



## For plurality

CSDS-Lokniti's post-poll survey showed exhaustion with Hindutva politics

A drop in satisfaction levels with governance, the stagnating popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the resilience of regional parties and the rejuvenation of the Congress party, and the fading of Hindutva for marginalised sections in the Hindi heartland. All these contributed to the National Democratic Alliance's reduced majority in the 2024 general election, according to the CSDS-Lokniti's post-poll survey. In its pre-poll survey, the agency had indicated that "unemployment" and "price rise" were key issues for a majority of the electorate and despite the healthy 46% support for the NDA, a chunk of those favouring the incumbents were willing to back the Opposition during the course of the election. The final vote share for the NDA, at 43.6%, was 1.4 points lower than what the constituents of this year's coalition received in 2019 even as the INDIA bloc secured a significant 41.4% support (if the Trinamool Congress's shares are included), a leap from 2019. In the previous Lok Sabha election, the Balakot action, the PM-Kisan scheme and 10% reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections category had helped the Bharatiya Janata Party romp home with 303 seats, according to Lokniti. But this time around, multiple narratives and political issues tied the party down in its strongholds. Even its ascendance in Odisha and Telangana was not enough to recoup its losses in the Hindi heartland.

The strong support by Dalits, other OBCs and minorities to the Congress in States such as Uttar Pradesh, and the Samajwadi Party's terming the BJP's agenda as a threat to the Constitution put the wind in the Opposition's sails. That Congress leader Rahul Gandhi enjoyed a four-point lead (36% versus 32%) over Mr. Modi among respondents in Uttar Pradesh, when asked about their preference for the Prime Minister's post, must alarm the BJP. Clearly, the party can no longer expect to rely on Hindutva as a cementing factor except in States such as Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which are distinguished by a lack of a diligent Opposition. For the INDIA bloc, and the Congress in particular, its credible performance notwithstanding, its task is cut out in these States. The Congress also increased its vote share in Karnataka from what it was in the 2023 Assembly elections, but the NDA's strong social coalition proved a hindrance in converting those increased votes into more seats. The message for the Opposition is clear – wherever it is in power, it must strive to provide a clear alternative to the NDA in terms of governance. And where it is not in power, it must rely on building unity among like-minded forces and a narrative of bringing change through alternative policies that offer a strong contrast to the centralising and unitary nature of the BJP.

## Master of three

Alcaraz has put himself at the head of the new generation in tennis

One of tennis' foremost challenges is in achieving multi-surface excellence. Grass, clay and the acrylic require varied skill sets, and while there are many jacks in the trade, there are very few masters. Carlos Alcaraz, with his maiden French Open title on Sunday, set himself on course towards joining an elite bunch of such greats. The clay-court Major was the 21-year-old's third, alongside US Open 2022 and Wimbledon 2023, and made him the youngest man in the Open Era (from 1968) to display such all-court mastery. The victory came at an important time for Alcaraz. Long considered the anointed heir to the famed trio of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, Alcaraz, in recent months, had not looked the part. Since winning Wimbledon, Indian Wells in March 2024 was his lone trophy, and the rise of Italian Jannik Sinner – Australian Open champion and the World No.1 – meant he had a generational rival to contend with. Lingering fitness issues, including the arm injury that limited his Roland-Garros tune-up to just one event, proved debilitating. But with a back-to-the-wall performance, including in the semifinal and final where he was down two sets to one against Sinner and a resurgent Alexander Zverev, Alcaraz chose one of the sport's grandest stages to showcase his true worth.

Iga Swiatek is yet to match the Spaniard's all-encompassing standards, but over the last two weeks, the 23-year-old showed that she was peerless on the red dirt. Saturday's win over the unheralded Italian Jasmine Paolini earned Swiatek her third straight French Open, fourth in Paris and a fifth Slam overall. Swiatek's dominance is best reflected in the fact that she has only ever entered six Roland-Garros singles main draws, has a 35-2 win-loss record and has lost just three sets in her four title-runs. Four-time Major champion Naomi Osaka did come within a point of ending Swiatek's stay in the second round, but the Pole displayed enormous mental fortitude to weather the storm and not let the doubts consume her. So good was her fortnight that she started drawing comparisons with the early years of Nadal. While Nadal's 14 titles may be insurmountable, Swiatek, like the 22-time Slam winner whom she idolises, can surely expand her success beyond clay. She is adept on the hard courts and has been the dominant World No.1 from April 2022, but for the eight weeks in late 2023 when Aryna Sabalenka reigned. The lack of success on grass – quarterfinals at Wimbledon 2023 being the best effort – has been Swiatek's bane and she has a golden opportunity to correct that in three weeks.

This month marks a year since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to the United States, where U.S. President Joseph Biden rolled out the red carpet and the U.S. offered to restart the decade-old plan to transfer technology for jet engines to India. The visit was marked by many such announcements of strategic and high-tech cooperation, with the U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) considered a major success for bilateral relations that would set the stage for a whole new phase in ties.

However, one year later, the pace of the relationship has not matched those ambitions for a number of external and internal reasons. As the newly sworn-in Indian Prime Minister will engage once again with the U.S. President this week at the G-7 outreach summit in Italy, and senior U.S. officials are set to arrive in Delhi, the "good, the not-so-good, and what could-become ugly" (to paraphrase the Hollywood western) in the relationship must be studied closely.

### The crests

It is clear where the 'good' and even 'great' in the India-U.S. relationship lies. Last September marked 25 years of the turnaround in ties post-Pokhran, that was heralded by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's famous Asia Society speech in New York, on September 28, 1998, where he called India and the U.S. "natural allies in the quest for a better future" for the world in the 21st century. Since then, Delhi and Washington have built up strategic ties year on year, with dialogues in a growing number of spheres – from climate change and green energy to critical and emerging technologies and outer space.

Over the past decade, the growth is seen in strategic trust in particular, with the conclusion of all foundational agreements, a plethora of military exercises, growing inter-operability and coordination on maritime operations, not to mention the considerable purchases in the pipeline of military hardware. A broader mutual understanding has been sparked by many of the old irritants going away from relations: the de-hyphenation of U.S.-India ties with Pakistan, silence over old concerns on Jammu-Kashmir that once roiled ties, India's increased engagement with the Quad (India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.) and the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy, and shared concerns over China's aggression have brought Delhi and DC increasingly on the "same page", internationally.

While the bilateral engagement has been thriving, much of it due to dozens of official-level conversations that continue, some of the "not-so-good" or work-in-progress areas lie in the areas of multilateral cooperation on global conflicts. Russia's war in Ukraine has been one major area of difference, especially as the U.S. has framed the war purely in terms of the



Suhasini Haidar

A close look at the 'good, the not-so-good, and what could-become ugly' in the relationship

international rule of law and humanitarian principles. India has chosen a more historical frame that also considers the disruption to other players like the Global South on issues such as food, fertilizer and energy security. There have been some compromises: the U.S. has withdrawn its objections to India's continued purchase of oil and other Russian exports and held off any talk of sanctions, while India has put over the annual India-Russia summit for two years now. It remains to be seen how the newly-elected Prime Minister manages engagements with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the next few months, with a possible meeting at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Kazakhstan in July and the BRICS Summit in Russia's Kazan in October. Some of the edge of the U.S.'s moralistic posture has also been taken off by its support of Israel's bombardment of Gaza and the continued killing of civilians despite calls from the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice to stop.

### The China factor

On the other multilateral front and growing concerns over China's threats against Taiwan, with the latest conflagration over the Philippines in the South China Sea too, India-U.S. cooperation at the Quad has flagged somewhat. This has mainly been a factor of logistics. Mr. Biden's decision to decline the invitation for India's Republic Day in 2024 meant that the Quad Summit was foregone, and the U.S. has indicated that it will not be rescheduled until after the U.S. elections in November. Planned visits by U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan were cancelled twice this year, at the last moment, due to the Gaza crisis, in turn affecting the iCET review. As a result, so has the visit by the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell (nicknamed 'Quadfather' or 'Asia Czar' for his role as Biden's Indo-Pacific Coordinator), who has instead focused on "Quad-Plus" meetings with the Republic of Korea and the Philippines over the past few months. All eyes are also on the Quad Foreign Minister's meeting to be scheduled in Japan this year, but much will depend on U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken being available for it.

There has been no Indian Ambassador in Washington for months, and South Block's ties with the U.S. Ambassador in India Eric Garcetti have been somewhat strained after his comments on Manipur and human rights. The State Department's comments on the state of democracy in India before the general election 2024 as well as consistent bad reviews for India in the State Department's Religious Freedom report enraged India's Ministry of External Affairs leading to the summoning of a senior US diplomat, and in turn widening the gap. Washington has been sounding excessively offensive and interfering and New Delhi prickly

and reactive. The decision by the U.S. to wait for the "final results" of the general election before congratulating Mr. Modi, and then issue a statement commending civil society and journalists for their "their commitment and vital contributions to India's democratic processes and institutions", will no doubt chafe the South Block-State Department equation.

### Tensions over 'plots'

Amid this discourse, the elephant in the room remains the attempted assassination of Khalistani separatist and U.S. citizen Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York, allegedly ordered by Indian security officials. June 2024 also marks a year since the plot in the U.S. was unearthed, along with transcripts linking the plot to the killing of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside Toronto, the same month (June 2023). Although details of the allegations became public only in November last year, it is clear that the discomfort over the perception that India is behind the killing of foreign citizens in friendly countries had begun to seep into the relationship even as Prime Minister Modi touched down in the U.S. last year. During a visit to Washington this summer, this writer saw signs that those concerns have broadened, particularly with U.S. intelligence agencies, the Department of Justice, and at the U.S. Congress, where lawmakers now routinely raise concerns from that section of the diaspora that feels most targeted by India, including those accused of terrorism by India. While the U.S.'s demand that India bring senior officials "to account" publicly for the alleged plot is a non-starter, the Government of India must realise that its theory of "rogue actors" being responsible for such a high profile plot will not wash either. It should proceed more quickly with its high-level investigation. Either way, one can expect the issue to come to a slow boil over the next few months as the trial in New York brings forth more details of what the U.S. believes, and passes on to the Canadian authorities too for the trial set to begin there.

Given the government's need to adjust to new coalition realities after the shock of the results of the general election as well as the fast-closing window of engagement with the U.S. government as Washington heads into "lame-duck" season, officials and leaders have their task cut out for them. While a possible Trump presidency in November might resolve many of the problems between them, it will most certainly introduce much more uncertainty to their ties as well. The opportunity for a Biden-Modi meeting this week then, followed by the visit by Mr. Sullivan to Delhi soon to complete the iCET review, as decided by the leaders during their phone call, is both desired and necessary for the restart they require, a year after it seemed that the relationship had reached "warp speed".

suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

## A push for more climate action

International climate change litigation reached a milestone on May 21, 2024 when the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) delivered an advisory opinion (the Opinion) sought by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS) concerning the specific obligations of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on climate change mitigation. The COSIS is an association of small island states set up in 2021. The ITLOS advisory opinion generates more attention in the context of the advisory proceedings to be decided by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the near future on the "Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change".

### New elements

The ITLOS took a radical step by accepting the request of COSIS with the aim of identifying the obligations of states that are not parties to the COSIS Agreement. That is when the request touches principally upon the obligations of states that are not party to the agreement authorising the request. The Tribunal, in its Opinion, laid down very clearly that under Article 194(1) of the UNCLOS, "the Parties have specific obligations to take all necessary measures to prevent, reduce and control marine pollution from anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)".

The Opinion has also removed doubts whether the release of carbon dioxide by man, directly or indirectly, into the marine environment qualifies to be in the category of substance or energy having potential deleterious effects on the marine environment within the meaning of Article 10(4) of the UNCLOS.

The ITLOS clarification on carbon as pollutant bolsters the position taken by the scientific community that the surface ocean absorbs around a quarter of the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted into the atmosphere, at increasingly rapid rates, resulting



Anwar Sadat

teaches International Environmental Law at the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi

The advisory opinion by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is a high point in international climate change litigation

in the progressive acidification of sea water. Other greenhouse gases (GHGs) do not have this effect. In addition, the sea also absorbs over 90% of the excess heat ('energy') generated by global warming, resulting in higher ocean temperatures and, ultimately, in sea-level rise.

### Understanding its legal importance

The principle of prevention or no harm rule which governs state behaviour towards regulation of shared natural resources (between two or more states) so as to avoid transboundary harm of a significant nature in another state has its two main limitations when the rule is sought to be applied to regulate climate crisis: its anchoring in a bilateral frame, and, the principle is not helped due to obstacles relating to attribution and standing in establishing a breach of obligation to climate change.

The Opinion, by siding with the principle for climate change (which is a collective interest as compared to bilateral ones), adds a new chapter. The necessary measures are to be decided in the light of the best available science and the relevant international rules and standards contained in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015, and also 1.5° Celsius rather than 2° C as the global average temperature goal.

The Opinion describes the obligation relating to the taking of necessary measures as due diligence obligation but the standard of it in the eyes of the Opinion is stringent one given the high risks of serious and irreversible harm to the marine environment from such emissions. But the Parties' obligations in terms of taking all necessary measures to reduce anthropogenic GHG emissions within Article 194 (1) are very general in nature. This can be interpreted to mean that neither the release of all pollution (GHGs) must be prevented nor that anthropogenic GHG emissions must cease

immediately or even eventually.

Measures that gradually reduce marine pollution by lowering GHG emissions over a period of time would be sufficient. Still, the identification of a general obligation by the ITLOS underlines one thing – that states do not have unfettered discretion in addressing climate change. Mere identification of general obligation will be of symbolic value and is inadequate.

Christina Voigt, an expert on environmental law, says as "most states are already implementing some action on climate change mitigation, the crux of the matter is not the existence of an obligation to mitigate climate change, but rather its content, in particular the standard of conduct applicable in relation to this obligation". The example to substantiate this point is the decision of the Netherlands Supreme Court, in *Urgenda Foundation vs The Netherlands*, where the court held that to comply with a general mitigation obligation inferred from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in light of the standard of due care, the Netherlands had to reduce GHG emissions to 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 (as opposed to the government's insufficient existing pledge of 17%).

The court identified this target largely by relying on scientific estimates and the least cost method of achieving the 2° C temperature goal in the Paris Agreement. The Opinion has not been able to identify the methodology concretely that can be used to assess a state's requisite level of mitigation action – as in the *Urgenda* judgment. Moreover, the necessary measures to be taken, as per the Opinion, are to be subject to the means available to the states and their capabilities, which means that the principle of equity cannot be ignored in deciding the requisite level of mitigation action, if any.

Though advisory opinion lacks legal force, it does not necessarily affect its political pull as authoritative judicial pronouncements.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Alternative medicine

The recent article by Dr. K. Madan Gopal, "The delicate balancing of health-care costs" (Editorial page, June 4), on the need for balancing health-care costs, puts forth much needed insights into the matter. India enjoys medical pluralism and the role of alternative health care too

needs to be deliberated upon in this context, especially in the preventive aspect. For instance, a patient of Osteoarthritis (Stage 1) reporting to a PHC should be provided with information regarding effective management of the same through Ayurveda. The scenario now is such

that the patient is put on non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and analgesics, which treat the symptoms while the cause persists. The condition easily progresses to the later stages which require surgical intervention. This results in decreased productivity and quality of life as well as a

growing financial burden. Intervention through alternative medical systems that have clinically established efficacy in specific conditions should be mainstreamed and made available to patients upon primary consultation. This level of integration of medical systems needs to be implemented at the

grass-root levels. As the global morbidity trend shifts steadily towards non-communicable and lifestyle diseases, alternative systems of health care can rise to the occasion, with the right kind of policymaking at the State and national levels. **Dr. D. Ramanathan,** Thrissur, Kerala

### At Roland Garros

A Spaniard is once again the king of Roland Garros. Though it is Carlos Alcaraz's first triumph on the storied clay court in Paris, he carried on the tradition of countryman Rafael Nadal. The future of world tennis seems to be in safe hands. **R. Sivakumar,** Chennai

# Why India needs a third aircraft carrier

Recent media reports indicate that the Indian Navy's long-standing demand for a third aircraft carrier is finally shuffling closer to fruition, with Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) set to begin the construction of an add-on Vikrant-class 40,000-odd tonne platform.

Building the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier-2, or IAC-2, albeit with upgrades, modifications and greater local content compared with IAC-1 Vikrant, is also intended to prevent CSL's carrier-building expertise, from lapsing into disuse. The navy remains palpably conscious of not re-experiencing the 'lost decade' between 1995 and 2005 when Mazagon Dock Shipbuilder's (MDL) submarine building expertise was allowed to deliberately dissipate.

This costly fumble led to MDL's submarine construction facilities disintegrating, following the unresolved corruption scandal involving the Indian Navy's purchase of four German HDW Type 209/1500 diesel-electric submarines (SSKs). These were thereafter resurrected in 2005 at a high cost, to licence-construct six French Scorpene SSKs, five of which have already been commissioned into Indian Navy service, while the sixth is due for induction by the year-end. Hence, the Navy's keenness on averting such a bloomer with regard to CSL by insisting on a larger carrier of around 65,000 tonne, and settling instead for the 'interim' IAC-2.

## Future concerns

The IAC-2 would supplement *INS Vikramaditya*, the 46,000 tonne refurbished Russian Kiev-class vessel and the 40,262 tonne short-take off barrier-arrested recovery (STOBAR) Vikrant, fulfilling the navy's enduring requirement for one carrier each for its two seaboard, and another in reserve.

The debate over IAC-2 has been plagued by numerous reservations like its astronomical cost of around \$5-6 billion and its



Rahul Bedi

is senior journalist covering military and security affairs for a clutch of overseas publications and domestic news portals

operational efficacy in an environment of burgeoning anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capability honed by China and Pakistan. The A2/AD is essentially a multi-layered defensive strategy to deter enemy carrier operations.

Furthermore, recent advances in cruise missile technology have made it easier and cheaper for countries like China and Pakistan to conduct A2/AD operations. So much so that even the U.S. Navy considered China's evolved A2/AD strategy a serious threat to its fleet, and remained wary of challenging it.

Moreover, within the Indian Navy, opinion was split between operationally pursuing a 'sea denial' strategy, largely by deploying submarines, or alternately seeking a 'sea control' approach via costly and relatively more vulnerable carrier battle groups comprising multiple surface and underwater escorts. Some also questioned the monetary logic of building a new carrier at the cost of inducting additional 'killer-hunters' SSKs whose numbers in the Indian Navy had depleted to 16, of which 11 from Russia and Germany were either beyond, or nearing retirement. These SSKs were eight boats less than the 24 which the Navy was projected to operate by 2030 in accordance with its Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCP). Correspondingly, equally critical surface combatants like corvettes, mine-sweepers, destroyers and frigates too were in short supply, as were naval utility helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other assorted missiles and ordnance.

