



## Third avatar

The mandate is for Narendra Modi to change his approach to governance

Electing the leader of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on June 7, Narendra Modi is set to become Prime Minister for a third consecutive term. The swearing-in is to be on June 9. Though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell short of a majority in the Lok Sabha, the NDA appears well poised for the third term, in terms of numbers and political compatibility among its partners. Key partners were effusive in their praise for Mr. Modi at the NDA meeting, who in turn struck all the conciliatory notes. He promised to strive for unanimity in all decisions taken by his next government, and underscored a commitment to 'sarv pantha sambhava' – equality of all sects. Telugu Desam Party leader N. Chandrababu Naidu, who is set to return as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal (United) leader Nitish Kumar – two partners as part of the pre-poll alliance that won the 2024 election and with the largest numbers after the BJP – showed no ambiguity in staying the course with the BJP. The alliance is off to a harmonious beginning, and it will require leadership and compromise by all parties to keep it that way. While all partners declared their respect for the renewed mandate for Mr. Modi, it is only natural that the caveat of coalition will apply too. The BJP's numbers are higher than its own under A.B. Vajpayee and of the Congress-led UPA governments, from 2004 to 2014.

Unanimity on all issues is not easy, but consultations can be, and those should go beyond the NDA's partners. Mr. Modi said he looked forward to more debates in the 18th Lok Sabha – a case that cannot be overstated, considering the erosion of parliamentary authority during the 17th Lok Sabha. Mr. Modi's second term had begun with a promise of seeking the trust of all – *sabka vishwas*, as he called it. That promise remained largely unrealised, particularly with regard to the religious minorities. There was no numerical restraint during the second term for Mr. Modi, but during his third, his government's survival will be dependent on non-BJP partners, necessitating compromises. The test of the democratic spirit will be in consensus building beyond the ruling coalition. The BJP, despite the setback it faced in the general election in heartland strongholds, expanded its footprint among new regions and communities in the south and the northeast, a point Mr. Modi noted in his speech at the NDA meeting. The Opposition too has emerged as a stronger presence in Parliament. The fresh mandate for Mr. Modi necessitates that he change his approach to governance and politics.

## Change and continuity

Mexico's first woman President must crack down on organised crime

When Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leftist nationalist and leader of the Movement of National Rejuvenation (Morena), became the President of Mexico in 2018, many warned that the Latin American country was on the path to become another Venezuela. But Mr. Obrador proved his critics wrong using populism with fiscal responsibility and pushing Mexico's polity, which was dominated by the pro-American, centre-right Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for over seven decades, towards the Left. The Morena's surge helped Claudia Sheinbaum, the 61-year-old climate scientist who was endorsed by Mr. Obrador, make history last week as she was elected the first woman President of Mexico. The former Mexico City Mayor, known for her tough measures in tackling violent crimes, won 58.6% votes, while her rival, Xóchitl Gálvez, the joint candidate of three opposition parties, secured 28.4%. Morena also won a two-thirds majority in Parliament, which makes Ms. Sheinbaum the first leader in over 30 years who can push constitutional changes – a long-standing promise of Mr. Obrador – through Congress without the opposition's support. Ms. Sheinbaum, who campaigned on the promise of wealth distribution, tackling crime and building a stronger economy, said she will stay true to Mr. Obrador's legacy.

Mr. Obrador's victory in 2018 marked a paradigm shift in Mexico's politics. He promised to end widespread corruption and launch a massive public spending programme. But unlike several other populists in the region, he adopted a pragmatic approach seeking to bring in gradual changes. He rolled out cash handouts of about \$350 for the elderly and monthly scholarships of about \$50 for students, besides launching reforestation grants in rural areas, without jeopardising the country's economic stability. The Mexican peso rose to its strongest levels in almost a decade and investments flowed in. While economic expansion averaged at about 1%, unemployment fell to 2.8%, one of the country's all-time lows. Mr. Obrador remained largely popular despite criticisms of his failing to tackle violent crime and his intolerance towards dissent. Ms. Sheinbaum should be mindful of the criticisms her predecessor faced. There are concerns that the Morena's supermajority would lead to constitutional amendments, doing away with some checks and balances on executive power. The new President should bring the fiscal deficit, which ballooned in Mr. Obrador's last year in office, under check while continuing his social security measures. A bigger challenge would be to crack down on gangs that control drug trafficking to the U.S. Ms. Sheinbaum should use her strong mandate to offer a social contract that improves on Mr. Obrador's welfarism with a stronger emphasis on the Morena's social democracy.

The results of the general election 2024 have thrown up a surprise. They portend greater democratisation in the country, with the regional parties doing well. These parties will share space on the ruling party benches as well as on the Opposition side in Parliament. This will help strengthen federalism, which is so crucial for a diverse nation such as India. It was badly fraying till recently.

Centre-State relations became contentious during the campaigning for the general election. The idea of '400 paar', 'one nation one election' and the Prime Minister's emphatic threat that the corrupt (i.e., Opposition leaders) will soon be in jail were perceived as threats to the Opposition-ruled States.

The Opposition-ruled States have been complaining about stepmotherly treatment by the Centre. Protests have been held in Delhi and the State capitals. The Supreme Court of India has said that 'a steady stream of States are compelled to approach it against the Centre'. Kerala has complained about the inadequate transfer of resources, Karnataka about drought relief and West Bengal about funds for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The attempt seems to be to show the Opposition-ruled States in a bad light.

The Supreme Court, expressing its helplessness, recently said that Centre-State issues need to be sorted out amicably. When the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014, it had talked of cooperative federalism. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 was an example of this when some States that had reservations about it, eventually agreed to its roll-out. But that was the last of it. With federalism fraying, discord has grown between the Centre and the Opposition-ruled States.

There is a huge diversity among the States – Assam is unlike Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh is very different from Tamil Nadu. A common approach is not conducive to the progress of such diverse States. They need greater autonomy to address their issues in their own unique ways. This is both democracy and federalism. So, a dominant Centre forcing its will on the States, leading to the deterioration in Centre-State relations, does not augur well for India.

### Financing and conflict is one issue

States face three broad kinds of issues. Some of them can be dealt with by each State without impacting other States such as in education, health and social services. But infrastructure and water sharing require States to come to an agreement. Issues such as currency and defence require a common approach. The last two kinds of issues require a higher authority, in the form of the Centre, to bring about coordination and optimality.

Expenditures have to be financed to achieve goals, and that results in conflict. Revenue has to



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be raised through taxes, non-tax sources and borrowings. The Centre has been given a predominant role in raising resources due to the efficiency in collecting taxes centrally. Among the major taxes, personal income tax (PIT), corporation tax, customs duty and excise duty are collected by the Centre. GST is collected by both the Centre and the States and shared. So, the Centre controls most of the resources, and they have to be devolved to the States to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.

A Finance Commission is appointed to decide on: the devolution of funds from the Centre to the States, and the share of each State. The Centre sets up the Commission and has mostly set its terms of reference. This introduces a bias in favour of the Centre and becomes a source of conflict between the Centre and States. Further, there has been an implicit bias in the Commissions, that the States are not fiscally responsible. This reflects the Centre's bias – that the States are not doing what they should and that they make undue demands on the Centre.

The States also pitch their demands high to try and get a larger share of the revenues. They tend to show lower revenue collection and higher expenditures in the hope that there will be a greater allocation from the Commission. The Commission becomes an arbiter, and the States the supplicants.

### Inter-State tussles, Centre-State relations

The States cannot have a common position as they are at different stages of development and with vastly different resource positions. The rich States have greater resources while the poor ones need more resources in order to develop faster and also play catch up. So, the Finance Commission is supposed to devolve proportionately more funds to the poorer States. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the 15 Finance Commissions so far, the gap remains wide.

The rich States, which contribute more and get proportionately less, have resented this. What they forget is that the poorer States provide them the market, which enables them to grow faster. The poorer States also lose much of their savings which leak out to the rich States, accelerating their development. It is often said that as Mumbai contributes a bulk of the corporation and income taxes, it should get more. But, this is because Mumbai is the financial capital. So, the big corporations are based there and pay their tax in Mumbai. More revenue is contributed in an accounting sense, and not that production is taking place in Mumbai.

The Centre allocates resources to the States in two ways. First, on account of the Finance Commission award. Second, the Centre is notional while the States are real. Thus, all expenditures by the Centre are in some State. The amount spent in each State is also a transfer. This becomes another source of conflict. Expenditures lead to jobs and prosperity in a

State. Benefits accrue in proportion to the funds spent. As a result, each State wants more expenditure in its territory. The Centre can play politics in the allocation of schemes and projects. For instance, it is accused of favouring Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. The Opposition-ruled States have for long complained of step-motherly treatment.

To get more resources, the States have to fall in line with the Centre's diktat. This has taken a new form when the call is for a 'double engine *ki sarkar*', i.e., for the same political party to be governing at the Centre and the States. It is an admission that the Opposition-ruled States will be at a disadvantage. This undermines the autonomy of the States and also weakens federalism.

The autonomy of States is not to be confused with a freedom to do anything. It is circumscribed by the need to function within a national framework for wider good. It implies a fine balance between the common and the diverse.

### Issues in federalism

The Sixteenth Finance Commission has begun work. It should try to reverse fraying federalism and strengthen the spirit of India as a 'Union of States'. This is not only a political task but also an economic one. The Commission could suggest that there is even-handed treatment of all the States by the Centre and also less friction among the rich and poor States when proportionately more resources are transferred to poor States so as to keep rising inequality in check.

The issue of governance, both at the Centre and in the States, needs to be flagged. It determines investment productivity and the pace of development. Corruption and cronyism lead to resources being wasted and a loss of social welfare.

To reduce the domination of the Centre over the States, the devolution of resources from the Centre to the States could be raised substantially from its current level of 41%. The Centre's role could be curtailed. For instance, the Public Distribution System or MGNREGS are joint schemes, but the Centre asserts that it be given credit. It has penalised States that have not done so.

The Centre's undue assertiveness undermines federalism. Funds with the Centre are public funds collected from the States and spent in the States. The Centre is notional and constitutionally created, while States and local bodies are the real entities, where economic activity occurs and resources are generated. The States have agreed to the Centre's constitutional position but that does not make them supplicants for their own funds. It is time that the utilisation of the country's resources is jointly decided by the Centre and the States on the basis of being equal partners.

This has become more feasible with the changed political situation after the results of the 2024 general election.

Utilisation of the country's resources needs to be decided jointly by the Centre and the States. The changed political situation after the general election makes this feasible

# Remoulding the Global Plastics Treaty



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As an instrument to end plastic pollution, it needs to ensure social justice and equity principles for the informal recycling worker

municipal solid waste management systems. According to the UN-Habitat's Waste Wise Cities Tool (WaCT), the informal sector accounts for 80% of municipal solid waste recovery in many cities.

A recent study by UN-Habitat and the University of Leeds estimates that around 60 million tonnes of plastic from municipal solid waste pollute the environment, including waterbodies, due to inadequate collection services and mismanagement of solid waste. Without the IWRS, the volume would be higher. However, as highlighted in the recent Leave No One Behind Report, strategies to reduce plastic pollution often neglect to effectively involve the recovery capacities, skills, and knowledge of the IWRS. This oversight worsens livelihood vulnerabilities and undermines existing informal recovery systems.

### Global treaty, need for a just transition

The Global Plastics Treaty is a significant attempt to establish a legally binding agreement aimed at reducing and eliminating plastic pollution. The decision to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) was made in early 2021 during the fifth UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya. The INC's journey, beginning with an Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in mid-2022, was followed by subsequent meetings in Uruguay, Paris, and Nairobi, with the fourth INC-4 in Canada in April this year. The final INC-5 meeting in South Korea will continue to see active participation from the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP).

The IAWP, a vocal participant in the UNEA Plastic Treaty process, emphasises the importance of supporting the formalisation and integration of informal waste pickers into discussions on addressing plastics. It also

advocates including waste pickers' perspectives and solutions at every stage of policy and law implementation.

These measures aim to acknowledge waste pickers' historical contributions, protect their rights, and promote effective and sustainable plastic waste management practices. There is no universally agreed-upon terminology for a just transition or a formal definition of the informal waste sector and its workforce. Clarifying these definitions is crucial.

### India's voice is important

As a key representative from the Global South, India promotes an approach that enhances repair, reuse, refill, and recycling without necessarily eliminating the use of plastics altogether.

India has also stressed the importance of adopting country-specific circumstances and capacities. Hence, India's informal waste pickers, who are indispensable, remain central to the discussion.

We, therefore, need to rethink the formulation of our EPR norms and raise questions on how to integrate this informal worker cohort into the new legal framework.

As the final round of negotiations for the Global Plastics Treaty approaches the INC-5, a key question remains – on how a global instrument to end plastic pollution can enable a just transition for nearly 15 million people who informally collect and recover up to 58% of global recycled waste, thereby shaping a sustainable future. By incorporating their perspectives and ensuring their livelihoods are protected, the treaty can embody social justice and equity principles while leaving no one and no place behind.

The views expressed are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The message of 2024

A truly federal structure should be evolved to avoid any possibility of majoritarian or dictatorial governance and tendencies in India in the future. India has had a narrow and providential escape from such a situation, thanks to an alert electorate and experience of the central

governance of the last 10 years. A coalition government is necessary if 'the India as we knew it' has to survive and progress. There need to be adequate checks and balances in place to ensure that the interests of all diverse sections are fully protected. **V. Rajan,** Thiruvananthapuram

The long shadow of a truncated mandate that looms large over the scheduled election of Narendra Modi for a third term in office will ensure that Mr. Modi will rule India looking over his shoulder often. His coalition partners are sure to have demands. The verdict of 2024 is a blessing in disguise for the

proper functioning of Indian democracy. Mr. Modi will have to be mindful of the sensitivities and sensibilities in every corner of India. Hail the Indian electorate for such a wisdom-tinged verdict. **Cijo Joseph,** Kozha, Kottayam, Kerala

There are many lessons in

the way the INDIA bloc has risen and the Bharatiya Janata Party has wilted to some degree. The people of India cannot be taken for granted. They voted on the basis of seeking answers to the burning issues of the day – price rise, unemployment, corruption and also farmer distress, to name a few. The Ayodhya

result drives home this point. The attempt to misguide people using the politics of polarisation failed miserably. **Jahangir Ali,** Mumbai

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SATURDAY - JUNE 8, 2024

## Reason to pause

Growth raises comfort level for status quo on rates

**T**he Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) acted along expected lines by holding the repo rate steady at 6.5 per cent for the eighth consecutive time. While two MPC members out of six voted for a rate cut, the MPC was perhaps persuaded by a range of factors to stick to a wait-and-watch approach, in terms of the rates as well as its stance of 'withdrawal of accommodation'. Perhaps, the biggest implicit factor is the context. It makes sense not to rock the boat till the new coalition government settles down.



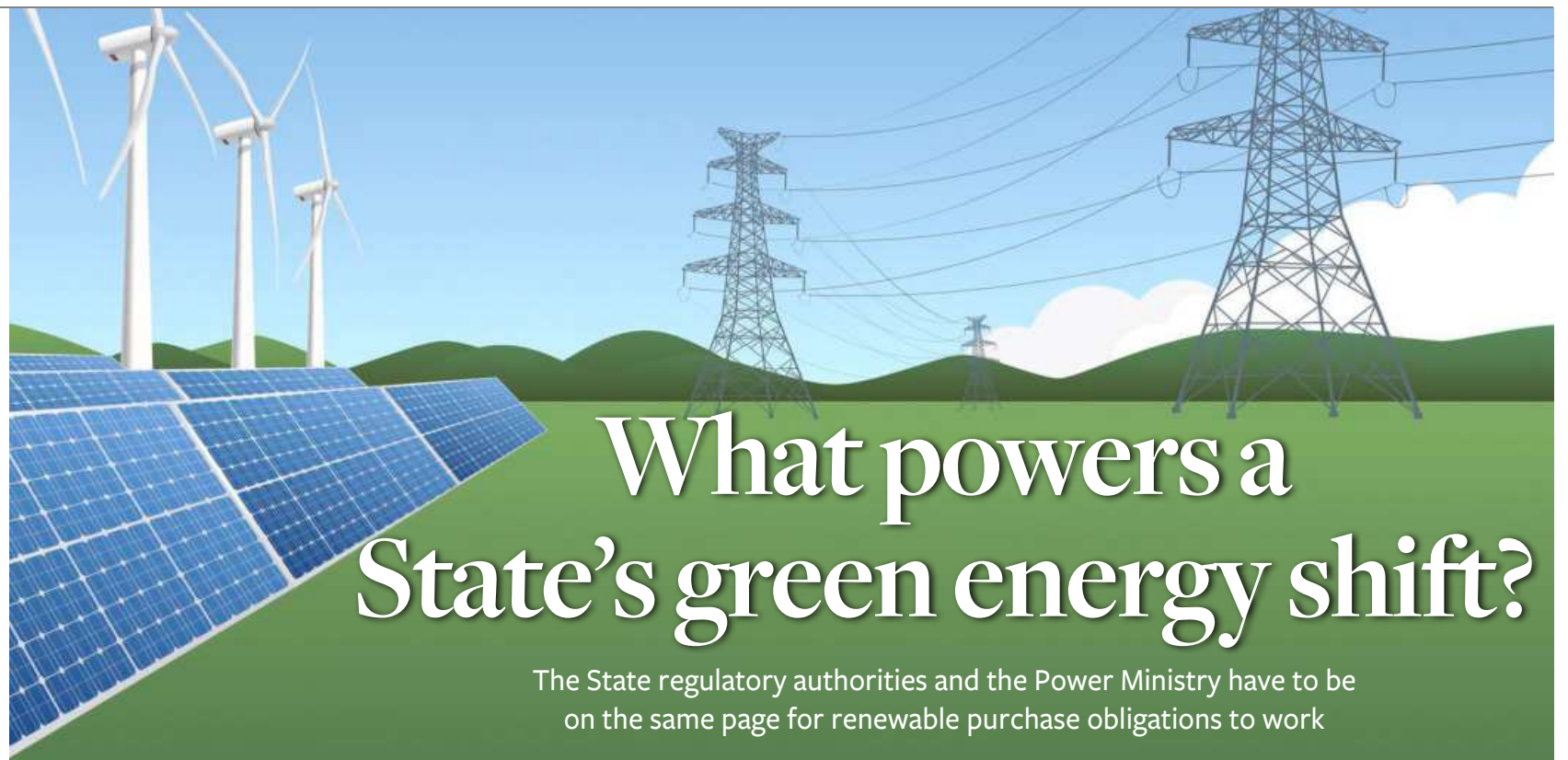
Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das, in his statement on Friday, also took a circumspect view on inflation, citing the firm trend in global commodity prices this fiscal. He retained the April inflation forecast for FY25 of 4.5 per cent, which is above the MPC's comfort zone of 4 per cent. The MPC's pre-emptive approach in managing inflation is likely to send a positive signal to bond investors on softer liquidity conditions and stable rates in the months ahead – a crucial factor in the context of the inclusion of Indian government securities in the JP Morgan Global Bond Indices with effect from this month. As if to buttress the case for a status quo on both rates and its stance, the MPC also raised its growth projections for FY25 by 20 basis points to 7.2 per cent over its April policy. The Governor's statement cites high frequency indicators this fiscal, and rising private investment and rural demand to explain this upward revision. There has been a 16.3 per cent growth in retail two wheeler sales in April-May; a 10 per cent rise in GST revenues in May and a 14.3 per cent drop in demand for the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which suggests lower rural distress; an expansion in steel and cement production, among others. Above all, the monsoon is expected to be above normal. A 15 per cent growth in bank credit in FY24 does not appear to suggest any credit constraint at prevailing rates.

With growth looking good at existing rates of interest, and the 'elephant of inflation' retreating rather slowly into the forest, the case for a rate cut now never looked very strong. However, a shift in liquidity management stance to neutral can be considered in August, once market volatility peters out and the Budget provides some clarity on the fiscal roadmap. A rate cut to keep up capex and investor sentiment can follow once inflation retreats.

The RBI Governor was at pains to stress that monetary policy did not take cues from external forces (in other words, the Federal Reserve), but were a response to domestic growth and inflation dynamics. Indeed, the rupee remained stable against the dollar this fiscal, despite capital outflows. There can be no denying the global confidence (setting aside the rating agencies) in India's macro fundamentals. With a rising gold component in India's \$652 billion forex reserves, India has more wiggle room than before to implement an independent monetary policy.

## POCKET

RAVIKANTH



## What powers a State's green energy shift?

The State regulatory authorities and the Power Ministry have to be on the same page for renewable purchase obligations to work

GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

## CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICH A MISHRA

**T**he Revanth Reddy-led Congress government in Telangana is working on a "Green Telangana 2050". Telangana is not the only State which is talking of taking green initiatives.

Climate change is an issue that has been gaining momentum for some time now, but what is new now is that the States which were not receptive earlier are talking about it. In fact energy transition and green initiatives are part of all political parties' manifestos.

While there may be political compulsions to go green due to greater voter awareness, the Centre has also been nudging the States towards this direction. But more importantly it is advantageous to States as it not only incentivises entrepreneurship it also helps States' budget. For the consumer green initiatives are pocket-friendly.

## PAIN POINTS

But no transition is easy. And a pain point in the entire process of green power has been Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) that mandates that all electricity distribution licensees should purchase a minimum specified quantity of their requirements from renewable energy sources.

In fact, States which were earlier reluctant have now become more receptive because the Union Government on its part has eased the process, facilitating the adoption for States that were feeling the strain.

However, the mandatory clause is still a sticking point for some.

In October 2023, the Central Government exercising its powers conferred by clauses (n) and (x) of section 14 of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 (52 of 2001), in consultation with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, specified the minimum share of consumption of renewable energy by designated consumers.

It also specified the share of consumption from renewable sources by different consumers based on electricity distribution licensee.

Consumption shares were also specified for other designated and captive consumers from sources other than distribution licensee.

In the first quarter of the calendar year 2024, India added over 1.8 gigawatts (GW) of solar open access capacity, a two-fold increase from 909.3 megawatts (MW) in Q4 2023, according to the newly released report — 'Q1 2024 Mercom India Solar Open Access Market Report'.

"Demand for green energy open access, especially solar, has been mounting, driven by the financial savings and initiatives to add renewable in the power procurement mix. An additional push comes from the corporates leading climate change mitigation strategies. If not for the regulatory restrictions, green energy

**The capacity additions will not be of value if infrastructure — grid connectivity and last mile connectivity — is not improved.**

open access could be the driving force that helps India meet its non-fossil fuel targets," according to Priya Sanjay, Managing Director at Mercom India.

In Q1 2024, Rajasthan led in solar open access capacity additions, accounting for almost 28 per cent of the quarter's installation. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra ranked second and third, accounting for 21 per cent and nearly 12 per cent of capacity additions, it said.

The capacity additions will not be of value if infrastructure — grid connectivity and last mile connectivity — is not improved.

## HOLISTIC APPROACH

As Venugopal Rao, Convener, Centre for Power Studies, puts it, "Generation and consumption of RE should be encouraged in a gradual and balanced way with a holistic approach so as to avoid imposition of avoidable burdens on consumers and new problems in technical and financial terms."

In tune with long-term load forecast, a balance between fluctuating load curve and power mix should be maintained to the extent technically practicable, he said.

"In other words, entering into long-term PPAs with RE units should not lead to availability of avoidable surplus power to the DISCOMs, backing down thermal power and paying fixed costs therefore, and, at the same time, purchasing additional power in the market to meet peak deficit," he added.

"Imposing targets on the States by the GoI is not correct in view of vast divergence in ground realities in each State and that is the reason why Ministry of Power used to make it clear that such targets are only guidelines and that it is for the SERCs to determine targets.

Once a viable and sustainable battery storage system is developed and put to use, then several problems associated with RE get resolved. At the same time, non-RE also can be stored accordingly and used as and when required. R&D should be encouraged in this direction," he said.

Subrahmanyam Pulipaka, CEO of National Solar Energy Federation of India, said, "To a large extent the challenges are addressed. Today for the first time the RPO has been notified through the statutory powers acquired under Energy Conservation Act. By dividing the targets to wind, hydro and also by dedicating a separate target for DRE, States now have flexibility in choosing options that are suitable to them. The new RPO also gives major part of allotment to other RE sources (non-hydro non-wind) making the current RPO considerably agile.

"However, one of the key roadblocks was that the State electricity regulatory commissions were not considering the previous central RPO trajectory, which was not binding. Hence there was reluctance among many SERCs. Now by notifying it under the newly passed Energy Conservation Act that empowers Centre to lay down trajectory and enforce it with penalties when not complied will help better implementation," he said.

As is the case with any compliance where both Centre and States are involved, implementation becomes a challenge if all parties are not on the same page. The story of RPOs is also similar.

Awareness and communication are important to avoid rifts in policy implementation. The Centre and States need to be in sync for the success of green transition.

## The US immigration bugbear in an election year

Biden's move on immigration has earned him brickbats from both Democrats and Republicans

Sridhar Krishnaswami

**T**he rather sweeping executive order issued by US President Joe Biden aimed at curbing migrant arrivals in the US has opened a can of worms with the White House coming under attack from the Republican camp maintaining that it did not go far enough and the progressives within the Democratic Party arguing that what is put in place is not much different from what the former President Donald Trump had done during his tenure and one that he was criticized for.

If President Biden thought he was trying to address a critical issue to his advantage some six months away from the Presidential polls, that may not quite work out that way. Immigration is on top of the charts along with the economy and governance even if there is a wide margin between Republicans and Democrats.

But it is an issue that cuts across political parties differently now that undocumented persons living in America are estimated between 11 and 12 millions and steadily climbing to the point where America is perceived to be

coming apart at the seams.

What has upset progressive Democrats and civil rights groups is the Biden administration, through an executive fiat, making use of a 1952 law that disallows access to the American asylum system if arrivals are seen to be "detrimental" to national interests. It is pointed out that the Trump administration used the 212(f) law to ban entry of nationals from Muslim nations which was immediately denounced as racist.

The latest orders will kick in only when the daily threshold is met and when the border is "overwhelmed". Calling for patience Biden has said that his action will help the US to "gain control" of the border. According to one estimate more than six million migrants have been stopped trying to cross into the US illegally during the Biden administration.

The problem of illegal entry into the US is not just from Mexico but from nationals of other countries, including India. Apparently there are close to 800,000 illegals from India, making the country in the top three after Mexico and El Salvador.



UNCERTAIN FUTURE. Asylum seekers at the US border REUTERS

## MEXICO'S WORRIES

The Biden White House is stressing that the latest restrictions will take effect only when seven-day averages cross 2,500 and when the border becomes overwhelmed. But officials in Mexico are worried of the implications of shut down of asylum seekers, one of which being that places like Mexico City would be unable to bear the brunt. The President of Mexico has suggested that the US should start sending back detained migrants to their respective countries directly.

President Biden is unlikely to settle a

difficult issue in an election year especially when the Republicans are seeing a political advantage. At different points of time since President George W Bush, the Democrats and Republicans have wrestled with Immigration in Congress with many a bill falling by the wayside on perceived shortcomings on security, strengthening the borders and the "path" to a green card and eventual citizenship.

Nationally, successive polls have shown a majority of Americans supporting lawful migration and recognising the contribution of immigrants. But the polarization in American politics has undoubtedly left its imprint on issues like immigration.

The last meaningful accord between the parties came about in 1986 when a staunch conservative like Ronald Reagan and the Dean of Liberals Edward Kennedy showed they could do business. Some three million persons are said to have benefitted. But neither Reagan nor Kennedy would have been naive enough to have imagined that they have settled the issue once and for all.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and UN

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## Fiscal consolidation

Apropos your Editorial 'The fisc matters' (June 7), with the excitement of the election results winding down, the government needs to continue with its fiscal consolidation policies.

The temptation to announce mouth watering freebies to blunt the criticism of the opposition, or to meet the unreasonable demands of alliance partners needs to be resisted.

Unemployment is not solved not by creating millions of government jobs. Price rise too is not curbed by printing more currency notes. The need of the hour is to improve infrastructure and make the conditions conducive to FDI, which

increases production, besides creating jobs in the private sector.

