are able to reach stratospheric heights. Blame it on a pompous bureaucracy or a frustrating caste system designed to keep privilege closely guarded. Whatever it is, the unspoken messaging we imbibe is to follow the beaten path rather than carve out a new one.

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ative spirit of many Indians here, while some of their counterparts in the US with exactly the same qualifications are able to reach stratospheric heights. Blame it on a pompous bureaucracy or a frustrating caste system designed to keep privilege closely guarded. Whatever it is, the unspoken messaging we imbibe is to follow the beaten path rather than carve out a new one. Avoid risk at all cost because god knows trying anything new is fraught with uncertainty. Insecurity is etched into our hard drives, a feeling that what little we have might get taken away too.

This defensive, inward-looking attitude goes against great inventions coming out of India. Instead, we are getting pushed down further into mediocrity. Over time, we have become a nation of citizens deferring to authority and latching onto (questionable) exemplars of our alleged greatness, like the invention of zero thousands of years ago.

It isn't just sheer grit that has catapulted Harris and Mrs Vance within reach of the White House. Their society is set up in a way that it is possible to take pride in one's roots and proudly brandish a dual identity, while also fully assimilating into the American way. The perennial outsider doesn't exist there. It's become fashionable to dwell on the divisions within the US but the welcoming acceptance of Mrs Vance at the highest echelons of power should serve as a valuable lesson in inclusion, for all.

The writer is director, Hurkay Films

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



AUGUST 12, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

SARBAT KHALSA MEETS
THE SARBAT KHALSA convention held the SGPC and its president, G S Tohra, responsible for the damage done to the Golden Temple complex and excommunicated Tohra from the "Khalsa panth". Significant changes in the Sikh Gurdwara Act have also been sought to ensure that Sikh *sahibans* (high priests) command due respect and are not reduced to the status of employees.

GULF WAR INTENSIFIES
IN ONE OF the worst air and naval battles in the four-year-old Gulf War, Iraqi warplanes and naval units in their joint action shot down

three Iranian war jets and destroyed five targets in the Khor Mousa area at the tip of the Gulf. After a month of lull, Iraq has intensified its attacks and in a fierce dogfight, shot down three Iranian warplanes which were escorting a naval convoy heading towards Iranian ports in the region that have been declared by Iraq as a "war zone".

SRI LANKA VIOLENCE
SIX SOLDIERS were killed and 25 injured when an army truck was ambushed by Tamil terrorists at Mulankavili in Sri Lanka's northern Mannar district, according to unofficial sources in Colombo. The Mannar police station confirmed that there was an "incident",

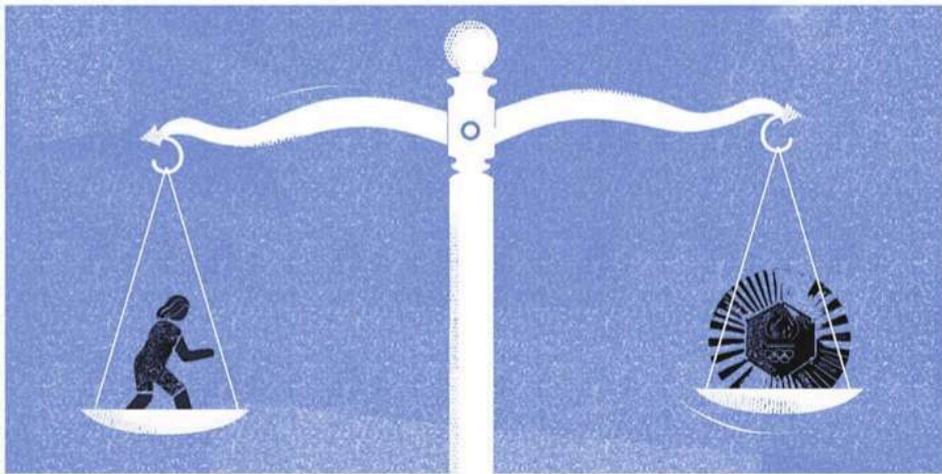
but said details were awaited. Tamil United Liberation Front sources in Jaffna said security personnel indulged in "indiscriminate" firing near a bus stand.

PM MISSES RAKHI
FOR THE FIRST TIME in 30 years, Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi, did not celebrate Rakshabandhan with the destitute children of Bal Sahay in New Delhi. According to Bal Sahay officials, the PM, who is the founder president of the institution, informed them only on the eve of her arrival about her inability to attend the function. "Urgent matters" are believed to be the cause of her absence.

THE IDEAS PAGE

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



C.R. Sasikumar

Vinesh Phogat's journey at the Paris Olympics made a nation hold its breath, mirrored its collective aspirations and tribulations. Did that cast an unfair weight on her shoulders?

Vinesh's story is our story

Because the odds are so high in this country and triumphs so rare, Phogat's near-miss is also ours



AAKASH JOSHI

VINESH PHOGAT — WRESTLER, fighter, rebel, slayer of giants on and off the mat — is an icon. She has become a powerful symbol thanks to her actions — rising from humble beginnings, in a place not known for women's agency and right to excel, taking on Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the lord of Indian wrestling, and a system ranged against her. On the mat in Paris, the woman dismissed by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) completed the hero's journey and silenced her critics by defeating the undefeated Yui Susaki. Even the tragic technicality by which she may be denied a medal screams of poetic injustice, almost as though scripted by a holy Bollywood writer trying to make the ending a tear-jerker.

Vinesh Phogat is a person who has had to overcome more than most. That she has surmounted the odds makes her a symbol, her success something to aspire to. It is a burden that she cannot shed. Because, in a country riddled with inequality, we are hungry for stories

Outside of the government, where can the young find secure employment?

If they were not virtuosos on the mat, statistically, given their background, what would the fate of Haryana's women wrestlers have been?

Vinesh Phogat had said that an Olympic medal would be her reply to those who hounded her and tried to silence her. But for a technicality, she has already proved her point. She is a dedicated sportsperson who has gone through a lot. But precisely because stories of triumph are so rare in India, she will always be more than the sum of her parts. We need her story — it is, after all, one of inspiration in the land of a million tragedies.

high that blinds us to the fact that there are so few avenues and opportunities. Outside of the government, where can the young — the 324 million Indians under 25, the demographic dividend — find secure employment? If they were not virtuosos on the mat, statistically, given their background, what would the fate of Haryana's women wrestlers have been?

Vinesh Phogat had said that an Olympic medal would be her reply to those who hounded her and tried to silence her. But for a technicality, she has already proved her point. She is a dedicated sportsperson who has gone through a lot. But precisely because stories of triumph are so rare in India, she will always be more than the sum of her parts. We need her story — it is, after all, one of inspiration in the land of a million tragedies.

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It was not Vinesh's burden

She carried not just dreams of a medal, but hopes of vindication for herself and millions of others. It was unfair all along



SUKHMANI MALKI

IN ROCKY (1976), as the climactic match between defending world champion Apollo Creed and past-his-prime underdog Rocky draws to a close, the commentators marvel that the latter is still standing. Rocky's eye is swollen; he asks his manager to cut it open so he can see, so he can keep fighting. He makes it through all 15 rounds, knocking out Creed for the first and 10th time in the same match, and the commentators announce a split verdict. Rocky's words from earlier come to life on the screen: "It really don't matter if I lose this fight... all I wanna do is go the distance."

After the almost cinematic ups and downs at the Paris Olympic Games 2024, as the fate of Vinesh Phogat's joint silver medal hangs in the balance at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the comparison rings uncannily true. Like Rocky, Phogat, too, aspired to go the distance. Except, the image of Phogat in tears on the mat carried a bur-

den much larger than that which Rocky ever had. Coming up as a sports-woman against all odds, and fighting battles for justice with a ferocity rarely seen, Phogat shouldered aspirations far beyond excellence and medal dreams. She carried to Paris dreams of vindication — for herself and millions of others. It was a burden she should not have had to bear.

The script for this was written much earlier over the course of a televised 18-month agitation fought with blood, sweat, and tears and then an uphill battle to the Olympics. On August 6, as Phogat managed one of the greatest upsets in world sports — she knocked out the defending champion Yui Susaki and broke her streak of 95 unbeaten international matches — it seemed like the ribbon with which to neatly wrap the story was within reach, whether silver or golden. Her disqualification from the finals, hours after the historic win, was a twist no one saw coming. It was met with outcry — and a solidarity that went far beyond sports.

Many saw their own stories in Phogat's trial by fire. Last year, the wrestlers' protest against their Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president and former BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh on allegations of sexual assault did a few things. It created role models, people who put their full weight

and careers behind holding power accountable. It also showed what such a reckoning can look like in India — the unshakeability of these ecosystems and the ugly ways in which they can take agency and power away from women. It was a moment of collective comprehension of the wall one comes up against in one's fight against the wrong man in the right place.

Phogat's tale did not begin on the mat. And so, bookending it with a medal can only be a consolation, for her and for countless others like her. That so many women identified with the burden that Phogat carried to Paris this year, that this was her burden to begin with, tells us much about a country that espouses values of both "naari shakti" and being a "sporting nation". Justice and dignity were supposed to be snatched back with grit and an commitment to brilliance. She had said once, "I will look him (Singh) in the eye and medal leke aongri main, tu dekh I will bring a medal, you see." This is why the dejection at her disqualification speaks of a sorrow that goes beyond Phogat. "Vinesh, you were not the one who lost. It's the defeat of every daughter of our country for whom you fought." Bajrang Punia commented on her disqualification. But this fight and this burden of vindication should not have weighed on her mind as she stepped into the ring. That is the real issue.

Phogat gave while protesting at Jantar Mantar, she said, "Junior women wrestlers come to me and ask how they are supposed to train like this, how I did it. How do I answer them?" Over a year later, that fear now looms larger, having witnessed the impunity of the powerful. But surely, Phogat's story, her journey to the biggest podium in the world is larger than one of vindication alone?

From Delhi to Paris was a long road. It told a story of potential stymied; of potential that it not been fighting against the wind. The recognition and fair opportunities that she has missed can be awarded to her by way of a medal. But the real task is to ensure change. Phogat carried on her shoulders the shared grief of dignity denied and the inability to dream for oneself without being knocked down by systems entrenched in misogyny. This is a battle for our courts and for us. It must be fought by building a culture that empowers justice. It can't be fought on the mat. Phogat has gone beyond her call of duty. As we await a decision on the medal, maybe we can ponder if there is a better script for this story — one that ensures dignity long before the mat.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Ministers should not allow themselves to be overawed by the racial politics of the Conservative era. That legacy was the Tories' doing. It remains the Tories' problem. Labour should speak for a better Britain." — THE GUARDIAN

A communist first

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's life, its highs and lows, became inseparable from the history of the Left Front in West Bengal



PRABHATH PATNAIK

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE CAME from a conservative family. Sukanta Bhattacharya, the renowned revolutionary poet of Bengal who died of tuberculosis at the age of 20, was his uncle, but the family disapproved of Sukanta's politics, as indeed they would have of Buddha's. Buddha's politicisation came from a different source, the Bengal of his youth which was not only intellectually and culturally vibrant, but also had a remarkable legacy of communism that had been inherited largely by the CPM after the split.

After a visit to India, Harry Pollitt, the British communist leader, had reportedly said that he would give his right hand for a communist party like India's. Its cadres were dedicated, disciplined, austere, untouched by corruption and firmly enmeshed within the rich intellectual and cultural ethos around it: this was even more true of Bengal. Besides, India, especially Bengal, had an obvious unfinished task at the time of independence — to carry forward the democratic revolution by instituting land reforms. The Communists alone could accomplish this. Lenin had theorised about such a conjuncture and the communists were clear about this task.

This clarity of vision and their organisational strength gave the communists in West Bengal an appeal that drew Buddha and numerous young persons of his generation to communism. In fact, starting from the Fifties, the communists appeared to be an irresistible force in West Bengal which could be kept away from power only through ruthless repression. Not surprisingly, a lull in repression after the Emergency allowed the Left Front to come to power in the state in 1977. Buddha, who had been a prominent student and youth leader and state secretary of the Democratic Youth Federation of India, was inducted at the age of 33 into Jyoti Basu's cabinet, one of five young men that Pramode Dasgupta, the state secretary of the CPI(M), had been mentoring to take over responsibilities from the older generation.

Buddha spent more than half of his adult life as a minister in the Left Front government, first as minister of culture, then as home minister, and finally as chief minister. There were two breaks in his ministerial tenure. Both were extremely brief. He did write a play during one of these interludes, which was also staged in Kolkata, but his ministerial responsibilities were to prevent him from writing more. This, however, also means that his life, its highs and lows, became inseparable from the history of Left Front rule.

The Left Front government, of which Buddha was an important part, played a stellar role in carrying out the unfinished task of West Bengal's democratic revolution. Operation Barga, under which sharecroppers, till then legally unrecognised, got registered and hence could claim credit from

banks for carrying out cultivation; the insistence that whoever sowed the crop could alone reap the harvest; the distribution of ceiling-surplus land to the landless; and the resurrection of the panchayat system that produced a vibrant grassroots politics, were some of the achievements of Left Front rule. They not only reduced the power of the *jotedars* and reinvented participatory democracy, but also contributed greatly to West Bengal's economic growth. Indeed, for the decade of the Nineties, West Bengal became the top-ranking state in terms of agricultural growth in India.