Financial constraints have forced the Indian Navy to revise its goal of operating 200 assorted warships by 2027 in keeping with the MCP. These fiscal shortages had also reduced the Navy's demand for 12 mine counter-measures to eight and an additional 10 Boeing P-8I Neptune long range maritime multi-mission aircraft, to just six.

Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force (IAF) along with the Indian Army was forever competing for a greater share of depreciating annual defence budgets, as it grappled to make good its fighter, helicopter and transport aircraft shortages, alongside other essential equipment.

IAF veterans reasoned that under the prevailing penurious conditions, an aircraft carrier would not only be a 'costly indulgence' but more pertinently, entail fielding a platform vulnerable to formidable A2/AD threats.

Other IAF officers believed that SEPECAT Jaguar IM/IS and multi-role Russian Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighters, fitted with enhanced maritime strike capability and extended strike ranges, could project power more economically and securely than a carrier.

The IAF's maritime Jaguar IM fleet, for instance, is armed with AGM-84L Block II Harpoon missiles and is also being equipped with Israel Aerospace Industries-Elta EL/M-2052/2060 multi-mode active electronically scanned array radar for sea-borne operations.

## Upgrading capabilities

And, in early 2020 the IAF had commissioned its first Su-30MKI squadron, armed with the BrahMos-A(Air) supersonic cruise missile at Thanjavur on India's southeast coast to monitor its seacoasts and the wider Indian Ocean Region. Military planners said Su-30MKI would enhance the IAF's capability to engage potential maritime targets with pinpoint accuracy.

Other navalists favoured upgrading the military capabilities of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, by creating an A2/AD maritime 'exclusive zone' around it to deter, amongst others, the hegemonic Chinese navy. And while the archipelago was undoubtedly 'immovable' it was likely to be cheaper than an aircraft carrier, besides being unsinkable.

# Political tides in Telangana

The Lok Sabha election showcased a mixed outcome for major political parties

## STATE OF PLAY

Ravi Reddy  
ravi.reddy@thehindu.co.in



The outcome of the Lok Sabha election for the 17 seats in Telangana has been a mix of sweet and sour experiences for all the major political parties.

The BJP is elated for having doubled its tally to eight seats and this has been amply rewarded with the elevation of State unit chief G. Kishan Reddy yet again as a Union Cabinet Minister. Firebrand leader and former chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar, winning his second consecutive Lok Sabha election from Karimnagar, has been appointed as Minister of State in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet.

The ruling Congress party missed out on an opportunity to continue its winning streak though its numbers had risen from three in 2019 polls to eight. It exuded confidence on crossing the double digit mark but party chief and Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy had to sweat it out in the north Telangana region against the BJP resurgence.

The Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) faced a significant setback, losing all seats and failing to retain deposits in as many as eight constituencies. This indicates that the drubbing received in the Assembly election last year winning only 39 against Congress tally of 64 is fresh in people's minds.

The party's strength has already come down to 38 technically with the loss of its candidate in the by-election to Secunderabad Cantonment Assembly Constituency after the tragic death of its MLA G. Lasya Nanditha. The party fielded her sibling G. Niveditha this time but she lost the

election. In reality, the BRS's numbers are down to 35 now as Danam Nagender, Kadiyam Srihari and Tellam Venkat Rao were elected on the party symbol but have already joined the ruling Congress and more could follow suit in the coming months for 'power'.

Majlis Party chief Asaduddin Owaisi retained the Hyderabad Lok Sabha constituency with a margin of over three lakh votes even as his rival and political novice Madhavi Latha of the BJP caused a buzz on social media with provocative stances. Yet, it needs to stay alert as the massive outreach programme of the BJP to gain a foothold in the old city can be ignored at its own peril.

## Various challenges

The Congress Party riding strong on its five months of governance needs to do some soul searching as Mr. Revanth Reddy termed the Lok Sabha polls as a 'referendum' for his government. The results showed it had lost the majority in 15 seats which it had won during the Assembly elections.

The government's promise of clean, accessible governance and initiatives by the Chief Minister in the past few months did receive favourable feedback. But it seems to have faltered on the issue of handling farmers' woes such as paddy procurement, seeds shortage and complaints of erratic power supply.

"We expected 12 seats but there was a clear transfer of BRS votes to BJP so we lost out in a few constituencies. A little more effort would have helped us win the Secunderabad and Mahabubnagar constituencies. We will now focus on strengthening the party in defeated seats," said Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhathi.

The BJP partially succeeded in leveraging communal sentiments and reaped the benefits of 'Modi magic', winning five seats in north and central Telangana. But, in South Telangana, it was the Congress show as its candidates won by two to five lakh margins with the only exception being in Mahabubnagar where BJP's D.K. Aruna barely scraped through with 4,500 votes.

The party needs to examine and introspect whether its overt focus on religion and overt faith in turncoats has yielded results. Long time party leaders are upset but the central leadership has been giving their concerns a cold shoulder though the selection of Mr. Kishan Reddy and Mr. Sanjay Kumar has come as a soothing balm.

The BJP's vote share has improved to 35.08% from 19.65% in 2019 while the BRS's vote share has fallen to 16.68% from 41.71% clearing indicating the vote transfer. Will this vote continue to stay put with the BJP is a big question.

As for the BRS, former State Planning Board vice-chairman and Karimnagar candidate B. Vinod Kumar admitted that in the fight between Congress and the BJP, the BRS had lost out. "The local bodies elections will surely show where we stand in terms of grassroots support," he claimed.

The results have given clear lessons to all these parties to make course corrections before the next polls.

# Confidence about economy declines after consistent recovery

RBI survey shows confidence about the economy, that reached a post-COVID peak in March this year, marginally declined in May

## DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

Confidence about the economy, job opportunities and income levels marginally declined over the past two months, shows data from the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) bi-monthly Consumer Confidence Survey. The decline in confidence came after a consistent and steady increase in optimism in the post-COVID period.

The survey was conducted in May 2024, as the country cast its votes for the Lok Sabha elections, in urban households across 19 cities including, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Chennai. It aims to determine current perceptions and expectations on various aspects of the economy. The findings quantify opinions on the general economic climate, employment, price levels, incomes, inflation, and trends in expenditure, compared to the situation from a year-ago.

In May 2021, only 7.5% of respondents in the RBI survey believed that the economy had improved compared to a year-ago. Following this, the share of optimistic respondents consistently increased, with 22.5% of respondents claiming an improvement in May 2022 and 32.1% in May 2023. Confidence about the economy continued to recover in the following months and reached a peak with 41.2% saying it improved in March 2024. However, in the latest round of the survey in May 2024, this share recorded a marginal decline to 40%, halting the recovery. Chart 1 shows the respondents' opinions on the general economic situation when compared to a year-ago period.

The share of urban consumers who are confident about their job prospects increased from 8.1% in May 2021, to 27.3% in May 2022, and 32.1% in May 2023. Consumers continued to be optimistic about the job outlook in the following

months and reached a peak with 38.1% saying it improved in March 2024. In the latest round in May 2024, this share too showed a marginal decline to 36.8%.

Notably, in March 2024, for the first time after the pandemic started, the share of consumers who said that their job opportunities worsened was not higher than those who said it improved. Due to the marginal decline in May 2024, this was not the case anymore. Chart 2 shows the shares of respondents who believed that the employment situation had improved/worsened compared to a year-ago period.

In May 2024, over 90% of the respondents said that price levels had increased when compared to the year before. The share of respondents with such views has remained over 90% since January 2021, with those saying price levels decreased remaining below the 2% mark. Chart 3 depicts the share of respondents' views on the price levels of commodities over the years.

In May 2024, the share of respondents who said income levels have increased since 2023 reduced from 27.7% in March 2024 to 25.3% in May 2024. The percentage of respondents who believe their income levels have decreased has risen from 21.7% in March 2024 to 22.4% in May 2024. Chart 4 plots respondents' opinions of current income levels compared to 2023.

Put together, the consistent recovery in confidence about the economy, jobs and income levels, recorded in the many months after the pandemic threat ended, paused in May 2024. The persistent problem of rise in prices, and this marginal rise in pessimism paints a worrying picture. Given that the 2024 polls were fought more on the grounds of livelihood issues such as inflation, unemployment and falling income, the new government sworn in on Monday should take a serious look at the findings of the RBI's survey's latest edition.

## Confidence tracker

The data for this analysis were sourced from the Reserve Bank of India's Consumer Confidence Survey



Chart 1: The chart shows the respondents' opinions on the economic situation when compared to a year-ago period

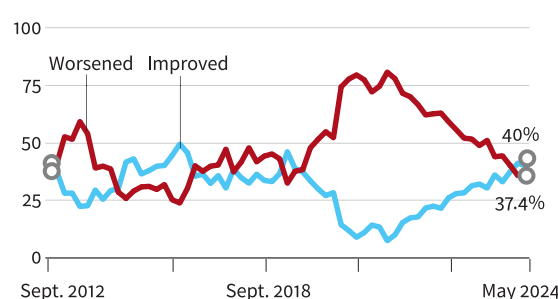


Chart 2: The chart shows the respondents' opinions on employment opportunities compared to a year-ago period

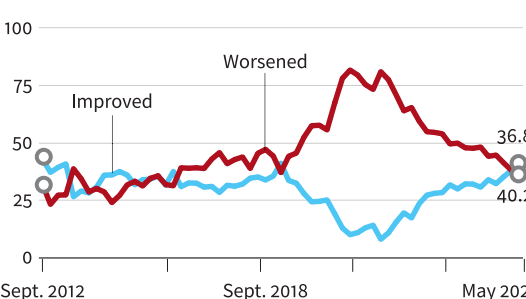


Chart 3: The chart depicts the share of respondents' views on the price levels of commodities over the years

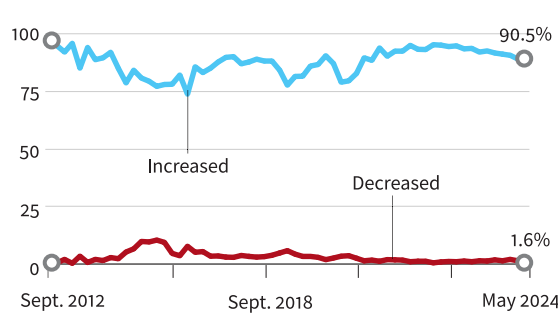
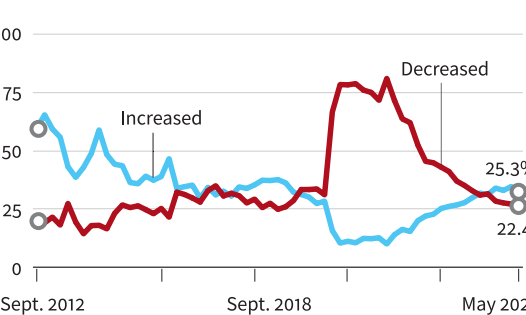


Chart 4: The chart plots respondents' opinions on current income levels compared to a year-ago period



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1974

## Council recommends Bangla for UN

United Nations, June 10: The U.N. Security Council today unanimously adopted a resolution recommending to the General Assembly the admission of Bangladesh as a member of the world body.

The resolution was passed without a vote in accordance with a consensus reached by the council members earlier.

The Mauritanian Ambassador, who is the current month's President of the Council, congratulated Bangladesh as soon as the resolution was adopted. The Chinese Charge d'Affaires said that his government welcomed the positive developments in the situation in the sub-continent and mentioned the implementation of the Council.

He said that his government was ready to develop neighbourly relations with the countries of the sub-continent on the basis of peaceful co-existence.

India, Bhutan, Pakistan and Algeria specially sought the floor of the Council to welcome the decision.

The Soviet Ambassador, Mr. Yakov Malik, recalled the efforts made by his government in the Council for the admission of Bangladesh.

The U.S. representative, Mr. William E. Schauffele, praised the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for having played a statesmanlike role in resolving outstanding issues.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1924

## Under-ground Railway.

Bombay, June 10: Bombay will have an underground railway system just on the London Model. The government has proposed to The B. B. and C. I. Railway company to put their line underground between two suburban stations in order to give the public free access to the free front. The cost of the scheme according to the government can be covered by the sale of frontages along the Queen's Road which now runs parallel to the railway line and which will be released if the scheme were put into operation. Not a mere boring of a tunnel, but the construction of a covered way which is already in progress will be borne by the government.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**The record high equity inflows in the month of May**

**34,697** in ₹ crore. Equity mutual funds marked an 83% surge from the preceding month, propelled by contributions from thematic funds. PTI

**Number of countries to attend Swiss-hosted Ukraine summit**

**90** Of the 160 invitations sent out, many countries and organisations, half from Europe, have confirmed attending the Swiss-hosted Ukraine peace summit despite Russia's refusal to participate. AP

**The number of internally displaced people in Sudan**

**10** million. The tally of internally displaced people in Sudan include 2.83 million driven from their homes before the current war began. More than 2 million other people have been driven abroad. AP

**The cut in interest rate in Pakistan's central bank**

**20.5** in per cent. Amidst better than anticipated decline in inflation, State Bank of Pakistan reduced interest rate by 1.5 per cent points to 20.5% amidst improvement in inflation. PTI

**The number of sunstroke deaths confirmed in Odisha**

**41** This summer season, 159 cases of alleged sunstroke deaths have been reported in Odisha. Of these, 45 deaths were found not to be due to sunstroke. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## On Special Category Status for Andhra

Why is the demand for special status for Andhra Pradesh back in the political limelight? Why did Chandrababu Naidu, back in 2018, settle for a special package? Is the State qualified to be granted special status? What did the 14th Finance Commission state?

**EXPLAINER**

**Sumit Bhattacharjee**

**The story so far:**

The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, which bifurcated unified Andhra Pradesh into two States, was notified on March 1, 2014 and had come into force from June 2, 2014. While the Act had specified many things, there was no mention of giving a Special Category Status (SCS) to Andhra Pradesh. Now with the completion of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the demand for SCS to Andhra is again gaining attention.

**What is the history?**

Shortly after the reorganisation, in a debate in the Rajya Sabha on February 20, 2014, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that "SCS would be extended to the State of Andhra Pradesh for a period of five years". This was appreciated and seconded by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader M. Venkaiah Naidu.

But after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took over the reigns of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led Union Government, the SCS was put on the back burner. When it was raised in both Houses by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and opposition MPs, it was said that Andhra Pradesh does not qualify for the SCS, firstly as per norms and secondly due to the dissolution of the Planning Commission in August 2014. The 14th Finance Commission had equated SCS with the general category status and had annulled SCS for new States.

**Why does AP not qualify for the SCS?**

The concept of SCS was first brought into existence through the recommendations made by the Fifth Finance Commission in 1969. It was done to benefit a few States through special grants from the Centre. The focus was on States that had socio-economic issues and geographical



In progress: Ongoing construction of the bridge at Amaravathi, Andhra Pradesh on June 10. RAO G.N.

disadvantages, such as hilly States.

Five factors stood as the qualifying benchmark for the granting of SCS — States that comprise a majority tribal population, low density of population, hilly States and close to international borders, States that have socio-economic and industrial backwardness, and lack of adequate State finances. At present, the States that have the SCS include Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and Uttarakhand.

It was debated that Andhra Pradesh, based on the above strictures, does not

qualify for the SCS and that the Finance Commission had already annulled it. However, the Centre offered Andhra Pradesh a special package (SP).

**What did the special package entail?**

Having been convinced that the SCS was ruled out by the Union Government, the first Chief Minister of residual Andhra Pradesh (2014-2019), Chandrababu Naidu of the TDP, who was then part of the NDA alliance, agreed for the SP. The SP included the recognition of the Polavaram irrigation project as a national project with full funding from the Union Government, tax concessions and special

assistance. Though Mr. Naidu accepted the SP, it was termed as a betrayal by the Opposition parties, including the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP).

In 2018, Mr. Naidu walked out of the alliance and also moved a no-confidence motion which failed. Political analysts say that Mr. Naidu had succumbed to pressure from the opposition, who were building up a strong campaign against the TDP, based on the SCS issue. His volte-face from SCS to SP was being publicised as a 'betrayal of the State'.

**Does Andhra still qualify for SCS?**

N.K. Singh, Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, in his book *Portraits of Power*, stated that the 14th Finance Commission had never said that SCS cannot be given and that it was up to the Union Government to take a call.

The 14th Finance Commission instead of SCS had increased tax devolution to the State to 42% and also introduced revenue deficit grants for States facing a revenue gap, which Andhra had already received.

SCS, which has an arrangement of funding States in a ratio of 90:10 (90% the Centre and 10% the State), may not be a ruled out chapter for Andhra Pradesh. The Union Government can take a call and refer it to the 16th Finance Commission and the NITI Aayog, and can get back to the arrangement.

**Why is SCS in the limelight again?**

Ever since the bifurcation of the State, it has been facing a revenue deficit. Additionally, the debts of the State have shot up enormously. Most of its projects and development have come to a standstill and on top of that the building for a new greenfield capital at Amaravati is pending and needs funding.

People are hopeful that since the TDP is again part of the NDA alliance which does not have a clear majority in the Centre, and is dependent on the MPs from Andhra Pradesh, it would be the right time to press for the SCS, for the overall development of the State.

**THE GIST**

The concept of SCS was first brought into existence through the recommendations made by the Fifth Finance Commission in 1969. It was done to benefit a few States through special grants from the Centre.

Five factors stood as the qualifying benchmark for the granting of SCS — States that comprise a majority tribal population, low density of population, hilly States and close to international borders, States that have socio-economic and industrial backwardness, and lack of adequate State finances.

Ever since the bifurcation of unified Andhra Pradesh, the residual State has been facing a revenue deficit. Additionally, the debts of the State have shot up enormously.

## What is happening in French territory of New Caledonia?

What does the new amendment SCS bill on voters' list stipulate? Why are Kanaks against it?

**Padmashree Anandhan**  
**Neha Tresa George**

**The story so far:**

On June 3, the Socialist Kanak National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of the south pacific French territory of New Caledonia called for French President Emmanuel Macron to abandon the plan to modify the electoral reform.