**V Jayaraman**  
Chennai

## Sound fundamentals

With reference to the news report 'India's macro stability is intact despite Modi's reduced majority' (June 7), the sentiment expressed by Goldman Sachs reflects a confidence in India's economic framework and governance. The expectation is that, despite a reduced majority for the BJP, the existing economic policies and fiscal discipline will continue to support the country's macroeconomic stability. This perspective underscores the belief that India's economic

fundamentals are robust enough to withstand political changes. It also suggests that the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation and structural reforms is likely to remain a priority. In essence, the focus on maintaining fiscal discipline, along with proactive economic policies, is anticipated to be a key factor in preserving the macroeconomic health of the nation.

**Amarjeet Kumar**  
Hazariabagh (Jharkhand)

## Budget imperatives

The new Government is likely to present the Budget for 2024-25 in the second week of July 2024. About 10 crore Income Tax and GST payers should also have a say in budgetary

allocations and economic policies. The data bank of GST and IT returns is very relevant and strong feedback for the Budget and Finance Ministry. A dedicated schedule with options in ITRs and GST returns for the tax payers to express their priority to allocate budgetary funds to infrastructure, education, healthcare, national defence, research, innovation & development, regional development, industrial sector-wise promotional schemes etc. will provide the Government with visionary approach commensurate with public aspirations for budget and economic policies.

**Vinod Johri**  
New Delhi

## Monsoon worries

Apropos 'Water balance in agriculture crucial' (June 7). After a double whammy of drought and scorching summer, lakes and ground water dried up, monsoon is yet to set in the Western Ghats region of peninsular India, barring pre-monsoon showers. Farmers in the area depend on rains spread over the 3-4 months, which is a typical monsoon pattern. Any downpour over a few weeks' time (like in 2018 and 19) may not help the Kharif crops but the IMD may strengthen its statistics of total rainfall. In either case farmers are the worried lot.

**Rajiv Magal**  
Halekere Village (Karnataka)

# Haunted by the Washington Consensus



ANTARA HALDAR

In 1989, the British economist John Williamson christened what was to become the defining intellectual export of the era of globalisation: The Washington Consensus. Initially a reference to the policies adopted to tackle macroeconomic turmoil in Latin America, the term quickly morphed into a canonical “ten commandments” of development. For at least two decades thereafter, evangelists of the “consensus” — the

World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the US Treasury (all headquartered in Washington) — would preach the orthodoxy with quasi-religious zeal. The end of the Cold War meant that the gospel could be brought both to newly decolonised countries and to the post-communist “transition economies”. Three and a half decades later, we have ample evidence to assess the Washington Consensus’s track record. One clear takeaway is that its one-size-fits-all approach often amplified macroeconomic events (like the 1997 Asian financial crisis) and reduced developing economies to sites for sweatshops. These countries ended up in a race to the bottom as they tried to out-compete each other on labour costs — meaning lower wages and less occupational safety. Tragedies like the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013, which killed 1,134 people and injured another 2,000, became all but inevitable. Moreover, none of these countries ever became a success story. The

“development miracles” that policymakers and academics now fetishise — Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, China, India — all departed from the Washington Consensus by making government an active participant in development. Ever since the 2008 global financial crisis, meanwhile, many countries in the Global North have been experiencing what used to be considered “Third World problems”: Declining growth, rampant inequality, failing institutions, a fractured political consensus, and anti-globalisation sentiment. The bright red line that the Washington Consensus presumed to draw between the developed and the developing world has grown ever blurrier. By 2009, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown — following on the heels of influential economists like Joseph E Stiglitz and Dani Rodrik — had pronounced the Washington Consensus dead. True, its lifespan coincided with the creation of the Human Development

Index; the Millennium Development Goals and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals; the Barcelona Development Agenda; the Beijing Consensus; the Seoul Development Consensus; and even experiments with new metrics such as Gross National Happiness. But none of these frameworks has proved especially resilient. Indeed, the specter of the Washington Consensus continues to haunt us. Global climate negotiations could not be more important for the future of the planet and human civilisation. Yet whenever the question of climate finance arises, developing countries are subjected to the same kind of humiliating treatment that the Washington Consensus once prescribed. Even as critiques of “the China model” ramp up, the hype about India continues, stubbornly, to be framed in terms of the possibility of it being the “next China.” And despite widely accepted critiques of gross domestic product as a measure of

economic development, it still sets the terms of policy debates. What would it take finally to exorcise the ghost? Among the explanations for why the “West and the rest” diverged historically — from Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* to Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel* — the most influential hypothesis has centered on “institutions.” Douglass North’s *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Hernando de Soto’s *The Mystery of Capital*, and Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson’s *Why Nations Fail* all make a persuasive case that an economy’s development depends on formal and informal rules, norms, and structures. The balance of world power is rapidly shifting. The Global South is already where most of the world’s people live; and by dint of its younger population, it is where the world’s future lies. Indeed, in 2023, the concept of the Global South and its possible role in global leadership was deemed mainstream. To navigate this new world, we will need to confront ques-

tions that the old consensus pushed aside. For example, is there more than one route to growth and development? Is there a way to reinvent or restructure the global economy, now that it has become a source of widespread dissatisfaction? Do some of the Global South’s core features — such as its relatively more communitarian cultures — make it better suited to a leadership role in the current era? And most importantly, what even is the goal of development? The Washington Consensus never had any time for such questions, and its ghost continues to impede the emergence of a new development paradigm based on cultural contexts and human cognition. The Seoul Development Consensus, with its pluralistic approach, was a promising step in the right direction. But we now need a Soul Consensus that accommodates ordinary people’s psychic needs, in addition to countries’ aggregate material needs. *The writer is associate professor of empirical legal studies at the University of Cambridge* ©Project Syndicate, 2024



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

## Assertion & confrontation



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

The board that started it all for Chandrashekhar Azad Raavan, now winner from the Nagina Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh, is still there. It proclaims proudly: “The Great Chamardr Bhimrao Ambedkar Village Gharkauli Welcomes You.” Near Saharanpur, Gharkauli has Brahmins and Rajputs as well as a large number of Dalit — Chamar — and Muslim residents. The board calling it (Gharkauli) a “Great Chamardr” village was put up in 2016. The upper castes in the village objected to it. The Dalits refused to remove it. Talks between the upper castes and Dalits failed. One day, the sign was found defaced. In came Chandrashekhar Azad with his posse of motorbike-borne riders amid roars of “Jai Bhim” and “Jai Bhim Army”. Tensions rose, stones were thrown by both sides and the policemen who were sent to investigate the matter were thrashed. Thus began a phase of direct confrontation and

Dalit agitational politics of a kind the younger generation had not seen. This led to more Thakur-Dalit clashes in the district that very month — on the birth anniversary of Rajput king Maharana Pratap. The state government held Azad’s Bhim Army responsible for inciting violence. Azad claimed the government was targeting it to malign the movement and shield upper-caste offenders. The state administration arrested Azad. The matter went to court and the high court acquitted him. But within hours, the Yogi Adityanath government ordered his re-arrest under the National Security Act. He was incarcerated amid massive protests from civil rights groups and was released partly as a result of that pressure. Upon coming out of prison, in 2020, Azad formed the Azad Samaj Party (ASP) with the intention of contesting elections. The ASP fought the 2022 Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh amid stiff resistance, obviously from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) but also from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which saw its citadel under threat. He contested the 2022 state polls from Gorakhpur against Yogi Adityanath. He ended up fourth with just over 7,000 votes. But it was enough to establish him on the political scene. Priyanka Gandhi called on him when he was in jail (and hospital). Azad’s announcement earlier this

week that he would support the INDIA bloc is a result of the rapport that was built then. Chandrashekhar Azad was born in Saharanpur, in Gharkauli village, in a Chamar family, studied at a Thakur-owned and -run college in nearby Chhutmalpur, saw the discrimination against Dalit students, and vowed to fight it. His father was a government school-teacher who advised Azad to be judicious about the battles he was fighting. This is not widely known but Azad began his political career in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. He joined the BJP but left it when he saw, he has said in interviews, that when there were clashes between Dalits and Muslims, the BJP was there to fight for Dalits. But when the clashes were between upper castes and Dalits, it quietly disappeared. Being an Ambedkarite and an admirer of Kanshi Ram (but not of Mayawati) he tried to follow the same principles of organising the Dalits as Kanshi Ram: Via education, through the bureaucracy, and in self-defence. The Bhim Army, which was the precursor of his political party, asks Dalits over 18 to join them. Most members belong to the Chamar community or its sub-caste Jatav but it also welcomes Muslims. It lacks a formal structure but claims to have thousands of members in and around Saharanpur. Its stress is on

direct action based on confrontation to preserve, protect, or restore the dignity of the Dalits. It runs more than 300 Bhim Army schools in Saharanpur district, and provides free-of-cost primary education to children irrespective of caste and gender. It also runs self-defence classes and encourages Dalits to visit all scenes of caste conflict on motorbike convoys as a gesture calculated to rile upper castes through defiant assertion. Ahead of the 2022 Assembly polls, Azad did talk to Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (SP) for some kind of adjustment. However, talks broke down because of distrust on both sides: Azad felt the SP wanted access to the Dalit vote bank and was not particularly interested in the problems of the Dalits. He decided to contest the 2024 elections on his own. His triumphant electoral victory shows you cannot keep a determined leader down. For obvious reasons, the BSP considers him a blot on the landscape. But the Bhim Army and the Azad Samaj Party are reporting growth while the BSP is showing decline and decay. It is too early to say whether Chandrashekhar Azad’s tactics will lead to a strategy of wearing the BSP down with the final aim of replacing it. It has emerged as a social force to represent Dalit interests. But the transformation into a political force beyond western UP is still awaited.

# Hindu-Muslim coalition back

The Muslim vote is the BJP’s biggest worry. Knives are already out and probing its most critical fault line. Without recovering UP, the BJP’s decline threatens to become chronic, and progressive

The headline least acknowledged in this general election is the return of the Muslim vote. Not Muslim political power, or the rise of a new Muslim leadership. Just a rediscovery of the power of the Muslim vote. Significantly, the results came just days after the Prime Minister lamented in one of his many TV interviews that many Muslims still believed they could determine who’d rule India. Speaking to Times Now, he said: “I am saying it for the first time to Muslim society, to its well-educated people. Introspect. Why you are falling behind, what is the reason? Why did you not get any benefits in the Congress era? Introspect (*atmanathan keeljiye*). The feeling you harbour, that you will determine who to install in power or remove from it, is ruining the future of your children. Muslims are changing all over the world.”



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Doesn’t look like the Muslims listened to him? See the results in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and West Bengal, for example. In both, the INDIA bloc’s constituents have a larger vote share than the National Democratic Alliance this time. It was never going to be achieved without the Muslims voting for it en bloc. Since all previous data from exit polls and other research tells us Muslims always vote strategically to defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), we need to ask why they have been so spectacularly successful this time, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Further, why did this not work in Bihar and Assam, two more states with a sizeable number of Muslim voters and a strong INDIA challenge? Please note in none of the three Lok Sabha elections in the Modi era — 2014, 2019, and 2024 — nor in the Vidhan Sabha polls of 2017 and 2022, has the BJP fielded even one Muslim candidate for any of UP’s 80 Lok Sabha or 403 Vidhan Sabha seats. Yet, it’s been securing almighty majorities. So what brought about this dramatic turnaround? This is also the BJP’s biggest worry. Knives are already out and probing the party’s most critical fault line, for and against Yogi Adityanath. Without recovering Uttar Pradesh, the BJP’s decline threatens to become chronic and progressive. The West Bengal result has destroyed exit pollsters’ reputation and astounded

both the BJP’s supporters and adversaries. Unlike UP’s 20 per cent (all figures are rounded off and approximate since we haven’t had a census since 2011), Muslims make up about 33 per cent of West Bengal’s population. Yet, the BJP had won 18 of its 42 seats in 2019 and seemed poised for many more this time. What reduced it to just over half of the earlier tally? In all states where it can get seats, the BJP follows a simple formula. Get more than 50 per cent of the Hindus to vote for you and you are home. This is what worked for it in UP, rendering the 20 per cent Muslims politically irrelevant. In West Bengal and Assam, the larger Muslim percentage required that the party get about 60 per cent of the Hindu vote. These outcomes, especially in UP and West Bengal, reverse a decade-long phenomenon of the Modi-led BJP’s politics making the Muslim vote irrelevant in the big, national picture.

The answer to all the questions we have raised so far about the turnaround in the power of the Muslim vote is a very simple one: The Hindu vote. It is a well-established fact that since Mohammed Ali Jinnah left India with his Pakistan, Indian Muslims have never accepted someone from their faith as their leader. Not even Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. They have always looked for Hindu leaders they could trust. It was mostly the Congress until 1989, when the faith broke with the unlocking of the Babri Masjid. The vote bank then moved to other forces which promised the same protection, mostly the old Lohiaites in the Hindi heartland, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad, and the Left in West Bengal. In Maharashtra and Kerala, and other parents of the south in the absence of alternatives, the Muslims generally stayed with the Congress. Some pockets of Muslim leadership in distant geographies emerged as a “threat”. The Muslims were not able to gift power to their newly chosen leaders by themselves. It is the leaders who built coalitions with a sufficient number of Hindus. It is Mulayam and Lalu with Yadavs and some other backward classes, the Left with the large Bengal Hindu underclass, and the Congress with its own concretised vote

banks south of the Vindhyas. It worked in the Hindi heartland as long as the vote was split three and a half ways (Samajwadi Party/Rashtriya Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, BJP, and Congress). You could then have a state like UP or Bihar with just about 28-30 per cent vote in that split, as Mulayam (2002), Mayawati (2007), Akhilesh Yadav (2012), and Lalu repeatedly showed. The trick was to get at least one or two caste-based Hindu vote banks to add to the Muslims and you were home. The rise of Narendra Modi shattered this formula. More Hindus moved to him, leaving the Yadav and Mayawati fortresses. So what changed in this election? First, the same Hindu leaders of the Muslims changed their discourse over the past five years, almost never aggressively talking up Muslim issues. If the BJP fielded only one Muslim in this Lok Sabha election, following on seven in 2014 and three in 2019, it is understandable. But the Samajwadi Party fielded just four and the Congress two (out of the total of 80 in the state) Muslims in UP, and Mamata Banerjee six in the 42 in West Bengal. The effort was to play down, or mask their Muslim dependence. The Muslim clergy, radical voices, all stayed quiet. The BJP was denied the space to play with polarisation. Think about why the BJP ratcheted up the Sandeshkhali “atrocities on women” issue the way it did. All data tells us that the reason Ms Banerjee is able to deny that 60 per cent Hindu vote to the BJP is the loyalty she commands among women. The BJP thought Sandeshkhali will dent that. It failed. We have the results. There are straws in the wind elsewhere. In Assam, Badruddin Ajmal drew a blank. A delimitation exercise had been carried out in a way that a lot of the Muslim vote was concentrated in one constituency, Dhubri, instead of influencing about three. In a straight duel, the Congress’ Rakibul Hussain didn’t just defeat Ajmal, he won by the largest margin among all candidates in India. In my book, this is a good example of the shift in the Muslim mind to the old normal. A return to parties capable of collecting a sufficient number of Hindu votes to build genuinely secular coalitions, and vote banks. Assam and Bihar are easy to explain. In the first, the absence of a caste division denied the Congress more Hindu space; in Bihar, BJP allies Chirag Paswan and Jitan Ram Manjhi kept the Dalit vote together, unlike Mayawati in UP. It is for all these reasons that we see the return of the power of the Muslim vote — in partnership with enough Hindus — as the standout indication for future politics. *By special arrangement with ThePrint*

# A summer kick for football fans

## EYE CULTURE

KANIKA DATTA

June 15 marks the start of a month of sleepless nights for football fans when the European Championship, better known as the Euro, kicks off with Germany taking on Scotland. From June 21, the nights will morph into dawn when defending champions Argentina meets Canada in the first match of Copa America. These competitions rank as the world’s second and third most watched football tournaments — the World Cup occupying first place by a big margin. This year’s editions have an extra edge because they are likely to be the last time we get to see two of the world’s greats, Lionel Messi of defending Copa champions Argentina and Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal in action. Both now play their trade outside the world’s major footballing geographies. Messi (36 years) appears for team Inter-Miami in the US-based Major League Soccer, a favoured retirement zone for ageing stars of the European and South American stage. Ronaldo (39 years) now stars in an upstart West Asian Saudi Pro League that poached some decent stars from Europe this season and has ambitions of joining the Union of European Football Associations. As with the tennis greats Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who tragically faltered in the first round of the French Open this year, football fans will eternally debate the

superiority of Messi vs Ronaldo. Their stats at 835 and 893 goals respectively cannot strictly be compared because Ronaldo is three years older. But Messi holds the edge where it matters — he has winner’s medal from the 2021 Copa America, beating Chile 1-0 and the 2022 World Cup beating France on penalties in one of the most compelling finals in recent memory. Messi, with two goals, including one in extra time, was voted Man of the Match. Ronaldo is still to claim a World Cup winners’ medal but insists he’ll be available for the 2026 edition, by which time he’ll be well past the usual sell-by date for most sportspeople. Formidably fit by any standards, he may well get the call-up. Even if he doesn’t, few fans privileged to watch him on the pitch in Portugal, England, Spain and Italy will forget his breath-taking skills. No less unforgettable is his star turn in the 2016 Euro final against France, not just on the pitch but off it. Tragically stretched off after 25 minutes, he emerged tear-stained and wan from the treatment room to police the touchline from corner flag to corner flag, yelling instructions and encouragement at his teammates. Unconfined to the technical area that boxed in Portugal’s bemused manager Fernando Santos, he became the coach at large and was rewarded by a searing 25 yard strike past the French goalkeeper by the little-known Eder. The Euro tends to get more attention because Europe has

dominated global footballing honours. In the 21st century, Europe has walked away with the World Cup, with 20 years separating the South American winner Brazil (2002) and Argentina (2022) with only Argentina figuring twice in the finals (2014 and 2018). It is the bigger and richer tournament starting 24 teams, with the winning team potentially earning \$30 million through group stage to final. For the Copa America, with 16 teams, the comparable amount is \$16 million in participation fees and prize money. This disparity reflects the comparative balance of money power in global football. Although South American football is associated with dazzling entertainment, only three teams — Brazil, Mexico and Argentina — currently figure in the FIFA world team rankings. The biggest irony is the short shrift given to the African Cup of Nations. It is African-origin footballers who have been lighting up European teams — these past three decades and yet their continental tournament is very much the poor relative. A biennial tournament that is played in November-December, it is viewed as a damned nuisance by European club managers who have to release their African stars for the duration halfway through the league season. Perhaps that is why many African footballers, such as Eder of Guinea-Bissau, find it rewarding to embrace European nationalities. Teams such as France, Germany, England and many others and their fans have been richer for it, as Euro 2024 will reveal.

# 10 past 10, 8:20 or 9:41?



YES, BUT...

SANDEEP GOYAL

I have always wondered why the hands of a wristwatch — irrespective of the brand — are invariably set to 10:10. It is, in fact, one of the most ubiquitous features of wristwatch advertising and wristwatch photography. It doesn’t matter if it is a humble Swatch, a storied Rolex, or an innovative Jaeger-LeCoultre — the hands are always set to 10:10, or very close to it. Watch manufacturers could easily have chosen a preferred watch setting as a differentiation, and owned it, but this is one visual representation from which no one wavers. I am told that behind this subliminal message is a phenomenon called “pareidolia”. The word has Greek roots (all the best words do!) and comes from “para”, which roughly translated means “beside” or “instead of”, and “eidolon”,

which means an image or shape. The word refers to the tendency of the human mind to see meaningful patterns in visual images, which may or may not actually be meaningful themselves. The outstretched hands of the watch on the round dial at 10:10 are said to look like a smiley (yes!) that might actually make you more inclined to buy the watch. There is apparently a lot of psychology involved in the choice of 10:10. Researchers photographed 20 different watches, with the hands set to 10:10, 11:30, and 8:20, producing 60 pictures. The pictures were then shown to a group of 20 men and 26 women in the first run of the experiment, and 11 men and 12 women in the second run. The experiment found that the 10:10 setting produced the highest pleasure rating of all three settings, and it was also the only setting interpreted as a smiling face. The 8:20 setting, in fact, consumers said, made the watch look gloomy and sad. The tendency to use 10:10 was not established as the norm until the 1950s. Prior to that, watches were almost always set to a time of 8:20 (hence the choice of that setting in the experiment mentioned earlier), which had the aesthetic advantage of being symmetrical while at the same time

not hiding the logo. At 10:10, the logo elements tend to get somewhat obliterated. Timex digital watches, by the way, are always set to exactly the same time as their analog watches: 10:09:36. Interestingly, Casio’s G-Shocks have their digital displays set to 10:58:50 across the board and the date displayed is always Sunday, June 30th. Why June 30th? June of 1957 was the month and year in which the Casio Computer Company was founded, and that too on the 30th, a Sunday. So that little bit of company history is echoed on every Casio watch. Now to 9:41. I am sure you have noticed that Apple products in marketing materials and screenshots always seem to be set at 9:41 am. It’s not a random coincidence for sure — there’s a deliberate and historical reason behind this seemingly arbitrary time choice. The 9:41 tradition can be traced back to the iconic Steve Jobs era. During product keynotes, the Apple co-founder aimed to unveil the star attraction around 40 minutes into his presentation. To ensure a close match between the time displayed on the product and the actual time on audience members’ watches, Apple initially set the time to 9:42 am in product photos. However, during a rehearsal for the original iPhone launch, things didn’t go exactly according to plan. Jobs unveiled the phone a minute earlier than anticipated — at precisely 9:41 am. The displays were then re-calibrated to 9:41 instead of 9:42. So Apple even today coordinates its keynotes in such a manner that “the big reveal” kicks in at about the 40-minute mark. At 9:41 to be precise. The secret of the “magic time” has now become a company protocol since the iPad was unveiled. More on 10:10. There is a region of the brain that gets activated when anything even slightly face-like comes into focus — it specialises in facial recognition. This brain part, the fusiform facial area (FFA) is located at the bottom back of the brain (the ventral surface of the temporal lobe, for all you neuroanatomy fans out there). An interesting feature of the FFA is that simple shapes, like emoji, seem to activate it faster than actual faces and the theory goes that evolution favoured the development of an ability to rapidly read facial expressions and determine emotions from minimal stimuli. The 10:10 configuration adopted by the watch industry seems to have learnt its biggest lesson on consumer delight from the FFA. *The writer is chairman of Rediffusion*



## OPINION

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OUR TAKE

## The jolt that UP gave to the BJP

Mandal 2.0 and anger over jobs cost the party seats, scuttling its hopes of a simple majority

Uttar Pradesh (UP) has been key to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in national politics. The Ayodhya Movement in the late 1980s and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 created the momentum for the BJP to become a party of office in UP and India in the 1990s, although the Mandal wave checked its progress and growth. But it wasn't long before the BJP's welfare-plus-Hindutva appeal attracted Hindu backward castes and classes. In 2014, the BJP won 71 seats from UP on its way to a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. An alliance including the Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal reduced the BJP tally to 62 in 2019, but the party still won 303 seats in the Lok Sabha. But this year, the party's tally has fallen to 240, with massive losses in UP, where its tally fell to 33 seats, a loss of 29. Besides, the party lost in Faizabad, the constituency within which the new Ram Mandir is located. Clearly, UP has given a jolt to the BJP, sabotaging its plans for a grand "400 paar" win: The state accounted for nearly half of the party's losses.

So, what explains this reversal of fortunes? On the one hand, it was an ideologically polarised election, where the BJP offered a shrill Hindutva message, with a sharp anti-Muslim edge. The messaging came in the backdrop of the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya in January, an event that was expected to provide ballast to the BJP's electoral plans. The INDIA bloc stayed quiet on both the Mandir and the anti-Muslim rhetoric but embraced a new version of Mandal that combined a demand for a caste census as well as protection of the Constitution and its social vision, including reservations, which the Opposition alleged was under threat if the NDA crossed 400 seats. In this Mandal versus Kamandal (Hindutva) battle, the former seems to have triumphed.

This "triumph" was possible also because the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Mandal legatee in UP, crafted a new slogan, *Pichhde, Dalit and Alpasankhyak* (PDA; backwards, Dalits and minorities), and then walked the talk in candidate selection. For instance, 42% of the SP candidates were from the non-Yadav OBC castes and Scheduled Castes made up 24.2% of the nominees, which enabled the party to appeal successfully to Dalit voters. The alliance with the Congress consolidated the INDIA bloc's support among Muslims as well as Mandal beneficiaries. In contrast, the BJP stuck to its jaded sitting MPs and Hindutva and banked on the Modi guarantee to tide over anti-incumbency. The third pole in UP politics, the BSP was inconsequential in what became a bipolar contest, although it did play spoiler for INDIA bloc in some seats.

Another factor that worked against the BJP was the angst of young people over lack of employment. Viksit Bharat in 2047 was too distant a promise for these voters who want quality jobs now. Coupled with high food inflation, a new constituency of angry voters seems to have emerged, especially in the rural hinterland. The Modi regime has unleashed aspirations, which means that the *labharthi* (beneficiary) has become more demanding. She is deeply religious, appreciative of the improvement in law and order and grateful for State largesse. However, she expects the State to speak a civic language of governance, focus on providing jobs that match her qualifications and aspirations, and address concerns of farmers. The UP numbers perhaps point to the arrival of a new voter, who is aware of the world and refuses to be a prisoner of polemics around faith or welfare. There is no guarantee about her vote if the State fails to keep its promises and address her aspirations.

THIRD EYE

Barkha Dutt



## What the verdict holds for the BJP, its mascot, Modi

PM Modi may need to turn into a consensus builder to manage NDA allies and also to negotiate the changing power dynamics within his own party

At the first meeting of the MPs of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister (PM)-elect, touched the Constitution to his forehead before taking his seat. Therein lies a symbolic story of this election verdict and its chastening, humbling, corrective power.

If we want to understand what shifted in the 2024 campaign and how the Constitution came to occupy a starring role even in the BJP bastions, let's start with the result in Ayodhya, the pilgrim town that is home to the Ram Mandir.

When Modi presided over the consecration of the temple in February, it was widely assumed that this would be the BJP's Pulwama moment for 2024 — an emotive issue that would define the campaign and easily push them over the finish line.

But once I started travelling it became evident that the Mandir was no electoral issue at all. There was reverence for the temple but it was seen as a matter of faith, not politics. From Bengaluru to Bhopal, people shrugged their shoulders when I asked about the temple — they never brought it up on their own — and said, "yes, but that's done now."

The defeat of the BJP in Ayodhya — two-time MP Lallu Singh losing to a Dalit candidate of the INDIA bloc — brings home multiple truths of this verdict. Lallu Singh was among the motor-mouths of the BJP who spoke of needing more than 272 seats for "making a new Constitution".

Speeches like these coupled with Narendra Modi's call for "400 paar" boomeranged. What might have been an esoteric campaign by the Opposition about saving the Constitution became a live wire debate among historically oppressed and marginalised communities who derive their identity and protections from the Constitution. The Opposition succeeded in pushing the Modi campaign on the defensive on this score.

Dalits constitute 26% of the Ayodhya-Faizabad constituency. The caste configurations compounded pockets of local anger among those who had lost homes and property in demolitions as the town was beautified for the Mandir. Eventually what unfolded in Ayodhya replicated itself in other constituencies. The BJP lost five seats in the Ayodhya Faizabad region. Elsewhere too, it took a hit in reserved constituencies (Ayodhya is a general seat). In 2014, the BJP won all reserved seats in Uttar Pradesh, in 2019 the BJP and its allies took 15 of these seats. In this election, the division in Dalit votes resulted in the BJP taking only eight of these constituencies.

While many other factors went wrong for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh — poor ticket selection, import of outsiders among them — the fact is that had Mayawati not fielded candidates that helped to split the anti-BJP vote, the BJP could

**THERE WAS REVERENCE FOR THE TEMPLE BUT IT WAS SEEN AS A MATTER OF FAITH, NOT POLITICS. FROM BENGALURU TO BHOPAL, PEOPLE SHRUGGED THEIR SHOULDERS WHEN I ASKED ABOUT THE TEMPLE**

## BJP under Modi: Politics as building party and nation

The 2024 Lok Sabha poll result paints an interesting picture. It gives hope to the moribund and fragmented Opposition, on the one hand, and ensures the continuity of the ideological and political advancement of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), on the other. The BJP, of course, secured fewer seats than in 2019. However, that does not mean an erosion of its support base. It should not be forgotten that democracy is not purely a game of dice. Its success depends on the index of social, economic, and cultural advancement of the people. India under Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi shows a difference from India under Jawaharlal Nehru's successors.