Once this phase was over, the Left Front government was less clear about what it should do next. The need for industrialisation was obvious, but how should industrialisation be accomplished? Should West Bengal follow the conventional route of enticing capitalists to set up units in the state? Or, should it form cooperatives in agriculture both to maintain the tempo of agricultural growth and also to start a range of industries that would be owned by the peasants at large? Should it set up industrial units in the public sector? While the last of these was ruled out because of fiscal constraints, Buddha, as chief minister, opted for the first. His decision may have been prompted by a sense of pragmatism; it may have been influenced by China's remarkable success following this conventional route; and it may have been clinched by the interest shown by the Tatas in establishing a small-car manufacturing plant in West Bengal. But whatever the reason, the Left Front government's attempt to acquire land from peasants for this project started a process of alienation of the peasantry from it that eventually led to its defeat, and to Buddha's withdrawal from active politics.

Meanwhile, the party had grown too flabby — it was no longer one for which Pollitt would have given his right hand. This is not to say that after the initial years, the Left Front's contributions were insignificant. It did pioneer the idea of autonomous councils within the state as a counter to statehood demands; just as the Left had pioneered the idea of states being formed on linguistic lines. The West Bengal Hill Council, in whose formation Buddha, as home minister, had a direct role, was a product of this. Many states in India at present, including West Bengal, are again facing statehood demands from various independent resident groups. The framework of the Council provides scope for adjusting the devolution of resources and powers in a manner that can obviate the need for any separate state — exploring this would be a testimony to Buddha's legacy.

Buddha's life had been one of exemplary simplicity and austerity. He lived, in a manner resembling one's image of a Communist, in a two-room apartment that needed urgent repairs. He had been ailing for quite some time, because of which he had asked to be relieved from the membership of the Politburo. One may agree or disagree with Buddha but one cannot quarrel with the fact that he was a truly noble and outstanding figure in West Bengal's political landscape.

The writer is former professor of economics at JNU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A GRAVE LOSS

THIS REFERS TO the report, "Former External Affairs Minister and Padma Vibhushan awardee K Natwar Singh passes away" (IE August 11). I am deeply saddened to learn that my good friend and colleague K Natwar Singh has passed away. He was my age, and I knew him for six decades. He made his mark as a foreign service officer for many years, in many countries. His contributions to politics were also significant. I pay my homage to his memory and convey my deep sympathy to his wife, Rajkumari Hem Kaur and the rest of the family.

Karan Singh, via email

TELLING CASE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Against unfreedom" (IE August 10). The fact that it took so long for Manish Sisodia to be released bail when the Supreme Court ruled no substantive evidence against him is a poor reflection of our judiciary. The Court has rightly denounced lower courts for "playing safe" in bail matters. How the Sisodia case progressed reveals how central agencies use legal loopholes and convoluted judicial systems to deprive a jailed accused of the right to a speedy trial. The SC should frame guidelines to rid the agencies of the rot that appears to have permeated its operations and hold them accountable.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

THE BEST OF SPORTS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Soaring High" (IE August 10). Javelin sensation Neeraj Chopra has inscribed his name in the nation's sporting history as the first independent Indian track and field athlete to clinch a second-straight Olympic medal. What stands out is his tenacity and drive to grow his skills. It's inspiring to see how Neeraj continues to soar despite the weight of expectations. His friendly rivalry with his counterpart Arshad Nadeem adds an exciting dimension to the classic Indo-Pak sporting duels.

Mahajan Rohan, Jammu

CASTE DOUBLESPEAK

THIS REFERS TO the report, "RSS-affiliated weekly says caste is India's unifying factor" (IE August 11). Hitesh Shankar's editorial piece eulogising the virtues of the caste system as India's unifying factor directly contradicts RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's repeated condemnation of it and claims of wanting it done away with lock, stock and barrel. The contradictory narratives from within the Sangh Parivar are no surprise. To quote B.R. Ambedkar, "Hinduism casts the Hindu to treat violence and segregation of castes as a virtue... If Hindus wish to break caste, their religion will come in their way."

L.R. Murmu, New Delhi

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Provision to skip local trials for certain drugs: regulator's rationale

ANONNA DUTT
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 11

THE DRUG Controller General of India on August 7 formalised the pathway by which certain categories of new drugs can get marketing and manufacturing approval in the country without conducting local clinical trials. Medicines for rare diseases, new cellular or gene therapies, drugs needed in a pandemic, and medicines specifically needed by the armed forces will be exempt from local trials if they have been approved by the US, the UK, Japan, Australia, Canada, or the European Union regulators. Drugs that have a therapeutic edge over existing treatments for a condition can also apply for this waiver.

Lower prices
 Waiving local clinical trials reduces huge costs burdens on companies. This is because trials are expensive — exactly how expensive depends on the kind of side effects that a medicine

may cause, the number of sites and trial participants needed, and the duration of the trial, including patient follow-up.

Thus, trials are a major determinant of a drug's price. This is especially true for new drugs which have to conduct three phases of trials to demonstrate their safety and efficacy. High prices in turn can act as barriers for entry to the Indian market. Waiving local trials will also help Indian pharmaceutical companies that have secured manufacturing licenses from international corporations. At present, even after obtaining manufacturing licenses, local clinical trials are a must for a product to enter the Indian market. A senior health official told *The Indian Express* that with this requirement now waived, pharmaceutical companies will be a big amount and thus be able to price their products lower.

Expedited availability
 Senior officials from the Union Health Ministry said that the move was made to ensure that cutting-edge therapies enter the

Indian market sooner. The step will likely hasten entry of drugs for the treatment of rare diseases afflicting very few people, where trials take longer to recruit participants. Similarly, the availability of new cancer therapies, whose clinical trials require long follow-ups, may also be expedited.

Among the drugs whose availability is expected to be accelerated are popular weight loss drugs containing GLP-1 receptor agonists (like semaglutide and tirzepatide), domnamab, which slows cognitive decline in early Alzheimer's patients, and cancer therapies like tarlatamab (lung cancers) and tovorafenib (pediatric brain tumour).

The New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules 2019 already makes provisions for such expedited approvals. It says that local clinical trials may not be required if a new drug is approved in specified markets, no major adverse events have been reported, a global trial with Indian sites is ongoing, there is no evi-

dence that enzymes or genes in the Indian population affect the drug's safety and efficacy, and the applicant has provided an undertaking to conduct phase IV trials.

No blanket approval

While Wednesday's order did not explicitly state this, officials from the Health Ministry said that the DCGI's Subject Expert Committee will still have the discretionary power to ask a company to conduct a local clinical trial, especially if there is scientific evidence suggesting that the new drug might behave differently in the Indian population.

"Companies may still be asked to conduct a local clinical trial if needed, but it will be on a case-to-case basis," the health official said. Moreover, all drugs approved without local trials will have to undertake phase IV marketing surveillance to keep track of any adverse events that might not have been detected in previous trials.

Some experts emphasise that the waiver has to be made after careful consideration. Prashant Reddy T, a lawyer specialising in drug regulations, said: "It is possible that some drugs may perform differently in the Indian population. Hence, it should not be a blanket waiver. As long as a committee looks into it and transparently states the scientific reasons for providing a waiver from local clinical trials, it should be fine."

Dr Abhishek Shankar, oncologist at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences-New Delhi, emphasised the need to find a middle ground. "Maybe drugs for which global trials have 10% Indian population may be approved in this manner. This will also incentivise drug manufacturers to include Indian patients in their existing global trials," he said, adding that while waivers may be necessary for "orphan drugs [used to treat very few people afflicted with rare diseases] or during crises such as a pandemic", these exceptions "should not be the basis for a policy".

Trials also help optimise the dosage for the

Indian population. Dr Shankar said: "There is a cancer which is recommended in a 400mg dose in the US. If prescribe the same for Indian patients they will experience toxicity".

Not novel concept

That said, the pathway India has chosen is not new. There are several regulators across the world who accept approvals from other countries as basis for their own approvals. The UK, for instance, post-Brexit allowed fast-track approvals for medicines that had been approved by regulators in the US, Canada, Australia, and the EU. The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration also has a fast-track process for approval of products that have been greenlighted by Comparable Overseas Regulators of the US, Canada, the UK, Switzerland, the EU, Japan and Singapore. However, applications under this pathway have to fulfill certain criteria, including the medicines having to be identical and manufactured using the same process, and trials abroad featuring a similar demographic.

EXPLAINED HEALTH

EXPLAINED SPACE

FIRST-EVER 'MEGAQUAKE ADVISORY' ISSUED BY JAPAN: WHAT THIS MEANS

AFTER A 7.1-MAGNITUDE earthquake shook southern Japan on Thursday, the country's meteorological agency issued its first-ever "megaquake advisory". The warning said that there is a higher than normal likelihood of strong shaking and large tsunamis on the Nankai Trough, a subduction zone (a region where tectonic plates collide with each other, and the heavier one slides under the other) along Japan's southwest Pacific coast.

However, this does not mean that a major earthquake will definitely happen during a specific period, the advisory said.



Shaded area is region where Nankai Trough quakes may occur. Govt of Japan

What is the Nankai Trough?

The Nankai Trough is a nearly 900-km long underwater subduction zone where the Eurasian Plate collides with the Philippine Sea Plate, pushing the latter under the former and into the Earth's mantle. This accumulates tectonic stress which can cause a megaquake — an earthquake with a magnitude larger than 8. The trough has produced large earthquakes roughly every 100 to 150 years, according to the 2023 study. "High probability of successive occurrence of Nankai megathrust earthquakes", published in the journal *Nature*. These tremors usually come in pairs, with the second often rupturing in the subsequent two years — the most recent "twin" earthquakes took place in 1944 and 1946.

Notably, Thursday's magnitude-7.1 earthquake occurred on or near the Nankai Trough, according to the United States Geological Survey. As a result, experts worry that the next tremor along the trough could be devastating.

When can the next megaquake along the Nankai Trough occur?

In January 2022, Japan's Earthquake Research Committee said the next magnitude-8-9 megaquake along the trough has a roughly 70% probability of striking within the next 30 years.

Such a megaquake could send tremors to areas from central Shizuoka — about 150

km south of Tokyo — to southwestern Miyazaki, Reuters reported.

Tsunami waves of up to 98 feet may reach Japan's Pacific coasts within minutes after the quake.

A 2013 government report found that a major Nankai Trough earthquake could impact an area that covers about a third of Japan and where about half the country's population of more than 120 million people lives, according to a report by *Nikkei Asia* magazine.

The economic damage due to the disaster could go up to \$1.50 trillion, or more than a third of Japan's annual gross domestic product.

But can earthquakes be predicted?

No. An accurate prediction of an earthquake needs a precursory signal from within the earth, indicating a big quake is on the way. The signal must also occur only before large earthquakes so that it does not indicate every small movement within the earth's surface. Currently, there is no equipment to find such precursors.

Thursday's advisory by Japan's meteorological agency was just a warning, not a prediction — it had nothing to do with science, Robert Geller, professor emeritus of seismology at the University of Tokyo, told the BBC. The advisory asked residents to prepare, review evacuation routes, and consider potential future warnings. **ENS**



AMITTA BH SINHA

A TECHNICAL snag in the spacecraft that took them to the International Space Station (ISS) has forced astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore to spend an extended period in space. Last week, NASA said they might have to wait till February 2025 to return to Earth.

Though in an unprecedented situation, Williams and Wilmore are not in danger. The ISS can comfortably house them for the next six months. Currently, there are seven other astronauts at the space station. The ISS, a permanent space laboratory orbiting Earth at a distance of about 400 km, is continuously manned and has never been without an astronaut since November 2000.

This is not the first time that astronauts have had to extend their stay at the ISS due to technical glitches. Williams and Wilmore, however, would have the longest unscheduled stay if they return in February.

Why are Williams and Wilmore stuck in space?

Williams and Wilmore travelled to the ISS on a Boeing spacecraft called Starliner in June. This spacecraft has made two trips to the ISS earlier but this was the first time it was carrying astronauts. Before the launch, a helium leak in Starliner's propulsion system was detected but was not considered serious enough to abandon the journey. Although Starliner developed two more similar leaks on its way, it reached its destination without any trouble.

However, after it docked with the ISS and the two astronauts transferred inside, more problems emerged in Starliner, raising questions over the safety of the astronauts on their return journey — originally scheduled after just a week. So far, ground engineers have not been able to resolve all issues to everyone's satisfaction, leaving Williams and Wilmore stranded as they do not have a vehicle to return home.

Both NASA and Boeing have said they hope to get Starliner in order soon. If that does not happen, the earliest that the astro-



(left) Wilmore and Williams at the ISS. The duo went to the ISS in Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. X/Space Station, NASA

nauts can return to Earth would be in February 2025 on another vehicle that is set to travel to the ISS in September. This spacecraft, operated by SpaceX, is supposed to carry four astronauts to the ISS and bring them back in February. However, if Williams and Wilmore also have to be brought back, then the SpaceX spacecraft will carry only two astronauts in September.

Can the ISS accommodate them?

In recent years, the ISS, which has been operational for 25 years, has usually been hosting seven astronauts at any given time. These astronauts mostly belong to the five countries/regions whose space agencies manage this facility — the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada, and Europe. The astronauts carry out a variety of space-based experiments and are themselves subjects of some experiments, particularly those regarding the study of impacts of the outer space environment on human bodies.

Nonetheless, the ISS is large enough to accommodate more astronauts. The number increases when a new team comes to take over or when astronauts arrive for short visits like Williams and Wilmore did. The facility is bigger than a typical six-bedroom apartment in the US, according to NASA. It has six sleeping quarters, two bathrooms, and even a gym. When visiting spacecraft attach themselves, additional space is created.

Cargo ships routinely make trips to

the ISS, carrying essential supplies and attending to maintenance requirements. On their return, these spacecraft take back waste generated at the ISS and dispose of it into space at the time of re-entering Earth's atmosphere where it gets burnt due to friction. In fact, one such cargo spacecraft, called Cygnus, operated by a private aerospace and defence firm Northrop Grumman, docked with the ISS last week. It carried more than 3,700 kg of cargo, which is currently being unpacked by the astronauts on board. It will remain docked with the space station till January after which it will return to Earth. As many as eight spacecraft can simultaneously dock themselves with the ISS.