**What happened?**

Widespread protests and riots erupted in New Caledonia in response to the French parliament's decision to amend the voters' list. The new amendment bill will pave the way for incorporating citizens who were either born or lived in the territory for at least 10 years. Kanaks, the indigenous community of the territory, opposed this on claims that it diluted their electoral power thus marginalising them. The Kanaks comprise 43% of the 1,45,000 population, while the European (French loyalists), Wallisians and

Futunians comprise 37%. The new voting amendment will give majority to the loyalists undermining the Kanaks' future towards decolonisation. This would also mean an alteration of the internal political environment towards French settlers.

**What is history of the archipelago?**

New Caledonia had Kanaks as the original inhabitants. France gained control of the territory in 1853 and governed the Kanaks with reservations. After the Second World War, colonial laws were abolished and the Kanaks were granted French citizenship. In the 1960s, increased migration from France turned the Kanaks into a minority in New Caledonia. Angered by their deteriorating socio-economic status and lack of economic and political involvement, an independence movement grew along with the emergence of the FLNKS in 1984. Thus, tensions soared between the Kanaks and loyalists between from 1984 to 1988 which ended with the signing of the Matignon agreements in 1988 and the Nouméa

accord in 1998 between the Kanaks and the French government. This allowed the transfer of powers from Paris to local authorities along with three referendums to decide the territory's independence.

The independence referendums held in 2018 and 2020 were in favour of France, and against an independent New Caledonia. Kanaks requested to postpone the third and final referendum due to COVID-19 in 2021, but the French disregarded the request. A lower turnout ensured a 96% result against an independent state. This infuriated the Kanaks who then opposed talks with the French government.

**Why do Kanaks want independence?**

Post World War II, after the granting of French citizenship and transforming the French colonies into overseas territories, New Caledonia's migration pattern increasingly reflected that, of what the Kanaks call, "settler colonialism."

Under this new model, social inequalities widened leading to the

exploitation of the indigenous community. This was observed in the steel and nickel mining sectors, where indigenous people remained as labour while the non-indigenous people reaped economic and political benefits. And despite France's promise to reverse social inequalities and better Kanaks' political participation, the 2019 census showcased the poverty rate among Kanaks to be 32.5%, while only nine per cent of non-Kanaks experienced poverty. The scope of economic progress being stalled and the vote by the French Parliament to alter the electoral composition is seen as a move to end Kanak independence.

**What is the French endgame?**

First, achieving tactical peace. More violence would mean an increased threat to overseas French citizens and a risk to Mr. Macron's party's reputation.

Second, integration is key to France's Indo-Pacific strategy. France considers itself an Indo-Pacific power through its overseas territories which combined makes it the second largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Additionally, the large number of French citizens authenticates French governance. The Islands represent a strategic position for France in the Indo-Pacific, especially against China. Therefore, to seal its presence in these territories, integration becomes necessary which is difficult as Kanaks demand independence.

The authors are researchers at NIAS, Bengaluru.

**THE GIST**

Widespread protests and riots erupted in New Caledonia in response to the French parliament's decision to amend the voters' list. The new amendment bill will pave the way for incorporating citizens who were either born or lived in the territory for at least 10 years.

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Post World War II, New Caledonia's migration pattern increasingly reflected that, of what the Kanaks call, "settler colonialism."

BUILDING BLOCKS

# Heat: how it animates engines and global warming

Understanding the microscopic and macroscopic characteristics of heat has been crucial for metallurgy and materials science, mining, refineries, and a large variety of chemical reactions, among other areas

Vasudevan Mukunth

**H**eat is animus. It was there at the birth of the universe, and its death will be the universe's death. It is impossible to overstate its importance, both throughout human history and across modern technologies. The innovation of steam-powered pumps and engines in the 17th and 18th centuries, reaching the first of many summits in James Watt's setup in 1764, precipitated the first Industrial Revolution. Today, global warming is forcing us to deliberate on the roles heat plays in our lives.

**What is heat?**

In the microscope scheme, an object's temperature is the average kinetic energy of its constituent particles. When two bodies at different temperatures come in contact, the temperature of the cooler one will rise and vice versa; heat here is the amount of thermal energy the bodies have exchanged to effect this temperature change. Macroscopically, heat is dealt with as a form of energy with specific characteristics, understood using the tools of thermodynamics and statistical mechanics, among other fields.

A medium can absorb heat at one location and dissipate it at another – a possibility that forms the basis of many modern technologies, including thermal and nuclear power plants and air conditioning. Engineers have developed ways to convert heat into mechanical energy, paving the way for machines like the internal combustion engine.

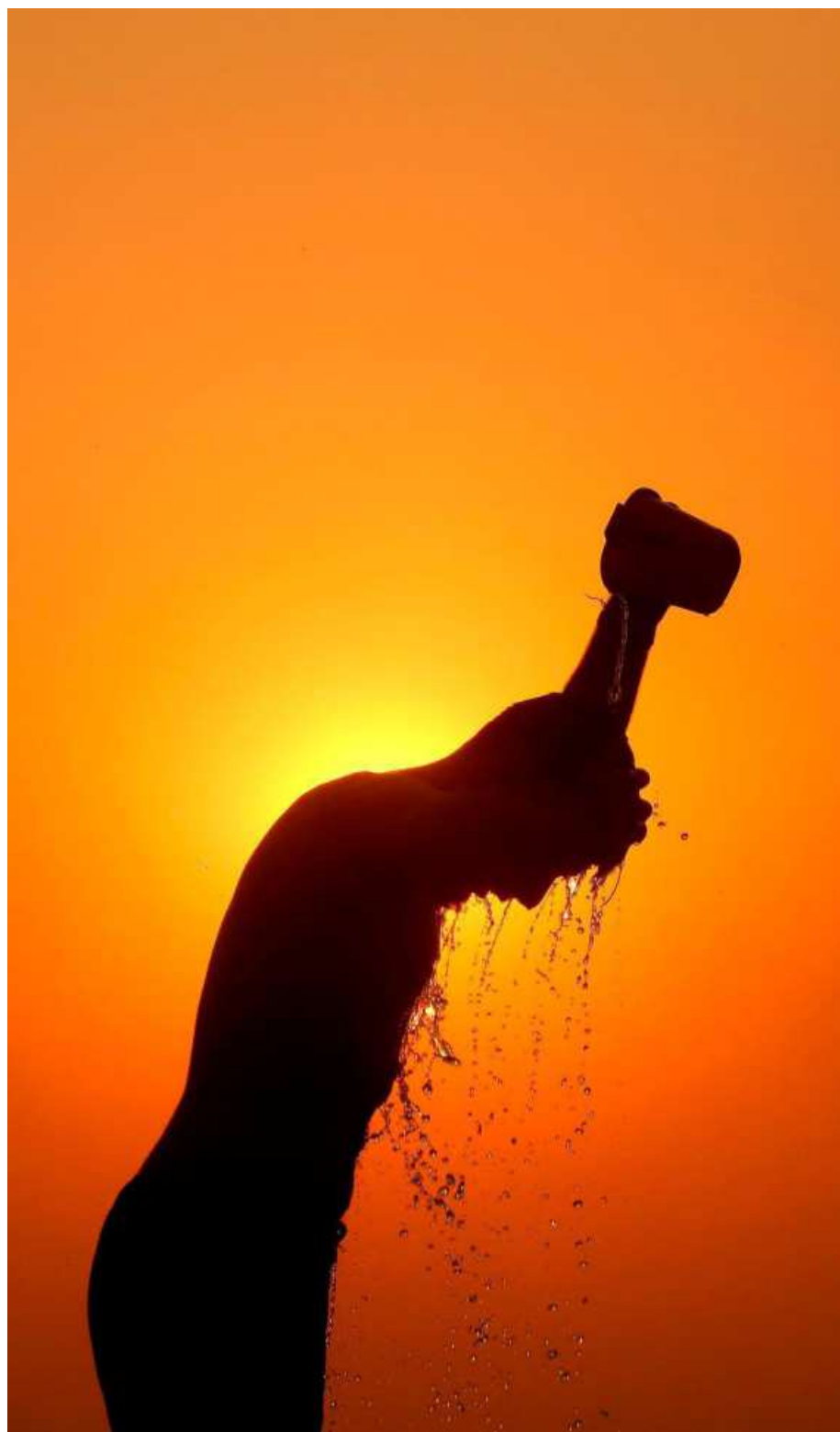
**How is heat used?**

Perhaps the best way to understand heat is through an application. Let's start with two examples: internal combustion engines (ICEs) and thermal power plants.

An ICE converts heat to (mechanical) work, and in this sense is a practical application of a theoretical entity called the Carnot cycle. This cycle describes the maximum thermodynamic efficiency an engine converting heat to work can have. To begin with, the engine has four components: a hot reservoir (a system with more heat), a cold reservoir (a system with less heat), an ideal gas in between (through which heat moves from the hot to the cold reservoirs), and a piston adjacent to the ideal gas. Each cycle has four steps.

In the first step (isothermal expansion), the ideal gas is insulated from the cold reservoir and is exposed to the hot reservoir. Heat moves from the hot reservoir – generated by, say, the combustion of petrol – to the ideal gas. The gas particles are heated up and the gas expands, pushing on the piston. In the second step (isentropic expansion), the gas continues to expand even as it is insulated from both reservoirs, pushing the piston. Its temperature doesn't change due to the insulation but it loses some energy against the piston. The expansion causes it to cool down as well. In these two steps, the piston has done work on its surroundings.

In the third step (isothermal compression), the gas is exposed to the cold reservoir and deposits its leftover heat there. This time, the piston moves downwards. In the fourth and final step (isentropic compression), the gas is



**Brutal glare:** A labourer bathes on a hot summer day in Jammu on June 1, 2024. AFP

insulated from the reservoirs while the piston continues its downward motion. This act compresses the gas and warms it up again, and the cycle can begin all over again. In the last two steps, the surroundings are said to have done work on the piston.

Similarly, in a thermal power plant, the main components are boiler, turbine, generator, condenser, and of course pumps. Let's assume the working fluid here is water. The ideal form of this system is the Rankine cycle, which also plays out in four steps.

In the first (isentropic compression), a pump compresses the water to a high pressure. In the second (heat addition), the water is pumped to the boiler. Here, the water is heated from an energy source – like burning coal or nuclear fission – while the high pressure is maintained, turning the liquid into a saturated vapour (that is, just about to condense).

In the third step (isentropic expansion), the pressurised vapour is

pumped to the turbine, where it expands to release heat and its pressure drops. The expansion drives the turbine's blades, which then produce power through a generator. The cooled vapour is pumped to the condenser in the final step (heat removal), where it is condensed at a fixed pressure back to a saturated liquid form (that is, just about to vaporise). The condenser is functionally a heat exchanger, where a coolant like cold water takes heat away from the vapour.

**How is heat related to work?**

Heat and work have the same physical dimensions. However, not all types of heat can translate to work. For example, if a system does work while also falling out of thermal equilibrium, it will lose some energy in the process. This can happen in an ICE if, say, the machine isn't well-lubricated and the piston's movement against the walls of the combustion chamber experiences friction. Such loss of 'useful heat' is

closely related to the concept of entropy, which represents a sort of disorderliness in a system such that the corresponding heat cannot contribute to useful work.

Likewise, when a system does work without losing or gaining heat energy – as in the isentropic expansion and compression steps of the Carnot cycle – the process is said to be adiabatic. Completely adiabatic processes are reversible.

The various components of ICEs and thermal power plants are designed to alternate some medium that is transporting heat between different states, in steps that maximise the amount of work and minimise entropy changes and other energy leaks.

**What are some applications of heat?**

Understanding the microscopic and macroscopic characteristics of heat has been crucial for metallurgy and materials science, mining, refineries, a large variety of chemical reactions, semiconductor electronics, meteorology, and transportation, among other areas.

Heat also has a starring role in Heating, Ventilation, and Air-Conditioning (HVAC) systems. Many cold countries generate and transport heat to homes and offices from centralised facilities, while individual homes also use electric heaters – which convert electric energy to heat energy by passing an electric current through a resistor – to keep people warm. Of late, many experts have articulated a 'right to air-conditioning' for the people of low- and middle-income countries suffering debilitating heat.

Heat engines like ICEs and steam engines use the Carnot cycle. Heat pumps, which are air-conditioners that warm the air instead of cooling it, use the reverse Carnot cycle. Similarly, air-conditioners that are used to cool large spaces, like halls, and the insides of cars use the reverse Rankine cycle. Other cycles, depending on the heat-transporting medium and the desired operating conditions, include the Brayton, gas-generator, regenerative, Siemens, and Stirling cycles.

**How is heat implicated in climate change?**

The world is responding to climate change on two fronts: mitigation and adaptation. Vis-à-vis climate mitigation, researchers around the world are devising new ways to produce heat energy for various applications without involving the combustion of fossil fuels and/or finding ways to reduce emissions from existing technologies – while policymakers are finding new ways to incentivise the uptake of these solutions.

Heat in climate adaptation is most familiar to Indians in the form of heat waves. During a heat wave, how healthy the body already is and how well it can prevent the accumulation of heat are very important.

The former depends on long-term living conditions, access to clean living conditions, and access to healthcare; the latter speaks to the short-term means available for a body to slow its accumulation of heat. Beyond a wet-bulb temperature of around 32 degrees Celsius, even short durations of non-strenuous outdoor activity can cause grievous harm.

Global warming itself is fundamentally a heat problem. Of the energy coming to the earth from the Sun, some is reflected, some is absorbed by the atmosphere, and some warms the ground. At night-time, the planet releases this absorbed energy in the form of infrared radiation. Greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, methane, and water vapour, absorb this radiation, translate it to kinetic energy and warm up the atmosphere, reducing the efficiency with which the earth's surface can cool down.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

K. Subrahmaniam

"Fly in the ointment (A. K. Dhan, New Delhi)"

"A fly in the ointment is 'something that spoils an otherwise satisfactory situation.' The idiom has its origin in the Bible. 'Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking flavour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour' (Ecclesiastee, 10:1).

*It was a nice party. But he was the only fly in the ointment.*"

"Weigh in with (K. R. Sreenidhi, Srikakulam)"

"To weigh in with' means 'to join in a discussion, an argument, etc. by saying something important or convincing; to contribute confidently.

*When the government's policies were being severely criticised at the meeting, the minister weighed in with strong arguments in support of the government.*

"Weigh on' means 'to make somebody's mind anxious.'

*Inflation is weighing heavily on the minds of the public.*

*His son's behaviour weighs on him.*"

"The Present Perfect Tense."

"Since and for' are used with the present perfect tense.

*I have not seen him since Monday.*

*I have not gone there since March 1991.*

*He has not come here for the last four months.*

"Since Monday' means from Monday up to now. Please note that 'up to' is two words and not one word. 'Since' is used when you want to refer to a period of time beginning from a point of time mentioned after 'since' up to now. He has not been here since 1990. The last time he was here was in 1990 and he has not been here till now.

*I have not eaten since morning.*

*I have been here since two O' clock.*

*One hundred people have been arrested since June.*

"Since' is followed by a point of time in the past and is preceded by the present perfect. You don't say 'I did not see him since 1990.' It must be 'I haven't seen him since 1990.' 'For' is used to convey how long something has been going on. It refers to a period of time. 'Since' goes with a point of time and 'for' with a period of time.

*He has not been here for two years.*

*She has worked here since 1985.*

*She has worked here for six years.*

*The house has been vacant since March.*

*The house has been vacant for several years.*

We have lived here for ten years and not we live here for ten years. I have known him for several years and not I know him for several years. So 'for' is used with the present perfect to convey how long something has been going on and 'since' is used with the present perfect to convey when something started in the past and is continuing up to now. There is a difference between 'he has gone' and 'he is gone.' 'He has gone' means he has left. 'He is gone' emphasises the state, it means he is absent, he is no longer here.

*She was here a few minutes ago and now she is gone.*

*She is going to be gone for a long time."*

*Published in The Hindu on March 24, 1992.*

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

## The 17th edition of the EURO championship kicks off in Munich, Germany on June 14. Here is a quiz on this prestigious championship

Soorva Prakash. N

**QUESTION 1**  
How many countries hosted the last edition of Euro in 2020?

**QUESTION 2**  
Which country has finished in the top four the most number of times?

**QUESTION 3**  
Name the countries that have won the championship when they also happened to be the host?

**QUESTION 4**  
I hold almost all individual records as far as European Football Championships are concerned. I played in most tournaments, most matches and most minutes, have

won most matches, scored most goals, with at least one goal in each of the tournaments I played in. Who am I?

**QUESTION 5**  
I won the player of the tournament award and also scored the most number of goals in that tournament, yet my country did not win the Championship in that edition. Who am I?

**QUESTION 6**  
Who scored the first ever hat-trick in the European Football Championship, all as a substitute?

**QUESTION 7**  
Who is the only player to have won the Euro Championship both as a player and as a coach?



**Visual question:** Identify this football player and the single distinction he holds in European Football Championship history. AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

- The only bowler from a non-test playing nation to have picked up a hat-trick. **Ans: Karthik Meiyappan of UAE**
  - The only player to have won the player of the final award twice. **Ans: Marlon Samuels**
  - The only player to have won the player of the final award and player of the tournament award in the same edition. **Ans: Sam Curran in 2022**
  - The only player to have ended up scoring the most runs in a single tournament twice and also won player of the tournament award twice consecutively. **Ans: Virat Kohli**
  - The only bowler to have picked up six wickets in an innings. **Ans: Ajantha Mendis**
  - The only Indian player to have scored a 100 in T20 World Cup history. **Ans: Suresh Raina**
  - The umpire has stood on-field in three finals. **Ans: Simon Taufel**
- Visual: Identify the players. **Ans: Umar Gul and Wanindu Hasaranga; both took the most wickets in an edition twice consecutively**
- Early Birds:** K.N. Viswanathan| Jagdish Godara| Akshansh Thakur| P. R. Srinivasan

## Word of the day

**Meliorism:**  
the belief that the world can be made better by human effort

**Usage:** As a believer in meliorism, I still feel the climate crisis can be solved.

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/meliorismpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /mi:lɪəɪz(ə)m/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'

the hindu businessline.

TUESDAY - JUNE 11, 2024

## Change and continuity

Modi 3.0 must stick to fiscal discipline, reform path

**T**he new government can hit the ground running, now that it has finished with the business of allocating portfolios to the 72 new ministers. To begin with, there is the Budget around the corner, the contours of which were laid out in the vote on account in February. Besides the Budget, there are a host of issues to be addressed, such as rationalisation of GST and income tax rates, creation of jobs and reforms in farming.