It is an undisputed fact that the party system plays a vital role in defining democracy and socio-cultural development. The Congress and its allies fail to understand the cultural aspirations of the people. They continue with the old economic models that kept India in a semi-subjugated state. Here, the vacuum has been filled by the BJP. Modi understood the importance of the party in ideological transformation. That's why he did not remain content with the parliamentary majority that he secured first in 2014 and subsequently, in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Under his leadership, the BJP corrected the imbalance of being a North India-dominated force by developing its social base in the South and the East. The last 10 years have seen a tireless effort to expand the BJP, both vertically and horizontally.

The 2024 election results exhibit the party's

success story. It is now a ruling party in Odisha and also a viable alternative ideological and political force in Kerala and West Bengal. Modi did not allow his concern for the party to get diluted, a phenomenon common among ruling elites. He himself acted as a vibrant agent to reach the grassroots through his vision and action. The changed nature of awarding the Padma honours demonstrates it. He also proved that denial of spirituality under the pretext of secularism is anathema in the Indian context, which gave him enormous goodwill among the people. It is Modi exceptionalism.

It is a truism that contextualisation of India's progress in terms of the BJP-RSS's ideology can hardly be digested by those who have been groomed with a syllabus that is predominantly Nehruvian and Marxist in ideology. They love to deny the BJP a legitimate space. They do not hesitate to denigrate the BJP-RSS: Rahul Gandhi's unflinching campaign against the RSS, reflecting a fallback to the Nehru era, exemplifies it. This relentless propaganda has made sure that the BJP is ever prepared to defend its ideology and political agenda.

That said, the BJP definitely has to gauge the reasons for the anti-incumbency against some of its MPs. Voting behaviour has shown an interesting phenomenon. The voters faced the dilemma of choosing between the BJP's ideology and leadership, and anger against the candidates it fielded. Most of those who could understand this dilemma and succeeded in



PM Modi will enter the history books for being only the second Prime Minister since India's independence to secure a third term. The first was Jawaharlal Nehru

have lost another 10-15 seats. In fact, it could have fallen as low as 19.

The results have also exposed the limitations of religion as an instrument of political mobilisation. The BJP lost Banswara, in Rajasthan, where Modi made his most inflammatory speech, one in which he spoke of *mangalsutras* and Muslims and used words like *ghuspathi* (infiltrators). Later, he disassociated from his own words. His voters noticed. Everywhere I travelled when I would ask BJP voters what they liked about the Modi government they would invariably list — infrastructure, internal security, India's place in the world order. When I would ask what he should change, from Bareilly to Bengaluru, the answer was the same: Focus more on jobs and dial down the Hindu-Muslim rhetoric. In a small village of Uttar Pradesh, a farmer used the word "bekaar" (useless) for politics of religion. "Don't talk to us about Hindus and Muslims. Talk to us about electricity and jobs." Not surprisingly, the BJP has done much worse in rural and semi-urban constituencies than in urbanised ones.

Modi will enter the history books for being only the second Prime Minister since India's independence to secure a third term. The first

was Jawaharlal Nehru.

It's ironic, but that is not the biggest headline from the election mandate. Above all the results are about the pushback against unbridled power and unilateralism. In Maharashtra, for instance, I remember meeting countless Modi voters who were distinctly unhappy about how the Shiv Sena had been split.

In Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP has done very well, there was still vocal disapproval about how Shivraj Singh Chouhan had been ousted as chief minister. Chouhan, who has won by the highest margin of votes, may now take the role of party president or home minister. And, perhaps, the unceremonious humiliation of Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan also made its impact felt in the numbers.

Modi will have to transition from being an alpha male to a consensus builder to manage not just the allies who have emerged as kingmakers, but also the changing power dynamics within his own party. Whether he can fly with clipped wings for the next five years is the question still in search of an answer.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

removing it won. Some of them failed. The election was not "Modi or No Modi", but he dominated both classes of BJP voters, those who voted and those who didn't vote with regret. This clearly shows that the social auditing of BJP representatives is essential to democracy. Voters enjoy much autonomy in the age of mass communication. It would be incorrect to assess them using the traditional parameters.

Parliamentary democracy is a means not to govern but also to connect with the sentiments and aspirations of the people. It is here that, more than the high command, the role of local representatives becomes crucial. The assessment of governance, policies, and programmes is a daily plebiscite that cannot be done by the bureaucracy. MPs are supposed to be the bridge between the people and policymakers. It is applicable to every party and democracy. A section of the Indian intelligentsia always ferrets out opportunities to privilege their old politics and ideas.

Delusion is a dangerous phenomenon. It kills originality as well as potential. The Congress and its allies seem to be in a similar situation. They failed to liberate themselves from the delusion of being the natural rulers of India. As a corollary to this, they don't hesitate to disregard the mandate that the BJP secures by virtue of its strength and ideology.

India witnessed a mutiny of pseudo-secular intellectuals after the 2014 elections. There is a wonderful contrast in their approach to Vajpayee and Modi. From the 1970s, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and, later, the BJP began to cultivate a larger social base. All sorts of criticisms were levelled, including the appellation of "Hindu fascists". When the party came into power in the 1990s, the BJP-RSS combined was compared even with the Ku Klux Klan. They shrewdly made a distinction between the orga-

nisation and its popular and credible leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, by calling him "the right man in the wrong party". Now, things have radically changed. Modi meticulously expanded the party in the South and the Northeast. He understood that in an ideological movement, everyone has to make their ideology the ruling one. Now, the BJP has become a pan-India party. He used his charisma to connect with the people at the grassroots, caring little for the metropolitan elites.

No other Indian leader has been as vigorously and contemptuously criticised as Modi in the West. The reason is not that he is championing the hard State in contrast to the soft State of Nehru and Vajpayee. Their dislike or abhorrence for him is based on their understanding of his persona. They find in him a thought leader whose creative endeavour is the biggest attack on the West's hegemony. The West's intolerance towards any such leader of the developing world is not disguised. They destroyed the image and support base of more than a dozen leaders from both the Left and Right-wing in Latin America since the 1980s. They failed here. Modi redefined politics by making it inclusive of spirituality and culture. This gives him both a political edge and cultural strength. Is it not ironic that western intellectuals and India's Opposition have common vocabularies against him?

The BJP is an organised party, partly an electoral actor, and partly an ideological movement. The election result should definitely lead the party to find the fault lines. It is more capable of self-correction than any other party in the country. The people know its rule is not like that of other parties. It has a challenge and a mission to resurrect the nuances of a civilisational nation.

Rakesh Sinha is a member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal

ANOTHER DAY

Namita Bhandare



## Missing women MPs in the new Lok Sabha

In the video, Sanjna Jatav dances to Rajasthan folk music. Her head is covered, but her joy shines through. Shot on June 4, soon after the results were declared, the clip has already gone viral with close to 100,000 views. The new Congress representative of Bharatpur is Dalit, married, a mother of two, a graduate, and at 26, will be among the youngest MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha after defeating the BJP's Ramswaroop Koli by nearly 52,000 votes.

This must seem like sweet vindication. Six months earlier, Jatav, a former zilla parishad member, had contested the assembly elections and lost by just 409 votes. Now, she's one of the

eight Congress candidates who've won from the state.

Days before counting day, Iqra Hassan was in London, back at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies to collect her master's degree. Plans to complete a PhD have had to be put on hold, she tells me on the phone, now that the 27-year-old is the new representative of Kairana and the Samajwadi Party in Parliament, where she will be one of just 25 Muslim women ever to be elected.

Despite the well-deserved euphoria of individual victories, the new Lok Sabha looks depressingly like the old Lok Sabha in a sig-

nificant way — the low representation of women. Eight months after political parties enthusiastically endorsed 33% reservation for women in Parliament and the assemblies, there is, for the first time since 2004, a marginal decline in the number of women MPs, from a "historic" high of 78 (14.3%) in the outgoing Lok Sabha to 74 (13.6%).

"We should be careful about even a slight dip," says Akshi Chawla, who curates Women-Lead, which tracks women's political representation. In percentage terms, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress does the best with 37.9% (11 winning women MPs). Even though the BJP will be sending the most women (31 of 240) to Parliament, they amount to just 12.9% of its winning MPs, according to Chawla's calculations.

This election, like others before it — the 1977 post-Emergency comeback and the Bofors/rise of V.P. Singh in 1989 — saw a fall in the number of elected women. It's as if the need to improve gender representation was subsumed in the din of the urgent and competing narratives of "save the Constitution" vs "400 paar". "In a do-or-die election there's a tension between opting for a pragmatic power grab and stand-

ing for principle," points out analyst Yamini Aiyar. As in the past, the message was clear — women can wait.

But, Aiyar adds, "Treating women as a vote bank and creating a narrative of 'women's empowerment' doesn't really build a genuine thread of women's rights." Women voters are able to see through the "grotesque violation" of giving a ticket to an accused serial rapist like Prajwal Revanna, now in jail and suspended from the JD(S), a BJP ally who, mercifully, lost.

Despite the entrenched misogyny of political parties, the women MPs of 2024 have, by and large, scripted their own stories. Some, like Iqra Hassan, come backed by family lineage. Others find their own way.

In Gujarat, where the BJP has won all 26 seats since 2014, the Congress finally made a dent. Its sole winning candidate in the state has a strong grassroots connection but was forced to crowdfund and accept as little as two rupees. Geniben Thakor, a 48-year-old OBC who has won two past assembly elections, has earned the title "giant killer".

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

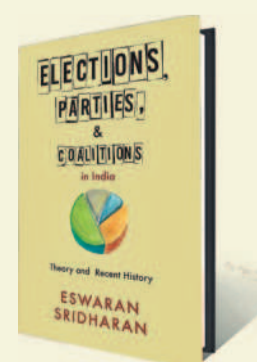
EDITOR'S PICK

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

### THE C WORD IN GOVERNANCE

After a decade of de facto single-party rule by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), coalition rule has made a comeback. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that the BJP leads was in office from 2014 to 2024, but only in name, since the BJP had a comfortable majority on its own in the 2014 and 2019 general elections. Mandate 2024, however, has left the party utterly reliant on coalition partners to stay in power.

Academic Eswaran Sridharan's *Elections, Parties, and Coalitions in India*, should help understand the import of coalition politics and its impact on governance in India. Eswaran, in 10 academic papers written or co-authored by him, shows how the BJP's rise since 1989 — and between 2004 and 2014 — the Congress's revival — is inextricably linked to the emergence of coalition politics. Both of these, arguably, have had outsized imprints on growth. He also argues that coalitions are viable in a federal system and that it has created regional blocs, which check the centralising urges of national parties.



**Elections, Parties, and Coalitions in India:** Eswaran Sridharan  
Year: 2024



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## HAWKS HAVE IT

Given all-round uncertainty, both global and domestic, the RBI has wisely decided to err on the side of caution

FOR THE EIGHTH-TIME in a row, the Reserve Bank of India has opted to maintain the status quo on the benchmark interest rates. As such, the repo rate, the interest rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks, will remain at 6.5 per cent. The RBI's primary objective in deciding the repo rate is to maintain price stability in the economy. By law, it has to target a retail inflation level of 4 per cent. The secondary objective for the RBI is to promote growth. Given that retail inflation is still above 4 per cent while GDP growth was above 8 per cent for the financial year 2023-24, this decision seems reasonable. But, looking ahead, while the RBI appeared more sanguine about India's growth, it was also a little more concerned about the stickiness of retail inflation.

On GDP growth, the RBI upped its forecast for the current financial year from 7 per cent to 7.2 per cent. In response, the benchmark Sensex soared by more than 1,720 points (or over 2 per cent) to hit a life-time intraday high of 76,795. The RBI noted that high frequency indicators of domestic activity are showing resilience in 2024-25. "The south-west monsoon is expected to be above normal, which augurs well for agriculture and rural demand. Coupled with sustained momentum in manufacturing and services activity, this should enable a revival in private consumption. Investment activity is likely to remain on track, with high capacity utilisation, healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates, government's continued thrust on infrastructure spending, and optimism in business sentiments," the MPC said.

However, on inflation, its primary concern, the RBI seems to have some worries. It is not as if inflation is not trending down — headline inflation has seen sequential moderation since February 2024 — but this decline has been in a very narrow range, from 5.1 per cent in February to 4.8 per cent in April. This has led to a growing divergence within the RBI's six-member Monetary Policy Committee, with two members voting for a cut in interest rate while the other four choosing to stay put. Clearly the hawks (members who are more bothered about inflation rearing its head once again) continue to dominate the doves (members who take a more benign view of inflation prospects) within the MPC. When questioned, Governor Shaktikanta Das clarified that the RBI's goal is not to cut rates as soon as they touch the 4 per cent mark, rather to cut when the policymakers are convinced that inflation will stay at or around that level sustainably. High inflation, especially food price inflation, has been a crucial concern among voters in the just-concluded elections. Given the all-round uncertainty, both global (geo-political tensions) and local (rising incidence of adverse climate events on food prices), the RBI has wisely decided to err on the side of caution.

## A WOMAN'S PLACE

For politics to be a more equal place, women must be leaders and decision-makers, not just voters and beneficiaries

IN SEPTEMBER LAST year, when the Women's Reservation Bill was passed in Parliament, it raised hopes of a more gender-equal legislature. The near-unanimous support for a Bill that promised 33 per cent reservation to women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies seemed to frame a political class that had finally accepted an idea whose time had come. Yet, eight months on, with the 18th Lok Sabha set to convene for its first session in a few weeks, the number of women in the lower House has dropped, from 78 out of 543 (an all-time high) in the 17th Lok Sabha to 73. It is clear that greater efforts must be made to break from the boys-club mindset, which continues to dominate politics.

Since the 1991 general election, when the gap between male and female voter turnout started narrowing, women's imprint on the political landscape has only become larger and deeper. In the recent elections too, while the number of women who turned out to vote saw a dip in some phases, the overall gender gap was almost non-existent, with both male and female voter turnout pegged at about 66 per cent by the Election Commission. Women have used the power that comes with their participation to shape electoral outcomes, with even political parties recognising the growing importance of the "woman vote". This recognition has mostly taken the form of targeted welfare schemes that have often taken campaign centrestage, including in the recent Lok Sabha polls: In West Bengal, for instance, the popularity of women-centric schemes such as Lakshmi Bhandar, a monthly cash transfer to over 2 crore women, is believed to have helped in sustaining the dominance of the ruling TMC. Earlier, the impact of Laadli Behna was seen to play a role in the BJP's return to power in the Madhya Pradesh assembly polls.

Yet, for women to have any real impact in politics, they cannot only be viewed as voters and beneficiaries — the national political imagination will need to accommodate and embrace the idea of women leaders and decision-makers. Other countries can show the way: In Mexico, which elected its first woman president, Claudia Sheinbaum, this week, quotas for women at every level of politics, including at the ticket distribution stage, have helped in the rapid progress of gender equality. Countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, with the highest female political representation, employ other kinds of affirmative action; parties in Sweden, for example, use the "zipper system", wherein candidate lists alternate between male and female candidates. For India, the Women's Reservation Bill is neither the beginning nor the end of the road to gender parity in politics — it is one milestone among many more to come.

## AMERICA'S NEW GAME

Cricket has been less than a fringe sport in America. After its World Cup win over Pakistan, that may be poised to change

UPSETS ARE MORE frequent in the T20 version of cricket, with weaker teams having to match their stronger counterparts over a shorter duration. Still, Thursday's World Cup result in Dallas — hosts USA defeating former world champions Pakistan — can prove to be a significant watermark in the popularity of the game in the biggest sports market in the world. Cricket has been less than a fringe sport in America, of interest mostly to first- and second-generation immigrants from the subcontinent and the Caribbean. But America loves a winner, especially one who prevails against the odds. The home team's unexpected win over Pakistan, which has won both the T20 and ODI world titles in the past, could give a big fillip to the game in the US. Breaking into the most affluent sports market in the world may reduce the ICC's financial dependence on India.

The team representing the Star and Stripes at the World Cup doesn't have a single player who has learnt the ropes of the sport in the country. The next step in the growth of the sport would be to introduce cricket in schools and colleges, which are the breeding grounds for future stars of basketball, baseball and gridiron. Here, cricket could follow the example of football, which was once a preserve of Hispanics, but has since developed a much wider following. The American women's team have been world champions while their male counterparts are regulars at FIFA World Cups and often punch above their weight. The sides have a large proportion of players who may not have roots in traditional football-crazy countries.

The T20 World Cup, till now, was riding piggyback on Indian eyeballs, both in the US and the subcontinent. Even the match timings cater to the Indian market. Sunday's India-Pakistan game is the most hyped fixture of the tournament, with its success dependent on how far India advances. Going ahead, the impact of the co-hosts making a big splash in a new game must not be under-estimated.

# A self-goal in Maharashtra



GIRISH KUBER

NDA's failure in the state speaks of perils of managing regional aspirations by remote control

IF UTTAR PRADESH, which single-handedly marred the BJP's chances of a third term on its own, was a sweet electoral cake for the INDIA bloc, Maharashtra was its icing. While the changing currents of UP's political waters were barely visible to most, it was hard to miss the signs of the BJP's near rout in Maharashtra. That said, the outcome in Maharashtra underscores three important points.

One, the BJP's remarkable ability to score self-goals; two, its exceptional ineptitude in understanding Sharad Pawar's skill in bringing all those who matter together for political gains, and three, Uddhav Thackeray rising to the challenge and displaying an as-yet unseen elasticity in political manoeuvring.

Like in UP, the BJP's central leadership had taken complete charge of the election machinery — from candidate selection to campaigning — in Maharashtra. And like in UP, it was blind to ground realities. Not only was it oblivious to dissenting notes within its own ranks, it also oversimplified the effects of inducting Ajit Pawar and his ilk. The BJP's existence in Maharashtra largely depends on its consistent anti-Pawarism. This began in 1995 when the saffron combine defeated Sharad Pawar, then a Congressman, to form the first BJP-Shiv Sena government in the state.

The BJP has historically deployed every possible tool — from Anna Hazare to G R Khairnar, a former municipal official and self-styled anti-corruption crusader — to undermine, if not beat, Sharad Pawar. Two years ago, when it absorbed Ajit Pawar, the BJP tried to defy its own history. The current Parliament election outcome is proof of how the move backfired.

To beat Sharad Pawar at his own game,

the BJP should have capped its bravado in taking on political fights and looked at what he does behind the scenes. This election, when the BJP propped up his high-profile nephew, Ajit, Pawar Sr silently worked to save his fief in Baramati. Through social engineering, he brought his political rivals on board, not letting his ego come in the way. In Marathi, this is called *berajache rajkaran* (politics of adding in, or inclusion) — a term he borrowed from his mentor, the late Yashwantrao Chavan.

This has helped Pawar never burn bridges, even with rivals. Ajit Pawar and the BJP ignored this, only to realise how all those believed to be Ajit supporters silently worked for Pawar Sr's daughter, Supriya Sule. Sharad Pawar lives politics. The octogenarian worked so tirelessly in this election that the BJP could win only two seats of the 12 in what was once its bastion, Vidarbha, and it has no seats in Marathwada.

In the outgoing Parliament, the BJP and then-unified Shiv Sena had 42 of 48 MPs from Maharashtra. The BJP's strength was 23 from the 25 seats it contested while Shiv Sena had won 18 of 23 in 2019. On the other hand, the Congress could muster victory in just one seat though it had contested as many as 24 in 2019, while its partner Sharad Pawar's NCP managed to win four of 20. The 2024 election offers a completely different scenario. The BJP has come down to an awful low of nine and though humiliated as rudderless, directionless and headless, the Congress has increased its tally to 13 from just one in 2019. Pawar's strike rate, though, is most impressive.

His outfit, the NCP, contested 10 seats of which it won as many as seven and missed

one by a whisker. Equally impressive is the Grand Old Party which entered into the contest in 17 constituencies of which it won 13. Notwithstanding the BJP and the NDA's seemingly unassailable hold over the state, the Opposition this time successfully halted the BJP's juggernaut and pushed it back into a corner.

The emerging political landscape looks more interesting considering the ensuing state assembly elections, slated in October. Having won 30 seats out of 48, the trinity of Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP now has a strong foothold in 180 state assembly segments of the total 288.

One doesn't have to be a political pundit to sense which way the Maharashtra assembly may go three months down the line. In recent Parliament elections, the Opposition's success was due to its strategy to make the BJP fight Maharashtra on its terms and make it a localised election. On the other hand, the BJP kept pushing its "Modi-versus-who" narrative though it found little resonance.

The combined strength of Uddhav Thackeray-Sharad Pawar coupled with the Congress this time successfully thwarted the BJP's attempt to set the narrative. If viewed in the backdrop of PM Modi's 20 election meetings, an equal number of pre-election visits and roadshows, the NDA's failure is a stark reminder of the perils of managing states and state leaders' aspirations by remote control. Not known for accepting its mistakes, the BJP's central leadership may need to display its nimble-footedness in taking corrective steps. Else, come October, it may be in for another shocker.

The writer is editor, Loksatta

## PLUG THE LEAKS

Exam paper scams becoming a major poll issue highlights need to listen to youth



MADHULIKA SONKAR

HOW DID EXAM paper leaks in the Hindi heartland become one of the top poll issues, and what does it say about India's young demography?

The 2024 Lok Sabha election results have thrown up several issues to be decoded around social engineering experiments steered by political parties. It is a classic case study of how the often mundane agendas of education and employment for the young can become surprising centrepieces of politics.

Exam paper leaks and scams in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, among other states, have been a key concern for young voters in the age group of 18-25. An investigation by The Indian Express ('The big all India exam leak', February 6) bears this out as 41 paper leaks over the last five years in 15 states affected 1.4 crore job seekers who had applied for over one lakh vacancies. Why this translated into angst and disappointment among the young voters needs to be understood, especially as exams continue to get cancelled and recruitment for state-level government jobs is postponed.

Large-scale examinations, conducted through standardised testing, are often considered to be a reliable mechanism in the educational framework. Globally, the model is known for its efficacy in saving time and administering tests through common rubrics in entry to higher education institutions. The well-known Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) are also critiqued for testing individual knowledge within a limited curriculum and rote learning.

Without much thought, the standardised testing model is replicated in recruitment processes for its ability to examine (and eliminate) large numbers of candidates in a specific span of time. The standardised exam, un-

like any other testing procedure, locates the individual within a massive cohort that may be preparing differently, but appears and competes together for a given number of positions. For jobs ranging from entry-level positions such as data operator to teaching in schools and colleges, this is a common recruitment method used by the state public service commissions. The preparation for aspirants coming from remote rural backgrounds and marginalised castes, however, comes with the pressure of debts undertaken to pay fees of applications, coaching centres and computer training centres and rent.

The gruelling making of a dream takes a minute to turn into failure with the news of question paper leaks and exam cancellation.

Sample this: In UP itself, three major competitive exams for government jobs were hit by question paper leaks in 2024. The latest in this list was the UP police constable recruitment exam in February, in which over 48 lakh candidates appeared. One must not overlook the outrage brewing among young aspirants which is said to have had the biggest impact on the BJP's poll prospects in the state. The INDIA bloc neatly tapped into the looming uncertainty among the youth when it announced fast-track courts and monetary compensation to aspirants. In Rajasthan, question paper leaks for recruitment exams remain a rampant problem, occurring with alarming frequency. With over 12 paper leaks during the Congress tenure in the state, its impact on the state's legislative elections in December 2023 was palpable.

For each paper leak scandal, the question to be asked is: What must be the compensation for years of labour, exorbitant financial cost, and the emotional toll incurred by lakhs of candidates who pin all their hopes on the exam? Beneath this question is also the fatigue of reappearing for the exams and the

fear of a new generation of aspirants joining the queue as exams get cancelled.

The time and dreams spent by young aspirants to crack recruitment exams are irreplaceable. These exams are also their shot at generational mobility by securing a government job. We must also take into consideration the extensive planning that goes into exam preparation — with migration to cities to attend coaching classes, taking up jobs that do not match educational qualifications and skills, and arranging alternative means of sustenance.

The inaction and lack of appropriate measures to curb the leaks are compounded by anxiety and disappointment among youth. With multiple shifts and the involvement of a nexus of commercial players, including coaching centres, printing presses, and consulting agencies, the absence of a robust and transparent mechanism to conduct exams is a problem that must be taken seriously. Even after passing the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) 2024, the government ought to ask whether deploying special task forces to investigate the organised use of unfair means in examinations is constructive. The cancellation of recruitment procedures has meant a spiralling of crises in the already scarce job market.

Perhaps, having its ears to the ground could have helped the BJP. Urban "influencers" gathering in New Delhi did not help placate the young voters. And don't forget, the young voter base was credited for the BJP's landslide victories in 2014 and 2019. In the 2024 elections, education, employment and social justice triumphed over the rhetoric of the temple and the communal divide. This is the preeeksha pe charcha the youth needed.

The writer is a sociologist and educator. She teaches at IIT Delhi

## JUNE 8, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### BHINDRANWALE DEAD

JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE and two of his close associates, who masterminded the terror campaign in Punjab, were found dead in the Golden Temple complex. The bullet-ridden bodies of Bhindranwale, Maj Gen Shahbeg Singh (retd) and president of the outlawed All-India Sikh Students Federation Amrik Singh were recovered by the security forces from the Akal Takht basement.

### AKALIS' DELHI BANDH

WITH THE AKALIS giving a call for Delhi bandh, the Capital appeared tense through-

out the day. Tension mounted following the morning AIR bulletin that the body of Bhindranwale was found inside the Golden Temple complex. A sizable number of Sikhs flocked to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, which soon became a battleground. The Sikh youths started throwing stones at the police and the policemen readied to retaliate.

### ARMY OUT IN J&K

TEN PERSONS WERE killed in cross-firing among violent Sikh youths and Nirankaris as well as police firing in daylong violence in posh Amirakadal, Wazir Bagn and Jawaharnagar localities of Srinagar. The Sikh youths, who were

accompanied by about 100 non-Sikhs burnt down four houses belonging to a minority community and desecrated three temples. Among those killed were three Muslims.

### 50 KILLED IN IRAQI RAID

THE IRAQ-IRAN WAR has started taking a heavy toll on civilian lives. Fifty people were killed in the Iraqi bombing of three Iranian towns. This was supposed to be in retaliation for Iranian shelling of the Iraqi port of Basra, in which 21 people were said to have been killed. This shelling in turn was in retaliation for the air raid carried out by Iraq, in which 300 people were killed.



# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Is it the economy, stupid?

Election results present a puzzle: India's economy is robust, yet voters have punished the government. Perhaps growth has neither been as dynamic as official numbers suggest, nor balanced



JOSH FELMAN AND ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN

INDIA'S ELECTORAL SHOCK poses a stunning economic puzzle. How is it possible that the electorate chastised rather than handsomely rewarded a leader who has presided over an astonishing economic boom? This would seem to be an event unprecedented in world history.

Consider the data. According to official data, in the three years leading up to the election, the economy posted real GDP growth rates of 9.7 per cent, 7 per cent, and 8.2 per cent. To be sure, the first of those numbers is the recovery from Covid. But even so, such consecutive numbers — increasing the size of the economy by more than one-quarter in just three years — would normally describe economic nirvana. So, what happened? Has the Indian electorate just demolished the adage attributed to former US President Bill Clinton's adviser: "It's the economy, stupid"?

No, and the explanation resides in a combination of measurement, model, and Modi. Consider how.

Start with measurement. Within the economic community, it is no secret that there are many problems with Indian GDP measurement — faulty deflators, the failure to deflate inputs and outputs separately, outdated sectoral weights, poor measurement of the large informal sector. These problems haven't received much publicity, largely because the IMF, World Bank, investment banks, ratings agencies, and foreign governments have been remarkably silent about these issues. But the problems are severe and matter hugely for interpreting India's economy.