The cargo spacecraft, however, cannot be used to bring back Williams and Wilmore as they are not equipped with the special capsules that can house humans in space.

Have astronauts stayed in space for a long duration?

Spending nine to 10 months in space is quite a long time but not unusual. Several astronauts have remained in space far longer than that. The current record is held by Russian cosmonaut Valeri Polyakov, who spent 438 days at the Mir space station between January 1994 and March 1995. Russia's Mir preceded the ISS and was operational between 1986 and 2001 before being brought down. More recently, US astronaut Frank Rubio completed 371 days at the ISS between

September 2022 and September 2023.

Several other astronauts, including women, have spent more than 300 days in space.

Williams and Wilmore are likely to spend more than 250 days by the time they return. Both these astronauts are on their third visit to the ISS. Williams spent 196 days on her first visit in 2006-2007 and then another 127 days in 2012. Wilmore, during his two previous visits in 2014 and 2015, has spent a total of 178 days at the ISS.

What happens to the human body in space?

NASA has increasingly been deploying its astronauts for extended stay missions to study the impacts on human bodies. US astronauts flying to the ISS can now volunteer to be part of such experiments. NASA is running a programme to study the impacts of short (up to 3.5 months), routine (up to eight months), and extended stays (more than eight months) of astronauts in space. Past studies have shown that bone density and muscle quality deteriorate faster in space than on Earth. Low gravity impacts brain fluids and extended stays can potentially alter brain structure. Extended stays can also increase the risk of heart disease.

Several other impacts have also been noticed. The ongoing programme would help in better understanding of these changes. For these reasons astronauts aboard the ISS spend almost two hours every day in the gym, doing a range of physical exercises.

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How Centre's Clean Plant Programme plans to boost production of fruits

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 11

THE UNION CABINET on Friday approved the Clean Plant Programme (CPP), aimed at increasing the yield and productivity of horticulture crops in India.

First announced in Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's interim Budget speech in July 2023, the CPP is also targeted at enhancing the quality of fruit crops across the nation.

The Ministry of Agriculture has sought an allocation of Rs 1,765 crore for the programme. One-half of this will be sourced from the budget of the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), while the other half will be in the form of a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

tain virus-free, high-quality planting material (plants used for vegetative propagation) in order to increase crop yields and improve income opportunities. These are

■ Development of nine Clean Plant Centres (CPCs) which will provide disease diagnostics and therapeutics, create mother plants to be sent to nurseries, and quarantine all domestic and imported planting materials intended for commercial propagation and distribution;

■ Enhancement of infrastructure, including the development of large-scale nurseries to facilitate the efficient multiplication of clean planting material — the mother plants obtained from the CPCs will be multiplied in nurseries and distributed to farmers;

■ Creation of regulatory and certification process to ensure thorough accountability and traceability in the production and sale of planting material.

What is the need for the CPP?
 India is the second largest producer of

fruits and vegetables in the world after China. From 2013-14 to 2023-24, the area under horticulture crops has risen from 24 million

hectares to 28.63 million hectares, and production has increased from 2774 million metric tonnes (mt) to 352 million mt.

India is also a major importer and exporter of fresh fruits. In the financial year 2023-24, India exported fresh fruits worth \$1.15 billion,

while it imported fruits worth \$2.73 billion. With the rising consumption of fruits in the country, demand has specifically increased for planting materials of foreign apples, and "exotics" such as avocado and blueberry.

According to sources, between 2018-20, the EXIM committee for import of planting material of fruit plants permitted the import of 21.44 lakh apple plants in 2018, which increased to 49.57 lakh in 2020. In 2018, permission was given to import only 1,000 avocado plants which increased to 26,500 in 2020. Similarly, permissions for the import of blueberry plants went up from 1.55 lakh in 2018 to 4.55 lakh in 2020.

At present, the process of importing planting material is very cumbersome, with imported plants having to be kept in quarantine for two years. The CPCs will cut this period down to six months, and thus make it easier for farmers to access disease-free and genuine planting material for horticultural crops in India.

The concept of CPCs is on the lines of projects in countries like the US, Israel, and the Netherlands.

NINE CITIES, NINE CLEAN PLANT CENTERS LINKED TO ICAR INSTITUTES

The CPCs will be established in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for specific horticulture crops. Each CPC will be linked to a different ICAR institute.

■ **IN PUNE**, the CPC for grapes will be linked to the National Research Centre for Grapes, Pune

■ **IN BIKANER**, another CPC for citrus fruits will be developed at the Central Institute of Arid Horticulture, Bikaner

■ **IN SOLAPUR**, a CPC for pomegranate will be linked to the National Research Center on Pomegranate, Solapur

■ **IN EAST INDIA**, a CPC for tropical and subtropical plants will be developed in collaboration with ICAR's East India Horticulture Centres in West Bengal and Jharkhand

■ **IN LUCKNOW**, the Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture will develop a CPC for mango, guava, and litchi

■ **IN BANGALURU**, the CPC will cater to four crops — mango, guava, dragon fruit, and avocado — and be linked to the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru

■ **IN SRINAGAR**, a CPC for temperate fruits — apple, almond, walnut, berries, etc. — will be developed at the Central Institute of Temperate Horticulture (CIHT), Srinagar

■ **IN MUKTESHWAR**, another CPC for temperate fruits will be developed at the CIHT's regional station in Mukteshwar

■ **IN NAGPUR**, a CPC for citrus fruits will be developed at the Central Citrus Research Institute, Nagpur

The Left's centrist conundrum

The term 'centrist' has recently emerged to refer to a politics that is neither formally right-wing nor left-wing. Levelled by some self-identifying leftists in debates on social media platforms, the label is intentionally derogatory and scornful. At best, it signifies the morally dubious and cowardly politics of 'liberals' in the face of right-wing assaults on democracy, equality, freedom, truth, justice, and social progress. At worst, centrism is seen as tacitly complicit in these assaults, even as their prime enabler. Therefore, despite opposing the right-wing, these left-leaning individuals often spend more time denouncing centrists, who they view as equal or even greater adversaries.

Some individuals who self-identify as neither right nor left-wing indeed exhibit a morally dubious 'centrism'. To appear objective and nonpartisan, they indulge in an all-sides-pleasing tightrope. Consequently, they make forced and false moral equivalences, give equal weight to illiberal, anti-democratic, and anti-constitutional voices and liberal-democratic and constitutional ones, and display amoral neutrality in situations demanding clear moral-political judgment. Such moral flimsiness cedes ground to illiberal, exclusionary, anti-constitutional ideological-political forces.

A second type of 'centrism' is more sinister, using the name of liberal moderation but readily sacrificing values of democracy, equality, pluralism, justice, truth, and liberty. This colludes with illiberal, inequality-promoting, exclusionary, authoritarian, and anti-constitutional forces. However, some leftists on social media pejoratively use the term 'centrist' to criticise a third type of politics: one embodied by individuals who grasp the need to avoid extremes to build coalitions, which they recognise as essential to defeat their primary ideological adversary and realise their constitutionally-driven ideological



Vanya Vaidehi Bhargava
Intellectual historian of modern India, and the author of the recently published book, *Being Hindu, Being Indian: Lala Lajpat Rai's Ideas of Nationhood*

Political realism demands recognising that political power is vital for moral positions to have efficacy. Nothing made this more evident than the helplessness of liberals and the left over the last decade.

A firm commitment to constitutional morality and political realism leads such individuals to reject ideological purism and sectarianism. Their deliberate renunciation of purity and absolute truth is an adoption of a prudent, sensible path to realise their constitutionally guided ideological vision, to which they remain committed.

A commitment to politico-moral ideals makes these 'centrists' reject purism. They know that while idealism is often crucial to inspire all progress, utopian purism has reduced an ideological and political group to a radical but politically irrelevant sect. And that self-defeating sectarianism thwarts the alliance-building necessary to defeat the gravest threats to one's ideological-moral visions.

Moral purity is relatively easy when not seeking power. Choosing not to seek political power is often viewed as a moral virtue, indicating disinterest in corrupting power. However, political realism demands recognising that political power is vital for moral positions to have efficacy. Nothing made this more evident than the helplessness of liberals and the left over the last decade.

Their moral outcries against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the building of a Ram temple atop a destroyed mosque, the vilification of Muslims, and other aspects of the unfolding Hindutva revolution, had little effect without power backing them. Power is crucial to enforce moral visions. And, gaining power requires identifying allies, building coalitions, making limited compromises, and rejecting ideological purism.

In the past decade, some leftist individuals criticised the Congress as centrist. Some aspects of the party's history legitimise this criticism. But the Congress has also successfully represented — as Yogendra Yadav once said — a 'centrist coalition of social groups, classes, and regions', which 'accommodates conflicting visions of India without giving into any extreme', and 'stands for a

non-majoritarian way of creating electoral majority'. If the Congress's intermittent adoption of a problematic 'centrism' enabled anti-constitutional forces, as some argue, its championing of another, principled centrism paradoxically kept supremacist Hindutva nationalism at bay until the 1980s. The success was demonstrated by Hindu Mahasabha leaders admitting that 'the entire Hindu population is with Gandhiji and his movement'. The Jana Sangh and the BJP's national vote share of roughly 3%-15% till 1988 similarly highlight the 'centrist' Congress's success at keeping Hindutva ethno-nationalism at bay. The Congress's 19.3% national vote share, even at its lowest nadir in 2014, means it remains the primary political force capable of challenging Hindutva supremacism nationally. Meanwhile, even when the CPI was more politically influential, during 1951-89, its vote share hovered between 2.5% and 9.94%. Since 1999, the CPI has steadily declined, ending with 0.49% of the national vote and two Lok Sabha seats in 2024.

The Hindutva ideological project has been actualised via state power. While people's power is highly significant in a democracy, state power is indispensable to ensuring that the polity remains a humane constitutional democracy and does not turn to inhumane unconstitutional authoritarianism.

Given the electoral irrelevance and political inefficacy of the left, I imagine that to halt the Hindutva juggernaut, many left-leaning Indians were compelled to rely on, in the 2024 elections, the same 'centrist' force they frequently castigated. This awkward reliance begs serious questions: will such individuals re-evaluate their ideological purism and their uncharitable judgments of others who are less purist? Might renouncing such self-defeating purism open a path to a less sectarian, and more ally-friendly, nuanced, innovative, and politically effective left-wing progressivism in India?

Data on quota is a Pandora's box

Debate over reservation shows ongoing issues with data transparency in T.N.

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan
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Politics over reservation in education and public employment is nothing new to Tamil Nadu. The State is one of the early movers with regard to the quota, having introduced it over 100 years ago. But, the absence of quantifiable data on community-wise representation under Backward Classes (BC) and Most Backward Classes (MBC) Denotified Communities (DNC) categories has been a subject matter of debate since the quantum of reservation was hiked to 50% in 1980. In the State, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have 18% and 1% reservations, respectively. The overall 69% quota was, through a 1994 Act, protected under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.

The question over the data has been addressed partially through the publication of the State Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Department's reply to a query under the RTI on the representation of Vanniyars and the rest within the exclusive 20% quota for MBC-DNCs over the last 10-odd years. The query, made in 2023, got a reply on July 31. The timing of the reply was significant, as the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), a chief advocate for the 10.5% separate reservation for the Vanniyars, had been pressing the government to issue an interim report on the issue, in view of reports that the State Backward Classes Commission had sought a one-year extension to make a recommendation on the internal reservation for the Vanniyars within the MBC-DNCs' share.

It all began with the previous AIADMK regime, which, on the eve of the announcement of the Assembly election schedule in February 2021, got a reservation law passed by the House and cleared by the then Governor.

Citing "extreme backwardness" of Vanniyars (who, in turn, encompass seven sub-castes — Vanniyar, Vanniya, Vannia Gounder, Gounder or Kander, Padayachi, Palli and Agnikula Kshatriya), the Special Reservation Act of 2021 had assigned 10.5% to this community, apart from 7% for 25 MBCs and 68 DNCs, and 2.5% for the remaining 22 MBCs. The law was first quashed by the Madurai Bench in Madras High Court in November 2021, and the Supreme Court upheld the decision in March 2022. In its judgment, the court said "no substantial basis" for classifying Vanniyars into one distinct group for internal reservation. Now, only the BC Muslims have been given a 3.5% reservation under the BC quota.

Since then, the PMK and other pro-Vanniyar activists have been demanding the restoration of the 10.5%. On July 24, PMK founder S. Ramadoss demanded an interim report on the work done by the State government and the Backward Classes Commission in 18 months. The RTI query revealed that Vanniyars were well ahead of the rest of the MBCs and DNCs in terms of

presentation in higher education and public employment. For example, with respect to admission to the MBBS, 5,938 candidates belonging to the MBC-DNCs were selected during 2018-22, both under the 20% exclusive reservation and open competition. Of them, Vanniyars accounted for 3,354. Likewise, of the 893 MBC-DNC candidates who qualified in the examination held by the Teachers Recruitment Board in 2021 for post-graduate assistants in government schools, 533 were from the community.

But, PMK president Anbumani Ramadoss dismissed the data as "incorrect" and demanded that the government release a White Paper on the representation of all communities within the MBC-DNCs in education and jobs since 1989. While the data sought to show that the Vanniyars' share within the 20% quota was above 10.5%, the PMK leader, relying on the data sourced by his party, contended that the share of Vanniyars in directly recruited Group I posts was much lower than 10.5%. The ruling DMK and the PMK differ on one other issue too. During the recently-held Assembly session, on June 26, the House adopted a resolution, proposed by the CM, urging the Centre to conduct a caste-based Census along with the general Census. However, the PMK argues that the State government itself can hold a socio-economic survey.