But even as the government starts carving out its priorities, it must dispel a looming concern over whether coalition dynamics will disrupt decision-making and the pursuit of reforms. It is crucial to bolster confidence at a time when private investment as well as consumption demand have started to pick up. An agreement between coalition partners on the economic pathway can pave the way for smooth decision-making, as differences can be sorted out beforehand. For starters, this exercise will help in framing a Budget that does not stray from the current fiscal consolidation path or the focus on capital expenditure. Budgetary outlays on capital expenditure have risen from 1.5 per cent of GDP in FY18 to 3.5 per cent projected for this fiscal in February; capex accounts for about a quarter of the size of the central budget of close to ₹48-lakh crore. As for welfare, a shift away from sheer dole to creating health and education infrastructure must be pressed upon.

From these elections, it is even possible to infer that the wholesale 'guarantee' of freebies has not really translated into electoral gains for anyone. Skilling, and improving the employability of the youth and their productivity deserves attention. Reducing the cost of health through public healthcare and insurance coverage is called for. Farm reforms, particularly in the storage and marketing of produce, must be pursued not only to boost rural incomes, of which there have been signs of distress over the last year, but also to improve supply chain efficiencies and control stubborn food inflation. It is possible to hammer out a Budget that is investor-friendly and welfarist, without being populist. Besides the structure of the Budget, details such as concerns over personal income tax rates and slabs should be attended to.

As for GST rates, these can be rationalised by merging the 12 per cent and 18 per cent slab into a 15 per cent category and the 5 per cent and 12 per cent slab into an 8 per cent category. In the renewed pursuit of free trade pacts — negotiations with the UK and EU are at an advanced stage — it should be borne in mind whether these are in tune with the performance linked incentive schemes. Robust data is key to making the right economic decisions. The Census exercise must be taken up urgently, while the base years for price and growth data too need to be updated. The collective resources of a coalition government can, in fact, result in unanticipated benefits — including a consensus over reforms across sectors and institutions.

## POCKET: BIZ DIZRUPTION

RAVIKANTH



ABHIJIT DAS

**A**n important task confronting the new government in New Delhi is the need to review India's approach to negotiations for free trade agreements (FTAs), particularly those with the developed countries. Why is this important? What are some of the key questions that should be addressed in this review?

Over the past 2-3 years India has finalised FTAs with Mauritius, the UAE, Australia and the four nation EFTA (European Free Trade Association) group. Further, considerable progress appears to have been made in the FTA negotiations with the UK and Oman. India is also negotiating FTAs with the European Union, Peru and a few other countries. It would thus appear that FTAs are being viewed as an important instrument for boosting India's exports.

Can FTAs be the primary driver of India's exports? FTAs can open new commercial opportunities for enhancing India's exports of goods and services. However, the incremental gain in exports on account of FTAs would be rather limited. To illustrate, a study by UK's Department of International Trade predicts that the India-UK FTA could increase India's bilateral exports of goods and services to the UK by £10.6 billion by 2035. This translates into an annual increase of around \$1 billion — a drop in the ocean compared to India's exports of \$776 billion today.

With the exception of the EU, the contribution of FTAs with most of the other countries with whom India is presently negotiating, is likely to be even more modest in giving a fillip to its exports. However, enhanced prospects of exports arising from the FTAs with the UK and the EU could remain a pipe dream, as they would get largely curtailed on account of measures such as carbon border tax. Overall, the premise that FTAs would be a significant contributor to India's export growth appears somewhat misplaced. A review of the performance of India's past FTAs would also bear out this point.

India's FTA strategy needs to recognise that FTAs are no longer mainly about trade flows. On account of inclusion of provisions on a large number of non-trade issues at the insistence of the developed countries — labour, environment, gender, corruption, regulatory coherence, to name a few — FTAs of the developed countries are increasingly becoming 'free from trade', or even 'far from trade', agreements. How would India be impacted, if the final provisions in its FTAs with the UK and the EU are similar



# India must review FTA strategy

**DEAL WITH CARE.** FTAs thus far haven't really delivered, and some of those being negotiated with developed nations include non-trade issues that would hurt India's interests

to those in the recent FTAs of these two developed country partners?

### THE LIKELY IMPACT

First, some of the provisions, particularly those on environment, labour and gender, would raise the cost of production in India, thereby eroding its cost competitiveness. Further, rules on these issues mark a clear trend towards norm-setting allowing countries to impose barriers on exports. These barriers would dent India's exports.

Second, many of the FTA provisions on sustainability are likely to be extremely pernicious for India, but would do little for protecting the environment. A cluster of commitments would prevent India from implementing policies to spur the domestic manufacture of goods required for de-carbonisation, thereby making the country overwhelmingly import dependent.

These include the following: eliminating customs duties on environmental goods; according non-discriminatory treatment to domestic and foreign suppliers in

An array of provisions in the existing FTAs of the developed countries are aimed at facilitating the grab of natural resources in developing countries.

government procurement of equipment required for renewable energy production and storage; and adopting high standards of environmental protection, or harmonising standards with those prevalent in the FTA partner country. The last-mentioned obligation would prevent most Indian producers, particularly those in the MSME segment, from selling even in the domestic market as they would not be able to comply with the stringent environmental norms. This would open the Indian market for sellers who can comply with high environmental standards — mainly exporters from the developed countries.

Third, an array of provisions in the existing FTAs of the developed countries are aimed at facilitating the grab of natural resources in developing countries. Prohibiting the imposition of export taxes on natural resources would prevent India from creating a value-added downstream industry based on some critical minerals required for de-carbonisation. It should also be noted that the following provisions could result in the developed countries acquiring *de facto* control over India's mining sector: treating mining entities from FTA partners at par with Indian entities; establishing high standards of environmental protection for offshore oil and gas operations; promoting the values of responsible sourcing and mining; and undertaking an environmental impact assessment prior to granting authorisation for mining projects. Resource grab could also extend to grab for government data

through provisions on digital trade, and grab for pathogen data through provisions on 'One Health Initiative'.

Fourth, even if many of the provisions on non-trade issues might not be legally enforceable, these should continue to ring alarm bells. India's FTA partners would not fail to use multiple avenues available in many FTAs, particularly public participation and submissions, consultations, cooperation, dialogue, and exchange of information, to ensure compliance with the provisions on non-trade issues.

In the 1990s and 2000s international investment treaties were promoted as being the magic wand for attracting foreign investment. This proved to be a mirage. It is apprehended that the fate of the so-called 21st century FTAs being negotiated by India would be no different when it comes to significantly boosting the country's exports. The real increase in India's exports will come from domestic initiatives that enhance price competitiveness — infrastructural improvement; reducing the cost of capital and export finance; and bringing down transaction costs.

On account of the economy-wide implications of the non-trade issues, in the long-term, the FTA embrace could smother India's aspirations and prospects in many sectors. An urgent rethink of India's FTA strategy is called for, before it is too late to make course correction.

The writer is an international trade expert. Views expressed are personal

# Banks must ensure adequate resources for lending

They can attract more deposits through product innovation, better customer service, and quick grievance redress systems

K Srinivasa Rao

**T**he Monetary Policy Committee, by keeping the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent by a 4:2 majority this time round, has indicated that the present elevated interest rate may be on its last legs. Opinions might be drifting towards easing of the interest rate cycle. With ECB (European Central Bank) cutting interest rates to 3.75 per cent from 4 per cent, the downward shift in interest rates is gathering pace. Though the RBI is focused on maintaining the right balance between domestic growth and inflation, synchronised action with major global central banks will be imminent.

Asset-liability management (ALM) of banks could be a challenge going forward. Banks are meeting the gaps in frictional liquidity using the liquidity windows of the RBI. Eventually, banks will have to avoid a deficit in durable liquidity. Credit growth reached 15.8 per cent year-on-year as of May 17, whereas the deposit growth was trailing, at 12.7 per cent. Such imbalance has continued since the acceleration of credit growth in FY23. However, the data on sectoral deployment of credit indicates that the

excessive credit exposure to unsecured retail loans and over-reliance of NBFCS on bank funding is moderating. This will reduce the credit risk of banks.

In the context of durable liquidity, the marked shift of household savings towards physical savings could exacerbate durable liquidity risks. Also, while a young India — with a median age of 28 years in 2021 — would be beneficial to the economy, for banks it could pose certain risks. The young generation of tech-savvy customers, with good financial literacy, can further shift savings to alternative sources apart from opting for physical savings. Thus, balancing structural liquidity in banks will be daunting unless new customers are targeted with product innovation and aggressive marketing.

### STRENGTH OF BANKS

The twin balance-sheet malaise of the past has turned into a twin balance-sheet advantage. Banks are now on a strong footing with remarkable improvement in asset quality, robust capital adequacy ratio, improved profitability, and high provision-coverage ratio.

But the growing deposit resource crunch could derail credit deployment.



**BANKS.** Must shore up deposits

Banks have already increased interest rates on deposits. It is evident that against the rise of the repo rate by 250 basis points (bps), the interest rate on new term deposit rates has gone up by 244 bps ensuring full transmission of interest rates to the deposit segment. For loans, the weighted average lending rate on fresh loans increased by 204 bps. Strong banks with weak lending capacity due to insufficient incremental deposit growth could pose greater risks.

Growth, inflation, and interest rate trajectory may correct itself in times to come. However, it will be interesting to see how banks attract deposits under rising competition from non-banks

including insurance companies. The RBI has called upon banks to work out different strategies and set appropriate business plans. Some of the proposed regulatory changes in the current monetary policy review could help banks. The definition of bulk deposit has changed from ₹2 crore and above to ₹3 crore and above. The RBI had already assured suitable reforms to the framework of liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) for banks to align with risks.

Allowing an auto-replenishment facility under e-mandate for recurring payments for FASTag, National Common Mobility Card (NCMC), etc., will shift some float funds from these entities to banks. Similarly, the auto replenishment of the UPI Lite wallet will also ensure the placement of funds just in time.

Product innovation, better customer service, and quick grievance redress systems will be able to improve the deposit inflows. The onus is now on banks to work out business strategies to attract and retain large-scale deposits to meet the growing credit needs of entrepreneurs.

The writer is Adjunct Professor, Institute of Insurance and Risk Management. Views are personal

© **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

### Consensus approach

The inauguration of the NDA government, with Narendra Modi sworn in as Prime Minister for the third consecutive term along with a 72-member council of ministers, marks a testament to the will of people who shunned majoritarianism and voted for an accountable government and a strong Opposition. With the support of allies critical to going past the majority mark in 2024, their representation in the council of ministers has now more than doubled compared with that in 2019. Both the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have the onerous responsibility to build consensus with the allies constituting the NDA, and give them a hearing and a place at the decision-making table while

ensuring the spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism. For the resurgent Opposition led by the Congress, they must no longer take recourse to boycotts or refuse to engage on crucial issues in Parliament and outside it.

**M Jeyaram**  
Sholavandan, TN

### Election reporting

The article 'Of elections and numbers' (June 10) made for a good read. Hundred per cent neutral reporting of elections by the print or visual media is very difficult. Man, after all, is a social animal. He has his own way of consuming politics. His preference for some political party has not happened overnight. It is indeed a process. Pollsters and the media at large have also been

influenced by some political parties and leaders. Hence their predictions, views, etc., on the outcome of elections are largely based on their liking and preferences too. Unless there is a fair degree of neutral reporting of both news and views of political, social and economic happenings by the media, political socialisation, which is *sine qua non* for a successful democracy, cannot be fully achieved in the country. However, one cannot be oblivious to the fact that economics or politics is not a physical science to ensure 100 per cent accuracy in its theories and practices.

**S Ramakrishnasayee**  
Chennai

### Stock market movement

Those not conversant with the stock

market would do well not to comment on the rise and fall of the market within the space of just five sessions. Just because the market has made up for the losses last Tuesday does not mean the investing public did not lose money. Most of the Indian investors indulge in options trading, where it is possible to lose money even if the stock prices rise. Given the nature of uncertainty of coalition governments, more volatility in the market can be expected.

**Anthony Henriques**  
Mumbai

### Functioning of ARCs

The editorial 'Asset no longer' (June 10) is a valid indictment of the functioning of a plethora of ARCs. Apart from the ones named, the

scorecard of many is not worth writing about. Allegations that an associate of a top public sector bank had disposed of a tranche of 'non-performing' education loan to an ARC of renown at throwaway price is thick in the air. As the ARC approached for settlement, the loanee was stunned at why and how the bank didn't give them such an offer of settlement. And the fact remains the ARC was still making a killing in the deal. That the RBI chose to rein in some of them is to be welcomed in the larger interest of the economy and financial system. It is unfortunate that many train their skills towards ever-greening of loans/assets to further their ulterior business motives.

**Jose Abraham**  
Kottayam

# Who are the 'real' owners?

Rules may be suspect, but firms must comply

Sreetama Sen  
Udyan Arya Shrivastava



**OWNERSHIP ISSUE.** Bone of contention ISTOCK.COM

A recent order by Registrar of Companies (RoC) penalising LinkedIn India for violation of significant beneficial ownership rules has put MNCs operating in India on tenterhooks. The RoC in this case fined Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and LinkedIn's global CEO Ryan Roslansky for failure to disclose that they were significant beneficial owners (SBOs) of LinkedIn India.

SBOs are natural persons who indirectly (or along with direct holdings) hold more than 10 per cent stake in an Indian company, or otherwise have 'significant influence' or 'control' over an Indian company.

In 2016, the Company Law Committee issued recommendations to curb the use of complex structures and chains of corporate vehicles to conceal real 'owners' behind companies engaged in money laundering or illegal transactions.

SBO rules were framed pursuant to these recommendations and mandate all individuals who are SBOs of an Indian company to submit a declaration to the RoC, and also maintain a register of its SBOs. Further, each company is required to issue a notice (in form BEN-4) to any individual it has 'reasonable cause to believe' are its SBOs and to all non-individual shareholders with over 10 per cent stake in the company.

## ORDER, ORDER

In LinkedIn's case, the RoC order noted that no individual had submitted an SBO declaration to LinkedIn India, and hence the company did not make any RoC filing. It further noted that the company did not issue any BEN-4 notices to its non-individual shareholders. This was seen by RoC as a violation of the SBO rules as, in its view, LinkedIn India had individuals identifiable as SBOs and was required to undertake these compliances.

The RoC order is prone to challenge before the Regional Director on several grounds. First, identifying professional executives as SBOs may not be an appropriate reading of law. The SBO framework seeks to identify individual 'owners' while professionals CEOs are only acting in managerial capacity. A

CEO's role is distinct from that of an owner of the company, and may not imply significant influence or control in the sense required under law for an SBO.

Second, such an approach does not advance the purpose of SBO disclosures. Professional managers like CEOs are already subject to regulatory disclosures. For instance, directors on the board of an Indian company are required to submit detailed forms which are publicly available.

Similarly, information regarding foreign managerial officers is usually readily available in foreign directories (especially if the foreign entity is listed).

Third, while the current SBO framework is robust enough to identify such individual owners, RoC's stance in the LinkedIn order results in conflating managers with SBOs. There is room for debate whether the RoC's order weakens the SBO framework by enabling actual individual owners to disclose details of professional managers as SBOs instead.

While clarity from the regulator would be helpful, all companies having any non-individual shareholders holding over 10 per cent stake should mandatorily issue BEN-4 notices to such shareholders. The legality of this requirement may itself be suspect, as the relevant provision in the SBO rules is framed pursuant to section 90(5) of the Companies Act, which limits BEN-4 issuance to cases where company has 'reasonable cause' to believe it has SBOs.

But considering the proactive approach adopted by RoCs in the recent past, companies should strictly comply with this requirement, as it only entails an intimation to be issued to its shareholders. It will further help showcase due diligence on the company's part if ever called into question by the RoC.

Sen is Partner (General Corporate), and Shrivastava is Senior Associate (General Corporate), Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas

# Is a savings dip driving growth?

In what may seem to be a paradox, the lower net financial savings of households appears to be a cause of the recent growth

## MACROSCAN.

CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

For some time now, there has been much discussion of and concern expressed about a decline in the net financial savings of the household sector in India. Overall household savings as a percentage of gross national disposable income (GNDI) rose from 18.8 per cent in 2019-20 to 22.4 per cent in pandemic year 2020-21 (Chart 1). That rise is understandable because opportunities and avenues for spending were severely restricted due to the pandemic and the accompanying sudden and prolonged lockdown.

So, the fact that following the pandemic that saving rate fell to 19.8 per cent in 2021-22 and 18.1 per cent in 2022-23 should not give cause for alarm, since the last figure is not very much lower than that observed prior to the pandemic.

Gross financial savings of the household sector reflected a similar trend, rising from 11.4 to 15.2 per cent of GNDI in the pandemic year, and then falling to 10.9 per cent (Chart 2). The real cause for concern, if any, is the trend in net financial savings, which is the difference between gross financial savings and the accumulation of financial liabilities during the year. Net financial savings, having jumped from 7.6 per cent of GNDI in 2019-20 to 11.6 per cent in the pandemic year, fell to 7.2 per cent and 5.2 per cent in the subsequent two years (Chart 2), bringing the figure down to a long time low.

The arithmetic implicit in these numbers does indicate that the decline in net financial savings is essentially the result of an increase in their financial liabilities by incremental sums that neutralise a large volume of gross financial savings.

## RETAIL LOANS SPIKE

Other data from the RBI indicate that the share of retail loans in total lending by the banks has risen, with items like loans for housing, purchases of automobiles and even borrowing to finance education registering significant increases. Personal loans advanced by the scheduled commercial banks rose by 21 per cent in financial year 2022-23 and 28 per cent in 2023-24, way ahead of the rise in nominal incomes.

There are reasons why there has been a surge in retail lending post the pandemic. On the one hand, India has regained its position as a favoured destination for inflows of foreign finance capital seeking high yields from equity and bond purchases. The large volumes of liquidity infused into the



system as a result of that capital inflow soon found its way into banks, which needed to keep the money accumulating as deposits moving.

During the high growth years after 2004, lending driven by this supply side pressure went largely into infrastructure projects in areas like power generation and distribution, roads, ports, and civil aviation.

There were obvious maturity and liquidity mismatches between the kind of capital that banks mobilised (which were relatively shorter-term deposits associated with expectations of high liquidity), and the long-term character of the more illiquid lending that the exposure to infrastructure involved.

But banks chose to take that route, partly because of the need to expand lending, and also because of pressure from the government, which owned most of these banks and was keen on raising infrastructural investment in private and public-private partnership projects.