Consider a recent example. In the past two years, the nominal and real GDP numbers have been telling two completely different stories. According to the nominal GDP numbers, growth has sharply decelerated from 14.2 per cent to 9.6 per cent. But the real GDP numbers show that growth has surged from 7 to 8.2 per cent. The only way to square these numbers is if broad inflation has completely collapsed, falling to just 1.4 per cent.

This seems highly implausible. It is true that the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation has decelerated. But WPI is not the correct deflator, since it measures input prices, whereas GDP is evaluated at producer prices, that is to say, output prices. And output prices have not collapsed; they continue to increase rapidly, as the 4.8 per cent Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation shows.

That said, even if growth has not been quite as dazzling as the official statistics suggest, it has been reasonable. So, there remains an electoral puzzle to be explained.

Some analysts have argued that the electorate was dissatisfied because the fruits of growth have been shared unequally. In this K-shaped view, government policies enabled the very rich to gain at the expense of the poor. It is polemically appealing but not accurate to claim that only a few billionaires have benefited from India's economic growth. Casual ob-



C.R. Sasikumar

ervation but also recent survey results confirm that the standard of living of virtually all Indians, including those at the bottom, has improved considerably over the past decade.

What is true is that growth has been unbalanced, in the sense that some sectors have been growing much more rapidly than others. And this brings us to the second element of the explanation: India's economic model. India's development has always favoured export-oriented services and people with high skills at the expense of agriculture and manufacturing and those with fewer skills more generally.

Consider, for example, India's well-known global success: Its export-oriented services sector. After the pandemic, as the world economy recovered and globalisation in services resumed, stellar names such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, and Microsoft transferred large amounts of high-skilled analytical work to India. Employment in Global Capability Centres (GCC) surged to an astonishing three million people. And as these workers have needed offices and housing, the surge in GCC employment has set off a construction boom, benefitting the workers in that sector.

On the other hand, consider agriculture. The woes of farmers have been a problem for Indian economic policy since independence. Governments have responded by providing subsidies, especially to the cereal-growing farmers in the North. But they have also repeatedly turned the terms of trade against the sector. Whenever food prices have risen and farmers scented opportunity, the government has imposed export restrictions and liberalised imports to bring down prices, thereby damaging farm incomes. The most recent example relates to onions. As prices rose, India imposed export restrictions and then released them slowly and partially which led to disaffection amongst onion farmers in Maharashtra, one factor in Modi's poor performance in that state.

This pattern of a rapidly growing export-oriented service sector and a lagging agricultural sector has been India's long-standing economic model. It cannot be attributed to the incumbent government. But there are some ways in which the Modi government's policies have made the imbalances worse — and this is the third element of the explanation.

The informal sector has been devastated

The informal sector has been devastated by a series of government actions. Data on informal enterprises is by nature scant, but proxies such as purchases of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and two-wheelers suggest that the triple shock of demonetisation, flawed implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and drastic lockdowns during the pandemic have destroyed profitability and employment. As for manufacturing, the Modi government has made efforts to encourage this sector, notably by providing subsidies through the Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme.

by a series of government actions. Data on informal enterprises is by nature scant, but proxies such as purchases of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and two-wheelers suggest that the triple shock of demonetisation, flawed implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and drastic lockdowns during the pandemic have destroyed profitability and employment.

As for manufacturing, the Modi government has made efforts to encourage this sector, notably by providing subsidies through the Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme. But this policy has had very limited success. A major reason is that it has been offset by other government policies such as protectionism. Another reason is that there has been no comparable push in labour-intensive sectors which would have expanded job opportunities for the poor and women. An even bigger reason is that the policy strategy has unbalanced the playing field. A few years ago, we coined the expression India's "A stigmatised capitalism" to highlight the generous and extensive favours granted to big business houses (especially Adani and Ambani) that allowed them to prosper at the expense of other investors, domestic and foreign. The resulting non-level playing field has extracted a toll, discouraging overall investment in the industrial sector.

In sum, there are only two ways to reconcile the economy and the voting results. We would suggest that growth has not been as dynamic as the official numbers suggest, nor has it been very balanced. Put another way, the overall pie has not grown sufficiently rapidly and it has been shared unequally, but in a different manner than believed. As a result, the unskilled people working in the agricultural, informal, and manufacturing sectors — the bulk of the workforce and voters — experienced the economy in a way that accords with ground-level reporting: that is, negatively.

Alternatively, if we don't accept the explanations of faulty measurement and an inherently slanted development model, we will be left with the biggest puzzle in global democratic politics: That gangbuster growth led to electoral disaster.

Where are you, James Carville?

The writers are, respectively, Principal, JH Consulting, Senior Fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics and former Chief Economic Adviser, Government of India

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The chain of instability that flows from the centre to the provinces must break at some point, and parties must sit together to come up with a common plan to ensure this. Otherwise, the people who fought hard to re-establish democracy... will start looking for alternatives to these systems." — THE KATHMANDU POST

## A mandate for humility

Return of coalition politics and stronger Opposition is significant. It calls for greater accommodation and responsible politics from all



RAM RAJYA BY RAM MADHAV

IT TOOK ME some time to reflect on the results of the Lok Sabha elections. As someone who has overseen at least a dozen elections in the last decade, even I was flabbergasted by the results like many others. But as the hype and hysteria settle, various facets of the mandate are unfolding clearly.

For the supporters of the BJP, it is a matter of relief and reassurance that the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is returning to office. Although numerically diminished, the BJP emerged as the only party capable of providing a stable government compared to any other arrangement.

It has gained significantly in the east and the south. In Kerala, the party won its first-ever Parliament seat and its vote share rose by more than 3 per cent from 2019 — it's a solid 16 per cent. In Telangana, its seats have doubled while the vote share rose from 19 per cent to an impressive 35 per cent. In Tamil Nadu, although the party failed to win any seats, its vote share went up from 3 per cent to around 12 per cent. The most significant achievement for the party was the victory in the Odisha assembly elections and the formation of a BJP government for the first time in the state. The party's performance in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat too is formidable.

It is an undeniable fact that the biggest setback and embarrassment for the ruling party came from Uttar Pradesh, a state from which it had high expectations. Results in that state call for serious introspection. Despite popular governments at the Centre as well as in the state, and despite so much good work, including the turnaround in Ayodhya and Kashi, the BJP ended up losing almost half of the seats it was holding in 2019. There is much cynicism on social media over the defeat in Ayodhya in particular, and Uttar Pradesh in general. While a serious soul-searching is necessary, outlandish disparagement is uncalled for. Results in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Bengal too didn't go as expected. The return of the Left Front in Bengal politics, securing more than 6 per cent votes, could be one reason. However, there appears to be more complex reasons for the party's below-par performance in these and other states.

Not many expected the INDI Alliance to do so well. But in the end, the constituent parties, especially the Congress in many states, and the SP, TMC, DMK, NCP-SP, Shiv Sena-UBT and others in their respective states made commendable gains pushing the alliance tally to above 230 seats. Contesting in about half of the seats in the country, the Congress party managed to increase its vote share by about 1.5 per cent, although it failed to touch the three-digit mark in the third consecutive election in the number of seats it has won. The BJP must not overlook the Congress's

significant gains in the northeast.

From the country's standpoint, these results have a mixed message. Speaking to a news channel during the election campaign PM Modi said that he missed a "strong Opposition in 2014 to 2024". "If there is one thing missing in my life, it is that of a good opposition," he remarked. A strong Opposition does seem to be on the cards, but only experience can tell if it would be a "good Opposition". With a numerically large Opposition in the House, the treasury side may need better managers who can effortlessly sprint across the aisles to ensure the smooth functioning of the House.

Sadly, the country is relapsing into the uncertainty of coalition politics, after a decade of stability and predictable politics. Although the country was run by an NDA coalition in the last 10 years, the ruling party enjoyed absolute majority on its own. With BJP restricted to 240 seats, the current NDA alliance will be different from the earlier ones. The silver lining is that unlike the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government of 1999-2004, which had 182 BJP members and depended on 115 members from other parties, it is better placed in the present NDA alliance's arithmetic. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that the important reform agenda being pursued by the Modi government might encourage more parties to come forward to support him, thus providing greater stability to the government.

Another serious challenge thrown up by this election was the victory of at least three independent candidates owing allegiance to separatist ideologies. Two of them, Amritpal Singh and Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, won from Punjab while the third, Abdul Rashid Sheikh, aka Engineer Rashid, got elected from Jammu and Kashmir. Amritpal Singh and Engineer Rashid won elections from jail, where they were incarcerated for anti-India activities.

While the two winners from Punjab have been open supporters of Khalistan ideology, Rashid is a known Kashmiri separatist. Rashid defeated senior National Conference leader Omar Abdullah by a majority of more than two lakh votes. Amritpal and Sarabjeet, too, won with considerable majorities defeating their Congress and AAP rivals. The last time such a separatist voice could enter the Indian Parliament was in 1999 when Simranjit Singh Mann won the election from Sangrur in Punjab. Hitherto such voices were restricted to state assemblies in the last two decades — Mann is a member of the Punjab assembly currently while Rashid was an MLA in the J&K assembly. Radical sentiments of *azaadi* and Khalistan are rearing their heads again in J&K and Punjab.

The victory of the Narendra Modi-led NDA for the third time will be a parliamentary record. However, the situation calls for greater accommodation and responsible politics from both sides. Mahatma Gandhi is remembered for many things. But he was the first to introduce coalition politics in the pre-Independence era. His success lay in humility and civility, qualities that the Indian polity is in dire need of. Coalitions are great levellers. Hope we witness the restoration of those virtues in our polity in the coming years.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS

## Caution, no cuts ahead

RBI is unlikely to lower interest rates before October as inflation remains high



DHARMAKIRTI JOSHI

ROBUST GROWTH CONTINUES to afford the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) the latitude to pursue lower inflation. Provisional estimates from the National Statistical Office show gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 8.2 per cent was higher than projected and the momentum seems to have continued into the first two months of this fiscal. With Mint Road communicating that its focus was on lowering inflation to its medium-term target of 4 per cent, the street consensus was for non-action on Friday.

However, it is becoming increasingly evident that the global rate hike cycle has peaked. Central bank moves from here on are going to be asynchronous, compared with the coordinated rate cuts in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. To be sure, actions by the Federal Reserve (Fed) influence monetary policy cycles in economies closely connected to the US, but uneven growth and local economic compulsions will spur differing rate actions.

The MPC's decisions are primarily influenced by its assessment of the strength of the economy, domestic inflationary challenges and, to a lesser extent, the monetary policy actions of systemically important central banks such as the Fed and the European Central Bank (ECB). RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das reiterated this during his policy address on Friday. The most influential central bank — the Fed — is likely to stay put in June because of a high inflation print in April amid strong growth momentum. We now expect the Fed to cut

rates only once, in December 2024.

That has cramped the space for monetary policy easing in many emerging markets, which are already witnessing capital flow and currency volatility after a change in the rate cut expectations in the US.

In India, too, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) turned net sellers and the rupee faced pressure from the greenback. Expectations from central banks in emerging markets mostly indicate a delay in rate-cutting cycles or at least slowing the pace. On the other hand, the ECB and many peers have begun wielding the knife, given relatively weak growth in their jurisdictions. S&P Global expects the Eurozone to grow at a feeble 0.7 per cent in the calendar year 2024.

Consumer inflation in India is solely because of the persisting supply shock in agriculture, which has kept food inflation high. Core inflation (which excludes volatile food and energy prices) stood at a benign and multiyear low of 3.2 per cent in April. Fuel prices were 4.2 per cent lower in April on-year despite firmer crude oil prices because cooking gas prices were cut. So, why is the MPC not in a hurry to snip, especially since it cannot control food inflation?

One key monetary policy lesson for central banks in the post-pandemic world has been to not ignore supply shocks, particularly when growth is strong. If growth momentum is strong, the MPC would tend to gravitate towards inflation control even in the case of a supply-driven shock. Food prices have been

persistently high, with a major contribution from vegetables, which inflated 27.8 per cent in April. Inclement weather and pest attacks have only raised the level and volatility of vegetable inflation. The heat wave conditions playing out in many parts of India over the past month and more can continue to exert pressure on food, particularly vegetable prices. The good news is that the south-west monsoon arrived in Kerala two days before schedule. The Indian Meteorological Department has predicted above-normal rains this year. If these are well distributed, food inflation should moderate and bring down overall inflation to 4.5 per cent this fiscal.

Second, food has a high (39 per cent) weight in the CPI and persistently elevated readings can keep inflationary expectations high and lead to a generalised pick-up in inflation. Third, so far, softer commodity prices have contributed to lower input costs for companies and have helped in keeping core inflation low.

In its April commodity outlook, the World Bank noted that heightened uncertainties in the Middle East have been exerting upward pressure on prices of key commodities, notably oil and gold. If sustained, this and a low-base effect can lift the extraordinarily benign core inflation this fiscal.

According to the S&P-GEP global supply chain volatility index, supply chains are operating near maximum capacity, signalling a better outlook for the manufacturing sector. That, in turn, will keep commodity demand healthy.

So, some caution is warranted on this front.

Finally, not only has the fiscal 2024 growth estimate been lifted to 8.2 per cent from 7.6 per cent by the National Statistical Office, but recent data points also signal a strong start to this fiscal.

GST collections at Rs 2.1 lakh crore in April were the highest ever in a month. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) stood at 60.8 for services and 58.8 for manufacturing in April — slightly lower than in March — but still in a strong expansion zone. The PMI readings for May show that this momentum continues. On its part, the RBI has kept its inflation forecast this fiscal unchanged at 4.5 per cent. Importantly, it has also become more optimistic about GDP growth, revising its forecast by 20 basis points to 7.2 per cent.

CRISIL's call is a moderation to 6.8 per cent, which is still high. This is because we expect the constrictive impact of monetary policy to continue. Growth in bank credit and credit card loans has already moderated. Additionally, the fiscal impulse to growth will reduce as the government tilts towards fiscal consolidation.

Summing up, the policy stance at central banks continues to be cautious because of inflation and should stay that way in the near future. We now expect the MPC to begin cutting rates in October at the earliest and have lowered our expectation to two rate cuts this fiscal versus the three expected earlier.

The writer is Chief Economist, CRISIL Ltd

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A UNITED FRONT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Mandal over Mandir' (IE, June 7). Ram Mandir was expected to give the BJP an edge in the election in Uttar Pradesh. But the party failed to reap any electoral dividends from the grand event. The saffron party's losses in Faizabad, Amethi and Lakhimpur Kheri should serve as lessons about the importance of keeping voters at the centre. The resounding success of the SP-Congress combine in UP is attributed to the troika of backward classes, Dalits and minorities. Consolidating the voter base carried them to victory.

SS Paul, Nadia

### LOST CONNECTION

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'BJP has numbers, not mandate' (IE, June 7). While the BJP is well-positioned to form the government, the result points to a loss of connection. It lost in UP, the state ruled by a saffron-clad chief minister, popular for his 'bulldozer justice'. This performance sends the message that UP has ceased to be a BJP citadel — thanks to its overconfidence, lack of action on rising prices and unemployment. The incumbent BJP MPs' over-reliance on Modi's charisma signalled that they did precious little for constituents.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

### AP'S CHALLENGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Ringing in the new' (IE, June 6). Andhra Pradesh's public doesn't seem to be after freebies; they want jobs. The state's conversion from industrial to agrarian-based, after the carving out of Telangana, has created a formidable challenge. Leaders need to understand the altered opportunities in the state and enable people to make money. But will the Centre grant Andhra the "special status" it is demanding?

Janvi Rawat, Ludhiana

### PROTECT THE ECI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Rules of the game' (IE, June 6). The EC's mismanagement this election season, dragging elections for 44 days in the unforgiving summers of India in this age of technology, is unforgivable. It led to the loss of lives of polling officers. Surprisingly, no court took cognisance of this and fixed accountability for the deaths. The ECI in the post-Seshan era emerged as a revered public institution and overseer of impartial elections — the lifeblood of a vibrant democracy. It must be cherished and protected from systematic erosion due to administrative ineptness and the onslaught of accusations from political parties and civil society.

Ranjiv, Faridabad

# Opinion

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2024



## A FAVOURABLE OUTLOOK

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das

“At the moment, the Indian economy is at an inflection point in its path towards greater transformational changes that will bring about more stability and growth”

## Prudent approach

There's no need for the MPC to rush into a rate cut as it can undo a lot of gains achieved on the inflation front

**W**ITH FOOD INFLATION remaining sticky, it is not surprising that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) chose to retain the key policy rate at 6.5%, even though core inflation has softened for the 11th straight month since June 2023 and services inflation has moderated to historic lows. The relatively strong growth trends also allow it time to pursue its objective of taming inflation. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has, in fact, upped its gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for the current year to 7.2% from 7%, despite a high base of 8.2%. Assuming the monsoon is a normal one, inflation for the current year has been forecast at 4.5%. However, the trend in prices of pulses and vegetables is uncertain, while core inflation may be impacted if companies increase prices and wages go up.

Two external MPC members believe policy rates should be cut now and that stance should be changed to withdrawal of accommodation. However, going by the RBI's tone, it is expected to wait until it is confident that inflation will sustain at 4%. A rate cut in August seems unlikely, but looks possible in October, if the rains are good and food prices settle down. To get a sense of the inflation trajectory, the central bank will watch for the size of the fiscal deficit and to gauge how disciplined the new government proposes to be. It is true that real interest rates are high, but one appreciates Governor Shaktikanta Das' concerns that the last mile of disinflation can be an arduous path. So, it would not be prudent to undo the gains achieved. Also, the RBI has asserted it would not "follow the Fed", but would consider local factors, indicating that it would go ahead with any policy changes—ahead of the Fed—if the situation is favourable.

Even if the rate cut is delayed beyond October, easier liquidity conditions should prevail in the second half of the year, after India's inclusion in the JPMorgan Bond Index later this month and increasing government expenditure. This should help interest rates at the short end of the curve ease and also boost bank deposits. The RBI is expected to leave a little more liquidity in the system than it has so far to ensure the growth momentum sustains. Liquidity in the system should be ample with loan growth expected to slow to 13-14% this year from 16% last year, after the clampdown on unsecured loans and the RBI's constant reminder to banks that they should maintain a balance between the increase in assets and liabilities.

In fact, slowing credit growth would temper real GDP growth for FY25 as would the fading benefits from commodities-led terms of trade, limited fiscal impulses, and weaker exports resulting from slower global growth in the second half of the year. Given that the GDP for FY24 was boosted by the wholesale price index-led deflator and the gross value added (GVA) is a more relevant number, it would be helpful if the RBI provides a GVA number. The headline number masks the pitiable growth in private consumption last year of 4% on a modest base. The RBI's claim that rural recovery is picking up seems premature; agriculture grew at an anaemic 1.4% in FY24 while real rural wages have now contracted for nearly 25 straight months. To be sure, there is elbow room but it is not "greater".

## STAYING THE COURSE

RBI HAS BEEN REMARKABLY NIMBLE WITH CONSTRAINED POLICY DISCRETION SINCE THE PANDEMIC

# RBI as a model central bank

**T**HE OPENING LINES of Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das' Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) statement today, vowing to position the RBI as a model central bank of the Global South, promises an interesting proposition — could central banks be the new public good bridging the gap between various strata of society while fortifying the financial markets against shocks and surprises? Interestingly, recent State Bank of India research using the Banker-Charnes-Cooper model shows that the RBI has been among the top three most efficient central banks — much higher than the Fed — in containing inflation following the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The decision of the MPC to keep the policy rates intact while remaining focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure inflation progressively aligns with the target met with a majority of 4-2 vindicating the stand. The divergence assumes importance, given that the European Central Bank adopted a pivot the day before yesterday (joining select nations from the European Union and Canada), its first after 2019, initiating a 25 basis point rate cut with a non-linear trajectory anticipated going forward.

Domestically, the latest GDP growth has placed the growth outlook on a firm footing. Real GDP growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7.2%, up from 7% earlier. The growth numbers could be a tad higher, especially if the Middle East softens with the reconciliatory efforts of negotiating countries, including India, and exports pick up in the merchandise category.

However, a shadow of risk remains through runaway industrial metal prices, chiefly copper, that has both — a supply-side glut, and usage in new-generation technologies like artificial intelligence fuelling the uptick. With Nvidia ascending to the world's second-most valuable public company yesterday, the demand may remain suspended in a higher zone

## SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

Group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India  
Views are personal



for many metals. The reworked growth numbers for China, according to the International Monetary Fund (5% in CY24 and 4.5% in FY25), anchoring higher for longer levels does not bode well for inputs.

Meanwhile, liquidity has turned into surplus in June after remaining in deficit during April 20-May 31. However, the government is moving towards the Just-in-Time mechanism of fund transfer, whereby government cash balances have moved to RBI E-Kuber, and hence, system liquidity in the future may become agnostic to government spending. Thus, government surplus cash balances will remain an important factor influencing system liquidity, making liquidity management more complicated. Thus, it will remain one of the most critical issues during this fiscal, and the RBI may have to innovate on liquidity augmentation tools.

On a separate note, past examples like during December 2016-August 2017 indicate that a change in voting pattern, as happened in this policy, ultimately leads to a change in interest rate decision, and rate cuts can be expected towards the second half of the current fiscal.

The key announcements on regulatory and development fronts include enhancing the bulk deposit limits of major banks to ₹3 crore and above from earlier "single rupee term deposits of ₹2 crore and above" brought in 2019. This

move reflects the changing landscape of liquidity, as also deposit centrality for banks from savers on two aspects: substitution and competition. While the glut in raising deposits from the retail book has forced many banks to increasingly opt for wholesale deposits, the savers themselves are split between alternative, competing channels of investments with diminishing opportunity cost. The flexibility offered to major banks as well as small finance banks (who have already been offered a glide path to convert into universal banking avatars) will imbibe better visibility on the asset and liability management front. Colloquially, this could also hint at either bank lending rates remaining higher for longer (than earlier anticipated) or the net interest margin of banks retracting

once a benign rate cycle begins. The RBI also decided to rationalise guidelines on export and import of goods and services in line with the changing dynamics of cross-border trade. Changing dynamics of trade include rising digital trades, technology, free trade agreements, and regional trading blocs, which require a review of guidelines.

Rising incidences of frauds has been a matter of concern, occurring predominantly in digital payments. In terms of value, frauds have been reported primarily in the loan portfolio (advances category). Accordingly, the RBI has decided to form a committee to explore the possi-

bility of creating a Digital Payments Intelligence Platform that will harness advanced technologies to mitigate payment fraud risks. Furthermore, the third edition of the RBI's global hackathon, "Harbinger 2024", will be launched with two overarching themes, "Zero Financial Frauds" and "Being Divyang-Friendly".

On the payment side, the RBI has extended the facility of standing instruction on per-paid instruments such as FASTag and UPI Lite. The idea is to provide an auto-replenishment facility to the customer and avoid repetitive transactions. The RBI's post-pandemic monetary policy conduct reminds us of former Fed chairman Ben Bernanke's comment that "constrained discretion" rules achieve the desired objective of monetary policy better than a strict rule-based approach. Constrained discretion is an approach that allows monetary policymakers considerable leeway in responding to economic shocks, financial disturbances, and other unforeseen developments, but constrained by a strong commitment to keeping inflation low and stable. The RBI has been remarkably nimble with such constrained policy discretion since the pandemic.

In this context, I will make a limited point from an academic perspective regarding the recent RBI draft circular on provisioning of project finance in construction phase.

Based on available data, out of 1,873 central projects under construction, 779 are delayed with respect to their original schedules and 253 have reported additional delays vis-à-vis their date of completion reported in the previous month. Then average length of the construction phase can range from 63-411 months. The average cost overrun is 18.65%, which varies from sector to sector. As a broader conclusion, the straightjacket rule of 5% may be thus looked at in greater detail like a "constrained discretion", as often used in the sphere of monetary policy making.

## Is it real or AI? It's nebulous for photographers

ON THE INTERNET, some questions are easy to answer. "Is it cake?" — slice through it with a knife. "Will it blend?" — stick it in a machine and find out.

But, "Is this AI?" That's a harder one. You might not think so. Clearly, something generated using a tool such as Midjourney or OpenAI's DALL-E should be described as "Made with AI". In these cases, the only human effort required is dreaming up a text prompt.

But here's a more nuanced example I've been thinking of. After setting off at 3:30 am one recent day, veteran photographer Matt Suesz got into position, ahead of the tourist crowd, to capture the sun rising over Utah's Canyonlands National Park. In post-production, he blended several frames to achieve ideal exposure. Then, he used Adobe Photoshop's "generative fill" function to fix a small but unseemly dust spot.

The end result was gorgeous, as his followers attested. But soon after posting on both Instagram and Threads, the image received an automated "Made with AI" label because of his use of generative fill. Suesz called it frustrating. "I think that gives the casual user, a regular person, the impression the whole thing was a prompt," he told me.

Meta Platforms Inc. put its AI labelling policy in place after its oversight board advised that users should be better informed of possibly manipulated content, even if the goal wasn't necessarily to deceive. Meta consulted "over 120 stakeholders in 34 countries in every major region of the world", wrote its head of content policy, Monica Bickert. The system is primitive; it relies on self-reporting or metadata attached by photo-editing software when AI is used.

Now that the system has been rolled out, some in the professional photography business feel it is heavy-handed. "The fact that Instagram, arguably photographers' most important platform, is weakening photographers' authenticity by attaching AI tags willy-nilly is insulting and outrageous," wrote Matt Growcott for PetaPixel, a leading independent photography news site.

But you might think: Suesz did use AI to alter his image, so the label is fair game. But then, why not have a label for any kind of editing in Photoshop? Techniques to enhance, improve or otherwise fix photographs have been used for almost two centuries. It's widely accepted that stylistic tweaks are appropriate, with the exception of most photojournalism. With AI, a fresh conversation emerges on where the line should be drawn. Suesz feels the blunt label — "Made with AI" — was aggressive. I agree with him. After all, no AI yet offers Suesz the capability of hiking through a national park at the crack of dawn.

Meta is fine with its heavy hand — for now. A blog post from head of global affairs Nick Clegg earlier this year pointed out that the company's current approach would be in place "through the next year, during which a number of important elections are taking place around the world". In two others, overlabelling and upsetting photographers is the much lesser of two evils — the other being the risk of allowing fake images to influence elections worldwide. The mistakes made in the run-up to the 2016 US Presidential election still hurt the company to this day.

In 2025, Meta can be expected to revisit and make changes to its policy, though users shouldn't get their hopes up for a solution that pleases everyone or even works. Today's detection methods are trivially easy to circumvent, though there is still value in providing a better way for good actors to be transparent with their audience. One solution to Suesz' complaint would be a sliding scale of disclosure, whereby some AI edits (such as removing a minor flaw) are added to metadata for those who care to investigate but do not trigger the "Made with AI" badge of shame.

A better way, one that doesn't rely on the honesty of people on the internet (ha!), is hopefully not too far away. Meta and others are researching methods sophisticated enough to detect when AI has been used by just analysing the image itself. Such a system could detect whether something is fully generated by AI or only partially altered, like Suesz' sunrise.

Meta is "working hard" on that approach, Clegg wrote, though it's a cat-and-mouse game. As AI becomes smarter at creating images, detecting when AI has been used will become even more difficult. Answering the fast-evolving ethical questions won't be much easier, either.

## Restating status as largest democracy



### NIRVIKAR SINGH

Professor of economics, University of California, Santa Cruz

**INDIA'S RECENTLY-CONCLUDED NATIONAL** general election was big in every possible sense. The process lasted longer than ever before, and more people voted than ever before. The choices made by voters across the country reaffirmed India's status as the world's largest democracy, since major issues of representation and material well-being were at stake.

Initial reactions in the global media have emphasised the perspective that the election results were a negative message personally to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was the face of the ruling party in this election, to an extent greater than ever before. Some results, such as the loss of the constituency in which the new Ram temple was built recently, have been interpreted as signifying the limits of divisive Hindu nationalism. The ruling coalition lost seats in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Bihar, to varying degrees. Other interpretations have emphasised the importance of economic issues such as employment and inflation. All of these factors, no doubt, matter to some extent. There are variations in voter concerns across the country, in particular the so-called Hindi heartland versus other regions.