The episode has underscored the need for making public, at the earliest, the data on the break-up of caste-wise and Group-wise representation of all communities in education and employment under the 69% quota scheme and all the government's replies under the RTI Act, just as the Ministry of External Affairs has been doing for years.

As the world warms, more ACs are sold, heating up the globe further

China and India will have the highest number of AC units, more than 45% of the total units available globally

DATA POINT

Hannah Ritchie

An average consumer in India tends to buy the least efficient air conditioner in the market, a recent analysis by the International Energy Agency (IEA) shows. While this pattern of behaviour is similar to the other five countries and regions — Australia, the U.S., China, Japan, and Europe — the range of efficiency in AC units available in India is not as wide as in other markets.

The IEA estimates that globally, people buy AC units that are half as efficient as what is available in stores. As Chart 1 shows, the dark line or the AC unit purchased by the average consumer lies on the extreme left end in the range of AC units available in the market. One significant barrier to buying efficient AC units is the cost involved. While they are cheaper to run in the longer run, the high upfront cost deters consumers from buying them. According to an analysis by Our World In Data, in India, the cheapest AC unit with a 3-star efficiency rating costs around ₹29,000 while the cheapest variant with a 5-star rating costs about ₹36,000. This premium on the upfront cost makes households opt for the less efficient option.

The efficiency of air conditioning units becomes significant because their numbers are set to triple by 2050. The IEA estimates that there are two billion AC units in the world and according to its projections, this figure is set to rise to over 5.5 billion by 2050. As Chart 2 shows, by 2050, China and India will have the highest number of AC units, more than 45% of the total units available globally.

One reason for high demand is climate change. As the world warms, more people will be exposed to heat waves, and those who already live in hot climates will experience more intense ones.

The other reason is the rise in incomes. In extremely hot countries, like India or Indonesia, if people can afford an AC, they will buy it. The higher the demand for AC units, the more electricity it would require. According to the IEA estimates, "space cooling," consumed around 2,100 terawatt-hours (TWh) of power in 2022. Global electricity use in 2022 was around 29,000 TWh. That means AC uses around seven per cent of the world's electricity.

Chart 3 shows the growth in electricity demand for ACs since 2000. Electricity demand for air conditioning has more than doubled in 22 years. This is also in line with growth rates in total electricity use, which increased by 90% between 2000 and 2022. Some of the electricity AC units use comes from fossil fuels, making them one of the drivers of carbon emissions. According to the IEA estimates, space cooling caused around one billion tonnes of CO₂ from electricity use in 2022. This amounts to 2.7% of total CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels and industry. But, this doesn't take into account the climate impact of refrigerants used in AC units.

The AC unit's (cooling) contribution to global emissions is much lower than emissions from heating such as space and water heating. Chart 4 shows the global carbon emissions from heating and cooling over time.

If the release of greenhouse gases from refrigerants is taken into account, it adds another 720 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e) to the annual carbon footprint of air conditioners. This takes the greenhouse gas emissions from ACs to 3.2% of all greenhouse gas emissions in 2022. Despite the electricity usage and emissions, research shows that air conditioning makes extreme heat tolerable. The 2021 *Lancet* Countdown report estimated that air conditioning prevented almost 200,000 premature deaths in 2019.

Conditioning rising emissions

The charts were sourced from Our World In Data (OWID). Hannah Ritchie is deputy editor and science outreach lead at OWID



Chart 1: Chart shows the average consumer's air conditioner purchase trends and energy efficiency ratings

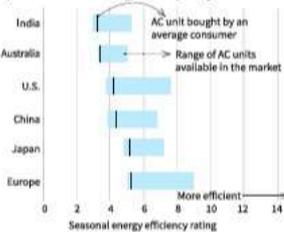


Chart 3: Chart shows the global electricity use for air conditioning in terawatt-hours (TWh)

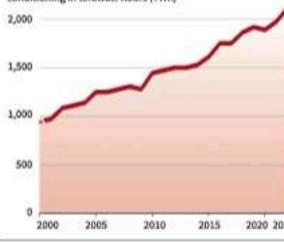


Chart 2: Chart shows the projected number of air conditioning units (in billion)

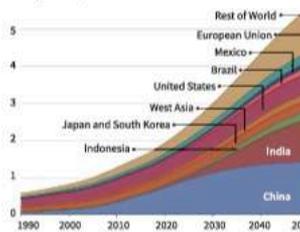
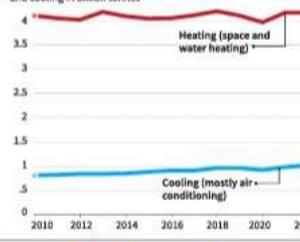


Chart 4: Chart shows global carbon emissions from heating and cooling in billion tonnes



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 12, 1974

Food imports to maintain public distribution system

New Delhi, August 11: The total quantity of foodgrains imported, including wheat received on loan from the Soviet Union during the 18 months from January 1973 to June 1974 was 6 million tonnes. These imports were made from Argentina, Australia, Canada, the U.S. and Russia.

Besides this, about 1.95 million tonnes of foodgrains (comprising 1,152 million tonnes of wheat and 4.3 lakh tonnes of milo) were purchased in April this year and this is expected to be received during the next few months. There are clear indications that the Government wants to go in for more imports to maintain the public distribution system, as the internal procurement of wheat has failed miserably. The total procurement of wheat in the current season has not touched two million tonnes and the earlier hopes of a pick-up in market arrivals following the rains have not materialised.

In addition to the import of 1.95 million tonnes contracted last April, the Government is reported to be closely watching the availability and price of wheat in international markets. It is stated that supplies will present no problem now as the total world production of wheat this year, excluding that of China, is expected to beat the previous record of 341 million tonnes in 1973.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 12, 1924

Rendition of the Berars.

Amritsar, August 11: Sheikh Sadiq Hassan, Barrister and Member of the Legislative Assembly, who has gone to Europe writes from London that he had an opportunity of seeing Lord Olivier, Secretary of State for India. In the course of his interviews the former impressed upon the latter the absolute necessity of a Round Table Conference with a view to establish Home Rule in India. He also spoke in favour of enforcing prohibition in India and asked for the appointment of a Commission to settle the claim of Nizam of Hyderabad for the restoration of Berar. In the course of his last plea, he referred to the assistance rendered by the Nizam in time of need to the British Government, Sheikh Sadiq Hassan is now proceeding to America where he will study the prohibition question as it works there.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The climate-resilient seed varieties introduced by PM

109 Prime Minister Narendra Modi released high-yielding, climate-resilient and bio-fortified seed varieties of agricultural and horticultural crops to enhance farm productivity and farmers' income. **PH**

The death toll from the Uganda garbage dump landslide

13 After torrential rain in recent weeks, a chunk of garbage from Kampala city's only landfill site broke off late on Friday, crushing and burying homes on the edge of the site as residents slept. At least 14 people have been rescued so far. **IRUTIS**

The share by which India's coal imports increased

6 In per cent, India's coal import rose to 75.26 million tonnes (MT) in the first quarter of the current fiscal compared to 71.16 MT of coal in the same period of the previous fiscal. Import demand is likely to remain subdued in the coming month. **PH**

The China-based companies blacklisted by the U.S.

73 The U.S. banned imports from five more Chinese companies over alleged human rights abuses involving the Uyghurs. They said this was to eradicate forced labour and promote accountability for China's "ongoing genocide against Uyghurs". **AP**

Bangladeshis held by BSF while entering into India

11 The Border Security Force has apprehended Bangladeshis who tried to infiltrate into India through the border in West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya. The BSF said that it was in touch with Border Guard Bangladesh. **PH**
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On amendments to the Waqf Act

What are the various contentious changes being proposed to the 1995 Waqf Act? Why have Muslim bodies and several Opposition parties registered their protest? How has the definition of 'waqf' being altered in the new Bill? What is the way forward?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

In August 8, the Union government introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the 1995 Waqf Act (1995 Act). The proposed amendments seek to significantly reform the law by enhancing the Centre's regulatory authority over waqf properties and, for the first time, permitting the inclusion of non-Muslim members in Waqf Boards. The draft legislation, proposed to be renamed the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development Act, 2024, is heralded by the government as a comprehensive overhaul aimed at enhancing "the efficiency of the administration and management of the waqf properties." However, several Opposition parties have accused the Centre of floating the Bill without adequate consultation with stakeholders, claiming it encroaches upon the Muslim community's religious rights.

What is India's 'waqf' law?

In Islamic law, waqf refers to property dedicated in the name of God for religious and charitable purposes. This can include any movable or immovable property set aside for the public good, embodying an act of piety that allows Muslims to extend their charitable deeds beyond their lifetime. A waqf can be established through a formal deed or instrument, or a property can be deemed waqf if it has been used for religious or charitable purposes over an extended period. The proceeds from such properties are typically used to maintain mosques, fund schools or provide for the poor. However, once designated as waqf, the property cannot be transferred through inheritance, sold, or given away. A non-Muslim is also allowed to create a waqf as long as the objective of creating it aligns with Islamic principles.

In India, waqfs are regulated by the 1995 Act. Waqf properties are identified and delineated through a survey conducted by the State government. A survey commissioner, appointed under the Act, identifies these properties through local investigations, witness testimonies, and review of public documents. Once identified, the properties are recorded in the State's official gazette, and a list is maintained by the State Waqf Board. Each waqf is managed by a *mutawalli* (custodian) who oversees its administration. While similar to a trust established under the Indian Trusts Act of 1882, a waqf, unlike a trust, cannot be dissolved by a Board.

What is the role of the Waqf Board?

The 1995 Act establishes Waqf Boards in each State to oversee the administration of waqf properties within their jurisdiction. These Boards are considered juristic persons, allowing them to sue or be sued in a court of law. Each State Waqf Board has a chairperson and includes one or two nominees from the State government, Muslim legislators, recognised Islamic scholars, and *mutawallis* of the waqfs. The Act also mandates the appointment of a full-time Chief Executive Officer for each Board, who must be a Muslim by faith and hold at least the rank of Deputy Secretary in the State government.

The Waqf Board is authorised to manage waqf properties and take measures to recover lost assets. It can also sanction the transfer of immovable waqf property through sale, gift, mortgage,



Next move: Union Minister Kiren Rijju with a delegation of Muslim clerics for a meeting on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 in New Delhi, on August 9. **PH**

exchange, or lease. However, this would require the approval of at least two-thirds of the Board members. Amendments to the 1995 Act in 2013 further strengthened the Board's authority and made the sale of waqf properties nearly impossible, as neither the *mutawalli* nor the Board had the right to sell a waqf property.

In addition to the State Waqf Boards, the legislation also establishes the Central Waqf Council – a national advisory body under the Ministry of Minority Affairs. The Council ensures the uniform administration of waqf properties across the country and is headed by the Union Minister of Minority Affairs. It also advises the Union government on waqf-related issues, including policy development, implementation of waqf laws, and resolution of inter-State disputes.

What are the key changes in the proposed law?

The definition of 'waqf' has been altered. Now, under the Bill, only lawful property owners who have practised Islam for at least five years are authorised to create 'waqf' properties through the execution of formal deeds. This revision abolishes the 'waqf by use' concept – which permits a property to be considered waqf based on usage, even if the original deed was disputed. Traditionally, waqf properties were often dedicated orally until formal documentation became standard practice.

To prevent any fraudulent waqf claims, the Bill states, "Any government property identified or declared as waqf property, before or after the commencement of this Act, shall not be recognised as waqf property." Additionally, the law also permits widows, divorced women, and orphans to be beneficiaries of proceeds from waqf assets.

Under the new Bill, the responsibility of surveying waqf properties, previously managed by survey commissioners under the 1995 Act, will now be assigned to district collectors or officers of equivalent rank. To improve the accuracy of waqf property records, the Bill proposes a centralised registration system. All

information about waqf properties must be uploaded to this portal within six months of the new law's enactment. Moreover, any new waqf property registrations must be submitted exclusively through this portal to the Waqf Boards. Notably, the Bill omits section 40, which previously granted waqf tribunals the authority to determine whether a property qualifies as waqf.

Instead, it designates the district collector as the final arbiter in such matters. Once a determination is made, the collector must update the revenue records and submit a report to the State government. However, the Bill makes it clear that the disputed property cannot be treated as a waqf property till the collector submits his final report. This implies that until the government decides the issue, a Waqf Board cannot be in control of the disputed land.

One of the most contentious aspects of the Bill is the proposed inclusion of non-Muslims in key waqf institutions – the Central Waqf Council, State Waqf Boards, and waqf tribunals. It empowers the Centre to appoint three Members of Parliament (two from the Lok Sabha and one from the Rajya Sabha) to the Central Waqf Council without specifying that they have to be Muslims. Under the 1995 Act, the three MPs to be included in the Council had to be from the Muslim community. But, as per the new Bill, State Waqf Boards have to include two non-Muslims and two women as members. The composition of waqf tribunals has been changed from a three-member body to a two-member body. The tribunal will now consist of a district judge and an officer of joint secretary rank to the State government. Under the proposed law, tribunals must resolve disputes within six months, with a possible extension of six months.

Additionally, the Bill empowers the Centre to "direct the audit of any waqf at any time by an auditor appointed by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, or by any officer designated by the Central Government for that purpose." The Waqf Boards are required to audit

their accounts annually, selecting auditors from a panel constituted by the State governments. Penalties will also be levelled upon *mutawallis* if they fail to maintain proper accounts.

The proposed law allows courts to intervene in waqf disputes. It removes the finality of decisions made by waqf tribunals, allowing aggrieved parties to appeal directly to the concerned High Court. This is aimed at increasing judicial oversight and curbing instances of arbitrary exercise of power by Waqf Boards or tribunals.