## BAD LOANS WORRIES

It turned out that many of these projects failed to take off, or were delayed, or could not earn the expected returns, resulting in large scale defaults. The spike in non-performing assets and the push by the RBI under Governor Raghuram Rajan to recognise these bad loans more transparently, led to provisioning and losses and subsequent recapitalisation of the banks. That experience forced the banks to turn more cautious on lending to infrastructure.

The pressure to expand lending driven by the liquidity infused by

international capital flows persisted and increased in the years after the pandemic. In response, the banks diversified away from lending to infrastructure into lending to the retail sector.

This led to a boom in lending for housing, automobile and durables purchases, and education, besides an increase in credit card receivables. Besides lending directly for these purposes, banks also lent to non-bank financial companies, which then lent to retail borrowers.

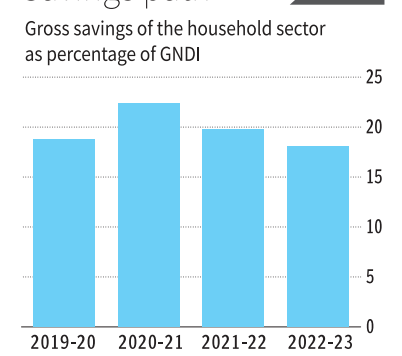
The supply side push into these areas meant that the universe of retail borrowers had to expand substantially. Many who were earlier excluded from access to large retail loans with low default margins, found themselves eligible and were only too happy to exploit the opportunity.

The danger in this is that it brings in weaker borrowers in whose case the probability of default is higher. But the numbers provide some basis for bank confidence in such lending. The ratio of non-performing loans to advances is lower for retail loans (Chart 3), being low in lending for housing and automobile and durable purchases, with only educational loans showing relatively high ratios. This has encouraged banks to continue with this strategy, leading to the decline in net financial savings noted earlier.

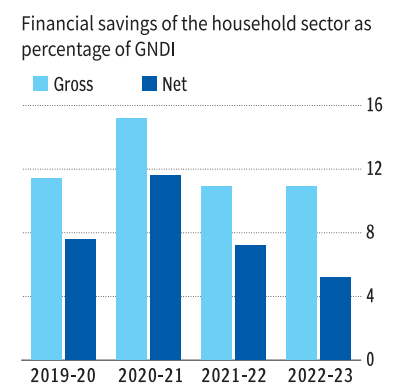
This trend has implications for India's growth trajectory as well. One puzzling feature of that trajectory has been the absence of clarity with respect to the drivers of India's relatively high growth, even after discounting for some overestimation of GDP growth rates resulting from changes in the methods of estimation.

India is by no means a successful exporter, except for software and IT-enabled services. So net exports cannot be the main driver of that growth. The government is focused, even if not always successfully, on reining in its fiscal deficit or debt financed spending. So, the stimulus

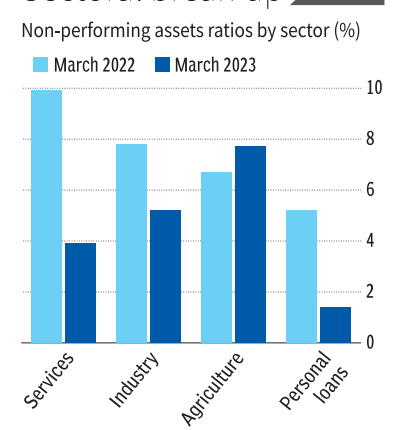
## Savings path CHART 1



## 'Net' worries CHART 2



## Sectoral break-up CHART 3



from that government spending is also limited. Despite this, if growth has been high in a number of years since 2003 it is mainly because of debt financed spending by the private sector.

Initially, this was dominantly bank-debt financed spending by the corporate sector, especially corporates making a bid for profits from infrastructural investments supported by the state. The enforced end to that growth strategy has been partly compensated for by an increase in bank debt-financed spending by the household sector.

In what may seem to be a paradox, the lower net financial savings thus appears to be a cause of the recent growth.

## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 11, 2004

#### TCS files draft prospectus for IPO

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has finally filed its draft prospectus for initial public offer (IPO) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The red herring prospectus was submitted to the market regulator late Thursday evening. The total number of shares on offer is 5.5 crore (55,452,600). This is divided into two lots.

#### RBI no to HSBC buying 2nd tranche of 5.46% in UTI Bank

The Reserve Bank of India has shot down HSBC's attempt to purchase a second tranche of 5.46 per cent in UTI Bank. HSBC had applied for acquiring 20.08 per cent in UTI Bank, of which only the first tranche of 14.62 per cent of the deal aggregating Rs 304.2 crore has been cleared.

#### Rlys to move coaches form Chennai by air

Indian Railways is set to create another first in rail history of the country by seeking to airlift passenger coaches from Chennai to Srinagar to begin commuter services in the Kashmir valley. The valley part of the ongoing Kashmir rail link project, connect Quazigund to Baramulla through Srinagar, will be ready by December 2005, covering a distance of 120 km.

# Green parties' wipeout tests Europe's climate goals

Ewa Krukowska  
Bloomberg

This weekend's European Union elections marked the end of the bloc's greenest parliament ever after concerns over everything from climate policies to migration gave the populists a boost.

The Greens, whose rise five years ago helped the 27-nation bloc embrace the world's most ambitious climate strategy, emerged in all but tatters from a ballot that ended on Sunday. Climate-friendly liberals also suffered a massive blow from voters while far-right nationalist parties strengthened their position in countries from Germany to Italy.

The results won't topple the Green

Deal. The mainstream parties that supported the sweeping plan to decarbonize the bloc's economy retained a majority. But they risk weakening the resolve of governments when they turn the policy into reality through measures that will affect households from Lisbon to Helsinki. There will also likely be some bickering among new lawmakers over future measures to meet the net zero target.

"The Green Deal will stay alive but not necessarily kicking," said Maximo Miccinilli, head of energy and climate at the consultant firm FleishmanHillard EU. "The EU should be able to defend measures that were already adopted for this decade but proposals for a new goal for 2040 will



**CLIMATE.** 'Right' blow ISTOCKPHOTO

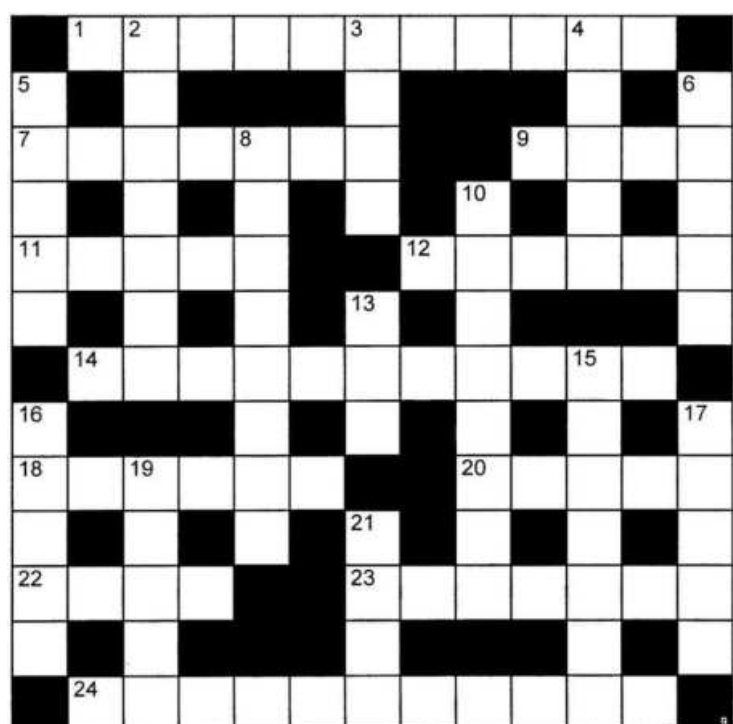
be a huge test for the new parliament."

Governments across the continent and the EU leadership in Brussels have already come under pressure to soften their ambition as discontent over green policies sparked protests and added to worries about rising costs of living and

migration. The most difficult steps to meet the EU's ambitious 2030 climate goal of cutting greenhouse gases by 55 per cent from 1990 levels are yet to be implemented. In 2027, the EU is due to launch a new carbon market for heating and transport fuels, a move that will impact consumers. By 2035, all new passenger cars will have to be emissions-free, effectively one step closer to sending the combustion engine to the museum.

"Populist parties have unfortunately gained too much ground" and "only fairer policies" and "better listening to citizens are the solution to polarization," said Laurence Tubiana, chief executive of the European Climate Foundation.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2458



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Chef d'oeuvre, greatest achievement (11)
- Restaging of old play (7)
- Heel goad (4)
- Movable part of helmet (5)
- Has confidence in (6)
- Undulation at sea (6,5)
- Eat with enjoyment (6)
- Bearing weapons (5)
- Be very fond (4)
- Manage to discern (4,3)
- Entering unlawfully on other's land (11)

#### DOWN

- Counsellor (7)
- Go over and over (4)
- Sleeveless garments (5)
- Valorous (5)
- Have an accident (5)
- Highly skilled instrumentalist (8)
- A snag, disadvantage (8)
- Curious; not even (3)
- Personal satire (7)
- Exercise by repeated practice (5)
- Prepares for publication (5)
- Bar (5)
- Former signaller's 'm' (4)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Get the better of a bit of a chef-d'oeuvre (11)
- Another showing of the Six-five in a genuine setting (7)
- It may encourage one to enter a fruitless pursuit (4)
- An open-and-shut case where armour is concerned (5)
- Tail of cabriolet corrodes, yet one has faith in it (6)
- The earth's fit for movement observable at sea (6,5)
- Some sorrel is happily used to supply the zest (6)
- Has a gun, unlike the Venus de Milo (5)
- Such close feeling is nothing to court player (4)
- Manage to get by if one can decry it (4,3)
- Resigns, past changing fact of walking where one shouldn't (11)

#### DOWN

- He gives counsel as diver gets in trouble (7)
- Bread portion will move like a wheel (4)
- Headlands have space for development (5)
- Face up to second note and be wildly enthusiastic (5)
- Disaster with coarse strong linen (5)
- He plays with skill, making out Rio's wrong after five (8)
- Depict a footballer and this may be the snag (8)
- Not being paired - not even this number (3)
- Satire of personal kind shows a politician held by fool (7)
- To go in for square-bashing, and produce a hole (5)
- Cuts film to make part of the best I'd evidently given up (5)
- It may give one purchase, the pound, for all time (5)
- Hamilton's first to arise in a dream, methinks (4)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2457

**ACROSS** 1. Results 5. After 8. Storage 9. Erred 10. Delighted 12. She 13. Elude 17. Elm 19. Nightmare 21. Panda 22. Average 24. Dodge 25. Treated

**DOWN** 1. Reside 2. Spoiled 3. Lea 4. Swept 5. Amendment 6. Tires 7. Redden 11. Greengage 14. Adamant 15. Helped 16. Defend 18. Mined 20. Grant 23. Elm

## Balanced development

Spatial inequality must be addressed

One of the prevalent views among economists and economy watchers, particularly after the pandemic, has been that inequality in India has increased over the years. Several studies and reports in recent years have emphasised this view. However, details for the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 — released last week — show inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, has, in fact, declined. At the all-India level, the Gini coefficient of consumption expenditure in rural areas declined from 0.283 in 2011-12 to 0.266 in 2022-23. For the urban areas, it declined from 0.363 to 0.314 during the same period. The Gini coefficient measures inequality on a scale of 0 to 1, with a higher value indicating higher inequality. In some states, it has gone up.

Although the headline number suggests that inequality has come down in the stated period, the numbers must be read cautiously. As argued by Pronab Sen, chairperson of the Standing Committee on Statistics, the affluent class doesn't report their spending well. The data is sensitive to certain income quartiles and doesn't capture the changes in the affluent quartiles very well. Therefore, the conclusion that inequality has gone down may not be correct. Besides, the real problem of inequality in India is spatial. In some states, there is a significant gap in the level of consumption between rural and urban areas. The difference in average monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) between rural and urban areas is stark in some states. In Chhattisgarh, for instance, the difference is 82 per cent. At the all-India level, the difference is nearly 71 per cent.

Further, the level of consumption is markedly different between states. For instance, MPCE in rural Tamil Nadu is nearly double that in Jharkhand. MPCE in urban Telangana is over 70 per cent higher than that in Bihar. There is no surprise that MPCE is higher in states that have moved ahead on the development path. Thus, the real policy challenge is to reduce spatial inequality and ensure growth and development are not skewed. Since the better-off states are in a superior position to attract investment and have more resources, the divergence will only increase over time, which itself may hurt India's overall growth prospects.

To address these issues, it will be important for the Centre to provide sustained policy and fiscal support to lagging states. Some of the poorer states do not have enough revenue to improve developmental outcomes. These states need to be provided more resources through the Finance Commission or directly by the Union government. To be fair, this will not be easy politically because better-off states, mostly in the southern part of the country, have already started complaining that their tax resources are being spent in poorer states, mostly in North India. But there is hardly another way to pull along these states. On their part, laggard states need to make the right policy interventions and invest in the right areas to attract investment. At a broader level, one of the reasons for the development difference is that India has not been able to build a large enough base for low-skill manufacturing. There would have been incentives for firms in a large manufacturing sector to relocate to areas with cheap labour, potentially uplifting poorer regions.

## Left out

Blinkered ideology has made it irrelevant

Inequality and joblessness in post-economic reform India have been persistent bleak spots in the landscape of economic growth but the movement that developed from colonial times to protect workers' and peasants' rights has steadily lost traction. Left parties once dominated the political landscape, with Left members of Parliament holding ministerial positions in the mid-nineties and supporting a Congress-led government at the Centre between 2004 and 2008. Now the movement has been reduced to a nonentity. It holds power in just one state from three at the start of the century, and only one of these parties has national-party status — the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M). Last year, the second-largest of the Left parties, the Communist Party of India (CPI), lost its national-party status. In the latest Lok Sabha elections, the Left marginally improved its position, with the CPI (M) winning four seats, up from three in 2019 (two in Tamil Nadu, one in Kerala, and one, surprisingly, in Rajasthan). The CPI won two, the same as in 2019, and the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation two in Bihar. In Kerala, the CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front lost one seat and witnessed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) open its account in the state. In West Bengal, the four-party Left Front, which had an electoral understanding with the Congress and once ruled the state for over three decades, came in third in 32 of the 33 seats they contested, coming in second in the single exception.

The minor gains in the latest elections do not alter the picture of steep decline. Leftist commentators have put this down to the rise of neo-liberal right-wing fundamentalism. This misses the bigger picture of the Left's failures. In the early noughties, the Left scored successes by supporting the rural employment guarantee law, which has become a mainstay for subsequent governments, the Right to Information, and the Forest Rights Act, which sought to protect the rights of tribals and forest dwellers. In West Bengal, its land redistribution movement of the 1970s undoubtedly transformed ownership rights. But the thrust of the movement remained negative and out of sync with the needs of economic growth. By protecting organised-sector workers, the Left failed to help unorganised-sector workers who account for the bulk of the workforce. A law for unorganised-sector workers to earn long-term benefits has been languishing for over a decade.

This abdication of responsibility for the most unprotected section of Indian labour as much as the promotion of gratuitous trade union-led violence has brought diminishing returns. With industry staying away from Left-ruled hotspots, workers in search of jobs were forced to move to geographies where protections are weak or non-existent. By opposing the United States-India nuclear deal and foreign investment in organised retail, the Left also showed itself to be blinkered by an ideology that its two international mentors, Russia and China, had jettisoned long ago. The irony is that in the competitive welfareism that has developed in the public discourse over the past decade, the Left's ideals have been swamped by caste and religious constructs. If the Left doesn't evolve and start representing the working class, it will continue to lose ground.

# India among Asia's new flying geese

It is placed well, both economically and geopolitically, to benefit from the China plus one strategy

ILLUSTRATION:BINAY SINHA



The term "wild-geese-flying pattern" of economic growth is a translation of the Japanese term, *Gankō Keitai*, which was coined by economist Kaname Akamatsu to describe the pattern of economic development he observed in Japan. Post-war Japan, as the lead goose, started out producing low-value products like garments. As its costs rose in the 1960s, it relocated production to the next flock of geese, the newly industrialising economies (NIEs) of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. As the NIEs caught up with Japan in the early 1990s, they helped launch the next flock of geese in the Asean-4 and China.

Viewed through Akamatsu's lens, the shift in supply chains from China is a natural progression of economic development, although US-China tensions and the pandemic have clearly accelerated this trend by forcing multinational firms to look for alternatives and diversify supply-chain risk.

### How much can India benefit from China plus one?

Concurrent data is mixed, but leading signals suggest significant benefits are accruing.

Greenfield foreign direct investment (FDI) involves the establishment of new facilities abroad and is a good gauge of the ongoing shifts in global supply chains. According to *Di Markets*, India took the first spot within Asia Pacific and the second position globally in 2023, attracting 1,006 greenfield FDI projects worth \$83.7 billion. Almost \$30 billion was pledged to manufacturing FDI projects outside the energy industry, down from the record of \$34.7 billion in 2022 but higher than any other previous year since the database started tracking FDI in 2003.

Our bottom-up survey suggests similar benefits. We collected a sample of around 130 companies that are either planning to relocate their production out

of China or are looking to invest in new production facilities in Asia or elsewhere.

Our results show that India has received the most interest from firms (28 out of 129 firms), followed by Vietnam (23), Mexico (19), Thailand (16) and Malaysia (14). These results differ from our 2019 survey, when Vietnam was the biggest beneficiary and India was not even in the top five.

Benefits to India are also broad-based across sectors, with firms looking to invest in smartphones, automobile & components, capital goods, semiconductor assembly and testing, and apparel.

While de-risking from China is an important push factor, firms setting up shop in India are also attracted by the captive domestic consumer market, its large and skilled workforce and progressive policies.

The source of investing countries also puts India in a sweet spot. Our survey shows that China is the lead investor across a preponderance of new investments, but mostly concentrated in the Asean economies. By contrast, a majority of investments into India are from US-based companies and the developed Asian economies of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Chinese firms' investment in Asean is partly intended to bypass trade tariffs, but as the West looks to plug loopholes that allow Chinese companies to redirect their trade via third countries, we believe the more diversified source of investment into India will be an advantage.

### Pushback against our views

We have heard three main objections to our view.

First, India's trade balance is not improving, so where is the benefit? Our answer is that global value chain or GVC integration is a process, and India is still in its early stages, where it is more dependent



SONAL VARMA

# Jobless youth and education

Some unemployment is natural. The natural rate of unemployment among the youth can be higher than the overall natural rate. But the actual numbers are staggering in India. A little less than one-third of graduates are unemployed, and the unemployment rate for those with secondary or higher education is nearly one in five. Why this state of affairs, and what can be done about it? Both the supply side and the demand side in the job market are important. However, the focus here is, unless otherwise specified, on the demand for jobs.