At the national level, the results are not easy to interpret. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) only lost 1% of the vote share, whereas the Indian National Congress (INC) gained less than 2%. Yet, the BJP lost 20% of its seats, whereas the Congress

almost doubled its number, with its gain in seats being slightly less than the BJP's loss. If we use national vote share to measure voter acceptance, then Modi's BJP has consolidated its national status, since its vote share has been well above its historical levels for three elections running. Indeed, this confirms Modi's standing, rather than diminishing it, as long as one discounts more grandiose claims such as his "divine mission".

Unpacking the results by state reveals that what is happening in India is a function of several factors, including the standing of regional leaders, and the importance of regional issues. After all, India's states have populations the size of typical countries, and have distinctive languages, cultures, and socio-economic conditions. As has been the case ever since the INC stopped being a party that represented the legacy of the national freedom movement, party coalitions and temporary, election-specific alliances greatly matter. In Andhra Pradesh (AP), a new coalition between the BJP and two regional parties seemed to make a difference, so that a 10% loss of vote share by another regional party, the incumbent, translated into 18 out of 25 parliamentary seats switching to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which the BJP leads. But in neighbouring

Odisha, concerns about the regional party leader's health seemed to play a role in the BJP's gains, which came after two decades of dominance by the former.

The vote share swings and seat losses in Rajasthan, Haryana, UP, and Bihar were all substantial, but different in magnitude in each state. In Haryana and Rajasthan, the INC gained, while in UP, it was their regional-party partner. But in Madhya Pradesh (MP), the BJP lost neither vote share nor seats. MP is a large, relatively poor part of the Hindi heartland. But wealthy and diverse Delhi still gave the BJP all its seats. There is no clear pattern mapping from economic performance to electoral outcomes, though one can conjecture that voters have high expectations of economic gains, stoked by the promises of all political parties, and they make their choices based on the past as well as their judgements of what individual regional leaders can deliver in the future. State elections most depend on local calculations when held separately, but voters can favour regional leaders who have decent track records combined with possible clout with the ruling party at the Centre, when the timing coincides.

Much more detailed analyses are possible, and will be done quickly, revealing much more about what voters want and

why they made the choices they did: Maharashtra, Karnataka, and West Bengal each had their own story, for example. Meanwhile, it seems that the regional parties of Chandrababu Naidu in AP and Nitish Kumar in Bihar are the kingmakers. They will stay in the NDA, but use their current bargaining position to extract what they can get. This is not a bad thing. Both leaders have been relatively competent in pursuing development goals. If anything, their prominence offers some balance to the rule by the pair of BJP and corporate heavyweights. In many dimensions, India needs less centralisation, not more. There is already high inequality, both regionally and in measures of income and wealth. Economic opportunities are increasingly unequal, and still relatively scarce.

From this perspective, the financial markets may be getting it wrong. Betting on a strong, centralised, single-minded government appeals to investors, and sometimes, East Asian development has seemed to benefit from that political concentration. But such political structures can also favour corporate concentration and stifling of competition. On balance, if India needs creativity, openness, and experimentation to thrive economically, then this electoral outcome may be close to optimal. The fact that it could also help reverse other trends in India, with respect to the non-economic aspects of life that most people cherish, is a huge bonus, whether or not it is what motivated voters.

If India needs creativity, openness, and experimentation to thrive economically, then this electoral outcome may be close to optimal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Stock check

In 2024, the people have given an electoral verdict that will be remembered for a long time in Indian politics. At the same time, the stock market's sudden spurt and downfall are part and parcel of the trading system. One day, it turned out to be hugely profitable and the next day resulted in a free fall, taking out the profits gained on the previous day from the stock market. So, the

stockbrokers are cautious in their approach to selling or buying. One can never be sure whether stocks would go up or down. There have been speculations about a stock crash on the day of the election results, which are childish and nothing but a bid to grab headlines. India's equity market has entered the market cap of the top five economies of the world. There must be a thorough fact-check before alleging a stock scam. —CK Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

### Newly elected MPs must raise standards

It is only appropriate to appreciate the opposition's role and strength in Indian democracy. We have seen that if it takes up cudgels of marginal communities intelligently, it reflects in electoral results too. However, there is still a lot that has to be done by the opposition by rising above divisive politics of caste, religion, region, and language. The opposition should work

towards building consensus to bring new bills on public welfare in Parliament, and take part in discussions rather than succumb to the ruling party's antics of making them walk out. The entire nation is eagerly awaiting new standards of parliamentary democracy from the elected members. The ruling party has a greater responsibility indeed. —Brij Bhushan Goyal, Ludhiana

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INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Rammath Goenka

## TAMIL NADU POLITY IS BECOMING A FOUR-CORNERED RING

TAMIL Nadu has continued to be one of the most fertile grounds for the INDIA bloc. It scored a perfect 40 out of 40, with DMK pulling out a stellar performance. Numerous roadshows by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah to garner support for NDA could not halt the DMK march. Though the lotus failed to bloom in the state, the BJP can take heart in the fact that its vote share almost doubled to 11.26 per cent. On the other side, AIADMK, the state's principal opposition, slipped once again—the fourth time in a row—drawing a blank. It lost security deposits in seven of the 34 constituencies it contested, the worst Lok Sabha outing for the party since its inception in 1972. Its vote share dipped to 20.44 per cent. Without making much noise, Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), a Tamil nationalist party fighting all alone, doubled its vote share to 8.15 per cent and established itself as a formidable player.

The flop show by BJP and AIADMK has fuelled murmurs in favour of a rapprochement between the two former partners, though their top leaders have rejected any such possibility. BJP state chief K Annamalai questioned the proposition, saying his party faced an unprecedented rout in 2019 despite the alliance. The AIADMK, too, reiterated there is no change in its stand on keeping the BJP away. Annamalai does not seem to be a big fan of his party's proven strategy of hitching a ride with an established local party until it is time to fly on its own. The AIADMK is worried about the minority vote bank shifting to its Dravidian rival if it opts to ally with the saffron party. The AIADMK may have managed to hold on to its core vote bank despite a delayed campaign and not-so-popular candidates, but it has reasons to worry about the leak in anti-incumbency votes in favour of the BJP and NTK.

The DMK, led by MK Stalin, an anchor for the INDIA bloc, has continued its march with several social welfare measures winning hearts. The party also seems to have gained from the division of opposition votes. With the AIADMK and BJP, with their alliance partners in tow, and NTK promising a hard-fought, four-cornered contest in the future, elections in Tamil Nadu are likely to become more exciting.

## GROWTH RATE REVISION COMES WITH RAIN RIDER

THE RBI has kept the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the eighth consecutive time. In a 4-2 vote, the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to remain focused on the withdrawal of accommodation to ensure inflation progressively aligned with the target. There are clear signs of a divided MPC, with two members voting for a softening of stance as well as policy direction, as against only one dissenting member in past policy reviews. The MPC's cautious view to maintain status quo also comes when advanced nations' central banks, including the European Central Bank, have begun rate cuts. But putting speculation to rest, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has emphatically reiterated that India's monetary policy will be solely driven by domestic growth-inflation dynamics and not by the policies of advanced economies.

Citing resilience in domestic economic activity, the RBI revised its 2024-25 GDP forecast upwards by 0.20 percentage points to 7.2 per cent, while the retail inflation estimate was kept unchanged at 4.5 per cent. If the RBI's growth projections materialise, it will be the fourth successive year of 7-plus per cent growth. According to Das, multiple indicators such as core industries' growth, services sector buoyancy, and manufacturing are exhibiting strength, while revival in rural demand is showing promise. The central bank hopes the forecast of an above-normal monsoon will boost kharif production, and subsequently increase farm sector activity to strengthen rural demand. Seen another way, should monsoon play havoc, rural spending, which has been a drag on overall private consumption, may remain weak and dent the 2024-25 growth rate.

Although the headline inflation has moderated, upside risks persist—particularly in food inflation, which stood at 8.7 per cent in April. Food continues to drive up the inflation gauge. Given pulses and vegetables are still rising in double-digits, household budgets are under severe pressure. Though the RBI expects Q2 inflation at 3.8 per cent, the decline will be short-lived with inflation likely shooting past 4 per cent in Q3 and Q4. Analysts expect monetary easing in the coming quarters, supporting lower interest rates and credit demand, which can further fuel economic growth. But rate cuts will likely begin only in late 2024 or even early 2025. Uncertainty over global oil prices, continuing geopolitical conflicts, supply disruptions and commodity price volatility could make the last mile of disinflation protracted and arduous. The RBI must remain watchful.

### QUICK TAKE

#### REVOLUTIONISE WASTE MANAGEMENT

SCIENTISTS have been excited ever since Japanese researchers spotted bacteria that could 'eat' plastic. Microbiologist Kohei Oda's accidental 2001 discovery in a rubbish dump near Kyoto took another 15 years to mature. The field exploded in 2016 when the Japanese team published a paper on the enzyme the bacteria uses to metabolise PET, the plastic used to make drink bottles, food trays and textiles. Recently, a French biotech startup said it's on the verge of commercialising the idea by building bacteria farms. This can revolutionise plastic waste management. Like we saw with Covid vaccines, this is an idea that needs multilateral intervention for wide dissemination at minimal cost.

KARNATAKA was seen as one of the swing states in the Lok Sabha polls. Both the BJP and the Congress had invested a lot of time and effort to swing the state in their favour. The BJP even entered into an alliance with the JDS to ensure that the anti-Congress vote was not split. As the results came trickling in, it was clear that the Karnataka voter had ensured political takeaways for both the BJP-led alliance as well as the Congress. Neither could claim unequivocal support of the voter in the state.

It is interesting that the seat share of the three major players returned exactly to what they were in 2014. Then, too, the BJP had won 17 seats with the Congress securing nine and the JDS holding on to two. However, the similarity between 2014 and 2024 ends there. Much water has flown below the political bridge in the last decade. The impact of the BJP-JDS alliance, their campaign revolving around the charisma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the factionalism in the state unit of the BJP, the projection and visibility of implementation of the state government's guarantees, and of course the Prajwal Revanna embarrassment—all seem to have played a role in the results.

Save for the 2019 verdict, the scope of BJP victories over the last two decades has been in the 17 to 19 range. Similarly, save in 2019, the scope of Congress victories have been in the range of six to nine seats. The JDS has won seats in the range of two to three seats, as it has done this time too. The BJP victory has been at the lower end of the range and the Congress at the higher end.

The election in Karnataka was held in two phases, with 14 seats going to the polls in each phase. The first phase involved seats in the Old Mysore region, while the second phase covered Northern Karnataka. The first phase involved the traditional strongholds of the Congress and JDS, while the second phase covered the traditional strongholds of the BJP. Interestingly, the BJP-led alliance did well in the first phase—the BJP winning 10 seats, and the JDS and the Congress two each. On the other hand, the 14 seats in the second phase were evenly divided between the Congress and the BJP.

One notices a play of political musical chairs with the parties rotating the seats they won in 2019. The JDS lost the seat it previously had—

The state's three parties have the same tally in 2024 as a decade ago. But that's where the similarities end. A united Congress took on a fractious BJP this time

## WHY CHANGES IN KARNATAKA LED BACK TO 2014 TALLY

SANDEEP SHASTRI

Political scientist, National Coordinator of the Lokniti Network, and Director (academics) at the NITTE Education Trust



SOURAV ROY

Hassan—but wrested two seats, one from an independent and another that was held by the BJP but was transferred to it as part of the seat-sharing arrangement. The Congress lost the one seat it had won the last time—Bangalore Rural—but wrested one seat from the JDS and eight from the BJP. The BJP retained 16 of its seats and wrested one from the Congress while conceding nine to its opponents. It is also important to record that in 11 of the 17 victories of the BJP, the party had changed its candidates. All the nine new Congress MPs and a new JDS MP are entering the Lok Sabha for the first time. Thus, three-fourths—21 of

28—of the Karnataka MPs have been elected from constituencies that they won for the first time. They include three former chief ministers, three former Union ministers and a former speaker of the state assembly.

What were the factors that helped the BJP claim a majority of the seats, even though it saw a loss of one-third of its seats? Three factors worked in its favour. The fact that over the last three elections, the voter in the state has distinguished between assembly and Lok Sabha elections, and in the span of a year voted for one party in the assembly polls and another for the Lok Sabha is clear.

## THE FAST-CHANGING GLOBAL STANCE ON PALESTINIAN STATE

ON a single day, Spain, Norway and Ireland joined 143 of the 193 member-states of the United Nations in recognising a Palestinian state. Spain has said its recognition applies to a unified Palestinian state that includes the Gaza Strip and West Bank under the Palestinian Authority, with East Jerusalem as the capital. Slovenia, Malta and Belgium are expected to follow soon.

There are differences in the conditions of recognition, of course. Norway has decided to plant a full-blown embassy in Occupied Palestine, joining only five other countries to have done so. Most of the other Palestine-supportive nations are asking for a vaguely defined two-state solution, with Spain asking for a pre-1967 border for Palestine with the capital in East Jerusalem. No country, however, has opted for a one-state solution in which 5.3 million Palestinians and 9.1 million Israelis would agree to live in a society where they both have equal rights.

The current melee seems to have cloaked the emergence of a divisive new geopolitical alignment within the US-led 'Coalition of Common Challenges' centred on Israel-Gaza and Russia-Ukraine. Fifteen of the 32 nations in the US-led NATO have already recognised or are on the brink of recognising the Palestinian state. All the 27 European Union member-states are players in the international sanctions imposed against Russia after its war on Ukraine in February 2022. Türkiye is the only NATO member not on this list. And therein lies a tale: that of countries that are generally within the US's vast and heavy-handed sphere of influence who are charting their own foreign-policy ways—even at the cost of riling the US.

The possibility of their being concerned with the pecuniary downside of being attached to the US by the hip is high. The sanctions against Russia are malfunctioning. Russia remains a healthy economy, in spite of the fact that the combined GDP of NATO member states is about \$51 trillion, over 20 times Russia's GDP, and NATO member-states spent \$1.3 trillion on defence in 2023, 10 times what Russia spent. Despite the fluctuations in its costly war with Ukraine, the country's GDP grew by 2.8 per cent in 2024, despite, as NATO grieved, "Western sanctions intended to impede Moscow's war effort". Meanwhile, the Gaza war has kneecapped Israel. According to the IMF, Israel's real

GDP growth this fiscal will be 1.6 per cent, less than half the estimate of 3.3 per cent and down from 2.9 per cent in 2023. With a further slide envisaged ahead, it is imprudent for stable economies to be roped to a ship with a big hole in its hull, even if that ship is bolstered by a far huger ship bristling with enough treasure to stave off a meltdown.



Fifteen of the 32 nations in the US-led NATO have recognised or are on the brink of recognising a Palestinian state. Many nations within the US's broad sphere of influence are charting their own foreign policies, even at the cost of riling Washington

In addition to this, there also appear to be incorporeal elements at play in this new directionalism—a theory of political flexibility and adaptability to emergent conditions—away from US geopolitical centrality and what is called destinationism, an *idée fixe* about an ideal condition. And these elements include statal appropriateness. The growing global stance against Israel has to do with political morality—an overstretched idea, given the corruptness of politics in general, but gaining surprising currency—while the limited opposition to Russia is predicated on pure geopolitics. In short, an eclectic collection of countries around the world is seeing Russia as a nation they can do a moral-economic business with but Israel as too feral

to be in the comity of nations. This *nova geopolitica* is being resisted by the US's staunch allies (and colonial states), but with increasing reluctance. Britain has confessed that it is considering recognition of a Palestinian state, but France has said while the subject is not "taboo", it is not the time yet, while Germany is standing firm against the idea.

But consider this: many of the countries that still stand in alignment with the US's unflinching backing of Israel in its madness in Gaza have expressed their favour of the international rule of law implicit in the International Criminal Court's warrant of arrest against Benjamin Netanyahu. These countries include Germany, France, Switzerland, Denmark, Spain, France, Ireland, Norway, Australia, Canada, Chile, Belgium, Slovenia, South Africa, Colombia, the Maldives, Oman and Jordan. They have all stated they would be obligated to arrest Netanyahu were he to appear in their territories.

Japan, which never bucks the US in the comity of nations, said that it fully supports the ICC. Its foreign minister told his Israeli counterpart that the ICC order is legally binding and Japan calls for an immediate ceasefire. One might be inclined to disdain this as inconsequential. After all, how likely is Netanyahu to want to cross these unwelcome thresholds? The fact is, the man loves visiting Europe. He has done so at least 55 times in his more than 100 overseas visits since 2009. So this is, without a smidgen of a doubt, going to hurt. It will almost entirely obstruct him from his ability to schmooze with leaders he considers of maximum importance to his chokehold on Israel.

Meanwhile, aside from cranking out its usual—and, by now, disregarded and disesteemed—naysaying on the matter of holding Israel imputable, the US is playing softball, especially with European breakaways from its line. It is ignoring or floundering in the face of the fact that this newfangled exercise of pragmatic latitudinarianism indicates the future of geopolitics.

(Views are personal) (kajalbasu@gmail.com)

### MAILBAG

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#### Reservation hold-up

Ref: *Autonomy required for Delimitation Commission* (Jun 7). That delimitation has happened only four times since gaining independence speaks volumes about the under-attention it has suffered from. Unless the census gets underway, further progress for the Women's Reservation Bill will have to wait. Sachidananda Satpathy, Sambalpur

#### Prioritise census

The 84th amendment of the Constitution in 2002 was specifically made so as not to have delimitation of constituencies till the first census conducted after 2026. If the new government is keen on implementing delimitation, the postponed 2021 census must be organised on a priority basis. N Rama Rao, Chennai

#### North-South bridge

Ref: *Fortify fiscal federalism, heal north-south cleave* (Jun 7). The editorial has made an excellent point about financial powers and responsibilities for the interest of the whole nation. We hope Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu will help build a cordial bridge between the Centre and the states. V K Krishnan, Kumbakonam

#### Reassure investors

Ref: *Rahul seeks JPC probe into 'stock market scam'* (Jun 7). The oscillation of stock market indices to an unprecedented high degree of 4% immediately after poll results is validly open to doubt. An inquiry is warranted to expose unscrupulous practices, if any, and reassure investors. Ullattil Pakiteeri Raghunathan, Thrissur

#### Election costs

Rahul Gandhi won at both Wayanad in Kerala and Rae Bareilly in UP. Now it seems he is going to retain only Rae Bareilly. There would certainly be a by-election to Wayanad soon. Conducting another election at Wayanad will cost a lot, which is unfair to innocent taxpayers. If a leader contests from two constituencies and wins in both places, the cost of conducting another election in one constituency should be collected from that party. G Sathyanarayanan, Chennai

#### Criminal candidates

Ref: *46% of new MPs have criminal cases* (Jun 7). It is incomprehensible as to how the Election Commission accepted nominations of criminals. According to the report, most of these politicians have serious cases registered against them. The EC should view this very seriously and enact necessary stringent rules to stop the practice of allowing candidates with criminal backgrounds to contest polls. Gopalan Nair, Kootanad



## Carry Out Exorcism On Our Exit Polls

Transparency to reduce impact on investors

Exit polls pose several layers of complexity in India. The sheer size of the electorate pushes pollsters to increase their sample sizes, stretching resources of all players. Competition among media organisations doesn't allow polling agencies to pool resources, which could improve forecasting outcomes. Polling is also less reliable in multi-contests, a hallmark of Indian politics. It becomes more difficult to predict seats from vote shares when swings for and against aren't restricted to two options, like in US or British elections. A fallout of multi-party democracy is pre-poll alliances that cloud intertemporal comparisons.

Randomising samples among a heterogenous electorate needs extra care with mathematical modelling. These are the theoretical complications involved in our exit polls. The practical ones arise from the nature of India's politics. As a developing nation, policy decisions are usually without precedent, and pollsters usually have a higher rate of failure with referenda. It's trickier to capture the mood of sections of the electorate, say, pre- and post-imposition of the GST. These are nationwide policy changes with a range of geographical, economic and political effects. Local policy changes with similarly divergent impact sub-locally require fairly intricate calculations to arrive at apples-to-apples comparison. A more settled politics yields steadier political forecasting, a scenario beyond the reach of most developing economies.

Exit polls here need to be more transparent about their particular shortcomings. More transparency is required over methodologies and statistical modelling. Self-regulation is an obvious route. But if it fails, sectoral regulators may have to step in with standards of disclosure. So far, rules applying to exit polls are designed to reduce their impact on voter behaviour. More rules are needed to counteract their influence on investors. Burden of regulation should be spread wider. The key, however, is to make polling a more rigorous enterprise. India-specific forecasting risks have to be identified and addressed.



## How brands should inspire politicians to move away from 'divide n' drown' to 'unify n' thrive'

# One Nation, One Market



Shivaji Dasgupta

Every electoral analysis suggests that ignoring the socio-economic ambitions of the 'other' India was a key tipping point for the volatile June 4 scorecard. Perhaps political parties suffering from diminished returns or outright defeats should have learnt a few tricks from consumer brands who smartly chose 'unify' over 'divide' to extract value from 'every' India.

The early years of rural marketing were defined by divide and rule. Brand bosses simply ticked the boxes for 'second priority' customers. Stock-keeping units were diminished ruthlessly to ensure affordability, as if a CSR activity.

Equally condescendingly, van marketing became the desirable focus, with nautanki being the stock-in-trade to lure 'under-educated', sophisticated-challenged villagers. Much later, for brands like Lifebuoy, this became a prolific hunting ground for creativity awards, like the Handwashing Campaign, which won at the Cannes Advertising Festival.

Serious work was done for developmental initiatives, like family planning and allied 'hygiene' virtues. Tractors, fertilisers, torchlights, cement and bidis were deemed 'survival code', while indulgences were preserved for the cities. Washing machines were famously used in Punjab to make lassi, a throbbing 1990s urban legend that seemingly verified the unbridgeable differences.

Even after liberalisation, the pattern continued. Major consumer electronics giants made what would later become the 'Tata Nano' error in launching 'sympathetic' sub-



'Socio' agendas per se are meaningless without the 'economic' suffix, as every India is unified in aspirations



Know your customer, India

brands. Quite like the ₹1 lakh car in the 2010s, the message from the underserved customers at the turn of the century was clear—don't tamper with the pride of the poor. Some notables of the early 21st century include Chhota Coke, at a ₹ price point, which increased the brand's rural penetration from 9% to 25%.

There were also HUL Shakti Amma, to identify women in villages who can be turned into micro-entrepreneurs, and ITC's exceptional e-Choupal initiative providing online information to farmers. But these were still 1.0 approaches, exciting 'bottom of the pyramid' purists like C K Prahalad—more 'art cinema' than mainstream.

The real change happened with internet-enabled mobile telephony, clearly the greatest equaliser in history. From 'divide', the game changed to 'unify'. At a 442 mn user base (53%), rural India is a clear majority for internet penetration. India's e-commerce landscape is expected to touch \$800 bn by 2030, with over 60% of demand from tier-2 towns and rural India by 2026.

The JAM trinity has ensured that around 80% of rural adults have bank

accounts. The expressway network in India is growing exponentially, doubling to nearly 6,000 km since 2021. As is UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik), GoI's regional airport development programme, with 517 routes operating across 76 airports.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, released by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation (MoSPI), total migration in rural areas was 26.5%. Folks who go for work bring back their ambitions, rather vividly.

One very significant thing happened during this digital evolution. For the first time, urbanites and ruralites enjoyed a comparable adoption curve, unconnected to historical patterns. Whether Facebook, Instagram, Amazon or digital wallets, the entitled classes didn't enjoy the first-mover advantage, for long. The long-neglected 'others' played catch-up in fast-forward mode.

K-pop, led by South Korean boy band BTS, finds suitable currency in both Murshidabad and Hyderabad. Tik Tok was the first to invoke this inclusiveness. Self-expression has become the prerogative of every progressive citizen, as literacy hovers around the 80% mark.

Sensible marketers are using cultural nuances to personalise the proposition while sticking to a universal deli-

very value. Consumer companies across categories like Nestlé, Domino's, McDonald's and Lotus Herbals have cited higher traction for premium products in 'next rung' markets, leading much of the post-pandemic revival. Bollywood and the OTT cult are aiding the party, while IPL, plays a happy consort in tandem with copycat micro-leagues.

Top-class healthcare is moving away from hub-and-spoke to deeper connect, led by large national brands. Electric two-wheelers are being marketed to a functional yet awake mindset, while QSR chains and OYO Rooms are opening everywhere.

A pioneering collaboration between Common Services Centres (CSCs) and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) is set to empower millions of citizens residing in remote areas with access to essential goods and services. In May, UPI transactions stood at more than 14 bn, 'cashless' going increasingly rural. Those who are still 'dividing' the market are drowning, while the 'unify-



The real change happened with internet-enabled mobile telephony, the greatest equaliser in history. From 'divide', the game changed to 'unify'

ing' forces are winning.

Most certainly, political parties should be emulating those marketers who have already cracked New India. Tonarow-cast our population as a fundamental oneness, courtesy technology and aspiration. Then to engage experientially, with customer-centric regional empathy. 'Socio' agendas per se are meaningless without the 'economic' suffix, as every India is unified in aspirations.

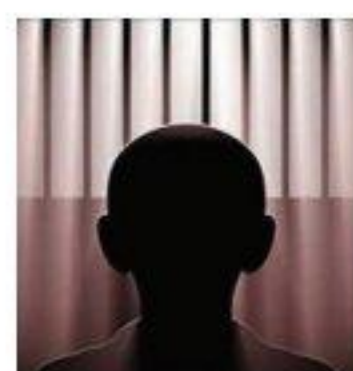
Unify and Thrive is the growth mantra of New India, demanding a departure from the 'Bharat vs India' binary. The winner does take it all, and this verdict is driven by an absolute majority, not by coalitions.

The writer is an autonomous brand consultant

## We, the Children, Must Receive Protection

A recent investigation has brought to light a troubling issue within India's prison system—a staggering number of wrongly incarcerated children are being held in adult prisons. A recent iProbono report, based on RTI responses, revealed that nearly 10,000 minors were wrongly locked up in adult prisons between Jan 2016 and Dec 2021. It is very likely that this number doesn't reveal the entire picture because information was only sought from central and district jails in 28 states and two UTs, and only half of the prisons responded. This is scandalous for a nation that purportedly invests its future in its young.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 states that placing a child in an adult prison is unlawful.



As per the Act, a child alleged to have committed an offence, or found guilty of an offence, is to be placed in an appropriate juvenile home—observation home, special home or a place of safety. Commenting on the JJ Act, the Supreme Court in 2005 had said, 'The Act is not only a beneficent legislation, but also a remedial one. The Act aims to grant the care, protection, and rehabilitation of a juvenile vis-a-vis adult criminals.' The first objective of the state is the promotion of the well-being of the juvenile, and the second is to bring about the principle of proportionality, by which proportionality of the reaction to the circumstances of both offender and offence, including the victim, should be safeguarded.

The state has failed to implement the law on all counts. Affixing responsibility is critical, as is improving the juvenile corrections system by creating a network of observation homes, special homes and places of safety. Efforts to increase awareness of rights and access to legal aid will help protect rights of such hapless young Indians.

## Personalising Palates on Cloud Nine



Mohammed Bhol

In the ever-evolving dining industry landscape, a new trend is swiftly emerging: cloud kitchens. These are virtual kitchens that operate only for delivery or takeout without needing a physical storefront.

These kitchens leverage technology to streamline operations, optimise efficiency and cater to the ever-changing demands of modern diners who crave convenience, variety and, above all, personalisation.

India's online food delivery market has seen tremendous growth. Valued at ₹10,97 bn in 2021, the market represented 10% of Indians using delivery apps and e-commerce websites. However, this is expected to reach ₹1,845.76 bn by end-2027, expanding at a CAGR of 30% between 2022 and 2027. This explosive growth highlights the increasing preference for online food delivery. Cloud kitchens stand out for:

► **Know thy customer** Harnessing

data and analytics to better understand customer behaviour and preferences. They can select menu items and offerings that appeal to their target demographic by using advanced algorithms and customer feedback systems, guaranteeing a smooth and enjoyable eating experience with every order.

► **Experiment, experiment** Breaking geographical barriers, enabling chefs and culinary experts to experiment with flavours and cuisines without the constraints of a physical location. This flexibility allows for greater innovation and creativity in menu development, as chefs can quickly test new concepts and dishes without the risk and expense of opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant.

► **Home and happy** Adapting to changing consumer tastes and preferences by operating in a virtual space, offering a dynamic and diverse at-home dining experience.