What are the potential implications?

Professor Faizan Mustafa, noted academician and Vice Chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna, told *The Hindu* that while the amendments are a positive step, it is crucial to implement measures that adequately protect waqf properties without infringing upon the freedom of religion guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution.

"Rights vested in waqf properties hundreds of years ago cannot be taken over by executive officers without fair judicial determination," he added.

He also noted that the increased centralisation of waqf property management might undermine the autonomy of Muslim religious institutions. While welcoming the inclusion of non-Muslims and women in waqf governance, Mr. Mustafa questioned, "Will non-Hindus be allowed on Hindu temple boards in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka?" He further asserted that excessive government control is at odds with the principles of economic liberalisation.

After its introduction in Parliament, the Bill was referred to a joint parliamentary panel for further scrutiny after the Congress-led INDIA bloc opposed the proposed law in its present form.

In March last year, the Union government apprised the Delhi High Court that close to 120 petitions challenging provisions of the 1995 Act are pending before courts across the country.

THE GIST

In Islamic law, waqf refers to property dedicated in the name of God for religious and charitable purposes. This can include any movable or immovable property set aside for the public good, embodying an act of piety that allows Muslims to extend their charitable deeds beyond their lifetime.

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CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

What is the Google 'monopoly' antitrust case and how does it affect consumers?

When a monopoly comes into existence, rivals are forced out and the company with the most power is able to abuse customers because they have very few other options. The U.S. Department of Justice sought to establish that Google had a monopoly in the web search and advertising sectors

John Xavier
Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:
On August 5, Google lost a major antitrust case brought against it by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) that sought to establish that the tech giant had a monopoly in the web search and advertising sectors. The 10-week-long bench trial that took place in September 2023 saw high-profile tech leaders, including Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, testifying before the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The lawsuit accused Google of using its dominant position in the search engine market to elbow out rivals and maintain monopoly. Its exclusive deals with handset makers were brought before the court as evidence. In the end, U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta ruled that Google was a monopolist.

What did the ruling state?
According to the ruling, Google's search dominance was primarily achieved through a strategy of exclusive distribution agreements, or default distribution. This refers to the way Google entered into lucrative contracts with "browser developers, mobile device manufacturers, and wireless carriers" so that it was the first or default search engine that users of such services or new phones were given. Google pays for this privilege and has shelled out more than \$26 billion for it in 2021, per the court.

"After having carefully considered and

weighed the witness testimony and evidence, the court reaches the following conclusion: Google is a monopolist, and it has acted as one to maintain its monopoly. It has violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act," the ruling noted, referencing a U.S. law that views business monopoly or attempts at monopolising as an offence. Per the court, Google used its monopoly power in two markets: general search services and general search text ads. "Importantly, the court also finds that Google has exercised its monopoly power by charging supra-competitive prices for general search text ads. That conduct has allowed Google to earn monopoly profits," reported the filing. Furthermore, the court harshly criticised the way Google failed to preserve employee correspondence that could have served as evidence.

However, some of the court's conclusions were in favour of the tech giant. It was determined that Google did not have monopoly power in the search advertising market. The court also noted there was no product market for general search advertising and that Google was not liable for actions involving its advertising platform.

In addition to this, Google will not be sanctioned for the way it failed to preserve employee chat messages, though the court warned it might not be so "lucky" in a future case. Interestingly, the judge observed that Google had brought out the "industry's highest quality search engine, which has earned Google the trust of hundreds of millions of daily users."

How do monopolistic practices harm consumer experience?

Regulators around the world monitor how businesses use technology in their countries, to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few entities. This ensures healthy competition in the market segment, so that all participants are striving to do better for their customers. When a monopoly comes into existence, however, rivals may be forced out of the market while the company with the most power is able to abuse customers because they have very few other options. Such companies also lose the incentive to keep improving the quality of their product.

The court ruling in the Google case even pointed to this as a risk factor. "Google's indifference is unsurprising. In 2020, Google conducted a quality degradation study, which showed that it would not lose search revenue if it were to significantly reduce the quality of its search product," observed the filing, "the fact that Google makes product changes without concern that its users might go elsewhere is something only a firm with monopoly power could do."

What did the U.S. DOJ say?

The U.S. DOJ hailed the ruling as a public victory for internet users in the U.S. "This victory against Google is an historic win for the American people," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland in a statement on the DOJ website. "No company — no matter how large or influential — is above the law. The Justice Department will continue to vigorously

enforce our antitrust laws." Google is far from the only company in the regulator's line of vision.

The U.S. DOJ is also reportedly teaming up with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to act against other large tech players on antitrust grounds, including Microsoft, OpenAI, and Nvidia, as per *The New York Times*.

What happens next?

Google will be appealing the ruling. In the meantime, the court has asked both parties, Google and the Department of Justice, to find a remedy ahead of their meeting with Judge Mehta on September 9. The remedy, in this case, could range anywhere between breaking up Google to ordering the search giant to end its exclusive deals with mobile makers. The former could fundamentally alter the dynamics of consumer digital business market as Google plays a key role by providing its platform to both individuals and businesses to interact. In the latter case, in terms of immediate effect, handset makers could lose billions of dollars they receive from Google to pre-load the company's search engine in the smartphone.

This hefty payment to smartphone makers, particularly Apple, disincentivises them from innovating a rival search engine. Apple, during the hearing, had said that it will continue to use Google as its default search engine. Apart from this lawsuit, the Justice Department is set to go against Google in another antitrust trial that deals with the internet company's ad technology.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

I was miffed that I was not invited to sing

Everybody in office seems disturbed. However, my colleagues are being very tight-lipped about it

S. Upendran

"You look happy! Does this mean that you've got your promotion?"
"I haven't heard anything about it."
"It's been more than a week. Hasn't your boss told you anything?"
"Nobody is talking. They're being very tight-lipped about the interviews."
"Tight-lipped? Does it mean they're angry about something?"
"That's one of the meanings of the word. When you look at someone tight-lipped, you look at the individual with your lips pressed together."
"Something that people do when they're angry — keep their lips pressed together."
"Exactly!"
"How about this example? There's no point talking to Aditya right now. He's only giving tight-lipped replies."
"Great example. 'Tight-lipped' can also be used to mean not saying anything. When an individual remains tight-lipped about some matter, he remains silent about it."
"He's unwilling to give any information about the matter."
"Exactly! The Minister has remained tight-lipped about the cause of the accident."
"Nobody really knows much about Naveen. He's always been tight lipped about his private life."
"Jai, on the other hand, is not tight-lipped at all."
"Tell me, does 'tight-lipped' and 'stiff upper lip' mean the same thing?"
"No, they don't! Someone who maintains a 'stiff upper lip', does not show or reveal his feelings."
"In other words, even when he is terribly upset, he keeps his cool."
"Exactly! A bad situation doesn't get the better of him."
"He is a very determined individual who doesn't show his emotions."
"Here's an example. I thought Revathi would start crying after having lost in the final. But she kept a stiff upper lip."
"The CEO maintained a stiff upper lip even when the union representatives threatened to go on an indefinite strike."
"No matter what they say or do, keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let them get a sense of what you're really interested in."
"Aren't you angry that your colleagues are being tight-lipped about your promotion? After all, isn't it...?"
"Well, I was a bit miffed, initially."
"Miffed? What does that mean?"
"Miffed is mostly used in informal contexts to mean annoyed — especially about the way a person behaves — the way he treats you."
"In other words, the person is not nice to you."
"His behaviour may be rather annoying. When you're miffed about something, you're only slightly angry about it — not very angry. The children were miffed when the school decided to cancel their visit to the zoo."
upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

On his 105th birth anniversary, a quiz on Vikram Sarabhai's life beyond ISRO

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1
Name the national research institute Sarabhai founded in November 1947. In its first days, it operated out of his residence before eventually taking shape at the M.G. Science Institute in Ahmedabad.

QUESTION 2
In 1962, Sarabhai set up the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR), the body that later became ISRO. Which body oversaw space-related activities in India before INCOSPAR?

QUESTION 3
When Sarabhai was doing his PhD at the University of

Cambridge, who was his doctoral adviser? Likewise, name the ISRO chairman whose doctoral adviser Sarabhai was.

QUESTION 4
In the mid-1970s, a French aerospace company transferred its Viking engine technology to India, where the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre used it to build the famous _____ engine. Fill in the blank. Hint: It is based on Sarabhai's full name.

QUESTION 5
Sarabhai's siblings X and Y were instrumental in establishing the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, based on "The India Report" on industrial design in 1958. Name X and Y.



Visual question:
What is the original name of this building and what is its connection to Sarabhai? LAKSMO (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Questions and Answers to the August 9 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The name of the highest civilian award in Bangladesh. **Ans: The Swadhinata Padak (Independence Day Award)**
2. This river flows through Bangladesh and is known as the Padma in the country. **Ans: The Ganges River (Padma)**
3. The name of the traditional craft of Bangladesh where artisans create beautiful designs on textiles using a resist-dyeing technique. **Ans: Nakshi Kantha**
4. The Bangladeshi festival that involves colourful boat races. **Ans: Nouka Balch**
5. The organisers of the "Concert for Bangladesh", on August 1, 1971, at Madison Square Garden in New York City. **Ans: George Harrison and Ravi Shankar**
6. The unique characteristic of the Grameen Bank's approach to lending, particularly in the context of its borrowers. **Ans: The majority of its borrowers are women**
Visual: The UNESCO World Heritage site in Bangladesh which is famous for its intricate terracotta Hindu temples from the medieval period. **Ans: The Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat**
Early Bird: Seema Das

Word of the day

Incinerate: become reduced to ashes; cause to undergo combustion

Synonym: burn

Usage: The paper incinerated quickly.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/incineratepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪnˈsɪnəreɪt/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

Opinion

MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 2024

Lab to land, science should reach the farmer directly, the benefit of research should reach the farmer. Efforts have been made to have everything at one place



Beyond suspicion

Sebi chairperson's integrity is not in doubt, but the SC should monitor the probe into the Adani issue

THE ALLEGATIONS MADE by Hindenburg Research against the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in July this year were damaging enough. But going by the latest set of charges made personally against Sebi chairperson Madhavi Puri Buch and her husband Dhaval Buch, the July report pales into insignificance. Accusing Buch of unwillingness to act on its January 2023 Adani report, Hindenburg said on Saturday that's because the Sebi chairperson and her husband had investments in offshore funds that had links with the Adani group. Hindenburg has also questioned Buch's ownership of stakes in a consultancy — Agora Partners — to show that she hasn't cut off ties to private businesses — something that being a regulator demands. It suggests that there were two Agora units — Singapore and India — and that she "quietly" transferred her 100% holding in the Singapore unit to her husband after becoming chairperson in March 2022, while she held the ownership during the board position.

Taken in isolation, these are damning accusations against any regulator. And the Buch couple have done well to dismiss all of them point by point. The statement shows how most of the allegations made by Hindenburg are based on half-truths and insufficient to conclude complexity. It also suggests that the Sebi chief made all requisite disclosures before taking over as Sebi chairman; recused herself from all decisions made on ICICI Securities (where she worked earlier) and Blackstone, where her husband works as a senior advisor. Buch has also categorically confirmed that at no point of time did any of the funds she was associated with invest in any bond, equity, or derivative of any Adani group company.

The two consulting companies set up by her during her stay in Singapore became immediately dormant on her appointment with Sebi and these companies (and her shareholding in them) were explicitly part of her disclosures to Sebi. What also lends credence to her statement is that even 360 One WAM clarified that IPE-Plus Fund 1, in which Buch and her husband had exposure, did not make any investments in any of the shares of the Adani group directly or indirectly throughout the fund's tenure. Some other sections of the market have also joined in her defence. There is a reason for this groundswell of support: The Sebi chairperson has been known for her unimpeachable integrity throughout her distinguished career. There is some merit in the suggestion that Hindenburg has clumsily recycled its own earlier claims which were debunked by the Supreme Court.

Having said that, it is also equally true that financial regulators should be like Caesar's wife — absolutely beyond suspicion. If there are questions about their conduct, the foremost job is to clear the doubt before taking any other step. That can't be achieved by claiming that a desperate cabal operating in India and abroad are aiming to destabilise India's financial foundation. The Supreme Court had earlier dismissed a petition seeking review of its January 3 verdict which rejected a plea to direct a court-monitored inquiry into allegations in the Hindenburg Research report. Given the latest round of serious allegations before it, will be in the interest of India's financial markets, the regulator, and Buch herself that the Supreme Court set up a separate panel to take over the investigations into the Adani fiasco. Till the panel report is out, the Sebi chairman should recuse herself from this case. Such an action will only enhance the reputation and integrity of the country's capital markets.

Olympic greenwashing has a silver lining

FOR CENTURIES, PARISIANS have emptied sewage into the scenic River Seine, rendering it unsafe for swimming. A \$1.5-billion clean-up in advance of the 2024 Olympics was supposed to fix the problem. But as the closing ceremonies approach, the river is safe for swimming only some of the time. Last week, four athletes — two from New Zealand, one from Belgium, and another from Switzerland — acquired gastrointestinal illnesses after competing in its waters.

Parisiens fouling the bill are understandably frustrated at the colossal expense and untold promise. Amidst an Olympics promoted as the greenest ever, it looks (and perhaps smells) like textbook greenwashing.

But is that such a bad thing? From Beijing's temporary air pollution clean-up in 2008, to the partially laundered Seine in 2024, Olympic environmental megaprojects nearly always fall short. Yet even when they do, they still improve the environment in some way, and provide a positive example for future Games and cities.