Many young people are looking for jobs, but this is actually just notional demand for jobs, even though the job seekers are serious. It is only the demand backed by proper skills, education, or some signal for potential contribution in the future that constitutes the effective demand for jobs. It turns out that such demand for jobs is actually not very high. The reason is straightforward. A reasonably good quality of education is meaningfully available to only a limited proportion of students. And, many employers, in various ways, offer jobs to these good candidates. The problem lies elsewhere.

The huge youth unemployment is among those who do have a degree, diploma, or certificate but are not meaningfully educated or skilled. However, the perception of these students and their families is that they should have a good job. Unfortunately, this is wishful thinking. This is the harsh reality. This is not to blame the students or their families and add to their discomfort in any way. The fault

lies in the system of education that has evolved over time in India. We have a crisis in education — notwithstanding the absence of any headlines on this in the media. The disease lies in the education system. The *huge* youth unemployment is a symptom in this context, and it is this that gets media coverage. What is the way out of all this?

We need to restructure education comprehensively, though in a phased manner. While higher public spending on education is important, it is not enough. We need other steps, such as finding a substitute for the reservation policy in educational institutions. The role of politics and ideology in education needs to be cut. It is also about the courses that are typically offered and those that are not offered. At the same time, the policy of recruitment and promotion of faculty members needs to be seriously reconsidered. Even the policy of allotment of land for educational institutions needs to be revisited. We need to go well beyond the Skill India programme as well as the New Education Policy.

The credibility of certification of students does not receive much attention but it is very important. Many of those who score high grades are actually not very well educated or talented. Scores based on rote learning, paper leaks, cheating in examination halls, manipulation of results, favouritism, etc are only a part of the problem. There are other issues. Examinations in India are, by and large, not very discerning. Since high scores are unreliable as a signal of quality, there is often high unemployment



GURBACHAN SINGH

on imported inputs as there are limited domestic options. However, as the domestic ecosystem develops, domestic production will substitute for imports, and exports will rise, leading to a more visible improvement in the trade balance over time.

Second, how can Indian exports be globally competitive when they need import protection? There is nothing unusual about India's policy. Looking back at the industrial policies of Japan and South Korea, such inward protectionism was common in early stages. However, this has to be temporary and government subsidies will need to be phased out at the right time.

Third, is an export-led growth strategy feasible in a de-globalising world? This is indeed a challenge, as India is taking off against a more hostile global backdrop. However, since firms today are looking to diversify risk and build resilience in supply chains, rather than just reduce costs, there will still be ample opportunities as the China plus one strategy gains traction. There is no reason why India should not maximise its gains.

### The China challenge

Even as India integrates with GVCs, it remains heavily reliant on China for imported intermediate inputs of industrial goods, electronic components, solar panels, etc. This is leading to a widening trade deficit with China, but more importantly, it limits the development of the domestic ecosystem, led by the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. For India to benefit from the trickle-down effects of GVC integration, there has to be a policy focus on increasing the domestic value added.

### Government policies have to be dynamic

India's initial objective should be to gain export market share in low-tech manufactured goods that are more cost sensitive. This requires lower tariffs on intermediate goods, entering into new free trade agreements, easier labour market regulations, good infrastructure, lower logistics costs, and a favourable investment climate. Subsidies to protect local manufacturers should have a sunset clause and focus should be on making domestic products more competitive.

The next stage involves moving up the value chain (i.e., from basic to more advanced products). This needs improved quality of human capital and a focus on innovation, for which the government can offer incentives to firms that engage in more research and development (R&D) spending. It will also require the development of an innovative intellectual property rights framework.

Countries that rank high on high-tech manufacturing, such as South Korea, have transformed the quality of their exports through innovation and have succeeded in moving from low-tech to high-tech manufacturing over time. That should also be India's medium-term goal.

Overall, India is placed well, both economically and geopolitically, to benefit from the China plus one strategy. Government policies will need to constantly evolve to ensure higher domestic value addition and to move up the value chain, such that this remains a multi-decade growth driver.

For India as one of Asia's new flying geese, this is only the beginning.

The writer is the chief economist (India and Asia ex-Japan) at Nomura

# Civilisation against the flow



## BOOK REVIEW

DAMMU RAVI

Water is the elixir that supports all life on earth. It is also the pivotal factor in the search for life on other planets and in establishing possible future human settlements in the outer world. In recent times, the rapid depletion of water in our habitats has the potential to trigger unforeseen chaos and conflicts both within nations and across borders. Aniket Ghanashyam's book *The Watershed Moment* brings out compelling perspectives that are likely to engage individuals and governments on the importance of human survival hinging on this precious resource.

The book highlights the intrinsic connect between water and human evolution, tracing how the progress of

humans from hunter/gatherers to more advanced civilisations — Mesopotamian, Harappan, Indus Valley, Chinese civilisations — was largely the result of well-developed water management systems. The book shows how our ancestors were able to achieve food security through these water management systems that provided a secure and settled existence and enabled the development of cultural components that made up the fabric of those civilisations. Inversely, the demise of these civilisations was attributed to the loss of water in the habitat. Nature's fury in the form of floods, droughts, landslides, heat, deforestation and so on, might have resulted in mass migrations.

In a bid to transcend nature's limitations, modern humans have been engaged in building dams, which over time became massive structures involving the infusion of technology and engineering skills. The massive Three Gorges Dam, built at an estimated cost of \$37 billion, generates about 22.5GW of power. Though dams contribute to economic growth,

navigation and trade and commerce, Mr Ghanashyam forewarns of the irreparable damage they cause to the environment, including to marine biology, fish stocks, migratory birds, deforestation, decomposition, mosquitoes breeding and much else. The displacement of an estimated 80 million, mostly indigenous people, to make way for dam-building in the past 60 years, accounting for 10 per cent of humanity, he says, is an unpardonable scourge in the name of development.

When the quest for survival hinges on this exhaustible resource, disputes are a natural corollary. Mr Ghanashyam reasons. The ephemerality of water can be better understood by analysing its skewed distribution: Of all the water on earth, 97 per cent is in the oceans, 2 per cent stored in glaciers and icecaps and only one per cent is considered freshwater on which humanity survives. This delicate balance that humans have with their water resources should make them even more prudent about the need to maintain efficient water conservation and management systems. Instead, the unbridled way societies extract

groundwater with a false sense of security is damaging the entire ecosystem, the author laments. For the same reason, the author is critical of India's minimum support price policy, which has encouraged the cultivation of water-guzzling crops such as rice, wheat and sugar in water-scarce regions of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Worse still, the government permits these crops to be exported, earning India the dubious distinction of being the world's largest exporter of water.

The author forewarns of the adverse impact on agriculture due to erratic rainfall patterns induced by climate change. As of now more than 60 per cent of the world's population relies on agriculture as a source of income as well as employment. The ability to feed nine billion people in the near future will require about 1.5 billion hectares of arable land (4.5 times the size of India). This mammoth agricultural activity, Mr Ghanashyam says, will require alternative methods of irrigation

beyond dams, with emphasis on use of sprinklers, drip-irrigation, fertigation (the technique of supplying dissolved fertilisers to crops through an irrigation system), as well as techniques used by our ancestors. He also reminds us of the essentiality of reviving rivers that have been the bedrock of civilisations. Putting the spotlight on the Ganga, which sustains about 650 million people, he suggests long-term measures

### The Watershed Moment

Author: Aniket Ghanashyam  
Publisher: Manipal Universal Press  
Pages: 171  
Price: ₹650



for revival that encompass the entire biodiversity of the river and involve all stakeholders, as well as learning from the experiences of the Thames and Rhine river rejuvenation programmes. The treatment of wastewater should be a priority in the Global South, according to the author, because it can mitigate water scarcity as well as enable food production to feed the poor so as to prevent widespread unrest and internal migration. Referring to a World Bank study that concluded that nearly 80 per cent of global waste water is released without adequate treatment, Mr

Ghanashyam advocates a "water pricing" policy to discourage wasteful consumption and generate revenue for waste-water treatment. He describes how a "water neutrality" policy can make communities responsible for water conservation. These solutions, he recalls, helped Cape Town, where he lived as a student and where residents' collective resolve brought the city back from the brink of a water crisis.

This passionately written book is informative and captivating, providing a deeper understanding and appreciation of the world's most indispensable resource. It is hard to disagree with a reasoned defence of the importance of water management as a key to the survival of the human species. At a broader level, water scarcity is bound to impact global gross domestic product with dire consequences for global peace and stability, undermining the very idea of shared citizenship. One cannot but notice the author's conviction striking a chord with the Prime Minister's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative that envisions a shared commitment to adopt and promote environmentally-friendly lifestyles.

The reviewer is a serving Indian Foreign Service officer



## OPINION

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OUR TAKE

## The importance of numbers

A healthy democracy needs healthy and regular statistics. Government needs to ensure this

The National Statistical Office (NSO) released the full report of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (CES) on June 7, bringing an end to a decade-long drought of consumption expenditure data — it had released a 27-page factsheet in February. While there are issues with comparing the 2022-23 CES findings with those of previous surveys, the fact that we finally have a CES report is something that ought to be welcomed. The publication of the CES findings will not just tell us about patterns of consumption spending and the nature of inequality, but also allow the policy apparatus to update important statistical series such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In case of the latter, a fall in the share of food in household spending could help reduce the impact of food price shocks on headline inflation numbers. These updates were long due and were held back because of lack of data.

The story of a delayed CES leading to obsolete statistical indicators is not a one-off under the previous two Narendra Modi governments. There is more than one example of important statistical exercises not being conducted or their results being held back, creating a dark spot for policy and public discourse in the country. The biggest example of this is the delay in conducting the decadal census due in 2021 — on the flimsy excuse of the pandemic, even as assembly elections were held in large states amidst the worst Covid wave.

The new government will do well to expedite the collection and publication of these results. In some cases, such as the census, it might have to evolve a political consensus on issues such as whether or not a caste census will be conducted along with the decadal census. No matter what the decision is, this is a discussion which cannot be kicked down the road any further.

Importantly, both the delimitation exercise (which will allocate more Lok Sabha representation to states on the basis of their population), and the reservation of seats for women in Parliament are dependent on this.

Politics is not the only area of concern regarding the statistical challenges in front of the new government. There are many issues on which independent economists and statisticians have been criticising government statistics. Whether these concerns are about compatibility, such as the demand for conducting bridge surveys to ensure current and old consumer surveys can be read together or making sure that our statistics do not sacrifice holistic coverage in order to make them look better, it is important that the government takes all of them on board. A healthy democracy needs healthy and regular statistics — and the onus for ensuring this is on the government.

## The ministerial route to party expansion

The 72-member council of ministers gives some insights into the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) regional and communal aspirations. For instance, take the representation of ministers from Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Kerala. They suggest the party's ambitious plans to expand its footprint in states that have so far resisted its overtures. Take the case of Ravneet Singh Bittu from Punjab and L Murugan from Tamil Nadu. Though both of them lost their elections, they have been included in the ministry. Similarly, there are two ministers from Kerala, where the party won just a single seat: One of them, Suresh Gopi, made history by becoming the first BJP MP from the state, while the other, George Kurian, is a Christian leader. Since the Shiromani Akali Dal broke its alliance with the BJP, the latter has been trying hard to build its base in Punjab by importing leaders from other parties. The choice of Bittu, the grandson of former Congress CM Beant Singh, assassinated by terrorists in office, can buttress the party's nationalist plank. Though it did not win any seats, the BJP, with 18.56% votes, has emerged as the third largest party in Punjab, behind Congress and AAP.

Similarly, the BJP has continued to invest in Murugan, 47, who belongs to a subcaste underrepresented in Tamil Nadu's Dalit politics. Murugan, perceived as soft towards the AIADMK, a potential ally, has been preferred over state head K Annamalai. In Kerala, Kurian's choice reaffirms the BJP's outreach to Christians. The party's vote share in the state has risen to 16.68%, and it had leads in 11 assembly segments, which suggests that it perceives an opportunity in the state's two-front polity. All these choices point to a party working out a long-term plan to win over voters who have repeatedly ignored it. Patronage is, of course, a legitimate political instrument to win support.

## Policymaking gains from coalition politics

The positive effect coalitions can have on policy is usually missed due to the identification of policymaking entirely with the speed of decision-making

The return to a coalition government at the Centre, with no party having a majority, brings with it immediate concerns of stability. These concerns are not trivial when the coalition is dependent on the leaders who have been on the other side of the fence and have, in the not too distant past, been major critics of the Prime Minister (PM). Yet, an excessive focus on what it will take to keep Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), and N Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in line will keep the focus away from recognising the opportunities that coalitions bring.

Conventional wisdom in India, which seeks governments with significant majorities, underestimates the costs of the security that coalitions bring. As governments with a significant majority can brush aside all criticism, they can take decisions that may not have passed due scrutiny. A striking example of excessive political stability causing unnecessary economic and social distress was demonetisation. It is now widely

acknowledged that the exercise did not remove black money, with almost all the demonetised notes being successfully exchanged for new currency. All that it did was disrupt the economy and cause considerable hardship. It is very unlikely that such a step could have been taken by a coalition government. The internal discussion on major issues that is typically seen in coalition governments is bound to have brought up the near-unanimous view of economists that demonetisation would not work.

The positive effect coalitions can have on policy is usually missed due to the identification of policymaking entirely with the speed of decision-making. PMs who make quick decisions are seen to be stronger leaders. The buffer that comfortable majorities provide against criticism can encourage quicker decisions, but decisions are just one part of policymaking. Theorists usually see policymaking as going through several stages. Before a decision is made there is the creation of the agenda and the formulation of specific policies within it. Policymaking cannot also ignore what happens after a policy is made. The success of a policy depends on its implementation. This, in turn, depends on the ability, and willingness, to regularly review policies so that their course can be corrected.

The recent record of the government at the Centre does not rule out the possibility of a coalition doing

better at most stages of policymaking. The election results suggest that the agenda of policymaking in recent decades going back to before 2014. The majority enjoyed by PM Narendra Modi in his first two terms ensured this agenda gained greater momentum. That the agenda did not address the conditions on the ground has now become clear with the Opposition making joblessness a successful electoral plank. A coalition government would have improved

the chances of the government being forced to give employment a greater priority than it received.

Coalition governments also bring together multiple ideological streams, usually representing diverse interests. This could leave its mark on policy formulation.

In the centralised regime of an all-powerful leader, there is little room in the formulation of policy for local conditions in different parts of the country. Policymakers have remained insensitive to the fact that millions of workers carry out short-term assignments in distant cities while retaining their homes and families in villages. This indifference was brought brutally into the open during the Covid crisis. The lockdown was announced without any consideration for the hundreds of thousands of workers who were forced to



Narendar  
Pani



The ability of a coalition to articulate diverse interests could also influence the implementation of policy

trek several hundred kilometres to return home. A coalition government, with parties representing the regions where the workers came from, may just have been more sensitive to their interests.

The ability of a coalition to articulate diverse interests could also influence the implementation of policy. A centralised, single-party government would tend to focus on the macro picture without sufficient concern for local detail. This was, arguably, evident in the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The entire project had been the centrepiece of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s politics for decades. The party took care to involve persons from across the country in the construction process in Ayodhya. The larger national focus did, however, come at the cost of attention being paid to the impact of the project on its immediate surroundings. That the local population did not share the national enthusiasm of the BJP for the temple has been made clear in the election results. The BJP lost Faizabad, the constituency which includes Ayodhya. It is conceivable that a coalition that included parties whose interests were concentrated in the region around Ayodhya may have

been more sensitive to the local impact of the project.

Excessively centralised governments can also have an impact on how policies are evaluated. While all governments seek to exaggerate their achievements, governments that are not open to criticism can do so more freely. Over the last decade, the government has given in to the temptation to change the measuring rods in ways that exaggerate its achievements. The consequences of these changes were not adequately debated before the measures were introduced. While a coalition government may have also fallen to these temptations, it is possible that internal differences would have led to greater debate before the change.

Recent experience tells us that while a strong majority does enable quick unchallenged policy decisions, it does not necessarily help in other aspects of policymaking. A coalition government has the opportunity not only to be more democratic but also more effective in the overall process of policymaking.

Narendar Pani is JRD Tata Chair visiting professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.

The views expressed are personal

## GST needs reforms, state govts must have their say

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is often described as independent India's most pathbreaking indirect tax reform. Here, India had the latecomer's advantage of learning from the experience of others — preceded as it was by about 160 countries in the implementation of a GST/value added tax (VAT). However, an India-specific GST paradigm had to be evolved considering our specificities. The destination-based consumption tax subsumed several pre-existing central and state taxes, with the aim to improve the tax effort (tax-GDP ratio), end tax cascading, enhance efficiency and competitiveness, reduce prices, and accelerate Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. The states had to surrender more taxing powers than the Centre, raising concerns about their fiscal autonomy. Hence, they were guaranteed compensation via a cess that assured 14% growth in their GST revenue for the initial five years. As the regime is about to complete seven years, it is pertinent to explore where the system stands with regards to the promises made and the way forward.

There were concerns regarding poor revenue performance in the initial years of implementation. However, the performance has been impressive following the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic; revenue collections touched new highs month on month in FY24. The average monthly collections in FY24 stood at ₹1.68 lakh crore with a growth rate of 11.6%. The gross GST revenue in April 2024 (start of FY25) reached ₹21 lakh crore, setting a new collection record. However, a comparative analysis of revenue performance between the pre- and post-GST periods reveals that an increase in the tax base is still awaited. The average of total taxes subsumed under GST during 2012-17 was 6.13% of GDP. During 2017-2023, the GST-GDP ratio, excluding GST compensation cess, declined to 5.65%, whereas the ratio barely maintained the previous level of 6.13% if GST compensation cess (0.48% of GDP) was included.

The states, in general, performed poorly in the post-GST period compared to pre-GST. In 16 out of the 17 major states, the share of GST in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) declined in the post-GST period, with Jharkhand being the only exception. Further, 15 out of 17 major states showed a decline in GST's contribution to their own tax revenue (OTR) collection. The only exceptions here are Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Given this slip between the cup and the lip, it is pertinent to reflect on the underlying factors and the future agenda for reform.