► **Quality has a quantity of its own** Scalability and cost-effectiveness are key advantages of cloud kitchens. By eliminating the need for expensive real estate and overhead costs associated with restaurants, cloud kitchens can operate with greater efficiency and profitability. This cost-saving benefit allows them to invest more resources into sourcing high-quality ingredients,



There's no kitchen without a fire

refining recipes and enhancing the dining experience for their customers.

Online ordering systems, kitchen automation and data analytics facilitated the expansion of cloud kitchens. Customers can place orders online and seamlessly use online ordering systems, while kitchen automation technologies save labour costs and improve consistency by streamlining food preparation procedures. Cloud kitchens leverage data analytics to obtain significant insights into client preferences and operational efficiencies, which facilitates ongoing innovation and improvement.

Online ordering platforms have changed how customers engage with restaurants. These platforms offer an intuitive user experience for selecting items, placing orders and completing payments—all from the comfort of a computer or smartphone.

Kitchen automation technology, such as automated cooking appliances, has further improved efficiency and uniformity of cloud kitchens. By reducing the need for physical effort, these technologies minimise the possibility of human error and cut down on operating expenses. Automated systems also ensure that food is always prepared with the same high standards, providing customers with a reliable and consistent dining experience.

Not only can fast-food or gourmet variants of meals like pizza and burgers be customised to fit individual preferences, but so can classic cuisines like biryani. Diners can choose from various gravies, adjust spice levels to their preference and select from a range of toppings to create a meal that perfectly matches their culinary desires.

Incorporating personalisation into traditional dishes like biryani reflects a broader cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity in food offerings. It acknowledges the varied tastes and dietary restrictions of a globalised customer base. This level of personalisation is revolutionising the food industry, allowing customers to control every aspect of their dining experience.

The writer is co-founder, House of Biryani

## JUST IN JEST

Like the kiss and the sigh, the slap is just a slap, with its own virtues

## Turn the Other Cheek For a Good Old OTS

Ah, that Indian cultural, civilisational phenomenon that goes by the descriptor, 'One Tight Slap'. OTS is a gesture so simple, yet so profound. It's the universal language of discontent, the hand's haiku, the palm's pushback. But could a slap be more than slapdash resort to violence? Without sounding cheeky, we ask: does OTS have ameliorative powers?

The slap, essentially, is a wake-up call. It's the tactile version of saying, 'Snap out of it!' as depicted in that popular meme of Batman giving Robin OTS to shake him out of complacency/stupidity. Then there's the more metaphorical slap of rejection—although in certain parts of India, it does take physical form. It's OTS that sends you questioning your penchant for shooting your mouth off. But it's also the slap that propels you forward, that turns 'You can't' into 'Watch me.' And let's not forget the slap of surprise—that accompanies plot twists, surprise parties and exit polls gone bonkers. So, next time you encounter a slap, don't recoil. Embrace it. Welcome it. Because every slap can be an opportunity for growth, a chance for improvement, a cosmic course correction. And, remember, it's not about the slap itself but how we react to it. So, take it on the cheek, turn the other one if you're feeling Christian-y. But never forget the ameliorative power of a good, one tight slap.

## The Startup Story's Just Starting



Amitabh Kant

Since Startup India launched in 2016, over 1,12,000 startups and 115-plus unicorns have emerged, valued at \$350 bn (2024). Yet, as the new government is sworn in, there's more to be done.

► **Look within** Self-regulation is critical for fostering a vibrant and creative environment among startups. Recent instances of corporate mismanagement, financial discrepancies and neglect of governance protocols have surfaced, raising concerns among investors and stakeholders.

It's essential for startups to adopt a self-regulating approach with a governance framework focused on fostering a culture of accountability, transparency and ethical conduct in business operations. Government or regulatory intervention resulting from consistent corporate governance lapses will stifle innovation in the long term.

Startup20 Engagement Group, formed under India's G20 presidency last year, put forward recommendations on corporate governance that startups would greatly benefit from adopting, in addition to complying with relevant regulations. Focusing on areas such as auditing, finance and financial management is a must for all founders.

► **Funds matter** Access to patient capital remains a critical challenge

for Indian startups, especially in deep tech sectors. India needs to create a substantial fund earmarked for deep tech startups, which will begin to bridge this gap. By providing long-term financial support through AIFs, this initiative will fuel innovation and facilitate sustainable growth in the deep tech startup ecosystem.

► **We need to increase domestic sources of capital for startups.** Foreign funding accounts for 75% of funds flowing into Indian startups. A large pool of funds exists domestically, and a portion can be channelled towards startups. Large institutions, such as insurance companies and pension funds, can set aside a portion of investible surpluses to invest in startups.

► **Family businesses and family offices** can take on the role of angel investors or provide seed funding.

Government may facilitate this process. Increased Indian funding must drive India's startup movement. With India's innovation and ingenuity, the

key lies in betting on ourselves. Combined with a drive for inclusivity, this approach will make India an architect of innovation.

► **Skilling it** India's premier educational institutions like IITs, IIMs, IIITs and engineering colleges must take a forward-looking view and design curricula to address India's acute shortage of new-age skills in areas such as product development, prompt engineers, data scientists and AI-ML experts, among others. The ascent of startup hubs like Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai, ranking 20th, 25th and 31st globally, respectively, underscores their significance in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, hosting 80% of India's startups.

India must expand startup ecosystems beyond these hubs, nurturing innovation centres in diverse locations. Offering opportunities within educational institutions and emerging startup cities for young entrepreneurs and skilled professionals is crucial for advancing India's entrepreneurial landscape.

► **Women power** Addressing gender disparity is imperative for fostering diversity and inclusivity in India's startup ecosystem. Only three of the top 20 VC firms have women partners. Promoting women's representation in leadership roles within firms is crucial for unlocking untapped talent and perspectives, ultimately driving innovation and growth in the startup sector.

This is not to say the entirety of action lies on the shoulders of the startup ecosystem. Government is playing an important role in creating an enabling

environment. National Quantum Mission, IndiaAI Mission and Semiconductor Mission, along with the recently announced ₹1 lakh crore fund for R&D, are a few examples. They need expeditious implementation.

With progressive government policies opening up space, geospatial and defence sectors, India's startup landscape has seen a surge in dynamic ventures. Leveraging India's cost advantage, these startups have the potential to propel the nation into a new era of space exploration, positioning India at the forefront of the global aerospace industry.

► **Think aur kuchh** Regulators will have to prepare themselves for technological upheaval and be ready to think of out-of-the-box solutions. We must strive to devise a vibrant ideas ecosystem in India that rewards innovation and makes India the world's innovation hub.

India's path to becoming the world's leading startup ecosystem by 2030 necessitates vibrant policies from the incoming government, fostering a thriving culture of innovation, and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. The country possesses the necessary elements for success. Existing startups have demonstrated impressive growth and resilience, offering valuable insights for aspiring entrepreneurs.

By embracing a forward-looking approach focused on long-term, sustainable and responsible growth, our startup ecosystem can emerge as a highly innovative, inclusive and sustainable ecosystem globally.

The writer is India's G20 sherpa



THE SPEAKING TREE

## Crossing the Ocean of Life

SANT RAJINDER SINGH

We lead our lives at the level of the senses in a dream-like state. All our precious time is spent gathering knowledge of the outer world. We take this world to be all there is, and focus our efforts on caring for body and mind's needs and desires.

Only through teachings of the saints and mystics do we realise that this world is not our true home, and we are not the body or the mind.

Our true essence is spirit or soul. The soul is a part of God that migrated away from God aeons ago and yearning to return to its Source. This human existence is the opportunity for our soul to find its way back. The journey to return home is the journey of the spirit, or what is known as the spiritual journey.

Meditation is the mechanism for embarking on and advancing on this journey. For success in this endeavour, we need more than self-help books or demonstrations of the meditation technique. We need to experience for ourselves the treasures that lie within. As we meditate, our soul connects with the love and light of God and is nourished, giving it strength.

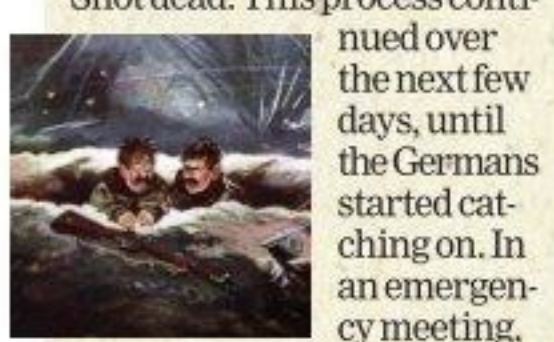
We must make a sincere and earnest effort, and meditating regularly and diligently so that we can take steady steps Godward. It's important to remember that life is short, and time does not wait for anyone. It is our responsibility to seize the breaths we have been given so that our soul can cross the great ocean of life and realise its oneness with God.

## ROLLING ON SATURDAY

### Breaking the Stalemate

In WWI, there was trench warfare, and things were reaching a stalemate. One day, an American came up with a plan. This private shared his plan to his trench mates, and they decided to try it out. The next day, an American soldier called out, 'Hans!' A German popped up and shouted back, 'Ja!' Boom, the German was shot dead.

The next day the Americans shouted again, 'Hans?!' 'Ja?!' Shot dead. This process continued over the next few days, until the Germans started catching on. In an emergency meeting,



they thought of using the same tactics as the Americans. So, a German asked, 'What is a popular American name?' 'John!' replied another.

The next day, a German shouted, 'John?!' An American called back, 'Is that you, Hans?!' 'Ja!' And that's how the Americans won WWI.

### Castaway Ahoy!

A cruise ship passes by a remote island in the Andamans, and all the passengers see a bearded man running around and waving his arms wildly. 'Captain,' one passenger asks, 'Who is that man over there?' 'I have no idea,' the captain replies, 'but he goes nuts every year when we pass him.'

### Chat Room

### Federalism and Consensus Back

Appropos 'Economy is the Real Politic' by Pranab Dhal Samanta (Jun 7), the verdict of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls is significant on many counts. It heralds a new beginning for cooperative federalism and consensual politics, which remained empty rhetoric and faced an existential threat from the 10-year BJP rule. Narendra Modi is poised to become PM for the third consecutive term, but he can hardly afford to take the NDA allies for granted, as the new government's survival hinges on their support. Legislation cannot be pushed through and passed without deliberations and debate in Parliament, as the Congress-led opposition alliance staged a spectacular comeback. The new dispensation will need to be more accommodating and display pragmatism.

M JEYARAM  
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu



## A thought for today

We've chosen the path to equality,  
don't let them turn us around

GERALDINE FERRARO

## The 13% Reality

It's a shame. Parliament's gender ratio just isn't changing

After 18 Lok Sabha elections, Parliament still has just 74 women MPs. Slice it, dice it any which way but the crawling pace at which women are fielded by political parties needs much more attention. That just 13% of parliamentarians are women, when, at 31.2cr, women make up 48% of the total 64.2cr voters, is the story of an inequality that seems almost unshakable. Less than 10% candidates were women, and 155 constituencies didn't have a single woman candidate. The largest party BJP has 32 women MPs. But at 69, barely 16% of its 441 candidates were women. It shows the



tortuous road ahead to achieve the 33% reservation – and even that ball has been kicked way down the road.

Two of six women Congress fielded in Karnataka have won. Delhi has two women among its seven MPs. Of Congress's total 41 women candidates, 13, or 34%, won. TMC showed the way – 11 of 12 women candidates were elected, 38% of TMC's 29 total MPs.

That should silence the lame lament of "where are the women?"

Where the needle's moved is that women MPs belong to various walks of life and age-groups, beyond family and tinsel town that have dominated the supply line of women netas so far. Career politicians were given more opportunity to contest, there are lawyers, academics and doctors in the mix. Winners include a 48-year-old Gujarati professor who crowdfunded her campaign; among youngest parliamentarians is a 27-year-old tribal woman who won on a general seat.

The onus is on political parties to increase women's political participation. And it is the Big Two that have to do much better – only 13% of MPs of both Congress and BJP are women. Get more women to jump the voters queue to be on the ballot.

## One Or Two Or None

Stop telling women to have kids like their grannies did

Birth rates have been falling across the rich, and even the not-so-rich, world. East to West many govts are trying to reverse this trend. Japan's govt is planning to launch a dating app this summer. The play feels desperate and is doomed to fail.

**Shake it off** | Putin whines about how Russian grandmothers and great-grandmothers used to have seven, eight, or even more children. Xi also talks up childbearing as a national virtue. These are countries where govt propaganda tolls heavy in society. And even here, it isn't working.

A Macron and a Trump also want to "demographically rearm" their countries. But men with such ideas couldn't stop the march of the nuclear family. Now women, in particular, are deciding to have fewer children, basis another monumental socio-economic shift. And neither a lecture on national duty nor a tax break can budge a deeply personal choice, with which one lives for life.

**You need to calm down** | While a *Handmaid's Tale* type of dystopia where a totalitarian govt enslaves women to bear children against their will isn't a real possibility, more extreme measures in undemocratic countries can't be ruled out. Yes, govts can't ignore momentous demographic shifts. But the solution shouldn't be a return to rigid family structures. An empowered pursuit of happiness is a hard-won freedom. Trying to reverse it is not worth the cost. Indeed, it is stupid. Because it ignores a logical solution – just liberalise immigration policies.

## Why We Just Can't Let Bygones Be Bygones

Feeling nostalgic? Be careful what you do with it

We're all prone to some sentimental waffling about the past, but once, this was considered an illness. *Nostalgia: A History of a Dangerous Emotion* by Agnes Arnold-Foster – is about the social, political, cultural and scientific life of a tricky emotion.

Nostalgia is not one, but many feelings; the Welsh hiraeth and the Portuguese saudade overlap with the idea of nostalgia, but have different implications.

To begin with, the idea of nostalgia was not seen as a warm, fuzzy feeling or an indulgence, but taken seriously as a disabling and killing disease. In 1688, a Swiss physician coined the term to describe the painful longing for home felt by soldiers or domestic workers. Medical professionals studied it extensively, casting it as an emotional pandemic, one that could be set off by certain songs or scents, one that tended to be especially acute in autumn. It could cause people to waste away in pining.

The pace of change in the 19th century, shifts in science, technology and industry, made nostalgia a widely recognisable condition. Then, it subtly shifted to connote time, rather than place. Capitalism, colonialism and international warfare were responsible for this refiguring. When enslaved people from Africa leapt overboard into the Atlantic Ocean, abolitionists said 'nostalgia' drove them to death. Indentured Indian workers were also said to be afflicted by nostalgia.

If nostalgia is homesickness, what is home? By the 20th century, nostalgia was no longer a sign of a refined sensibility, as millions of people moved or were forced to move

to new places. For an increasingly mobile global workforce, this emotion became mundane, normal.

Nostalgia is never a simple yearning for the past, or for a period of time we invest with meaning. It is a reconstruction of the past to align with our current values. Whether it is personal memory or collective remembering, it is an act of retrieval that selects some good bits and blurs the surroundings.

It is a reaction to the fear of actual or impending change, an urge to return to a place, a time past or a beloved person. While there have been times when it was a cause for worry, as in the 'nostalgia fad' of the 1970s in Europe and US, or the yearning for a lost empire or the rehabilitation of Nazi memorabilia, it is now seen with a benign lens.

It is no longer a threat to body and mind, but an exploitable state. The past has a powerful allure, it can make you buy stuff. Advertising has long cashed in on bygone eras. It can also shape politics. Nostalgia is cast as a dangerous emotion, exploited by right-wing forces to evoke a past glory. But the book points out that the left-wing is equally given to romantic visions of the past, whether it's the idea of the NHS in Britain or the Paris Commune. In Eastern Europe, the idea of 'ostalgie' is a strange backwards utopianism. It is also an insistence that the socialist past is not reducible to the popular narrative of personal misery, economic stagnation and political repression.

The problem is not collective nostalgia, but what we do with the emotion – it is dangerous only when it becomes a way for people to channel their hatred.

## mindfield

SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



## UP Vote For 'Deemokrasi'

• Why temple didn't work as a force multiplier for BJP • Why class & region were key voting determinants • Why checks & balances on power were a key voter concern

Indrajit Roy



Few things age as badly as hubris. UP, which brought BJP's juggernaut to a grinding halt, offers a vivid illustration. Faizabad, home of Ayodhya where Modi consecrated Ram's Temple barely six months ago, rejected BJP. Along with 36 of the state's 80 constituencies, Faizabad's residents – and each of its four divisions – chose SP, a party once known for taking a hard line against the Ram Jannabhoomi movement. Faizabad's residents did join in celebrations of the return of Ram Lalla, but they were not impressed with BJP's further attempts to politicise the deity.

**What happened around the temple** | The temple construction affected lives. Almost 5,000 houses and businesses were reportedly asked to vacate land without commensurate compensation. And these were the lucky ones: many could not claim compensation for their ancestral properties dating back centuries, as they did not have appropriate documentation. Some houses were prohibited from having balconies. For months, the city was a construction site. Residents say govt contractors flouted rules to cut corners. The widening of the Ram Path, which leads to the temple, resulted in the demolition of local shops and temples that gave Ayodhya its distinctive identity. Many of those less impacted by the temple construction were indifferent: okay, we got the temple, now what? BJP leadership had little time for UP's provincial Hindutva. For everyday Hinduism, for many ordinary UP-wallahs, 80% of whom are Hindu, the temple wasn't the key determinant in voting decision.

**Constitution's guarantees took centrestage** | Lallan Singh, Faizabad's BJP candidate, declared early in the campaign that if his party won over 400 seats, the party would secure the two-thirds majority required to amend the Constitution and dismantle affirmative actions for Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs. The Constitution and its guarantees quickly replaced "Modi ki guarantee" as the talking point for voters across the state. Building on UP's vernacular socialist tradition, INDIA allies assured audiences that a caste census would be

conducted and resources distributed accordingly. "Jiski jitni sankhyabharhi, utni uski hissedari," the phrase popularised by social justice activist Kanshiram, was revived. Modi's attempt to politically use this claim to fair distribution backfired as people in UP, as elsewhere, tuned in to the INDIA manifesto: saving the Constitution no longer sounded like abstract rhetoric, it was about defending real rights.

PDA – Pichada (backwards), Dalit and Alpasankhyak



Uday Deb

(Minorities) – social coalition, which INDIA nurtured, acquired cohesive purpose. Faizabad is again illustrative. Here INDIA's pro-OBC SP fielded Awadesh Prasad from the Dalit Pasi community. This helped dispel Dalit suspicions about the party. If Dalit candidates are usually fielded only from "reserved" constituencies, Prasad competed for – and won – a 'non-reserved' seat. In Kairana, SP's Iqra Jahan similarly won by breaching the Jat-Muslim polarisation that had affected the constituency since 2013: 30-year-old Jahan is a SOAS graduate who played a prominent role in the social media campaign against CAA.

**Regional variations in voting** | But UP's six regions voted very differently. The richer western UP and Braj returned a majority of NDA parliamentarians. The middling

Purvanchal and Awadh were a mixed bag, with both coalitions matched evenly. The poorer Bundelkhand and Rohilkhand were harshest on NDA and were swept by INDIA. Here agricultural distress played a pivotal role. It was in Lakhimpur Kheri, one of these constituencies, that a BJP legislator's son had allegedly mowed down protesting farmers. The legislator was shown the door this time. Prosperous urban constituencies – Varanasi, Lucknow, Kanpur – went entirely to BJP, suggesting the vote's class dimension. Rural and semi-rural UP went largely to INDIA, suggesting the resonance of its NYAY campaign, which spoke to the material struggles of some of the planet's poorest people.

**What mattered to voters** | Voter preferences in UP echo much of the rest of the country. The demand for the right to representation resonates with people right across the country. Stagnant wages, rising prices, and glaring inequality hit BJP. Many are also realising that Hindutva does not satisfy anyone's material, social or even spiritual needs: "Targeting Muslims neither creates jobs nor brings mental peace," a villager reasoned on the outskirts of Varanasi, which Modi won by a relatively slim margin.

Above all, voters in UP cared enough about a diverse and balanced democracy, and helped give INDIA a stronger opposition. They may well vote for BJP, led by Yogi Adityanath, in the next Vidhan Sabha elections, to re-elect the patron of popular Hinduism and provincial Hindutva. Many voters, however, understand that the improvements in law and order attributed to Yogi's administration have little to do with BJP at the Centre. Thus the "double engine sarkar" did not take off as a vehicle of development.

In strengthening *deemokrasi*, as it is locally known, UP voters didn't act as liberal individualists. But they know a thing or two about keeping power in check. After all, Krishna, the young cowherd who challenges the king of Mathura, is about championing checks on state power from below. The people of UP, who are often caricatured by the rich and the literate as bigoted bhakts, have delivered a key lesson for Indian democracy: no matter how powerful you are, you will be held to account.

The writer is Professor of Global Development Politics, University of York

## Can A Curveball Be Hit For A Six?

America's T20 World Cup victory over Pakistan is a milestone moment in US cricket history. Yes, it will take time & effort for Americans to fall in love with the game. But it will likely happen

Avijit Ghosh@timesgroup.com



Be it sports or politics, nothing's more uplifting and romantic than the triumph of an underdog. A Goliath's reverse fills us with a delightful disbelief, pleases the David in our hearts. That's why of all cricket triumphs stored in the rucksack of our memories, 1983 remains the fondest, because it was conjured against the seemingly invincible.

US too has experienced unexpected euphoria in sports, none bigger than what happened in Brazil's mining town of Belo Horizonte. With a ragtag team that included a postman, a mill worker and a 'funeral director', the Americans astonished England 1-0 in the 1950 football World Cup. "At the final whistle, newspapers burned on the terraces, a funeral pyre for England, and spectators rushed on to the pitch to carry the brave American team out shoulder-high," wrote football guru Brian Glanville in *The Story of the World Cup*.

Uncle Sam's nerve-jangling triumph over Pakistan in the T20 World Cup in Dallas on Thursday is cricket's answer to that jubilant moment in US sporting history. For captain Monank Patel and his multi-racial merry lads, it was an away game at home; the stands packed with noisy non-resident Pakistanis. Pakistan ranks No. 6 to US 18 in T20. But the difference in status doesn't reveal the true gap in pedigree and quality of the two sides. US played its first international cricket match against Canada in 1844. But in baseball country, the willow never struck deep roots. In the hierarchy of cricket-playing countries, it remained a nobody. The victory against Pakistan, which makes them a genuine contender for a Super Eight spot, seems to be an announcement of intent: we want to be somebody.

The triumph has found sweet echoes across India because players of Indian-origin were fundamental in its construction. Skipper Monank Patel, a wicket-keeper batter who earned Man of the Match with a half century,

was born in India's milk capital, Anand. Mumbai-born pacer Saurabh Netravalkar, the bowler of the day along with N Kenjige, is a software engineer in San Francisco. Netravalkar was India's highest wicket-taker in the U-19 World Cup in 2010 but had given up the game for a career in computers. But the dream and the desire lingered. Sometimes he would drive six hours to Los Angeles to play a game on Saturday, then drive back through the night to play another game in San Francisco on Sunday. Netravalkar's inspirational story is emblematic of the Indian community in US which the book, *The Other One Per Cent* by Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur and Nirvikar Singh, maps and captures in detail.

Two other Indian players deserve a larger mention. One is Nitish Kumar, who like his namesake Bihar politician, is adept at changing sides. The Ontario-born represented Canada earlier. Like the master JDU politico in the Lok Sabha polls, his intervention was small but crucial to the eventual outcome. Kumar wrenched out a desperate last-ball boundary off Mohammad Amir, stretching the game to Super Over.

Mumbai-born Harmeet Singh's story is about life and second chances. The left-arm spinner was stellar in India's 2012 U-19 World Cup triumph. The languid grace of his bowling action reminded Ian Chappell of Bishan Singh Bedi. But Singh lost his way, once quite literally, driving a car into Andheri railway platform. Other controversies ensued

his career went southwards and life sideways. He found redemption in Dallas.

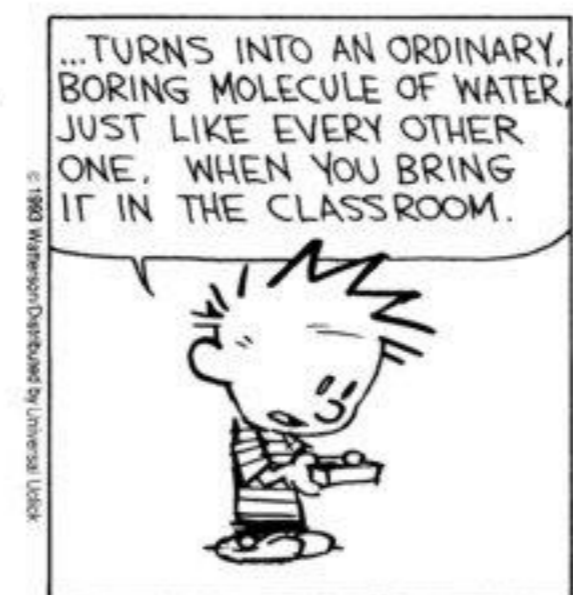
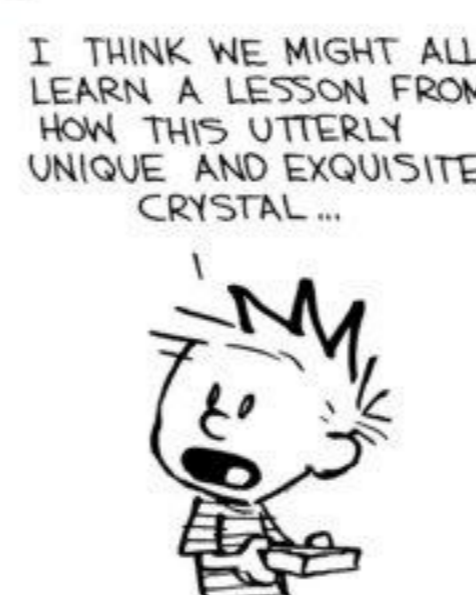
The host's improbable triumph has lit up a tournament that had prompted justifiable criticism about the vicious pitch in New York where balls exploded like popcorn in heat. And while that issue might resurface when India faces off with familiar foes Pakistan on the same ground on Sunday, US can justifiably celebrate the moment even though, as *New York Times* reported, "many Americans were oblivious to the magnitude of their victory in Dallas".

Sport is forever in search of new markets. In 1994, the football World Cup hosted by US helped Major League Soccer (MLS) find its feet there. Since then, barring 2018, the Stars and Stripes have always fluttered in World Cups. Cricket seems to be following a similar path. The glitzy glam superhit first edition of Major League Cricket (MLC), the US equivalent of IPL, was staged last July, with Nicholas Pooran-led MI New York taking the trophy. The second season is scheduled next month. About 200,000 play cricket in about 400 local leagues in US. But even now the home page of Cricket USA website has a section explaining the game to the curious visitor.

The truth is eight of the 15 players in the US squad have early or familial roots in India; others coming from Pakistan, the West Indies, South Africa and New Zealand. Twelve are 30-plus in age; the remaining three are 29. It remains to be seen how the victories over Pakistan and Canada – and against Bangladesh before the tournament – breed active interest in the game. The journey will take long, but the road seems right.



## Calvin &amp; Hobbes



## Sacredspace



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

John Ruskin

## There Are New Possibilities In Victory And Defeat

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Swami Vivekananda famously said, "You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita." That line is a wonderful reminder to the self when we start taking life too seriously.

When you pray or read scripture, you can think of many other things, but when you play a sport, you must be single-minded. There is no room for half-heartedness. You have to play as if your life depended on it. About five billion people watched the World Cup football tournament in 2022. We were collectively glued to our TV screens not just because of the skill involved but because someone was kicking the ball as if his life depended on it. That intensity of involvement, which pushes human beings beyond their limits, makes the whole world sit up and watch.

However, the fundamental premise of any sport is this: you must have the fire of wanting to win but also the balance to see that if you lose, it's okay. You never play a game to lose. But if you do lose, it is still alright with you. If you maintain this balance within you, you are a sportsman.