The modern Olympic Games have often served as a convenient excuse to build expensive, environmentally-destructive infrastructure. Stadiums and other sporting venues are the most obvious examples, but everything from highways to athletes' villages are just as common. After the celebrations are over, the new construction is often underutilised and even abandoned. This has been an ongoing and embarrassing problem that's grown with the expanding scope and expense of the Games.

Then in 1988 things started to change. That's when the small town of Lillehammer, Norway, won the right to host the 1994 Winter Olympics, and — spurred by environmental activists — quickly embraced the idea of making them sustainable. For example, facilities were built for energy efficiency and with an eye to post-Olympic uses. These were modest efforts by today's standards, but in retrospect that year's competition shifted how hosting duties were won, and are today widely regarded as the first "green" Games.

By the early 2000s, aspiring host cities realised that snagging the bid required a public commitment to a more sustainable mega-event with a tangible environmental legacy. Enter Beijing. As far back as the mid-1980s, the Chinese government publicly aspired to host the Olympics. However, it wasn't an easy sell. Among other issues, Beijing had some of the world's worst air pollution. So, to win the rights to the 2008 Summer Games, China promised an ambitious \$1-billion clean-up of the city's smoggy air that included factory closures and relocations, shifts to cleaner burning fuels, and traffic restrictions.

The strategy worked during the Games. Pollution plummeted and skies that had been gray and hazy for a generation were suddenly clear and blue. But afterwards, the temporary nature of many initiatives was revealed when the pollution returned.

Perhaps Beijing would've addressed these issues eventually without the need to impress the International Olympic Committee and a global television audience. Without them, however, it would've taken much longer.

Now it's Paris's turn. The desire to turn the sewage-choked Seine into a swimmable waterway dates back to 1990, but it wasn't until the city was awarded the Olympics that there was sufficient political and financial backing to make it happen. Still, despite over \$1 billion in spending, success has only been partial. Heavy rains can overwhelm the newsystem, rendering it unsafe for swimming (much less triathlons) and athletes have made high-profile complaints about what still floats in the water.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Seine is safe even part of the time is a vast improvement that benefits Paris and its environment long after the games are over. That's not a bad outcome for a mega-project that never would've happened if the world's biggest sporting event didn't give Paris its blessing. Future host cities, faced with the need to create a sustainable legacy, may need to engage in a bit of greenwashing too — and environmental activists will need to accept that something is better than nothing at all.

FAIR MARKET

OBLIGATIONS IN DIGITAL COMPETITION LAW COULD BE REFINED TO ACCOUNT FOR PRO-COMPETITIVE EFFECTS

A case for nuance

POLICYMAKERS, INDUSTRY, START-UPS, newspapers — everyone is talking about digital platforms and their effect on market competition, with the platforms' alleged anti-competitive conduct often coming under the spotlight in these conversations. Conduct like self-preferencing, where platforms prefer their services over other market players, is often the bone of contention. A critical element that escapes scrutiny in these discussions are the pro-competitive effects, including substantial consumer benefits, of digital services. It is essential that these effects also receive attention to ensure a balanced and nuanced approach to their regulation.

Digital platforms often enhance competition by lowering entry barriers and spurring innovation, eventually safeguarding the interests of consumers and small sellers. For instance, e-commerce platforms have revolutionised retail in India, providing consumers with a wide range of products at competitive prices and enabling small vendors to compete with large ones. This does not imply that there are no competition bottlenecks in digital markets. However, while resolving these challenges, policymakers should also consider the positive impact of the effects, particularly for small businesses. The law must address specific and proven competitive harms while avoiding unintended consequences, like undermining digital platforms' pre-existing competitive and consumer benefits.

What does traditional competition law say?

Traditional competition frameworks allow for consideration of pro-competitive effects, an aspect overlooked in the current discourse on platforms. These effects are assessed by weighing the positive impact of conduct on efficiency, innovation, and consumer welfare with any anti-competitive concerns. Further, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) may also consider pro-competitive



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effects, including accrual of benefits to consumers or improvements in the production or distribution of goods or provision of services, while assessing the conduct of companies. The CCI has routinely considered these effects. In the case of Uniglobe Mod Travels Pvt. Ltd. vs Travel Agents Association of India & Ors, the commission observed that the presumption of an appreciable adverse effect on competition could be rebutted by the parties if they can prove that their conduct has pro-competitive effects, or that it does not cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India. Other jurisdictions like the European Union also follow this approach, where they consider efficiencies and consumer benefits in their assessments.

Winds of change

Policy-makers' approach to pro-competitive effects seems to be changing, as evident by proposed digital competition Bill (DCB), a proposed law that aims to regulate large technology players, does very little to account for pro-competitive effects. The DCB provides exemptions to regulated companies from various obligations based on factors such as cybersecurity and fraud prevention. However, the exemptions do not allow assessment of the pro-competitive effects of market conduct, including consumer benefits and cost-reducing efficiencies.



Faculty member in the economics area at IIM-Ahmedabad

Further, the Bill provides various principles that will form the basis of obligations for regulated entities without considering pro-competitive effects. For example, it provides that covered entities cannot require or incentivise the use of their products or services, as well as those of related or third parties, along with their core digital services. While a prohibition on conduct that forces users to buy tied or bundled products can help provide users with more choices, restrictions on incentivisation will curtail the pro-competitive effects of digital services for consumers, like lower prices and better engagement terms. In Sonam Sharma vs Apple Inc. (2013), the CCI observed that tying could result in pro-competitive effects and spurn innovation.

Too little, too late

The Committee on Digital Competition Law's (CDCI) report provides the theoretical basis for the Bill. It acknowledges that digitalisation can have several pro-competitive effects, such as market contestability, innovation, and new offerings, and that certain practices highlighted under the DCB's obligations can also have benefits such as reduced manufacturing and distribution costs and enhanced product quality. However, the DCB does not sufficiently reflect these considerations. The CDCI envisages that subsequent regulations, which will provide principle-based oblig-

The Bill provides various principles that will form the basis of obligations for regulated entities without considering pro-competitive effects

Are monopolies and duopolies bad?



RISHI RAJ
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The answer lies in whether they are state-promoted and protected or products of competition and innovation

THE MONOPOLY of big tech has become a big issue with firms like Google, Apple, Meta, and Amazon having frequent run-ins with regulators in the European Union, US, and even India.

Last week, a US judge ruled that Google violated antitrust law, spending billions of dollars to create an illegal monopoly and become the world's default search engine. Prior to this, the US department of justice and 15 states had sued Apple for monopolising the smartphone market, hurting smaller rivals, and driving up prices. The lawsuit has accused the company of blocking rivals from accessing hardware and software features on its devices.

In India, the ministry of corporate affairs-led committee has recommended an ex-ante regulatory framework for digital platforms. Earlier, the Competition Commission of India had passed strictures against Google, and is still to pronounce its order against Apple in a similar case. It is not only the big tech firms against which several start-ups have flagged monopolistic practices; in sectors such as telecom and civil aviation, apprehensions have been expressed about an emerging duopoly which could harm consumer interest.

But are monopoly and duopoly really that bad as is being flagged by several critics, experts, and regulators, be it in India or abroad? The answer is not that easy. Before diving into the issue, it's important to distinguish between two kinds of monopoly or duopoly — one that is state-induced, and the other that is born as a result of competition and inno-

vation. The one that is state-promoted by restricting competition, giving protection to one or few players, is bad for the country and consumers. The monopoly of state-run television channel Doordarshan, state-provided telecom services, or Air India and Indian Airlines were rightly checked and discarded.

Similarly, the duopoly of Hindustan Motors and Premier Automobiles pre-1984 did no good to anyone. We can cite numerous examples across sectors until the 1990s liberalisation happened.

However, Google, Apple, Meta, or Amazon are not state-promoted, protected monopolies. They are all products of innovation and competition. In fact, they continue to innovate and compete fiercely to stay ahead. For example, with competition emerging from MagmaIndia and Ola Maps, or Amazon's assurance of all possible help in relief and rehabilitation has struck a note of hope. In the aftermath of the disaster, time is of the essence for taking restorative measures. Laws are meant for people and not the other way round for the government to cite them to not declare the landslides a national disaster. The Centre must release

share, two airlines will dominate the market and control fares.

Do such fears have a basis? Not really. In telecom, before the arrival of Jio it was feared that Bharti and Vodafone operate in a cartel which the regulators need to break. But the two competed fiercely and despite Bharti being the bigger player, Vodafone had a larger share of premium and post-paid users. With the entry of Jio, a new player became the leader based on innovation. Today duopoly fares may be expressed over Jio and Bharti, but the fact

is that competition between the two often delays any tariff hike. In civil aviation, before IndiGo it was Jet Airways which ruled the sky. It was joined by Kingfisher Airlines and for a while the two controlled the market. Still, a new entrant, IndiGo, changed the rules of the game. Today, both Jet and Kingfisher are

dead, enough to assure us that a merged Air India and IndiGo would continue to compete fiercely. Why is it that monopolies or duopolies born out of competition have a different trajectory than the state-promoted and protected ones? The answer is simple: the latter were inefficient, did not care about consumers, and most importantly had zero innovation. At the moment the market opened to competition their dominance became history as consumers abandoned them.

The lesson is straightforward: Regulate dominant firms but do not go overboard. It makes sense to focus on specific pain points

Regulators may charge Google and Apple with monopolistic practices but do consumers feel the same? It doesn't seem so. Consumers continue to swear by Google's search engine and Apple's products. Then who has problems with them? It's emerging firms who have to operate in the ecosystem which is controlled by the big tech firms. The grievances may be genuine, yet challengers emerge. Generative artificial intelligence is dominated not by Google but OpenAI. If home-grown MagmaIndia keeps Google on its toes, it means it has potential to be a challenger. There is an element of creative destruction in market-based economies that checks monopolies or duopolies.

Economist Friedrich Hayek was not disturbed by monopolies as he batted for free markets. He was only troubled if a monopolist had a capacity to withhold services that people were dependent on. The ability of a monopolist to set a price for essential products did not concern him. What needed to be checked, according to him, was different terms for different customers. He explained that if a company was so efficient in producing ball bearings that it drove out competitors, it would not be a problem so long as it supplied to all seekers on the same terms.

Big tech firms pass the Hayek test. The lesson is straightforward: Regulate dominant firms but do not go overboard. It makes sense to focus on specific pain points and address them rather than unbundle firms like Google as US authorities are suggesting, or have ex-ante regulations as India is envisaging.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Waynad crisis

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Waynad to comfort the victims of the landslides and gain an on-the-spot understanding of the scale of the disaster is much appreciated. The damage was incalculable; it was such that it would cost a lot of money to rebuild the homes — they should be landslide-resistant — and rehabilitate the victims. A lot of rebuilding, considering the

ecology, topography, and geology of the region, must be done. Prime Minister Modi's assurance of all possible help in relief and rehabilitation has struck a note of hope. In the aftermath of the disaster, time is of the essence for taking restorative measures. Laws are meant for people and not the other way round for the government to cite them to not declare the landslides a national disaster. The Centre must release

substantial funds to the state government to help the victims put up the pieces and rebuild their lives. —G David Milton, Maruthancode

Disappointment in Paris

Apropos of "Missing the mark" (FE, August 10), we were hoping that our athletes could bring a medal haul in double digits from the Paris Olympics, but it turned out to be an anti-climax as we could only win six

in total. We should focus on strengthening the infrastructure of various sports across the country, if we can concentrate only on track and field and swimming, which have 25 medals on offer in the Olympics, it would be a great beginning. Some cricket obsession has to shift towards other sports to make them equally popular. —Bal Govind, Noida



ADAM MINTER
Bloomberg

Now it's Paris's turn. The desire to turn the sewage-choked Seine into a swimmable waterway dates back to 1990, but it wasn't until the city was awarded the Olympics that there was sufficient political and financial backing to make it happen. Still, despite over \$1 billion in spending, success has only been partial. Heavy rains can overwhelm the newsystem, rendering it unsafe for swimming (much less triathlons) and athletes have made high-profile complaints about what still floats in the water.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Seine is safe even part of the time is a vast improvement that benefits Paris and its environment long after the games are over. That's not a bad outcome for a mega-project that never would've happened if the world's biggest sporting event didn't give Paris its blessing. Future host cities, faced with the need to create a sustainable legacy, may need to engage in a bit of greenwashing too — and environmental activists will need to accept that something is better than nothing at all.

Seeking light, dispelling darkness in Bangladesh

SOUMALYA CHATTERJEE

A decade has happened in the last couple of weeks: a discredited quota system has been removed, hundreds of lives have been lost and Sheikh Hasina, notorious for her dictatorial traits, resigned and fled Bangladesh. This week shall shape the future of Bangladesh at least for the decade to come.

Students have backed the veteran economist and Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus, as the chief advisor of the interim government — a praiseworthy stance for it means they did not get enticed by the Islamic fundamentalist forces and the BNP. Amid this chaos, writer and activist Tariq Ali congratulated the students of Bangladesh for their amazing triumph and addressing them as 'comrades and friends', advised: "Do not trust the so-called opposition parties. They are no different. Rely on your own strength... This is a historic victory. Do not let anyone steal it from you."

There is no reason to hold a contradictory view. But the Indian response to the Bangladeshi students' victory is a bit puzzling. There are reasons for this anxious response. India's relationships with neighboring countries such as Pakistan and China are tense and unlikely to improve soon. In this situation, Bangladesh was one neighbor with whom New Delhi had been on good terms. Hasina's exile is bound to make the Indian government anxious. These geopolitical ten-

sions are justified to some extent. But the popular Indian response to Bangladesh does not align with this line. It has to do with something else.