The GST performance recorded so far must be assessed against a host of factors,

**GOODS AND SERVICE TAX IN INDIA IS STILL EVOLVING AND NEEDS REFORM TO ENSURE THAT ITS SOCIAL MARGINAL PRODUCT IS POSITIVE**

including the plethora of rates that presumably stood in the way of increased compliance in tax collection on account of, among other factors, the proliferation of fraudulent claims for input tax credit. The poor performance of the states needs to be viewed in the context of an equal division of total tax revenue between the Union and the states. Another issue pertains to the operation of the Integrated GST (IGST), wherein it was expected that, being a consumption-based tax, consumer states would gain. However, evidence from a consumer state like Kerala reveals that the IGST-SGST ratio is only at a low level of 1.2, indicating a significant loss of revenue for the state.

GST in India is still evolving and needs reform to ensure that its social marginal product is positive. From the perspective of the states, there is much to be gained from redesigning the division of GST revenue between the Union and the states, wherein the share of states is raised from the present level of 50%. The functioning of the IGST-clearing mechanism, despite the significant improvement over time, leaves much to be done.

In the reform agenda, the most discussed issue has been the simplification of the rate structure. Former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian made the case for a three-rate structure with a standard rate of 18%, a lower rate of 10%, and a demerit rate of 40%. Since the GST compensation period is over, cesses should be incorporated into the normal rate structure at the top rate of 40%. This is expected to eliminate a major distortion, whereby a significant source of revenues has been walled off from the standard divisible pool of taxes that provides resources to both the Centre and the states. Vijay Kelkar, the chief architect of India's GST and chairman of the 13th Finance Commission, argued for a single GST rate based on the experience of most of the developed countries. Of the countries that have GST, 80%, including Singapore, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan, have opted for a single tax rate and were successful in increasing compliance and minimising tax disputes.

The need for reform in tax rates cannot be over-emphasised. However, considering the country's abysmally low tax effort, one needs to ensure that the reforms do not cause further erosion here. Any change in the rate structure also needs to ensure that it does not aggravate the already rising levels of consumption inequality and fuel inflation, as it hurts the poor the most. There is a need for caution while replanting reforms from countries that have already achieved higher tax efforts with homogeneous socio-economic structures. Reforms addressing the above issues call for more research backed by sound theory and empirics. Unfortunately, however, research on GST in the country is handicapped by the required data getting generated aplenty but not being made public.

KJ Joseph, is director, and Kiran Kumar Kakarlapudi is assistant professor, Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The views expressed are personal

{ URSULA VON DER LEYEN } EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT

No majority can be formed without the European People's Party... Together, we will build a bastion against the extremes from the Left and from the Right

On the European Parliament election results



## Sharif in Beijing: In step with China's power game

Pakistan Prime Minister (PM) Shahbaz Sharif concluded his five-day visit to China on June 8. While a trip to China is part of the ritual for every Pakistani PM, the timing was curious. Sharif went to Beijing in the midst of budget preparation, when normally the PM's presence is required at home. The budget presentation has been postponed from June 10 to June 12 to allow for the extended visit. This reflects Pakistan's desperate economic situation. A visit to the country's biggest bilateral lender was in order. China has extracted its pound of flesh with Pakistan's endorsement of its positions on Taiwan, Xinjiang, Xizang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea. The reference to South Asia is along the lines of past statements.

PM Sharif's delegation included virtually all senior Pakistani cabinet ministers. Interestingly, the delegation also included the army chief, General Asif Munir. His inclusion was justified on the ground that he is a member of the Special Investment Facilitation Council. This body was set up to invite foreign investment in Pakistan. While Sharif held roadshows to attract investment, it is unlikely that the army chief confined himself to discussing the economy.

Pakistan's priority is to seek Chinese support to tide over its worsening economic situation. It is in the midst of negotiating a \$6 billion, three-year credit facility from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF would like to ensure that its credit is not used to simply pay off Chinese loans. It would require a rollover of the Chinese debt payments, not only for the current year but for the duration of the new credit facility to be negotiated. A longer-drawn-out repayment schedule is crucial to the survival of the Sharif government. How far will China go to bail out its client State? The joint statement is silent on the Chinese response.

Pakistani endorsement of the Chinese position on Taiwan has been a feature of all past statements. This year, the paragraph went beyond previous commitments. Does it only reflect Pakistan's abject dependence on China? Or does it also reflect China's geopolitical compulsions? Since last year, China has escalated cross-strait tensions. After the election of Lai Ching-te as Taiwan's president, it intensified military pressure on Taiwan. It needs diplomatic support on the unilateral change it wishes to bring about. Pakistan seems to be only too willing to provide it. The

joint statement mentioned, "Both sides stressed that the authority of the UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 brooks no dispute or challenge". This resolution was adopted in 1971 when Communist China replaced Taiwan as a member of the United Nations and as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The fact that China needed to recall it half a century later in a joint statement with Pakistan, a country that is facing an existential economic crisis, tells us something about the resistance its strong-arm tactics have generated.

The joint statement mentioned that Pakistan "firmly supports the Chinese government's every effort to achieve national reunification and opposes any form of 'Taiwan independence'". Pakistan's enthusiasm for supporting the Chinese position on Taiwan could complicate its position vis-à-vis the United States (US). Pakistan needs US support to secure the IMF deal. The US enjoys a veto in the IMF.

The paragraph on South Asia includes a reference to the "opposition to any unilateral action". This veiled reference to deletion of Article 370, was also there in the statement issued during PM Imran Khan's visit to Beijing in February 2022. The paragraph reflects the limits of the relationship, which is shaped by Chinese interests rather than Pakistan's priorities. While Pakistan briefed the Chinese side about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the Chinese side limited itself to repeating the old mantra that "it should be resolved in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements".

Before the visit, Pakistani media briefings raised expectations about the launch of the second phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC II). Contrary to initial claims of Chinese investment to the tune of \$46 billion in Pakistan under the programme, it has brought \$25 billion since its launch. The joint statement is limited to "upgrading" the existing programme rather than announcing big-ticket items.

In the meantime, Pakistan has been elected for a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2025-26.

DP Srivastava is a former ambassador and the author of *Forgotten Kashmir: The Other Side of the Line of Control*. The views expressed are personal



OUR VIEW

THEIR VIEW



# Derivatives trade: Sebi's approach is pro-market

Retail investors may have wisened up lately, but their zest for derivatives remains a worry. The market regulator's proposals to tighten futures and options eligibility can reduce risks

If the behaviour of retail investors over the last week or so is observed, they would seem to have outsmarted professional asset managers. Take 3 June, for example, the first equity trading day after the week-end announcement of exit polls. As the market jumped more than 3% on forecasts of a big majority in Parliament for the ruling BJP, retail investors sold shares worth ₹8,587.5 crore, instead of joining the rally. In contrast, foreign portfolio investors bought Indian shares worth ₹6,617.3 crore that day while mutual-fund purchases stood at ₹3,072.9 crore. Then, on 4 June, when the actual election results were declared and the BJP fell short of a simple majority, retail investors purchased shares worth ₹21,178.9 crore, sensing an opportunity in a market that dropped some 6% in response to that news. Again, foreign investors and mutual funds went the opposite way, selling shares worth a combined ₹18,760 crore. The rise of stock indices in the following sessions made it clear that retail investors had played it right. But this is a rare instance of household traders emerging on top. More often, it is retail investors who end up losing, unable to time the market like professionals do and bearing more risk than they can grasp and afford. Our recent boom in the retail trading of equity futures and options (F&O) offers proof of reckless investing. As many as 9 out of 10 retail investors were found to have lost money in 2021-22 by a study done by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

This explains why Sebi now proposes to tighten stock eligibility for F&O trading. In a discussion paper released on Sunday, it broached the idea of raising the bar for its condition of sufficient liquidity and trading

interest in stocks for derivatives of these assets to be traded. "Without sufficient depth in the underlying cash market and appropriate position limits around leveraged derivatives, there can be higher risks of market manipulation, increased volatility, and compromised investor protection," Sebi said. For a stock to qualify for the F&O segment, the regulator wants a checklist met that would include not just criteria like it being traded for at least 75% of all trading days with 15% of active derivative traders having traded it across a span of time, but also higher limits for average daily turnover of cash trades and contract premiums, apart from a larger range of open F&O contracts on a rolling basis. Market participants need not get into the finer details of Sebi's proposals to get the drift. They basically aim to keep out shares that may be too risky for retail appreciation. F&O trading volumes are estimated to have shot up 20 times since their pre-covid level, thanks to a retail frenzy that has made India a global outlier on this. What makes these trades so attractive is the chance of making outsized profits with small sums. Investors can take large bets for brief periods with little margin money in the hope of not needing to pay the full money as net positions get settled. But the risks can be very deceptive and tend to catch most lay investors unaware.

Sebi is welcome to tighten the screws on trades that can hardly be distinguished from gambles. The F&O segment is meant to enrich the overall quality of market information and induce efficiency. Instead, we face the need to pre-empt a crisis arising from an insurge of retail investors who may be clueless of how reckless they are being. In general, we need deeper financial markets. But not like this.

# Economic theory was at play all through the Lok Sabha election

From Pareto optimality to Giffen goods, various economic concepts offered close political parallels



**MADAN SABNAVIS** is chief economist at Bank of Baroda and author of 'Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun'.

The outcome of India's election was quite singular, compared with 2014 and 2019. All major parties celebrated it. The NDA was happy because it returned to power, the Congress and INDIA were happy that they did better than in the past, while regional parties were pleased they came out stronger in their states. This is what in economics would be close to a 'Pareto optimal' situation, where everyone is better off and no one worse off.

All through election season, one could see several concepts of economics at play. The most startling was the 'irrational exuberance' witnessed on 3 June when the Sensex closed at a peak of 76,468 on the back of exit polls on 1 June which indicated a huge mandate for the ruling establishment. The premise was that a landslide majority of 350-360 Lok Sabha seats for the NDA would accelerate economic reforms, thus reviving the Keynesian 'animal spirits' of industry. When the results on 4 June revealed a majority for the NDA (though not for the BJP), the market index crashed to 72,079 amid worries that reforms would slow down. In market parlance, stocks tend to 'revert to the mean,' and not surprisingly, on 5 June, the Sensex closed at 74,382, which was higher than its closing level on 31 May.

The exit polls were another exercise that saw economic laws prevail. These polls went wrong in the last Lok Sabha

election, as well as during recent state assembly polls. Hence, this time, all of them seem to have followed a policy of 'adaptive expectations,' by which the last outcome is simply scaled up in an effort by pollsters to look good. Such expectations are considered safe because we learn from the past and assume that the present will carry on in the future. But exit polls went wrong again, like GDP forecasts (no analyst projected 8.2% growth for 2023-24).

The last two elections, in 2014 and 2019, had resulted in what would be called a 'monopoly' in economics. A single-party Lok Sabha majority results in monopoly power that can be wielded in every field. A coalition this time means that there would be more of an 'oligopolistic' structure, so we can expect some checks and balances, as every partner would have a unique strategy. This is where 'game theory' comes into play, with each party trying to maximize its gains by guessing the response of the other. These dynamics are likely to prevail even after the new coalition government takes charge.

If one goes back to this year's election campaigns, including manifestoes, promises of monetary benefits formed a common theme. These included cash transfers, apart from free power, bus rides, etc. What has been brewing for long in election seasons is the creation of a 'moral hazard' by so-called freebies. The hazard is that once implemented, handouts will be hard to withdraw, as it would antagonize beneficiaries who may vote for the opposition.

For individuals, what matters is what Adam Smith laid emphasis on, 'self interest.' While a G20 summit, Vande Bharat trains and the goal of becoming a developed country can inspire pride and lift people's morale, votes are cast for tangible benefits. So the micro picture matters more than the macro.

Elections, however, present a market that is better than goods and money markets in terms of what economists would call 'information asymmetry.'

Every party is eager to give out all the information needed to attract voters. This could be in the form of what has been done or what will be delivered if elected to power. With symmetric information available to all participants, this is largely an efficient market. Most economic markets are not.

A major part of election campaigns is centred on making the right noises. These are what are called 'announcement effects.' Just as regulators in the financial sector are thought capable of moving markets by just making announcements (talking them up or down, i.e., voting patterns are mostly driven by political announcements). They are credible because if parties renege on them, they would face the wrath of the market (or voters) the next time round. A plethora of announcements are made by all parties to send the electorate the right 'signals,' a term used by George Akerlof, who espoused a theory of signalling in the market for second-hand cars (or 'lemons').

The outcome patterns of election results are also interesting. There are several constituencies and states that continue to vote *en masse* for the same party. Here, the theoretical concepts of Veblen and Giffen goods come in. The former refers to a luxury good for which one is willing to pay a higher price, even if just for social appearances. The latter is something one may consume more of even if its price rises because it's a necessity. Brand loyalty induces similar inelastic behaviour. So too in the case of parties that get votes as part of a family tradition or for an appeal of ideology.

Behavioural economics has taught us that many decisions taken are based on psychology, which can be influenced by marketers, including politicians. On a lighter yet ironical note, the final results have not entirely been Pareto optimal. They were bad for India's Left parties, which face the threat of 'withering away,' as Friedrich Engels prophesied of the state under communism.

*These are the author's personal views.*

MY VIEW | TRUTH, LIES, AND STATISTICS

# Statistical reforms will not get far without a consensus

PRAMIT BHATTACHARYA



is a Chennai-based journalist.

I received an anguished email from a senior Indian Statistical Service (ISS) officer a few weeks ago. The officer believed that his entire career over the past quarter century had been a "waste" since the statistical system does not reward performance. "As the system has been kept highly opaque, it has created a false sense of expertise... such as experts in national accounts or experts in consumer expenditure surveys... creating an impression that they (the deemed experts) are indispensable," the mail said. "(A) complacent attitude has made ISS officers averse to any change."

It is easy to dismiss the gentleman as a disgruntled officer who did not get the positions he fancied. But I have heard such complaints from scores of people associated with the statistical system over the past few years. Senior ISS officers have little training in handling big data, and lack knowledge of modern database management, a National Statistical Commission (NSC) member complained to me. Another statistician pointed

to the inability of the statistics ministry to set up a decent data warehouse as evidence of its decaying capabilities.

The declining autonomy of the statistical system and its weakening capabilities may be intertwined in a vicious cycle today. A weakened statistical system is unable to justify the estimates it generates, or explain contradictions between different data-sets. This in turn allows politicians and politically motivated technocrats to meddle in statistical affairs. Officers who can 'manage' political demands end up climbing the career ladder, demoralizing others.

The absence of incentives for statistical innovation compounds problems. Statistics, after all, is an applied science, and progresses through experiments. Ideally, the National Statistical Office (NSO) should have a dedicated unit for conducting pilot trials and methodological innovations. Once innovations are tried and tested in a statistical sandbox, data users should be made aware of what the innovations entail, and only then should changes be rolled out. What we currently have is a system of ad hoc changes. Even when small-scale trials are conducted before effecting such changes, the trial data is almost always withheld.

India's statistical crisis is now too severe to

be ignored. As reported by this newspaper earlier this year ('India's statistics system is a mess. The PMO is looking in', 23 January), the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has prepared a policy paper on the sorry state of the statistical system, with suggestions for reforms. Some reform suggestions have also come from individual EAC-PM members, according to two people familiar with these developments. The need to revamp India's statistical infrastructure found mention in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. A person who attended a meeting on this subject at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in March said that there is considerable agreement on the need to upgrade the statistical system. But the path towards that upgrade still remains hazy.

The new government will be doing itself and the country a favour if it sets up a high-level task force to conduct a detailed assessment of the state of the statistical system and

outline a time bound path for reforms. As I have argued earlier ('India's Statistical System: Past, Present, Future', *Carnegie Endowment WP 2023*), this committee should first of all conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the existing public data pipeline. It should examine how much key ministries spend on ad hoc surveys and whether the government and the public will be better served if fewer high-quality surveys are conducted under the supervision of a statistical authority. It should also provide indicative assessments of the costs involved in keeping data in silos, and the benefits that might accrue when economic statistics of different kinds are integrated.

Secondly, the task force should suggest legal and organizational changes that can help create an effective and autonomous statistical system. Official statistical work must be subjected to review by technical experts or statistical auditors, who should be answerable to Parliament, not the government of the day. The National Statis-

tical Commission was set up to play such a role. But the lack of statutory backing for the Commission ensured that it remained a toothless regulator.

Finally, the task force should prepare a medium-term statistical strategy document. This document should set out guidelines on documentation and statistical communication. It should indicate steps to foster greater innovation. For instance, it could outline human resource policy changes that encourage statisticians to do better research. It will be possible to improve statistical processes and products on a sustained basis only if all stakeholders share a broad consensus on what ails the statistical system, and what must be done to fix it. Without such a consensus, the reform drive will falter.

It is worth noting that there was a major thrust to revamp the statistical system five years ago. However, that modernization drive ran out of steam because of a lack of buy-in from key stakeholders. Hopefully the government will learn from that experience, and get all stakeholders on board this time.

A credible statistical system can help us find agreement on basic economic facts, and improve the quality of public discourse in the country. It will also help policymakers and businesses avoid costly mistakes.



**JUST A THOUGHT**

There are two types of people in the world: those who accept statistical statements as true without question, and those who do not understand them.