This is a perfect metaphor for life. As a high-voltage election reached its culmination and the results were announced, it was time for us to take our inspiration from the playing field. Many have forgotten what it means to live in a modern-day democracy. In this system, we have collectively decided to choose our leaders through the power of the ballot box. Maybe somebody I don't like has just been elected, but I still have to bow down and accept the

verdict because the wonderful gift of democracy is that we have found a way of transferring power non-violently.

In the past, much blood was spilled when one regime gave way to another. Do we want to return to a monarchic or theocratic or feudal setup? If we choose democracy, it is time to abandon our tribal mindset. Above all, the vile speech and gang warfare on social media where people endlessly spew toxicity at each other should come to a halt. It is time to stop being sore losers or boastful winners.

Trying to paint the other as evil just because the verdict is not to our liking is juvenile. A mature democracy has to outgrow such pettiness. Does this mean that we have lost our right to speak or protest? No. A democracy means we retain our right to

disagree, dialogue and debate, but it is important not to succumb to hatred.

For the victor, the sweetness of triumph should not turn into the lethargy of complacency. For the loser, the bitterness of defeat should not turn into despair. Victory should be the stepping stone for heightened levels of performance. Defeat should lead to an honest evaluation of what was done and what could be improved.

Ultimately, there is no such thing as triumph or loss. As humans, we come into life with nothing and go with nothing. In a limited context, some win and some lose. But to rise beyond limited notions of victory and defeat is the whole point of the game of life. It is also the essence of every spiritual process.

Every event in life is the birth of a new experience and a new possibility. Once we truly see and accept that, our life finds its fullest blossoming.



THE SPEAKING TREE



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Balancing act

Regional allies driving a hard bargain will test Modi's skills in running a coalition Govt like never before

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has emerged as the most potent coalition to form the next Government under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Central to its strength is the support of regional parties for maintaining a parliamentary majority. Nevertheless, the hard bargaining by these allies, though politically essential for them, affects the Government's policy formulation exercise and the nation's progress. The NDA's regional allies, such as the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP, Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) and others, are engaging in intense negotiations to secure their interests. The JD(U) has already demanded a special status for Bihar while Naidu has a long list of demands. Coalition Governments, by their very nature, are unstable and we have had a long history of coalitions that failed to complete their term. Regional parties serve as the voice of their respective States, advocating for localised interests that might otherwise be overlooked in the Union



Government's broader agenda. This ensures a more inclusive approach to governance, reflecting the diverse needs and aspirations of different parts of the country. However, this hard bargaining can have several negative implications for policy making. The need to accommodate the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, demands of various regional partners can lead to fragmented policies. Instead of a coherent national strategy, policies may become a patchwork of compromises, weakening their overall impact. Prolonged negotiations and the need to achieve consensus among coalition partners can slow down the decision-making process.

No doubt coalition Governments have played a significant role in governance, especially in the 1990s. One of the most notable coalition Governments was led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who not only faced numerous challenges but also set a precedent for future coalition politics in India. Vajpayee's Government was an alliance of more than 20 parties, each with its agenda and demands. Managing such a diverse coalition required significant diplomatic skill and often led to compromises on policy decisions. Following the nuclear tests, India faced international sanctions, which posed a significant challenge to the economy. The Government had to navigate these sanctions while continuing to pursue economic growth and development. The Kargil conflict with Pakistan in 1999 was another major challenge for the Vajpayee Government. The conflict tested the Government's ability to manage national security issues while maintaining internal political stability. The Government's response to the 2002 riots was seen as inadequate by many, raising concerns about the coalition's ability to address communal harmony and human rights issues. It was only Vajpayee's leadership and statesmanship that pulled off a near-impossible feat and completed full term. It remains to be seen if Modi can do the same.

### PICTALK



A parachutist lands ahead of the Canadian ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the World War II D-Day

# Punjab quietly yields surprising results



SUKHDEV SINGH

Punjab's voters remained uncharacteristically silent, leaving political parties hopeful yet uncertain about the election outcome, which ultimately did not favour any single party



The general parliamentary Lok Sabha elections 2024 have been held smoothly in Punjab without any noticeable wave or enthusiasm in favour of any political party. There has been a mysterious silence among the people raising unpredictability and allowing every party to have high hopes on the one side but hold fear in their hearts. Most political parties except the CPI-CPIM had fielded their candidates in every constituency claiming for their victory on all the thirteen seats. The voting has been lower than in the previous elections and the current national voting percentage. There could not be alliances between the political parties because of their illusory hopes for their victory independently which pushed them into the game of engineering party-switch of the leaders. The long-time allies Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) fell apart and fielded independent candidates with the BJP importing its candidates from the state Congress top brass and Aam Admi Party (AAP) and Indian National Congress (INC), who are in alliance at the national level, could not agree on seat sharing and fielded their candidates in each constituency. Other political parties such as Bahujan Samaj

Party (BSP) and Akali Dal (Maan), CPI-CPIM had also fielded their candidates. But the voters surprised most of them by electing seven congresses, three AAP, one SAD and two independent raw candidates. The ruling party in the state, the AAP, has won only three seats with a vote share of 26.02%, reduced from 42% in 2022 against its claim for all the thirteen in the state; it has managed to lead only in 32 assembly segments against its victory in 92 assembly constituencies in 2022 state assembly elections. Some of its candidates holding state government ministerial portfolios have trailed behind opponents in their assembly segments. All this is a matter of serious concern for the AAP to introspect. The ruling party in the Centre, the BJP, has not been able to win any seats though it was quite hopeful for their victory with a team of the top brass of the state Congress 'taken over' by it on its side. Of course, to its satisfaction, it has succeeded in raising its vote bank share to 18.56% and leading in 23 assembly segments. The Congress has won 7 seats and has gained the lead in 38 assembly segments against its victory only in 18 assembly



THE VOTERS OF PUNJAB HAVE SPELT OUT THAT ALTHOUGH THEY MAINTAIN THEIR IDENTITIES, THEIR POLITICAL AND INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR IS PREDOMINANTLY SECULAR AND PREJUDICE-FREE

constituencies in 2022. It has succeeded in managing the vote share of 26.3%, winning seven out of 13 seats in this election despite the unexpected defection by almost all its senior leaders to the BJP and other parties. The two independent candidates who were neither very big leaders nor supported by any political party, have won by defeating the established leaders of established political parties by sizable margins. The voters of Punjab have spelt out that although they maintain their identities, their political and interpersonal behaviour is predominantly secular and prejudice-free. Although it is a fact that Punjab's population is majority Sikh and rural, its other population being 40% Hindu, one-third Dalit and other horizontal and social categories, it has distributed its representation neither based on religion, nor region and social hierarchies, but based on local issues of development. Secondly, in the absence of sound trust in the political class, its choice reflects a rejection of the other 'not chosen', who is or has been in power, rather than the choice itself. The voters in Punjab have painted their character and power by maintaining

silence before voting but exercising their power independently and wisely on the day of voting. They have rejected the dominant discourses of religion, caste and urban/rural polarization, the discourse of victimization justifying non-performance. They have voted for Congress on its promise of MSP for agricultural produce, a promise to pull agriculture out of distress since it is agriculture that is the spleen of Punjab's economy so far. Whether a Hindu or a Sikh, whether an urban or a rural person, whether an upper caste or a Dalit-everybody, as a part of their collective consciousness, understands the relevance of agriculture in the state. It has chosen independent candidates exercising their rejection of all others and expressing their sympathy for their 'condition' against the state power. Thus, their victory can be attributed to local sentiments and political dynamics rather than any other radical ideology influencing voter preferences. In fact, for them, it would be a difficult choice between the Congress and the BJP.

(The writer is a retired Professor from Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MORE VOTERS BUT LOWER ENGAGEMENT

Madam — Apropos the news story "More voters but lower turnout in 2024, confirms EC," published on June 7, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, it's heartening to see the Election Commission lifting the model code of conduct following the announcement of election results and the beginning of government formation. The overall voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was 65.79 per cent, which, although slightly lower than 2019's 67.40 per cent, still indicates robust democratic engagement. Notably, the data reveal a significant surge in women voter participation, with a turnout of 64.72 per cent compared to men's 63.11 per cent. This trend is particularly pronounced in states like Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha, where women's turnout surpassed men's by notable margins. This increase in female voter engagement is a positive sign of growing political awareness and empowerment among women, which can lead to more inclusive governance. The turnout of the third gender, although low at 22.33 per cent, suggests there is still work to be done to ensure their full participation in the democratic process. Overall, these elections highlight the evolving dynamics of voter engagement in India, reflecting a more diverse and representative electorate.

Ananya Sharma | Nashik

### MARKETS BOUNCE BACK

Madam — Apropos the news story "Markets extend winning momentum to 2nd day running," published on June 7, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, it's fascinating to see how the market's optimism can be so closely tied to political stability. The recent surge in the Sensex and Nifty, following the unanimous election of Narendra Modi as the leader of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), underscores the confidence that investors place in political continuity and leadership. The 30-share BSE

### Taiwan greets Modi, China fumes



Regarding the news story "China lodges protest with India over PM Modi's response to Taiwan President Lai's greetings on his poll victory," published on June 7, here are my thoughts. As a regular newspaper reader, the recent diplomatic spat between China and India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media interaction with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te is quite intriguing. Modi's expression of enthusiasm

for strengthening ties with Taiwan, following Lai's congratulatory message, has irked China, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province. China's swift protest underscores its sensitivity to any international recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty. The geopolitical chessboard in the Indo-Pacific region is complex and Modi's statement hints at India's potential shift towards deeper engagement with Taiwan, especially in trade and technology. This could be a strategic move to counterbalance China's growing influence. However, it also risks straining India-China relations, which have already been tense. China's insistence on the One China policy and its warning against Taiwan's "political calculations" highlight the delicate nature of this issue. As an observer, I see this as a significant moment that could reshape regional alliances and economic partnerships in the coming years.

Kabir Patel | Rajkot

Sensex's impressive jump to 75,078.70 points and the NSE Nifty climbing to 22,799.50 signal a strong market reaction to Modi's impending third term as Prime Minister. The gains in companies like NTPC, State Bank of India and Tata Steel reflect a broader bullish sentiment, though some laggards like Hindustan Unilever and Nestle temper the overall enthusiasm. It's noteworthy that despite the positive domestic sentiment, Foreign Institutional Investors are still cautious, selling off equities amid high valuations in India compared to Chinese stocks. This juxtaposition of political stability and cautious foreign investment paints a complex but intriguing picture of the current market dynamics.

Ishani Malhotra | Gwalior

### EMBRACING SOCIAL WORK

Madam — Regarding the news story "Rejuvenating Indian social work, culturally," published on June 7, here are my thoughts. Every profession is unique and essential for societal growth and develop-

ment. Social work, however, carries an added responsibility - to serve people and communities, striving to uplift them. It involves working with people and their surroundings, considering external and internal factors simultaneously. Social work is not just about empathising with others' circumstances but also about reflecting on potential solutions and alternatives. In today's India, social work as a profession is emerging as one of the crucial sectors. Over the last decade, this profession has expanded its horizon and established itself across the country. It is encouraging to see a growing number of young professionals choosing this career path. India needs more such young minds and professionals who can work on the ground and formulate policies to address critical societal issues. However, it is essential to question whether we are truly fulfilling this need.

Ishita Verma | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Overcoming child sexual abuse stigma

The profound and lasting impacts of child sexual abuse necessitate dismantling systemic barriers and fostering supportive environments



SMITA BHARTI

According to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 64,469 victims were reported in 2022 under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Despite the alarming prevalence of reported cases of Child Sexual Abuse, it remains hidden behind layers of denial, silence, stigma and shame as the issue is deeply rooted in societal structures, such as patriarchy and gender bias, which often prioritize family honour and silence over confronting abuse. Research suggests that 90 per cent of the perpetrators are known to the child, such as family members, trusted neighbours, or teachers. These individuals often hold positions of trust and responsibility, making it even more challenging to address the issue. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a serious issue that affects many individuals. Research highlights the profound and lasting impacts of CSA, including detrimental effects on mental health, emotional stability and social functioning, which can persist into



adulthood if not properly addressed. Addressing child sexual abuse requires dismantling these systemic barriers and promoting an open, supportive environment that prioritizes the well-being and rights of children.

### Recognizing the Signs of Sexual Abuse:

Understanding the signs that a child may have been subjected to sexual abuse is the first step in addressing this grave issue. Sudden changes in behaviour can be indicative of underlying abuse. Children may exhibit a range of physical and emotional behavioural changes like:  
\*Unexplained injuries or bruises in the genital or anal area.  
\*Sudden changes in behaviour such as withdrawal, unusually quietness, aggression, or depression.  
\*Nightmares or bedwetting.  
\*Displaying knowledge or interest in sexual acts beyond

their age.  
\*Avoidance of specific people or places.  
\*Sudden decline in academic performance.  
These signs may vary depending on the child's age, personality and the nature of the abuse. It's essential to be alert to these changes and maintain open communication with a child, create a safe environment for disclosure and take any disclosure seriously.  
**Preventing The Abuse:**  
Preventing child sexual abuse (CSA) demands a collective effort where the responsibility doesn't solely fall on children. There are steps parents, caregivers and trusted adults can take to minimize the risk and empower their children in navigating this complex world. The stigma and shame attached to sex and sexuality often translate into not having open conversations with children and giving them the appropriate vocabulary to express such concerns. On one hand, it makes it difficult for them to articulate if they've experienced abuse and on the other it hinders prevention. It is important to start conver-

sations about body autonomy, boundaries and consent from an early age. Teaching children the proper names for their body parts and emphasizing the power of saying "no" to any touch that feels uncomfortable or unwanted is important. However, the onus of preventing CSA cannot and should not solely rest on the child. Building a foundation of open communication is equally essential from the parents' side. This is possible only when adults create a safe and nurturing environment where a child feels comfortable expressing any concerns or discomfort they may have. Adults must take responsibility for creating safe spaces and intervening when they suspect abuse may be occurring. Child sexual abuse shatters a child's sense of safety and trust. It can leave them feeling confused, ashamed and isolated. As a caregiver, the first step is to acknowledge the gravity of the situation. Recognising the abuse and validating their experience is crucial.  
(The writer is executive director, Sakshi - a rights-based NGO; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## COALITION GOVERNMENT AND DIPLOMACY

Recalibration of diplomatic priorities due to coalition compulsions is on the cards



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India has voted and the verdict is out. It has brought back the era of coalition governments, the pressures of alliance partners weighing in on key policy matters, back to India's polity after a decade. The era of robust, single-source decisions is most likely over and may not return for a decade. The voter's verdict will have long-reaching impact on India's foreign policy and diplomatic trajectory for a long time to come. The relations with the US which were nurtured by the Modi Government in the past decade and which have reached a certain stable platform, are unlikely to be disturbed. The technology partnership added to the existing trade partnership, has bipartisan support in Washington. This means in the eventuality of Trump returning to in the US, towards the year's end, it won't be a spoiler in India US bilateral relationship. India and the US have in the past, shown enough maturity in discussing sensitive issues, such as the alleged hit plan on India-designated terrorist G S Pannun, behind closed doors. Most US businesses operating in India may be relieved, with a coalition verdict, as it could, take away many concerns (expressed by their US-based colleagues behind closed doors) regarding the overreach by a PM, with a brute majority. They may be relieved to find several pockets of influence, with more alliance partners coming in the Government, weighing on crucial policy decisions. The US and global capital would feel safe in India as a market, as long as it is business as usual, no surprise protectionist regulations and there is a growth market. In a coalition government, with several checks and balances, the scope for unilateral decisions, is less likely. Also, as many experts mentioned to this author, the US would be happy to have a peaceful democratic ally in Asia, to counter



an aggressive China in the Indo-Pacific. Joint exercises, with Indian defence forces, sharing of crucial intelligence of strategic importance (even though India is not part of the five eyes network), sharing and empowering India on semiconductors, close co-creation of standards and regulations on critical and emerging technologies such as AI are not likely to be impacted. India and the US on plurilateral platforms such as QUAD, the I2U2 and on wider UN etc would not be impacted. However, pompous, state visits and hosting each other's leaders on a grand scale (reference Trump in 2019 and Indian PM state visit to the US in 2023) could move to more sober, away from the camera, diplomatic conversations. Despite an occasional criticism of India, by mainly US think tanks and policy experts, primarily on human rights, polarising speeches, freedom of speech and religion in India etc, there is bipartisan support for India and deep relations between the two nations and it is not likely to change. If the India-US civil nuclear deal proved to be the cause of a weak coalition government (due to the withdrawal of support by a crucial ally from the UPA government 1.0), there exist no such threats to the bilateral relationship currently. Even with a coalition Indian government at the centre. Washington and New Delhi have successfully managed to educate their senior lawmakers/politicians/think tanks/experts on either side of the aisle, regarding the strategic importance of the relationship. President Biden, even though faces occasional criticism from his party colleagues or pressure groups, regarding being a bit too lenient approach towards India on several issues, he understands the relevance of this relationship in the current context. There is likely to be a new Indian ambassador to the US (the former ambassador post-retirement unsuccessfully contested elections in 2024) in the next few months. The Indian ambassador to the US does most of the heavy lifting on building consensus across the aisle on several mutual bilateral issues. The choice of the next ambassador would be a space to watch out for.

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

## Indian electorate ushers in a new political era



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

By rejecting divisive politics and reducing the BJP's dominance, voters have endorsed a new era of coalition politics favouring regional and smaller parties

The outcomes of the recently concluded Indian Lok Sabha elections signal promise for the region, prompting nations to reconsider and reassess their democratic political frameworks. In a resounding declaration of democracy's resilience, the once seemingly invincible fortress of the Modi-Ka Parivar lies shattered. The echoes of this strong message from the public reverberate louder than the emotional sensationalism, resonating with the collective voice of a nation that has spoken unequivocally for the power of balance. Despite the relentless onslaught of propaganda and fervent efforts to manufacture public opinion, the Indian electorate has delivered a decisive blow, reclaiming their power and rejecting the facade of religious fervour masquerading as governance. Narendra Modi, the erstwhile political juggernaut, now stands at the precipice of his last tenure, his aspirations of perpetual rule dashed against the rocks of reality. His grandiose ambitions of global dominion and spiritual leadership lie in tatters, mere relics of a bygone era marked by hubris and delusion.

The BJP's significant loss, laid bare in the aftermath of the election, paints a stark portrait of defeat. With 92 seats lost out of their previous 303, including once impregnable strongholds in rural heartlands and urban bastions like Mumbai, the party finds itself relegated to the sidelines of political discourse. The myth of invincibility shattered, the BJP stands exposed, its veneer of infallibility stripped away to reveal the inherent flaws and fallacies of its governance model. The result also exposes the impact of heavy spending on AI-driven social media manipulation. Government agencies outspent political parties on Google ads leading up to India's national elections, with the BJP ranking second. This stark contrast in spending highlights the influence of advertising in shaping democratic norms, serving as a stark reminder of democracy's vulnerability to manipulation.

Yet amidst the debris of defeat lies the triumph of democracy. The people have spoken, their voices resonating with clarity and conviction, reaffirming their allegiance not to religious ideologies or cults of personality, but to the principles of democracy and secular governance. This electoral upheaval serves as a clarion call for change, a witness to the indomitable spirit of a nation that refuses to be swayed by divisive verbiage or empty promises.

As the dust settles on the frontline of Indian politics, the narrative of triumph and victory spun by the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi stands starkly contrasted against the reality of their electoral performance. Despite Modi's impassioned spiel and grandiose claims of India's newfound global prominence, the truth remains irrefutable: the BJP's grip on power has weakened, its once impregnable fortress breached by the resolute will of the Indian electorate. The BJP's electoral arithmetic, touted as proof of its enduring popularity, belies a deeper truth of diminishing returns and waning support. While the party managed to retain a significant portion of its 2019 tally, the loss of 92 seats, coupled with the failure to secure the predicted landslide victory, exposes the chinks in its armour and the vulnerabilities lurking beneath the



THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN, THEIR VOICES RESONATING WITH CLARITY AND CONVICTION, REAFFIRMING THEIR ALLEGIANCE NOT TO RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES OR CULTS OF PERSONALITY, BUT TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND SECULAR GOVERNANCE

surface of its facade. Modi's campaign discourse has taken a sharp turn towards foreign affairs and diplomacy, perhaps as a tactic to deflect attention from his administration's domestic shortcomings. By emphasizing India's global ascendancy and economic strength, Modi aims to eclipse the harsh realities of mounting unemployment, economic disparity and social turmoil within the nation. Amidst his grandiose assertions of India's international accomplishments, including hosting global summits and economic growth, Modi's narrative conveniently obscures governance failures and policy deficiencies. Despite his celebrations of India's elevated global standing, the everyday struggles of citizens remain overshadowed by political oratory, highlighting a growing disparity between political narratives and lived experiences.

Facing electoral setbacks and a reduced mandate, Modi and the BJP confront a populace increasingly demanding accountability and change. The rejection of empty promises signals a call for transparent, people-centric governance, underscoring the need for a political shift away from complacency towards accountability. Modi's foreign policy rhetoric aligns with his domestic agenda, framing a narrative of "us-vs.-them" and emphasizing resolve against perceived threats like Pakistan and China, particularly in combating terrorism. Despite clashes with Pakistan and the 2020 China confrontation showcased as symbols of national strength, critics challenge Modi's response to Chinese aggression, while BJP members rally behind his assertive stance. Yet, beneath this facade, lie intricate geopolitical complexities and diplomatic hurdles. India's navigation among

global powers demands a nuanced approach, prioritizing national interests amidst turbulent international dynamics. Accusations against the BJP for prioritising foreign affairs over domestic concerns challenge Modi's nationalist narrative, despite his claims of India's global ascendancy. Opposition voices condemn the party's erosion of democratic norms, yet Modi's firm stance resonates with many voters, reflecting a desire for a stronger international presence. However, mounting criticism of the BJP's handling of issues like inflation and unemployment casts doubt on its commitment to democracy. Recent electoral setbacks, notably in Uttar Pradesh, reveal deep-seated discontent, with opposition framing the BJP's governance as a threat to constitutional rights, leading to disillusionment among both critics and former supporters.

The symbolism of Ayodhya, from the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 to the consecration of the Ram temple in 2021, epitomizes the BJP's journey to power and its subsequent challenges. While Modi's imprint on Varanasi is undeniable, with infrastructure development projects transforming the city's landscape, the cost of progress has been the erosion of its unique identity, lamented by many locals. The electoral panorama in Uttar Pradesh unveils a complex interplay of shifting loyalties and deep-rooted grievances, particularly within marginalized communities such as the Dalits. Despite Modi's enduring popularity, evidenced by his victory in Varanasi albeit with a notably reduced margin, the BJP's electoral fortunes have been tempered by various concerns, notably regarding constitutional rights and social equi-

ty. The BJP's ambitious electoral slogan, promising an overwhelming triumph, stirred apprehensions among the Dalit populace, raising fears of potential amendments to the constitution. This apprehension, as the media reports asserted, stemming from the fear of diluting protections advocated by Bhimrao Ambedkar, prompted numerous Dalit voters to align with the opposition INDIA alliance, which adeptly mobilised a coalition of marginalised groups. Modi's language targeting Muslims as "infiltrators" further galvanised opposition to the BJP, particularly among Dalit and Muslim communities, despite the party's efforts to allay Dalit fears and disavow any intentions of rescinding their constitutional privileges. The electoral terrain in Uttar Pradesh reflects a shifting paradigm, with marginalized communities asserting their voices and demanding accountability from political incumbents.

The narrative of disillusionment and disenchantment highlights the intricate nature of Indian politics and the hurdles confronting the BJP as it navigates the evolving currents of public opinion. Despite facing electoral setbacks, the BJP remains a potent political force, positioned to forge the next government alongside its allies. However, the undercurrents of discontent and unmet assurances could potentially influence the trajectory of Indian politics in the years ahead. The resounding voice of the nation echoes: it's now up to the government, poised to lead for the next five years, to heed the lessons of tolerance spoken by the populace of the world's most populous country.

*(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and author; Views are personal)*

## Soaring milk prices may hit affordability, health

Growth in the dairy industry necessitates ethical, accessible and safe milk production; without these, milk could become inaccessible to the general public

For ages, milk has been universally acknowledged as an excellent source of nutrition, especially for children. A good sign that milk & dairy production in our country is increasing fast. However, if the trend of consistently rising milk prices is not held up, it may be hard for the common man to afford it, thus impinging on the health of their family. Whole milk price of popular brands is presently hovering around Rs. 66 a litre. Nutritionists recommend routine intake of milk and its derivatives to maintain a balanced diet. So ironic that the legendary repository of milk, 'a country with rivers overflowing with milk' is now concerned with feeding safe milk to its people!



HARISH BARTH WAL

India has been consistently atop in milk production since 1997 and contributes about 25% to the global milk output. In 2023, India produced 231 million metric tonnes of milk with a decadal compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6%. More important than NITI Ayog's prediction of achieving the 300 million metric tonnes mark by 2030 is the need to ensure that this staple nutrition is accessible to

the countrymen at large. The fault lines must be identified and addressed in time. Beyond just a fluid secreted by the mammary glands of female mammals for nourishing their young ones, cow milk and cows are special to India, sacred and pure since the Vedic era. Along with its other holy derivatives like curd and ghee, it is a routine offering to Gods at religious observances particularly during Shivaratri and Nag Panchami festivals. To Hindus, the cow is sacrosanct, at par with Gods. As against other milch animals, buffalo, sheep, goats and camel, the cow is also a symbol of motherhood, fertility, prosperity, health and strength. It has had sanctity in other faiths as well. Egyptians

accorded cow the status of goddess of milk, 'Iat' due to its association with nurturing attributes. Among early Christians, milk was figuratively used for abundance, blessings, spiritual food and purity. Prophet Muhammad said, "The milk of the bovine (cow) contains healing, its fat is a medicine and its meat a cause for sickness." This is despite most milk in India being derived from buffalo, which is valued for its higher fat content and its use as a draught animal. In our country, 60% of the milk is produced by the unorganised sector, remaining 40% is from the organised sector, mostly dairy cooperatives and private players. However, the scenario is set to reverse and in a few years the milkman of

the unorganised sector may have to shift the profession for numerous reasons. For one, the city folks prefer value-added or packaged milk & dairy wrapped in pouches or packets made of LDPE, LLDPE, HDPE or EVA; cans and tetra packs. Admittedly, the products from the organised sector are superior; pasteurised (i.e. heating for a while up to 700C to minimise infection, then cooling) and sticking to certain quality specifications yet it has its pitfalls partly the deliberate ones. I recall the description of the Vijaya brand milk tetra pack of an Andhra Pradesh dairy in the early 80s while I was in Bhopal. It guaranteed freshness without refrigeration for up to six months in any ambient temperature - decades

after, we witnessed Amul, Britannia and other popular brands taking the cue. Mind that the milk in the pouch procured from the booth degenerates when heated just in 10 to 15 minutes, it is so delicate. There is more to tetra packs than tetrahedron texture to keep its non-degradability intact for long. It is toxic preservatives like formaldehyde and other additives in play to extend the shelf life of milk and its derivatives. Studies have already shown serious health consequences like food poisoning, gastrointestinal and cardiac issues, hepatic and renal failure and even cancer. It is like lethal insecticides being spread 400 times more than the permitted doses on maturing crops to avert food-

grain loss and ensure enhanced shelf life. Also, witness many popular desi ghee brands selling at Rs. 450 a litre while in villages it costs between Rs. 1200 to Rs. 2400 although dairy people confide that per kg cost of desi ghee is Rs. 500 to Rs. 600. Indian dairy business is incessantly growing at 4.5% annually. The organised milk sector is elated at the growing international and domestic demand and business prospects. Yet it must be monitored that the ethical aspects are not compromised and the domestic consumers are not taken for a ride. Fodder availability for large milch cattle, education & training and technology improvement are the other formidable issues in dairy to

be addressed. Our young ones also must be made to learn that saying no to milk is saying no to nutrition and that almond milk, soy milk, rice milk and coconut milk are poor substitutes. Amul Federation, the undisputed leader has planned expansion activity abroad and is targeting one Rs one lakh crore business now. Dairy supports the livelihoods of one billion people worldwide. As we celebrate Milk Day, an FAO initiative, to recognise the importance of milk as a global food let us not overlook that the common people are not deprived of this staple nutrition.