What happened here is that the moment Hasina fled Bangladesh, thousands of posts flooded the feeds of Facebook, Instagram and X. The world was watching everything: from the students' march on the streets, celebrations of their victory, occupation of Hasina's house, vandalizing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue, and setting the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on fire.

We live in a time where images speak louder than anything else. Images always had this power to leave an imprint that you would remember till your last breath. And today, circulation of an image happens in the blink of an eye. A chunk of posts started, stating that the minorities in Bangladesh are under attack. It took no time to trend #IIEyesOnBangladesh/Hindus on X. Half of the empathy turned into hatred in a few minutes.

It was images — posters, caricatures, photographs — that implanted a seed of empathy among us and it is the image again that has led a few of us to equate the Bangladeshi minorities' condition with the worst sort of ethnic cleansing. Impatience among netizens is nothing new. During the adrenaline rush they fail to ponder over facts and react. It is true that properties have been vandalized, minorities have been attacked but do we have enough evidence to declare this a genocide?



Social media and the mainstream Indian media are also responsible for spreading a lot of misleading propaganda to vitiate the political and social environment in India. As a result the democratic voices, sharing their rational views, have been cornered. The propagandists have spread images, showed videos without verifying, keeping the commoners from seeing the other side of the story. I've seen hundreds of posts where Muslims were seen guarding Hindu temples

and the mosques were announcing that Hindu brothers should be protected. Amid the darkness, there indeed was light.

We need to understand that Bangladesh is in a phase of transition. Anything can happen. In such a situation we must stand in solidarity with our neighbour and share our views rationally to guide them. We do not want the movement, which has earned victory at the cost of hundreds of lives, to be hijacked by jamaat-e-Islami or BNP or by any

other fundamentalist-opportunist force. We want secularism to prevail over Bangladesh.

Lastly, I must say that the Indian response to anything cannot be a generalized statement. The nature of our country does not allow this. We unite in diversity. Our response to Bangladesh also carries manifold voices but we must work to stitch them in empathy.

(The writer is an alumna of the department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University)

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Yesterday the familiar sound of the time-gun was again heard at its accustomed hour in Calcutta, and it came as boon and a blessing to men of punctual habits. The needs of those who live out of hearing of this useful signal, however, still remain to be considered, sidered, and a suggestion just made in the columns of the Times for the benefit of Londoners is worth noting. For Calcutta is not the only city where the need is felt for a reliable system of public time-keeping. Even within sound of Big Ben the lack of public clocks appears to have struck at least one overseas visitor as extraordinary, and his comment on the subject is declared by one correspondent, Dr. Michael Grabham, to be by no means ill-founded. Another writer, Mr. F. Hope-Jones, Vice-Chairman of the British Historical Institute, criticises the "total absence of municipal time services" in England, pointing out that elsewhere street timing is undertaken by the civic authorities as a matter of course, together with street lighting and cleaning. Mr. Hope-Jones endorses a statement made by Dr. Grabham to the effect that recent developments have provided electric clocks of great reliability and simplicity of construction, quite capable of maintaining street, time services at a trivial cost. If London can be induced to try a practical experiment with one of these devices, the results should be worth watching. With the time-gun to give the lead, every Calcutta resident might thus be enabled — in Dr. Grabham's phrase — to "think in minutes."

NEWS ITEMS

AFGHAN ABSCONDER YOUNG PRETENDER AMONG KHOIST REBELS

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT
A COMMUNIST states: Reports from the United Provinces that Abdul Karim Khan an Afghan refugee, is missing from his station coupled with rumours from Kohat that a youth claiming to be a grandson of Amir Sher Ali has appeared among the insurgents against the Afghan Government, leave little room for doubt of the identity of the pretender.

Abdul Karim Khan is the illegitimate son of the late ex-Amir Yakub Khan. Born in India of a serving maid, he was disowned several years ago by his father, who refused to provide for his support, describing him as a man of no account and a disgrace to the whole Afghan community. As he was incapable of earning his own livelihood, he was given Rs. 80 a month for subsistence by the Government. He has for years been a notorious wastrel of an unbalanced type. He absconded from justice in 1917 and on his return the Government were forced to incarcerate him, first in Muradabad and later in Fyzabad and Benares jails. He was eventually released from jail on giving a written undertaking that he would be of good character and not quit Benares without permission.

As soon as his escape became known to the Government of India, they requested His Majesty's Minister at Kabul to apprise the Afghan Government of it, with an expression of their regret that this or-do-well should have been able to elude surveillance and make his way into Afghanistan.

BABBAR AKALI CASE RISING ON MUTINY LINES ADVOCATED

YESTERDAY at the Central Jail, before Mr. Tapp, Special Sessions Judge, who is trying the Babbar Akali case, Dhanna Singh of Katli, who was recently arrested in the course of a scuffle for a gun, and who has since turned an approver, examined by the Public Prosecutor, stated that Babu Santa Singh told the witness that the Government was tyrannical and was standing in the way of the reform of the Sikh Guardwara; that the British had conquered the Punjab from the Sikhs by treachery; and that in order to re-establish the Sikh raj there should be a rising on the lines of the Indian Mutiny. Witness approved of the proposal and joined the Babbar Akalis.

The approver then related how the Babbar killed Buta, Lambardar, and committed dacoity at his house.

EMPIRE "JAMBOREE" 13,000 BOY SCOUTS AT WEMBLEY

INDIA, Burma, Ceylon, China, Hong-Kong and all parts of the British Empire were represented among 13,000 Boy Scouts of various nationalities and colours participating in the Empire "Jamboree" which was inaugurated this afternoon by a great procession at Wembley in the stadium.

The Duke of Connaught, accompanied by Sir Robert Baden Powell, welcomed the boys.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Early diagnosis and bad prognosis

Six blocks from my home lives Aurora, an organizational change executive I know for some years. Three years ago, I found her distraught; her doctor had found a tumor in her left breast. Tests confirmed that it was cancerous.

Her job entailed medical insurance. She saw the best specialists. Then she went through the mortifying cut-poison-burn routine. She had surgery and radiation; she received doses of chemotherapy. Months later, she came out relatively well. The tumor was gone. She looked well and didn't lose her hair. The prognosis was good.

What wasn't good was her mindset. She had once worked in a hospital and had read enough about cancer. She believed it was elusive and intractable. Once gone, it can arise again, spines-like, and threaten your life.

She researched and identified a famous cancer institution. She went there with all her records and went through a battery of tests. These sought to detect chemical markers in her blood that would predispose her to cancer. Science has advanced. The specialists also sought to identify genetic markers that made her more vulnerable to cancer. As often happens, the results were good but there were identifiable chinks in her armour. Subtle threats lurked. The murderous disease could resurrect.

The last I knew she was considering what is called liquid biopsy, which can spot the presence of cancerous cells in her blood or other tissues. The problem is that it can tell of their presence but not of their location. Aurora would then have to go through a raft of invasive tests to determine their location, even though the cells may never cause a clinically identifiable disease and need to be



Illustration by: Debarata Chakrabarty

treated. Not only that. She tells me that there is talk of further diagnostic advances — for instance, a mirror that can detect the minutest change in your body and alert you to its implications.

These are remarkable advances. Doubtless, they will save lives. Early recognition and accurate diagnosis will permit swift and pointed treatment. That is a benefit that we must attribute to scientific progress. Multi-pronged physiological surveillance combined with emerging genetic surveillance will help us know of diseases long before their depredation makes us aware of the danger.

But — and here is the rub — they will also do other things.

I notice with Aurora that, instead of being reassured and happy with the results so far, she has become preoccupied with what may come down the pike. The more she has had the benefit of discussion with top doctors in the field, the more she has learned about the uncertainty and insidiousness of the disease, she has become more determined to do her utmost to fight. To be fearful of severe sarcoma is human; to want to battle a mortal malady is natural. But Aurora appears to be living a life fitting between labs and pharmacies,

doctors and specialists. It is a life of angst, anxiety and sheer agony.

It is not just Aurora. It is not just her cancer. Aurora illustrates the painful paradox of our healthcare. There are a vast number of people for whom good medicine remains beyond financial reach. But even for those who can afford first-rate service, because either they have generous medical insurance or they are affluent, early and efficient diagnosis can be a great blessing.

It is seldom so. As clinical practice has become more far-seeing, medical care as dispensed by a general practitioner or a particular

specialist has become more time-bound and mechanical, routinized and almost ruthless. The average physician has neither time nor inclination to understand the terror of a patient facing a serious illness, let alone the motivation to dispel his confusion and walk with her on the path to recovery. The patients shudder between specialists, half comprehending and half sleepwalking through procedures they trust will bring them some relief.

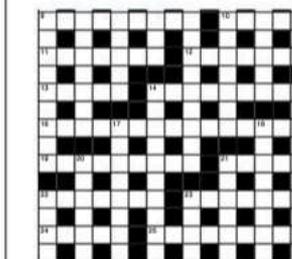
Given the breakthroughs in biotechnology and machine learning, diagnostic capabilities will keep improving at a rapid rate. A large percentage of a country's population could then be identified as likely to be vulnerable to one major disease or another. This may have great significance for insurance companies which may choose highly differentiated rates for people with different susceptibilities. It may even have a large impact on the recruitment policy of organizations which make a significant investment in the long-term training of their staff.

But the biggest impact may be on the individuals themselves who have to live with the knowledge that their bodies harbour the seeds of incipient diseases that may hugely change their future lives. What they will need then, very much like Aurora, is a significant measure of counseling and guidance to live peacefully and with manageable anxiety in the shadow of probable emergence of a murderous malady.

The next few phases of my friend's development I will anticipate, along with her, with both hope and concern.

The writer is a US-based international development advisor and has worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

LETTERING ACCURATE
A G I B A O V
T H E T I M E S
S E A T T I N G
H A R D W O R K
S A R I N E P O O L
C O S T O R D
C O U N T R Y
T E R M I N O I S S Y A T

ACROSS

- 9 Second secretary with oil migrate picked up dish (9)
- 10 The type that regularly gobbles (8)
- 11 Fit to swallow tablet pro tem? (7)
- 12 A Spartan swimmer died without help (7)
- 13 I count 50 having country (5)
- 14 I'd once drunk split, breaching etiquette (9)
- 16 A Northern Irish lady brings in large man for stock control (6,9)
- 19 For one German hosting buffet it helps to make omelette (8)
- 21 Some Londoners devour fruit (5)
- 22 Criteria must ask about revolutionary Japanese ware (7)
- 23 Wind from the rear outside recalled pasta dish (7)

DOWN

- 1 I avoid tips in a former digest (10)
- 2 Old mate in Paris welcomes rare beef (8)
- 3 Woman's keen to bottle fruit (6)
- 4 Staunch supporter of plant (4)
- 5 £1 is exceptionally dear for a kitchen device (10)
- 6 Foreign Office spies, nicking a cricket club's bread (8)
- 7 Offer kind young nurse a dingly (6)
- 8 Charge by the day for feeder (4)
- 14 Where to do some poaching, best by trouble (8,5)
- 15 I am anyone's after refreshment and dressing (10)
- 17 Pretty good commercial match (8)
- 18 One who represents Georgia during strike (8)
- 20 Sweet drink in most of France once (6)
- 21 Kiljoy is boring drunk, having ejected one Republican (6)
- 22 Son put away stuff (4)
- 23 Time-consuming story's less powerful (4)

Welfare vs. Work

In discussions about India's economic landscape, a provocative idea has emerged: that well-intentioned welfare schemes might inadvertently displace the youth from actively seeking employment. This notion challenges the conventional wisdom surrounding social safety nets and calls for a deeper examination of their impact on labour dynamics. The core of this debate lies in the observation that while welfare programmes are designed to offer support, they may, paradoxically, reduce the incentive for some individuals to enter the workforce. This is a complex issue, suggesting that the benefits provided could create a disincentive for employment rather than merely offering necessary support. Economic studies from different regions have indicated that similar welfare interventions in the US and Europe have led to decreased labour participation. If we consider this perspective in the Indian context, it raises the question of whether welfare schemes are actually contributing to a voluntary form of unemployment? This question is especially pertinent in a nation grappling with high unemployment rates and widespread rural distress. The Union budget allocations reflect a reduced emphasis on several prominent welfare programmes. For example, allocations for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a cornerstone of rural employment support, have remained stagnant. This stagnation occurs despite persistent demand in rural areas, suggesting that current funding levels might not suffice to address the needs effectively. Similarly, while certain schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman have seen marginal increases, others have not received adequate enhancements to keep pace with growing demands. The unintended consequences of welfare programmes can be profound. If welfare benefits are perceived as sufficient to sustain individuals without employment, this may affect their motivation to seek work. This dynamic underscores the need for a careful balance in the design of welfare schemes. They should be structured not just to provide immediate relief but also to encourage long-term economic participation. Additionally, the rise of informal labour markets, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, introduces another layer of complexity. The gig economy, characterised by temporary and often precarious work arrangements, has expanded significantly. This shift has implications for social security and labour protection, potentially exacerbating the challenges faced by workers in less stable employment conditions. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach. Welfare schemes must be designed with clear eligibility criteria and sunset clauses to ensure they do not inadvertently discourage labour force participation. Equally important is the need for robust support systems that facilitate transitions from welfare to employment, rather than merely providing financial assistance. Ultimately, the goal of welfare programmes should be to empower individuals to participate in economic activities, not just to provide temporary relief. As India continues to navigate its economic challenges, it is crucial to re-think and refine welfare policies to ensure they effectively support both immediate needs and long-term economic growth. This approach will help foster a more dynamic and resilient labour market, capable of meeting the aspirations of the country's youthful population.