*(The writer is a blogger and writes on health, social and other issues, views are personal)*

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Coalition *dharma*

Challenge for Modi to ensure unanimity

ADDRESSING a meeting of the NDA parliamentary party, which elected him as its leader on Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that he would strive to ensure unanimity in all decisions of his government during his third term. The PM has described the NDA as an organic alliance committed to the principle of 'nation first', while claiming that this is the 'strongest' ruling coalition ever. This is the first time that Modi will be leading a genuine coalition government; the BJP had single-handedly crossed the half-way mark in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but fell short of the magic figure this time. It now needs the support of allies like N Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) to form the government. Both regional satraps are expected to not only extract their pound of flesh but also keep the BJP-led dispensation on its toes.

The PM has said that mutual trust is at the core of the NDA. This trust will be put to the test as the government gets down to brass tacks. Over the past decade, the ruling BJP has steamrollered one Bill after another through Parliament, thanks to compliant allies and a weak Opposition. However, neither the saffron party's partners nor rivals will be a pushover this time. Buoyed by its electoral success, the Congress-led INDIA will miss no chance to corner the government on the Agnipath scheme, the Uniform Civil Code and other pressing issues.

The all-important question is: Will the lack of a brute majority make PM Modi and the BJP more accommodative of the needs and aspirations of their allies and less dismissive of their political opponents? Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a legendary proponent of coalition *dharma*, believed in taking everyone along and building consensus. It remains to be seen if Modi can reinvent himself to fill those big shoes.

## Child food poverty

Despite strides, nutritional inequity worrisome

A recent Unicef report highlights a grim reality: over 180 million children under five globally live in severe food poverty, an alarming crisis that affects one out of four kids in this age group. This stark statistic underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to address malnutrition and ensure the wellbeing of future generations. Even as India marches towards rivaling the top economies of the world, the report is a sobering reminder that the country figures among the 20 that account for 65 per cent of the children living in severe food poverty. Unicef's guidelines emphasise the need for children to consume a diverse diet from at least five out of eight food groups daily. Yet, millions of children worldwide, including 64 million in South Asia, fail to meet this standard, leading to severe nutritional deficiencies and long-term developmental impacts.

However, amidst this dismal scenario, there is a beacon of hope in India as the country has reduced the gap in severe child food poverty between poorer and wealthier households over the past decade by at least five percentage points, highlighting strides made towards nutritional equity. This progress is a testament to the impact of targeted government policies, community-driven initiatives and partnerships aimed at improving access to nutritious food for the most vulnerable children. But India cannot be complacent; a lot remains to be done.

The global food system, criticised for promoting cheap, high-calorie and nutrient-poor foods, exacerbates the crisis. To combat this, governments and international partners must prioritise the reduction of child food poverty, ensuring that nutritious and diverse foods are accessible and affordable. Health systems should deliver essential nutrition services and social protection systems must be responsive to the dietary needs of vulnerable families. Investments in sustainable solutions are vital to ensure that every child, regardless of his or her socio-economic background, has the opportunity to thrive.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1924

## The cause celebre

THE most sensational Indian case that has ever come up before an English court has ended exactly as all previous cases of the same general category ended. The Englishman who was a party to the suit has won all along the line and the Indian has gone to the wall. Sir Sankaran Nair, as defendant, has had exactly the experience that Mr Tilak had in an equally famous case as plaintiff. There is really nothing new or surprising in this. Englishmen who try cases as judges or jurors are, after all, ordinary human beings with a full measure of the frailties of their race. In any matter that excites racial or political passion in an unusual degree, it is as difficult for a judge or a juror to keep his mind free from bias as for other men of the same intellectual and moral calibre. In such cases, the judicial training of the judge too often only enables him to find plausible reasons for conclusions arrived at on independent grounds; and the only difference between the judge and the jury is that, not being under any obligation to state their reasons in detail, the latter can afford to do without that self-deception which the former has so frequently to resort to. It was his consciousness of this fact that prevented Mr Parnell from bringing those who accused him of the horrible crime of complicity in the Phoenix Park murders before a court of law. "The case," as a high authority in daily and hourly touch with Parnell has told us, "would naturally have been tried in London," and "not only the plaintiff's own character, but the whole movement that he represented would have been submitted to a Middlesex jury, with all the national and political prejudices inevitable in such a body."

## Keep your friends close, enemies closer

Chanakya and Machiavelli will be needed in large doses as the PM negotiates the coming months

JYOTI MALHOTRA  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has staked claim to becoming Prime Minister again, his third consecutive term, equalling Jawaharlal Nehru's record; allies Chandrababu Naidu, Nitish Kumar, Eknath Shinde and Chirag Paswan have welcomed him warmly on behalf of a renewed NDA coalition; and in Punjab as well as Jammu & Kashmir, Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, Amritpal Singh and Engineer Rashid 'Langate' have won their seats — the last two are still imprisoned under the NSA and UAPA, respectively.

All three very different messages from this election potpourri can only be underlined by a fourth, a post-poll rumour — Sonia Gandhi, it seems, has spoken to both Naidu and Nitish about potential support; speculation is rife in New Delhi that INDIA may be willing to offer the top job to either in case they are willing to switch coalitions.

That is unlikely to happen because INDIA simply doesn't have the numbers. Modi is surely on his way to becoming PM again. But if the press knows that Sonia is reaching out to the same men who are gifting Modi expensive silk Kanjeevaram shawls within hours of them speaking to her, the intelligence agencies — and therefore, Modi and Amit Shah — know too. The knowledge will keep them alert. Keep your friends close, for sure, but keep your enemies closer — both Chanakya and Machiavelli will be needed in



REALPOLITIK: Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar may find themselves with no choice but to acquiesce if they want the Centre to release a generous financial package for their states. P71

large doses as the thrice-anointed PM negotiates the coming months in power.

Naidu, especially, will hope to moderate Modi's penchant for polarising rhetoric — the question is whether he and his Stanford-educated son, Nara Lokesh (whose statement "there's no place for arrogance in the government" has been like a pleasing monsoon shower for many across the land) will be able to withstand the enormous power wielded by Modi and Shah. The Naidus & Others may soon find that the exercise of power cuts both ways: They have already been told that they cannot have one of the four top jobs — in defence, external affairs, finance and home ministries — or even the post of Speaker in Parliament. They may find themselves with no choice but to acquiesce if they want the Centre to release a generous financial package for their beloved Andhra Pradesh, or Bihar, as

If Naidu believes his priority is to groom his son to take over AP, he may not have much time for twinges of conscience on national issues.

the case may be for Nitish.

Nor are the Prime Minister and his men — there are unlikely to be many women in the Cabinet, what with both Nirmala Sitharaman and Smriti Irani gone — likely to relinquish their control over the media, notwithstanding Sudhir Chaudhary's latest finding on *Aaj Tak* that a large section of India's Hindus didn't par-

ticularly care for Hindutva, which is why the BJP lost so many seats in this election.

The question is: Will Modi and Naidu quietly agree to carve out their respective spheres of influence — Andhra Pradesh for Naidu and the rest of the (non-BJP-ruled) country for Modi — or will Naidu allow his views on sensitive matters, like religious equality before the Constitution as manifested in the Places of Worship Act of 1991, to inform his pact with the PM? We saw how in recent months, the UP administration swiftly allowed the installation of idols in the Gyanvapi mosque and how the high court quickly fell in line. Will Naidu shut his eyes and turn his gaze away when this matter comes up again and the tension, thick and palpable, returns to the PM's constituency?

Guess we will know soon enough. If Naidu believes his priority is to groom his son to take over the state, he may not have much time for twinges of

conscience on national issues — in fact, the PM may be happy if the TDP leader is consumed with his self-styled Republic of Andhra Pradesh and doesn't retain much of an attention span for leftover matters the BJP promised to bring to fruition in its manifesto, such as the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code across the country.

It is this potential see-saw for influence at the heart of the NDA coalition that could characterise the coming months and years. Naturally, an emboldened Opposition will attempt to accentuate this tension — equally, the government may be fully prepared for Parliament sessions to be washed out to allow the Opposition to exhaust itself in the sound and fury of debate, discussion and sound bites, while it exercises power outside.

If the PM, intentionally or otherwise, misreads the mandate — it seems likely from his speech at the parliamentary party meeting in Parliament on Friday, when he made fun of the Opposition — he may spend quality time moving the BJP juggernaut along, rather than reaching out across the aisle in the Vajpayee spirit of reconciliation.

A continuing hardline is evident in the fact that the Prime Minister of Pakistan is the only South Asian leader not invited to Modi's swearing-in party — some might even call it discourtesy. To make such a strong gesture right at the beginning of your new term in power is the equivalent of not just shutting the door to all manner of conversation with your enemy, but closing off your own options — certainly, a short-sighted take for a would-be regional power. Closer home, on the matter of both Amritpal and Engineer Rashid, the quality of mercy is also expected to be severely strained.

Keep your enemy closer, did someone say?

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part. — Thomas Jefferson

Life lessons from 1966  
Mont Blanc crash

RK SABOO

EVERY year, I recall a tragic incident that happened in 1966 when Air India Flight 101 crashed into Mont Blanc in France on January 24. All 117 people on board were killed, including Homi Bhabha, an eminent nuclear physicist from India.

The young son of our friends, Gen Kulwant Singh and Teji, was among those who died in that mishap. A few days before the incident, Gen Kulwant passed away due to a severe heart attack. Their only son, who was studying in London, came to India for the funeral. He was returning to the UK when tragedy struck.

I am fortunate to be alive because I was supposed to be on that flight. I was scheduled to attend a meeting at the Groz-Beckert headquarters in Germany. Mahendra Jhavar, a friend of mine, and I decided to spend two days in Beirut before boarding the Air India flight from there. The day before the flight, on a whim, I called Mahendra and we decided to visit Beirut later. Every member of my family was aware that on the fateful day, I would be travelling on an Air India plane.

Those days, only landline phones and telex facilities were available. Early in the morning on January 24, I received a call from the Groz-Beckert managing director, who told me about the mishap.

My parents and brother in Calcutta heard of the crash on the radio. They were distraught, having no information that I had changed my itinerary. My wife Usha quickly informed them that I was safe. Among my family, friends and business associates, there was an overwhelming sense of relief, joy and thankfulness to God. There were celebrations and prayers. Prasad and donations were handed out to the needy.

Boeing 707 was scheduled to land in Geneva, Switzerland, but it crashed moments before that. According to the investigation, the pilot, believing that he had crossed the ridge leading to the summit and that the plane was at a height that provided adequate clearance over Mont Blanc, continued his descent. There was suspicion of sabotage as Bhabha was aboard the flight, but it was dispelled.

I often ponder whether my life was saved by my good fortune, my parents' blessings, my friends' best wishes, my wife's prayers or just my instinct that made me miss that flight. My two sons, who were three and eight years old at the time, were unaware of what was going on. However, the thought of what might have happened to them in my absence made me tremble.

I realised the fleeting nature of life. I learned a very important lesson from that crash — every day is a gift. Make the most of the 'here and now' because that's all you have.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Quenching Delhi's thirst

Refer to the editorial 'Delhi's water crisis'; the fact that the Supreme Court had to step in and direct the Himachal Pradesh Government to release 137 cusecs of water to help New Delhi tide over the water crisis is a sad commentary on the state of affairs. The failure of leaders to resolve the issue amicably reflects the lack of cooperation, coordination and collaboration among the states. The Upper Yamuna River Board should have played a proactive role in ensuring effective water management and distribution. Besides, the failure of the authorities concerned in the Capital to address water wastage — which is reportedly 50 per cent — caused by leakage and theft points to criminal negligence on their part.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

## The rise &amp; fall of Nifty, Sensex

Apropos of 'Rahul for JPC probe into market crash, questions role of PM, HM'; the sharp fluctuations in India's stock market after the exit poll results necessitate a thorough investigation. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi's call for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the matter is welcome. Comments by PM Narendra Modi and other ministers potentially influenced market behaviour. The surge in the NSE Nifty 50 and S&P BSE Sensex ahead of the results, followed by a sharp decline, raises questions about market manipulation and insider trading. Transparency and accountability are imperative for maintaining investor confidence. SEBI must conduct a comprehensive investigation to ensure the integrity of the financial markets.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

## INDIA put Modi in his place

With reference to 'Oppn parties must keep INDIA intact'; the writer has rightly observed that the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections has hit PM Narendra Modi's sense of invincibility. It is Modi's reputation as a 'once-in-a-lifetime' leader that is at stake. The INDIA bloc has successfully stopped the Modi-Shah juggernaut in its tracks. While the BJP, which is set for a third straight term at the Centre, has not been defeated, there is no denying that the saffron party did suffer a massive setback in this election. The onus of holding the ruling regime accountable remains on the Opposition leaders.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

## Assault on Kangana

With reference to the front-page news report 'CISF staffer "slaps" Kangana at Chandigarh airport, detained'; the assault on the newly elected MP should be condemned in the strongest terms. The incident should be taken seriously. Security at sensitive places like an airport is not a trivial matter. In this case, a constable entrusted with the role of ensuring security took the law into her own hands because she allegedly had an issue with a remark previously made by the actor on the farmers' stir. While every citizen living in a democratic country is entitled to dissent, resorting to violence is not acceptable. This was not expected from an official on duty. The CISF constable must receive stringent punishment.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

## Suspension not enough

Apropos of 'CISF staffer "slaps" Kangana at Chandigarh airport, detained'; it is shocking that Kulwinder Kaur, a CISF constable, allegedly abused and slapped Kangana Ranaut, a high-profile Bollywood actor and the newly elected MP from Mandi, at the Chandigarh airport. If a political leader who is generally accompanied by an entourage of guards can be assaulted by a security official at a public place, one can't help but shudder to think about the safety of a commoner who expresses a controversial opinion. The mere suspension of the erring constable is not enough. Stringent action should be taken against her.

VIJAYA SHARMA, BY MAIL

## Hooliganism in uniform

Refer to 'CISF staffer "slaps" Kangana at Chandigarh airport, detained'; it is unfortunate that CISF constable Kulwinder Kaur allegedly abused and assaulted Mandi's MP-elect and actor Kangana Ranaut. The security personnel had no right to attack the actor over her stance on the farmers' protests. Officials on duty must not let their personal opinions or beliefs dictate their actions. Any person in uniform is duty-bound to follow the requisite protocol while dealing with public representatives and be courteous to the public at large. The authorities can set a strong precedent by ensuring action against the official.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

# Govt must be proactive in tackling security challenges



**LT GEN KAMAL DAVAR (RETD)**  
FORMER CHIEF, DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

A new government is set to take charge under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, who is beginning his third term as the Prime Minister. Thus, continuity and consistency in major governmental policies can be expected. However, with a coalition at the helm, some transformational decisions may take a back seat. Much serious work awaits the government. Apart from the criticalities that need to be speedily addressed, the emerging security challenges across various domains will also have to be confronted.

That India faces two adversarial nuclear-armed neighbours, China and Pakistan, working both independently and collusively, has to be factored in. India's strategic challenges extend in the west from the Strait of Hormuz, running southwards along the eastern coast of Africa to the Malacca Strait in the east, also spanning the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The Indo-Pacific region, increasingly becoming an area of strategic contestation between the US and China, also impacts India as it is one of the major players in this realm.

India has land borders exceeding 15,000 sq km, which it shares with seven nations. India also has a 7,683-km coastline and an exclusive economic zone of over 2 million sq km. Internal security challenges do emerge once in a while in J&K and some of our restive northeastern states, while a fading Naxal/Maoist insurgency still persists. China's continuing belligerence towards India and its unending 'salami-slicing' tactics in the border regions are of major security concern for us. Thus, overall, India has to ensure its territorial and economic sovereignty.

Since Independence, India has witnessed major conflicts in 1947-48, 1962, 1965, 1971 and the Kargil War in 1999, apart from battling many internal security upheavals, including insurgency in the North-East and, countering terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Despite all these kinetic conflagrations, India has not yet promulgated a National Security Doctrine (NSD). Since the past many years, national security has moved far beyond military activities, prosecution of war or managing internal security problems. Today, national



**IMPERATIVE:** CDS Gen Anil Chauhan (centre) during his visit to INS Chilka in Odisha last week. The Navy's requirements need to be met through adequate funds. ANI

security embraces non-military dimensions, including terrorism, economic security, energy security, food security, environmental security and cybersecurity. National security responsibilities span more than the charter of the Ministry of Defence, calling for a "whole-of-government approach". Most powerful nations of the world have enunciated their NSD, which lays down their priorities in a variety of fields. Though the major strategic mission objectives will be military-oriented, the NSD will comprehensively lay down prioritisation in various fields of governance and

Though the Modi government has laid emphasis on indigenisation of military hardware, much needs to be done to achieve *atmanirbharta*.

protection of national interests, apart from synergising the nation's geopolitical, military, diplomatic, financial and technological strengths. Accordingly, the new government must lay emphasis on the formulation of the NSD with alacrity.

Another important defence reform which the newly elected government should bring to fruition is the long-awaited integrated theatre commands (ITCs) edifice for synergising the operational capabilities of the three Services. Notwithstanding the differences over its implementation by the Services, a way has to be found to get "more bang for

the buck". The government should institute a committee of serving officers, renowned veterans and civilian experts to suggest the composition, charter and geographical responsibilities of the ITCs.

As is universally known, India holds the dubious record of being the world's largest importer of arms, ammunition and military platforms. Though the Modi government has laid emphasis on indigenisation of military hardware, much still requires to be done to achieve *atmanirbharta* (self-reliance in production of military equipment). The government must give a major fillip to manufacturing as per our defence requirements, synergising the work of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, public sector ordnance factories and the technologically adept private sector. Foreign manufacturers of repute should also be encouraged to shift some of their production units to India — genuine public-private sector cooperation will be of great assistance to meet Indian defence's burgeoning needs.

The Navy's requirements to ensure the security and independence of our sea lanes need to be met by adequate capital budget funds. Work must commence on the demand for a third aircraft carrier and additional submarine capability.

Simultaneously, the strategic Andaman and Nicobar Command must be strengthened to safeguard India's interests in the Indian Ocean and keep China's misplaced maritime ambitions in check. One area where the government will have to arrange funds is for the Indian Air Force's long-pending requirement of 114 fighters as its present holdings are precariously down to unacceptable levels.

Importantly, the government must oversee the three Services collectively, analysing the lessons from the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war and the Israeli-Hamas conflict. These conflicts have put to rest many traditional concepts which were being practised by many armed forces across the world. Besides the nuances of artificial intelligence and information warfare, the employment of drones, air defence systems, missiles, tanks and infantry combat vehicles need to be looked at afresh.

The government should remember that it takes time to improve defence capabilities, and procrastination in defence matters will only be at the nation's peril. The need to strengthen all the constituents of Comprehensive National Power should be the guiding principles in our march forward to deservedly take a seat at the global high table.

# Election results show the political class has let Punjab down



**ASHUTOSH KUMAR**  
PROFESSOR, POLITICAL SCIENCE, PANJAB UNIVERSITY

THE 2024 parliamentary elections in Punjab were exceptional in many respects. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the BJP went solo in all 13 seats in the state, necessitated by their break-up in 2020. It was an election to test whether the state would finally respond to the 'national constituency' phenomenon sought to be created by the saffron party across the states in the past decade. It was based on issues like cultural nationalism, national security, the exalted place of the country in the world order, India being the fifth-largest economy, welfare guarantees and Modi's leadership.

This was yet another opportunity for the SAD — the oldest regional party in India and one that has always claimed to represent the Sikh community's political interests — to check the steep slide in its electoral fortunes. And if the slide were to contin-

ue, what would be the implications for the Sikh-majority state?

At a time when there has been a large-scale ideological shift to right-wing conservatism, visible in the surge of cultural nationalism in north, central and western India, would Punjab remain immune to it, despite having a sizeable Hindu population? Was there an unmistakable sign of the revival of radicalism in the Sikh community, already indicated by the unexpected win of Simranjit Singh Mann in the 2022 Sangrur bypoll and the Amritpal Singh episode? The election was also seen as a mid-term assessment of the performance of the AAP government, which has a brute majority of 92 in the 117-member House.

The poll was yet another test of the farmers' power in state politics. The question was whether the agrarian distress was going to be an issue that would have a significant electoral impact, especially for the BJP and the Akali Dal.

Going by the verdict, it is obvious that Punjab's 'exceptionalism' continues in many ways. For one, local issues and candidates continued to determine the electoral choices in the state, even though it was a General Election. The Modi factor did not work in Punjab. BJP candidates and



**SWAY:** The election was yet another test of the farmers' power in state politics. TRIBUNE PHOTO

state leaders — many among them turncoats — continued to face protests by farmers — a repeat of the 2022 Assembly elections.

Though the party polled an impressive 18.56 per cent of the vote share, it could not win even a single seat. This time, the BJP was the runner-up in Gurdaspur, Ludhiana and Jalandhar, which all have a significant Hindu presence.

As far as the AAP government's dismal performance is concerned, it was evident that the party banked upon its populist schemes to mobilise voters and not on the basis of its record of the fulfilment of its promises of eradicat-

The SAD's decline is bad news for the state, as it creates a vacuum, allowing for the rise of hitherto dormant radical, secessionist forces.

ing drugs, corruption and all kinds of mafias, from sand to liquor.

It did not help that the party has been making these promises since it made its debut in the 2014 elections, when it won four seats in Punjab. It also hardly helped the party that some of its top leaders have been in jail or are facing trials/criminal charges. The fact that AAP contested 22 seats in India but could only win three (all in Punjab) is little solace for the party.

The Congress managed to win seven seats with a 26.3 per cent vote share, slightly higher than AAP's 26.02 per cent. It obviously bene-

fit from the plurality voting system. The party's decision to not have an alliance with AAP despite being part of the INDIA coalition did help it, as it got the anti-incumbency votes cast against the AAP government. Rahul Gandhi's frequent visits to the Golden Temple and his nationwide appeal against majoritarianism helped endear the Congress to the Sikh masses.

The steady decline of the Akali Dal, the Panthic party that shaped the politics of the state, continued as it managed to get only 13.42 per cent vote share, down from 27.76 per cent in the 2019 election. The lone win from the Badal family seat of Bathinda is not going to erase the question mark about Sukhbir Badal's leadership. Once a cadre-based ideologically oriented party, the SAD's decline is bad news for the state, as it creates a vacuum, allowing for the rise of hitherto dormant radical, secessionist forces.

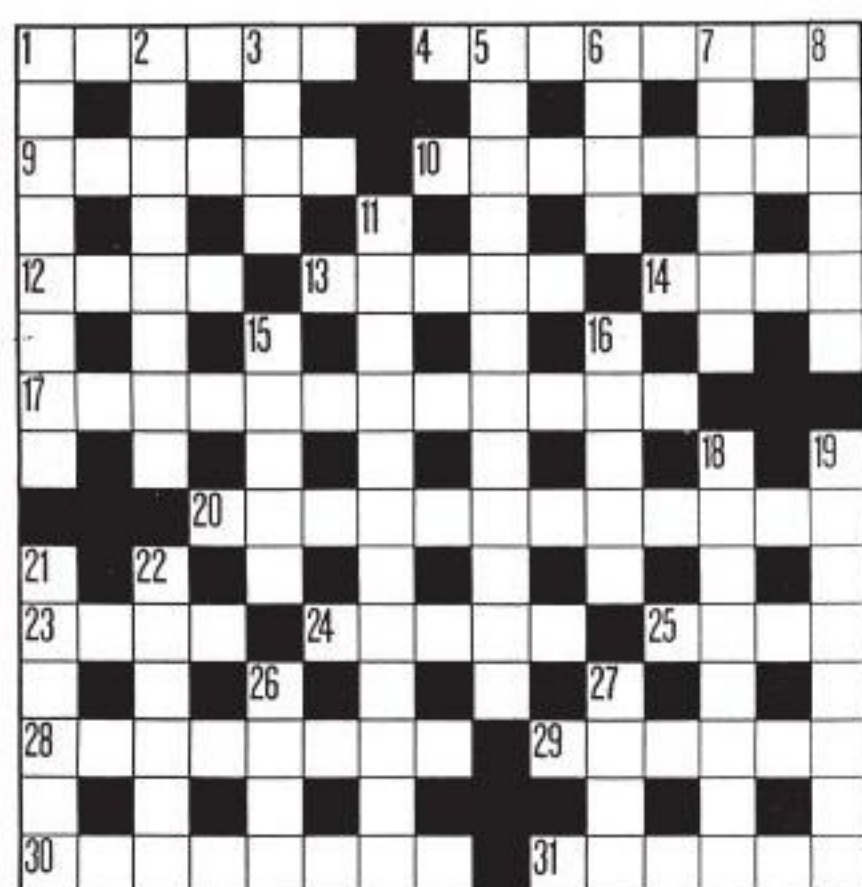
The victories of Amritpal Singh and Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, the independent candidates from the Khadoor Sahib and Faridkot constituencies, respectively, with impressive margins, are a worrying development. Both have been identified with separatism. Their wins are a grim reminder of a segment

of the Sikh electorate still harbouring the wounded psyche, a result of decades-old unfulfilled demands and the unfortunate events that occurred in the dark days of militancy. Also, their wins can be attributed to the growing alienation of people — especially the youth, who have been rendered unemployable because of the dismal state of the education sector — from traditional parties.

The exodus of industries and the agrarian crisis mean very few job opportunities for the youth, and hence the large-scale migration of human capital is happening, emptying the villages. There is also growing demographic anxiety as the exodus of the youth coincides with an influx of the Hindu migrant working class.

People in the state are consumed by the fear of ruination of its agriculture-based economy, as the Green Revolution had run its course long ago. The landed peasantry, once dubbed 'rich farmers', are now at the receiving end, as successive governments at the Centre — under the spell of the corporate sector — have focused on the service and manufacturing sectors. Here again, industries have been migrating to neighbouring states. The political class has let Punjab down.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Reduce to lower rank (6)
  - State of great disorder (8)
  - Solitary (6)
  - Pretentious nonsense (8)
  - Widespread (4)
  - Soothing (5)
  - An intended method (4)
  - Inspid (4-3-5)
  - Too rigidly attached to procedure (12)
  - Prolonged dull pain (4)
  - Narrow bowling enclosure (5)
  - Blond (4)
  - Indulgent (8)
  - Waste time (6)
  - Deep crack in glacier (8)
  - Insubstantial (6)
- DOWN**
- Low spirits (8)
  - Many and various (8)
  - Grievous price (4)
  - Steps inadequate to meet need (4,8)
  - Be gloomily depressed (4)
  - Haughty (6)
  - Negligently inert (6)
  - Resentful animosity (4,8)
  - Worth (5)
  - Wild African horse (5)
  - Without aim (2,6)
  - Only just (8)
  - Almost landlocked European sea (6)
  - Postpone dealing with (6)
  - Region (4)
  - Collapse (4)

**Yesterday's solution**

**Across:** 1 Proof, 4 Devious, 8 Pad, 9 In essence, 10 Laconic, 11 Turin, 13 Rookie, 15 Broach, 18 Split, 19 Crammed, 21 By degrees, 23 Coo, 24 Remorse, 25 Abyss.

**Down:** 1 Popular, 2 Old school, 3 Feign, 4 Drench, 5 Visitor, 6 Own, 7 Sheen, 12 Real McCoy, 14 Integer, 16 Hideous, 17 Accede, 18 Sober, 20 At sea, 22 Dim.

## SU DO KU

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

EASY

## YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

## CALENDAR

- JUNE 8, 2024, SATURDAY**
- Shaka Samvat 1946
  - Jyeshtha Shaka 18
  - Jyeshtha Parvishite 26
  - Hijari 1445
  - Shukla Paksha Tithi 2, up to 3.56 pm
  - Ganda Yoga up to 6.27 pm
  - Aardra Nakshatra up to 7.43 pm
  - Moon in Gemini sign

## FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	19:23 HRS
SUNRISE:	SUNDAW	05:21 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	41	29
New Delhi	42	29
Amritsar	41	25
Bathinda	42	27
Jalandhar	41	26
Ludhiana	43	23
Bhiwani	43	29
Hisar	43	25
Sirsa	41	27
Dharamsala	32	20
Manali	23	11
Shimla	25	15
Srinagar	27	13
Jammu	42	25
Kargil	22	08
Leh	20	06
Dehradun	39	24
Mussoorie	27	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C