Hydrogen Horizons

Australia's ambition to position itself as a green hydrogen superpower is a compelling narrative, one that aligns with its rich natural resources and expertise in energy production. However, as with any nascent industry, the path to realising this potential is fraught with challenges that need careful navigation. At the heart of Australia's green hydrogen push lie technological innovations, exemplified by the work of companies like Hysata. The firm's advancements in electrolysis - a process crucial for producing hydrogen from water - promise to significantly reduce the energy costs associated with hydrogen production. By addressing the inefficiencies of conventional methods, Hysata is paving the way for cheaper and more scalable hydrogen production. This innovation is essential because cost has been a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of green hydrogen. If Australia can lead in making hydrogen production more economically viable, it would mark a substantial step towards its goal of becoming a global leader in this field. Australia's vast renewable energy resources provide another strong foundation for its hydrogen ambitions. The country's abundant sunshine and wind create ideal conditions for generating the renewable electricity needed to produce green hydrogen. Moreover, the discovery of geogenic hydrogen - naturally occurring hydrogen within the earth - adds another layer of potential, offering a source of hydrogen that could be tapped with minimal environmental impact. Yet, despite these promising developments, there are significant economic and logistical challenges that could hinder Australia's ascent as a hydrogen superpower. One of the primary hurdles is the cost and complexity of transporting hydrogen. Hydrogen is notoriously difficult to store and ship, requiring extremely low temperatures and specialised infrastructure. These challenges make the prospect of exporting hydrogen to energy-hungry nations far less attractive than it might initially seem. Some experts argue that Australia's focus should shift from export to domestic utilisation. By using hydrogen to decarbonise its own heavy industries, Australia could reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and create a robust internal market for green hydrogen. This strategy could serve as a proving ground for hydrogen technologies, allowing Australia to refine its processes before considering the more complex and costly task of exporting hydrogen at scale. Furthermore, the global race to dominate the green hydrogen market is intensifying. Countries like Germany, Japan, and China are investing heavily in hydrogen technologies, driven by the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions and transition to cleaner energy sources. Australia must move swiftly and strategically to maintain its competitive edge in this rapidly evolving market. While Australia's potential to become a green hydrogen superpower is undeniable, the journey ahead is complex. Success will require continued innovation, strategic investment, and a focus on overcoming the economic and logistical challenges associated with hydrogen production and transportation. By carefully navigating these challenges, Australia can not only achieve its green hydrogen ambitions but also play a pivotal role in the global transition to a more sustainable energy future.

Sucker Punch

The fact that the International Olympic Committee had done the necessary spadework and approved her participation (even subsequently clarified its stand) should have ended the murmurs - only it didn't, and that was reflective of the smallness of spirit in the cry wolf attempt. It was ridiculous to say that Khelif had punched hard in a boxing match at the Olympics; what else could be expected at that level of sport?



Imperialist poet Rudyard Kipling's White Man's Burden is an unashamedly racist poem predicated on the premise that the ways of Westerners are superior to those of the "devil-like" irresponsible and "lively" natives.

It increasingly casts a moral duty on the Westerners to civilise the unruly non-Westerners (in this specific case, the colonised Filipinos). It posits the falsity of noble intentions about Westerners to justify any dehumanizing acts e.g. colonizing, subjugation or even reckless name-calling.

This narrative of entitlement afforded to the colonialist Western powers has been consistently applied, be it with the British Raj in the Indian subcontinent, the Belgian colonists in Congo, Italian colonists in erstwhile Abyssinia, or with the French excesses in Algeria.

While the days of the "colonies" are long over, the subliminal spirit of racism, supremacy and disdain towards non-Westerners still afflicts many. This has resulted in the strong revival of revisionist conservative parties across the European Continent and in the possible return of Donald Trump in the US elections.

If Marie Le Pen's neo-fascist party of the far right has been breathing down the neck of the French government, in Italy, Georgia Meloni's extreme right-wing Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) is nailing the roost.

Such an environment naturally emboldens a spirit of xenophobia and distrust towards the proverbial "others". Not only does it breed "othering", Islamophobia, anti-immigration demands etc, but also normalises the political-social approval of injustice and fairness as being unique to the Western world.

Shades of such bias and unsubstantiated accusations that have been the historical privilege of the entitled West, were affixed in the Olympic arena. Italy's boxer Angela Carini withdrew from the bout

against Algerian boxer Imane Khelif after 46 seconds claiming that she was hit abnormally hard! This is loaded, not to far, improprio/unimodulated to the point of vile accusations and online abuse calling out Imane Khelif as a "biological male" or "transgender".

Her appearance, power in the punch, and spectacular success led to a flurry of aspersions without proper verification or confirmation by the Olympic authorities themselves.

The unsporting optics started early, with Carini refusing to shake hands with Khelif after the bout.

Understandably, Khelif was distraught, as was the Algerian Olympic organisation which stood resolutely by its cornered athlete, as she withstood the media-smirks and reckless name-calling.

Many Westerners like the unbinding Trump, JK Rowling, and even Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, joined the complaining chorus by saying that it was, "a match that did not seem on equal footing"! This left Khelif with no choice but to take it on her proverbial chin, albeit, outside the boxing ring.

However, soon a counter public outcry defending Khelif erupted and gained traction. Many realised that the conventional storyline scripted by the Russia-backed International Boxing Association (no longer recognised by the Olympic Association) was not legally tenable.

They recognised that perhaps the functionalities of these competing bodies had their own axe to grind and were in the midst of the usual mudslinging, and that this event gave them an opportunity to pick doubts that were gleefully poked up by some.

The Olympic Committee iterated that Khelif and Lin Yu-

ting (a Taiwanese boxer called into similar question) were indeed women and that, "they have been born as female. They have boxed as females for a long time in female competitions without any major problems".

This included the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Jumping the gun on someone's looks was squarely unfair. In any case, issues of gender, require maturity and sensitivity in understanding and commenting. As the social media stance shifted from attacking Khelif to defending her dignity, the Italian boxer who had initiated the accusation soon retracted and apologized. It was clearly a case of premature judgement, discriminatory spirit, and above all, racism that besets the majority of the First World, still made up of former colonists and their apologists.

Sane voices like that of Claressa Shields, Gold medalist in 2012, that women with naturally high levels of testosterone should not be penalized just because others may not have the same levels, added the much needed nuance.

She clarified, "That's like saying, 'Oh, she's too strong to be at this weight, she's knocking everybody out, we're going to be in the men's division.' It has to be some facts that make sense." The fact that the International Olympic Committee had done the necessary spadework and approved her participation (even subsequently clarified its stand) should have ended the murmurs - only it didn't, and that was reflective of the smallness of spirit in the cry wolf attempt.

It was ridiculous to say that Khelif had punched hard in a boxing match at the Olympics; what else could be expected at that level of sport? That it takes

an extraordinarily gifted gene pool with extraordinarily bested bodily composition to run at speeds that they do, jump as high as they do, swim as fast as they do, or even punch as hard as they do, was lost on so many.

Indeed, tests and validations to ensure certain compliances (or non-compliances) are a must and they must have been done, yet so many pitched in with their regressive basic instincts, without proper substantiation.

The duplicity of standards is glaring and possibly the unsubstantiated backlash may not have been so severe had the boxer been from the West.

Years ago, another "other" in the form of Serena Williams had won a court case, "Queen. Don't afraid to rule like a King" - following despicable insinuations that she was a "man" owing to her physique and strength. She went on to become the most successful tennis player of all time.

The French themselves got a dose of inelegant whippersnapper when Amelie Mauresmo won two Grand Slams (when the likes of rival Martina Hingis has called her "half man") but withdrew afterwards, as her inherent talent could only take her that far.

The French had readily and rightly taken objection to unsubstantiated aspersions on one of their own, but perhaps affording a similar instinctive reaction to an Algerian in the Paris Olympics may have been too much to expect.

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Excessive market jitters

Investors in South Korea seem jittery since the stock markets have been on a dizzying roller-coaster ride in recent sessions, triggered by fears that the US economy has been slowing faster than expected.

The benchmark Kospi rebounded sharply Tuesday, along with the markets in Japan and Taiwan, allowing investors and financial authorities to breathe a sigh of relief.

But it is too early to conclude that a phase of steep losses on recession worries is over, especially given the depth of stock that gripped the Korean stock market and elsewhere in Asia a day earlier. The main bourse Kospi plunged 8.8 percent Monday, marking the biggest fall since October 2008. At one point, it fell by over 10 percent, triggering circuit breakers for the first time in four years.

Worries about a potential US recession as well as overpriced tech stocks linked to artificial intelligence sent Japan's benchmark Nikkei plummeting 12.4 percent Monday, the largest one-day fall since October 1987, as Taiwan's index gave up 4.4 percent, the worst sell-off since 1967.

The free fall on Tuesday came even though the US Federal Reserve, which recently left key rates unchanged, hinted at a possible cut in September. The positive signal was dispensed by worse-than-expected US data that showed fewer new jobs, a higher unemployment rate and slowing wage growth.

The Korea Herald

Another fear factor involved major tech stocks, some of which have led a surge in the US and other stock markets by highlighting the rosy prospect of AI-related innovation and productivity. Tech front-runner Nvidia reportedly delayed the rollout of its next-generation "Blackwell" B200 AI chips due to a design flaw. Chipmaker Intel also announced poor quarterly earnings Thursday that resulted in its decision to lay off about 15,000 people, casting a cloud over the tech sector at large.

Seoul's stock market, which is tech-heavy and in close sync with Wall Street, is vulnerable to major external shocks like a recession in the US or a negative shift in stance toward AI-related shares. If foreign investors reportedly fled the stock market, due to a design flaw. Chipmaker Intel also announced poor quarterly earnings Thursday that resulted in its decision to lay off about 15,000 people, casting a cloud over the tech sector at large.

Tuesday's rebound is a welcome reprieve for investors, but several predictable factors that can prompt investors, both local and foreign, to place sell orders. The Korean government and financial authorities are closely watching the latest top-to-tyranny gyrations in the stock market, but they seem to be essentially optimistic about the fundamentals of the Korean market.

In an emergency meeting on the economy and financial markets Tuesday, Finance Minister Choi Sang-muk shared the view with Bank of Korea Gov. Rhee Chang-yong and Financial Services Commission chief Kim Byoung-hwan that Monday's market crash was "excessive".

They pointed out several factors, such as US slowdown, the yen-carry trade and renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East spurred massive sell-offs, but claimed that the Korean economy is well on its path toward recovery and well positioned to deal with external shocks.

THANK YOU Jesus, Mother Mary & St. Jude for a safe journey. - DS.

PERSONAL

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demolished the statue of Mujibur Rahman and set fire to the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre was reminiscent of the demolition carried out by the Taliban in Bamyan, Afghanistan.

The selective killing of minorities and destruction of temples indicates that fundamentalists and divisive forces are active behind this agitation.

Yours, etc, Shivoull Chakraborty, Kolkata, 9 August.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Regulate coaching centres

SIR, This has reference to the article "A neighbourhood copes with loss" (4 August) by Vivek Shukla. The recent drowning of three young child services aspirants in the flooded basement library of a coaching centre in Delhi is reflective of these institutes' lack of concern for public safety, apathy of civic authorities and rampant corruption that hamper the enforcement of law.

To check the negative impact of coaching culture in the country, the Centre gave instructions to state and UT governments in January this year to regulate infrastructure, curriculum, teaching faculty, misleading advertisements and fee structure at these centres. But such 'teaching shops' have mushroomed in the Delhi-NCR region in recent years. They cater to the needs of desperately career-conscious, tuition-crazy students preparing for IAS, NEET, JEE, CAT, CUET, and other competitive exams.

Motivated by greed for quick money, the dubious merchants of

education have built buildings and basements in flagrant violation of rules and building bylaws, charge exorbitant fees, deny even basic facilities and employ unqualified teachers. Post protests by political leaders and students for action against the guilty and compensation to the aggrieved families, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi has sealed many recalcitrant coaching centres, bulldozed coaching centres and made some arrests.

The probe has been transferred to the CBI. Opening more government colleges with proper infrastructure, ensuring affordable quality education, and creating ample employment opportunities in the public and private sectors are long-term solutions to the current malaise.

Yours, etc, D S Karag, Hoshiarpur, 7 August.

PASSIVE ARMY

SIR, This refers to the article 'Movement hijacked by fundamentalists' by Erin Haque Bithy

published today. There is no denying that fundamentalist forces of Bangladesh have hijacked the student movement against job quotas.

According to the Supreme Court verdict, the Hasina government had reduced the quota to meet the demands of students. It was thought that the student movement would end. But after a week a violent movement against the Hasina government resurfaced.

Police failed to control the violent mobs which ultimately led to the resignation of Hasina and her flight to India.

After the resignation of the Hasina government, the army took control. Even then the violent agitators did not stop their looting, firing and killing of people randomly.

Instead of taking action, the army remained passive. This raises the question of whether the army wanted to control the situation or allowed it to happen so that Hasina was compelled to resign and flee from the country.

AN INTELLECTUAL

SIR, The passing away of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee marked the end of an era of "bhadralok" politicians. Known for his trademark "dhool" and "panjiri", Bhattacharjee was also a playwright and a poet. An alumnus of Kolkata's Presidency College, he perfectly fit the bill of the Bengali intellectual with a varied range of interests.

Film-maker Satyajit Ray was one of his friends. Bhattacharjee restored the white paint of Shreebhadr Minar near Esplanade in Kolkata after Ray expressed disgust seeing the red coating given to the monument by the first Left Front government.

He translated many international literary works into Bengali. He wrote extensively on the changes in China and published a book on the subject.

In Bengal, the CPM drew flak from its critics for the exodus of industries from the state. Bhattacharjee wanted to change the narrative and pushed for the state's industrialisation. However, the efforts were misdirected and the rest is history.

Yours, etc, Shivoull Chakraborty, Kolkata, 9 August.