**JOHN MCCARTHY**



GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Artificial general intelligence: It could reboot India's prospects

How wisely we adopt AGI could determine our place in the world and also define the legacy we leave for future generations



**SRIKANTH VELAMAKANNI** is co-founder, group chief executive, and vice-chairman of Fractal.

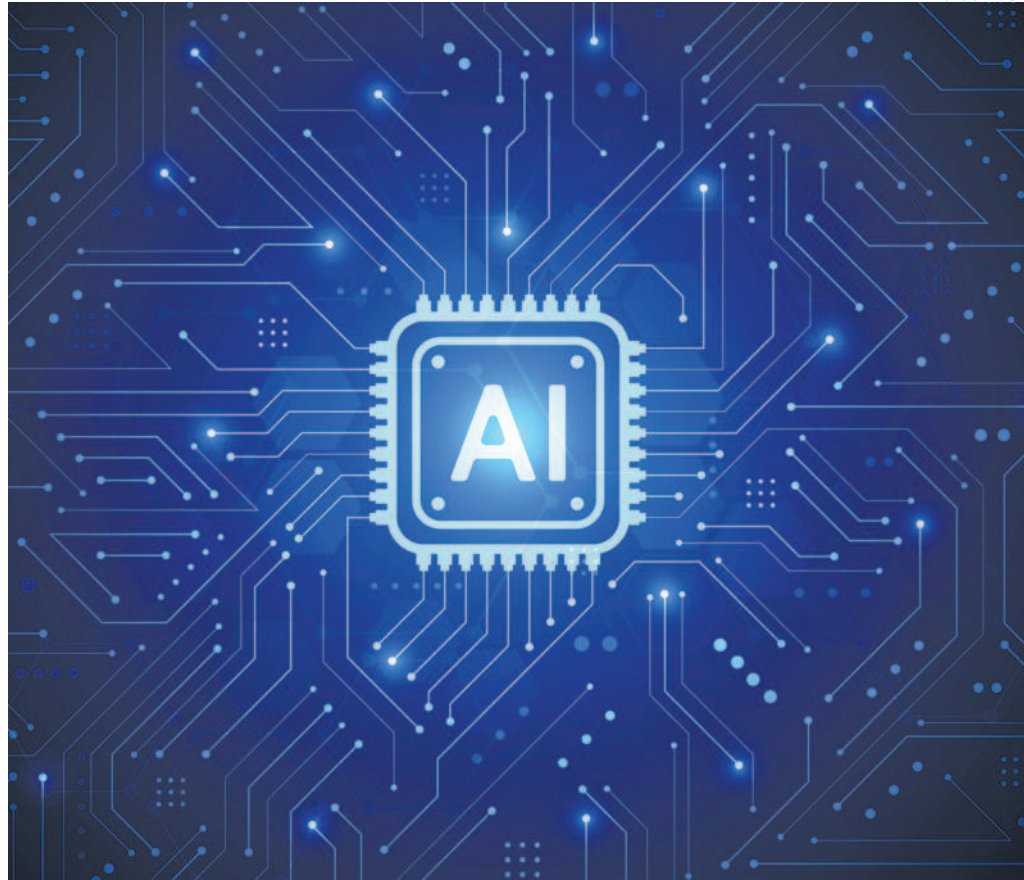
Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world." This was Vladimir Putin, talking about artificial intelligence (AI), in 2017. The Russian leader acknowledged AI as not merely an advancement in technology but a pivotal force capable of reshaping the geopolitical landscape. Historically, technological superiority has been a cornerstone of global dominance. The British Empire, which led with naval technology and the industrial revolution, was a prime example. As the CEO of an AI firm, I navigate this realm with a perspective rooted in the possibilities and challenges it brings. Drawing from historical parallels, I foresee AI playing a critical role, not just in technology, but as a pivotal element of India's national strategy.

In March 2024, The Indian Cabinet approved the 'India AI mission,' with a funding of over ₹10,000 crore across five years for AI development. It will support AI super-computing infrastructure accessible to startups, academia and industry. As India joins the AI race, we must it prepare for the next evolutionary leap that is Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

AGI refers to an AI system with general intelligence that can match or surpass human cognitive abilities across virtually all domains, including reasoning, learning, perception and problem-solving. Achieving AGI could potentially lead to powerful AI systems that, if misused, pose significant risks. Unlike AI designed to do specific tasks, AGI can generalize its abilities to solve any problem, including those it has not been specifically programmed for. That means AGI can perform any intellectual task that a human being can, with similar cognitive flexibility.

In healthcare, for example, an AGI system could monitor individual health metrics in real time, predict potential problems and coordinate customized preventative care and treatments. In an ideal AGI world, cities would operate with optimized energy use and minimal waste, while global challenges such as climate change are tackled through predictive modelling and advanced engineering solutions. While this promises a leap in efficiency and capability, it necessitates stringent safeguards against potential misuses such as surveillance overreach and autonomous weaponry, ensuring that AGI serves to enhance rather than undermine human autonomy and equity.

While the probability of developing AGI within the next five years might be low (estimates range from 10% to 50%), its risks should not be underestimated. Just as a 10% chance of an asteroid colliding with Earth would trigger global preparedness, AGI demands as much attention. We must prepare for an AGI-driven economy that may radically trans-



form job markets and economic structures. It is also imperative to safely integrate AGI with India's defence strategy. Human nature often leads us to under-prepare for catastrophic risks, primarily because such events are rare. This psychological tendency, called the availability heuristic, means we often discount the likelihood and potential impact of events that are not readily recalled as immediate threats. Given this natural inclination, the responsibility falls heavily on Indian policymakers to safeguard us against these risks.

**An AI agenda for India:** India should establish a dedicated department of AI, a central authority for coordinating all AI-related activities, mirroring the urgency that once applied to nuclear capabilities and space research. The department should not only set standards and guidelines for AI development, but also drive AI policies and initiatives that align with India's strategic interests.

To harness the potential of AI and foundation models, Indian policy should aim to liberate and democratize access to vast data-sets across public and private sectors. By making more data available, India can stimulate the development of more robust AI models that are tailored to its unique demographic and socio-economic landscape. This step is crucial for fostering a thriving AI ecosystem that can compete on a global scale and address local challenges effectively.

To enhance national security and innovation, India should create an AI ecosystem for strategic AI use cases. Focus on developing a robust AI ecosystem for deployment in defence, drone technology, cybersecurity and other systems. India must foster an environment that supports the creation of companies that develop and supply these technologies. This initiative could emulate successful models like the US government's backing of Palantir through In-Q-Tel and Israel's support of Elbit Systems via its ministry of defence. Investment from the National AI Mission can be co-invested in deep-tech startups, providing capital support for them to embark on global-scale projects.

To build AI proficiency nationwide, India should launch a comprehensive AI skilling initiative. The government should set a goal to train 50 million people in AI usage skills such as data literacy, AI ethics and applications in specific sectors like healthcare, finance and manufacturing. Plus, a targeted initiative to cultivate advanced skills should aim to train 1 million individuals in AI development, covering areas such as machine learning, neural networks and natural language processing. To achieve these objectives, India can forge partnerships with universities and technical institutes to integrate AI-focused curricula, launch specialized degree programmes and promote continuing education modules. Collaborations with online education platforms can provide scalable access to courses. Working with the industry can ensure that the training provided is directly applicable, enabling hands-on experience through apprenticeships and real-world project engagements.

**A whole new world:** With AGI, success will no longer be about leading in technology, but about mastering a domain that could well dictate the course of human evolution, economics and global governance. Just as Britain's technological edge dictated its global influence, mastery over AGI could very well dictate the future balance of global power, ushering in an era where control over this transformative technology determines leadership. I am optimistic about the transformative power of AI to benefit humanity. However, it is incumbent upon us to approach the future with a broad sense of responsibility and collective vision for a world where technology serves the greater good. Just as we regulate nuclear technology for its potential for both unparalleled benefits and catastrophic consequences, we must govern AGI with a similar level of caution.

AGI presents a paradigm shift in how we envision the future of technology and its role in society. How wisely we adopt it will not only determine our place in the world of tomorrow, but will also define the legacy we leave for future generations.

# Britons seem to have lost faith in the NHS for sound reasons

The UK's healthcare system is in awful shape but could be rescued



**THERESE RAPHAEL** is a columnist for Bloomberg Opinion covering health care and British politics.



The UK's Labour Party has promised to fix the once-reliable NHS

Anecdotes aren't data (as the apparently oft-misquoted saying goes), but over the past 14 years the two paint a depressingly similar picture of Britain's National Health Service (NHS).

A friend recently diagnosed with breast cancer was told she needed surgery to remove a small tumour. It took months for her general practitioner to refer her for testing after she initially complained of unexplained weight loss and later pain. The operation was scheduled and cancelled several times. There were junior doctor strikes. It was a weekend. The right equipment wasn't in place. She heard various explanations.

Unwilling to wait further, she used her savings to fund the surgery privately—by the same consultant (as surgeons are known in the UK) who was scheduled to operate in the NHS hospital. By then, some 10 months had passed since she first called her GP and the cancer had spread to her lymph nodes, requiring more extensive surgery. Her prognosis is uncertain.

The story of the NHS over the past 14 years might be called 'The Big Wait' or even 'The Big Short' (if that title weren't already taken). More than 7.5 million people are awaiting treatment, up from an already high 4.43 million before the pandemic. The service is short of doctors, nurses, beds, radiographers, scanners and more. There are hospitals in such a state of disrepair that they are unsafe. Many British doctors are opting to practice abroad or leaving the state system.

The Big Wait means higher costs, in terms of festering health problems, the mental toll of uncertainty and the productivity loss from lives on hold. It has contributed to a stark rise in the number of people who are economically inactive due to ill health and an uptick in excess deaths. GP offices in Britain are often understaffed; appointments can take weeks to get despite government attempts to reduce wait times. More and more Britons, like my friend, are opting for private care if they can afford it, resulting in what is effectively a two-tiered health system.

Underinvestment is partly to blame. Average health spending in the UK between 2010, when the Tories returned to government, and 2019, before the pandemic, was 18% below the EU average. The UK would have had to spend £40 billion (\$51 billion) more each year to match French levels of health-care spending and £73 billion more to equal Germany. Although the Tories have increased funding more recently, average real terms

growth is still below historical trends. And the problems go far beyond financing.

The UK model suffers from several flaws that have been compounded by policy decisions over the past 14 years, but also structural changes such as an ageing population, people living longer lives and more expensive treatments. Healthcare suffers from a curious combination of over-centralized decision-making and silos of care that make it slow to adopt innovation and adapt to patient needs. This isn't an indictment of universality in healthcare. There is no perfect system; the US stands out among advanced countries for not having universal care. Other major-economy health systems have problems but report better outcomes in most areas.

There have been some efforts to address some of the flaws, but they don't go far enough. And none fix the albatross around the NHS's neck: the lack of a comprehensive system of social care. That has meant the elderly and those with chronic needs are often held in hospitals, which harms their outcomes and reduces availability for those with acute illnesses. The Tories' unkept promises to fix social care will likely be one among many party epitaphs.

The Labour party's outspoken shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has rightly said the NHS is a service not a shrine. He has promised to focus on efficiency and outcomes, overcoming the kind of institutional defensiveness that has been exposed most recently by a damning report into a decades-old contaminated blood scandal. He seems determined to place more focus on preventive care and community care.

Labour has proposed to halve wait times exceeding 18 weeks within five years of taking office. And yet such plans, and Streeting's broader goals, take resources—likely in the form of either higher taxes or the introduction of charges for some basic services, along with structural change to the way the NHS operates. So far, nothing suggests that degree of boldness.

The National Health Service is often said to be the closest thing the UK has to a national religion. It performed admirably during the pandemic, but Britons are losing faith for good reason. If the Labour Party hopes to restore confidence and deliver better results, it would have to do more than tinker.

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

# The rise of local AI should democratize this technology

SIDDHARTH PAI



is co-founder of Siana Capital, a venture fund manager.

Groundbreaking announcements on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) have been making news. For instance, Google and OpenAI introduced new GenAI-powered assistants that can engage in real-time conversations, even adapting when interrupted, mirroring human interaction. These assistants don't just converse; they can also analyse your surroundings through a live video feed and translate conversations on the spot.

Google announced new tools at its I/O Conference, including enhancements to its bewildering array of products under Gemini AI, to compete with OpenAI's new ChatGPT 4o announced the day before. Google also announced that it is building Gemini into a "do everything" model across almost all its product suites. For its part, OpenAI's conversational ChatGPT 4o model can supposedly respond with a lag time of 320 milliseconds, which is about the same as human speech. With humour, sarcasm and more, its responses are remarkably human-like.

However, the immense computational power and energy required to train and deploy these large language model (LLM)-based systems raises concerns about their sustainability. LLMs are designed to understand and generate human language by processing vast amounts of data, literally every scrap available online. They leverage specific learning techniques, such as transformer architectures, to create sophisticated models that can perform various language-related tasks. The most prominent examples, such as OpenAI's and Google's, have demonstrated remarkable proficiency in functions like text and image generation, summarization and now conversational AI.

The primary advantage of LLMs lies in their ability to generate coherent and contextually relevant text. This is achieved by training on diverse and enormous data-sets. They are helpful, but the downside is the massive computational resources required for their training and inference engines. These models typically run on powerful cloud servers with high-performance silicon, consuming substantial energy and generating a significant carbon footprint. Also, the need for constant internet connectivity to access these models can be a limitation in scenarios where privacy, security or connec-

tivity is a concern; most of them are natively available only in a 'cloud' environment.

To compete with LLMs, researchers and companies (notably Microsoft with its Phi model) are exploring ways to bring AI capabilities to devices like laptops and smartphones. In contrast to the cloud-dependent nature of LLMs, local AI models aim to deliver AI capabilities directly on smaller devices. These models are lightweight, consuming far less computational power and energy, which makes them more eco-friendly and reduces operational costs.

By processing data locally on a device, these models minimize the need to transmit sensitive information over the internet, enhancing user privacy and data security. Further, since local AI models can operate without constant internet connectivity, they are accessible in remote or underserved areas. They offer faster response times, as they don't require a network. Local AI models are particularly well-suited for cutting-edge computing sce-

narios, where real-time processing and low latency are critical. Smart home devices, autonomous vehicles and industrial IoT applications can all benefit.

Led by researchers like Sebastian Bubeck, the Phi model is designed to give small devices generative AI capabilities without compromising performance. The core idea behind Phi is to curate and optimize the data fed to the model, ensuring that it remains compact and efficient while retaining its ability to perform complex tasks. ([bit.ly/3VxyMf](https://bit.ly/3VxyMf)). Phi leverages advancements in model compression, quantization and distillation techniques to achieve its goals. Model compression reduces the size of the model without much affecting performance. Quantization reduces the precision of the model's weights, making it less computationally intensive. Distillation involves training a smaller model to mimic the behaviour of a larger one, effectively 'transferring' knowledge from a larger model to a smaller one.

Yet, the transition from cloud-dependent LLMs to efficient local AI models is far from assured. Achieving high accuracy with a smaller model requires sophisticated techniques and innovations in model architecture and miniaturization. Additionally, local AI models must be highly adaptable and capable of running on various local hardware configurations without compromising performance. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of local AI models are immense. By democratizing access to AI capabilities and reducing the environmental impact of AI deployments, models like Phi represent a significant step towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for artificial intelligence. The efforts to bring AI capabilities to small local devices mark a pivotal shift in the evolution of AI. A *Wired* reporter says he is running one of these models on his laptop and that the model has all the "wit and wisdom" of ChatGPT. ([bit.ly/4c4Ji8](https://bit.ly/4c4Ji8))

As research in this field continues to advance, I expect we will see more sophisticated and capable local AI models emerge, enabling a new wave of applications and innovations. If AI becomes hyper-local and network-independent, it can transform how we interact with technology and the very role of this technology in society.

**AI models are on their way that will deliver the technology's advantages to millions without net connectivity**



## The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## RESUME & REFRESH

The new Cabinet promises to build on what has already been done and pass on the baton seamlessly

THE UNION CABINET of the Narendra Modi Government 3.0 sends out some important messages, and the prime among them is continuity and stability. After a verdict that has unsettled several political and electoral certainties, this was, perhaps, the need of the moment. Now that there is a coalition government at the Centre without a party with a majority, now that the mandate casts the responsibility to carefully navigate a crowded NDA terrain on the BJP, and now that there is a possibility that the pull and tug of allies could be heard and seen frequently, the fact that the big ministries — Home, Defence, Finance, External Affairs, Road Transport and Highways, Railways — have not changed hands sends a signal that is reassuring. To be sure, there will be changes, going ahead, to meet the evolving challenges in a nation that is in transition. But the Modi government is promising that, at the same time, it will build on what has already been done, and that batons will be passed seamlessly. That's a message worth underlining.

The allocation of portfolios makes another important promise — that the government will give primacy to state concerns, that it will ensure a Centre that is listening and responsive. It cannot be incidental, surely, that this council of ministers has the largest number of former chief ministers in it, from the BJP and its ally parties: Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Manohar Lal Khattar, Sarbananda Sonowal, HD Kumaraswamy, Jitan Ram Manjhi. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has also been a chief minister and so has PM Modi. While each of them brings distinctive talent and experience and achievements in public office to his new position — for instance, Chouhan gets the agriculture ministry presumably as a reward for his successful helmsmanship of the sector in MP — together they will, hopefully, infuse the new ministry with a greater sensitivity to the country's regions and the federal compact. Many of the most important governance challenges of the future — from attracting economic investment, to removing obstacles in the way of growth that lie in sectors such as power in the Concurrent List, to addressing thorny issues like delimitation — will call for much closer coordination between the states and the Centre, and an uninterrupted dialogue between them.

At least two of the BJP's key allies — Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP — have openly expressed their grievance with the portfolio distribution exercise. There may be more discontents waiting to be given a hearing. There are important state assembly elections on the near horizon — in Jharkhand, Haryana and Maharashtra — which may call for a reset of the give-and-take in the ruling coalition. With JP Nadda joining the ministry, the BJP must also find itself a new president who can be the interlocutor with allies in a new context of greater power-sharing. Balancing these several imperatives will be a challenge, and for a BJP that has been used to having its way in the last decade, it will also be a time of valuable learning. There's a lot to be done — and the Cabinet is well-begun.

## DRYING UP

Urban India's recurring water crises should compel rethinking on sustainable use of fast-depleting aquifers

REDUCED RIVER FLOWS and falling water tables have made the summer harsher in several parts of the country. In Karnataka, the season began early, in March, when the drought, which carried over from last year, created and aggravated a water crisis in the state's capital, Bengaluru. In Delhi, the scorching temperatures have led to a similar emergency, reigniting an old dispute over water allocation to the capital. Last month, the Delhi government moved the Supreme Court, seeking an increased share of the Yamuna's waters. In response, on June 6, the Court asked Himachal Pradesh to release 137 cusecs of water. It also directed Haryana to facilitate the flow of this water to the NCR. However, Delhi government has complained that the neighbouring state is not complying with the directive, while Haryana contends that water is "getting evaporated" in transit. With the world warming up, the country needs a long-term policy to obviate such conflicts and make sure people do not suffer water shortages.

The Narendra Modi government has accorded importance to providing tap water connections, but the health of aquifers continues to be neglected. The country has historically tried to address water deficits by focusing on supply-side parameters. In line with such an approach, the Centre has asked states to prepare inventories of water bodies as a first step towards preventing the encroachment of these aquifers. Much more needs to be done to tackle long-standing shortfalls. There is very little coordination between departments that deal with surface and groundwater, irrigation resources and drinking water. The few water-sharing arrangements between riverine states come apart during shortage seasons. And plans to harvest rainwater remain largely on paper, despite floods and dry spells alternating with worrying regularity in most parts of the country.

In recent years, programmes such as the Sahi Fasal Campaign, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana and Atal Bhujal Yojana have taken early steps to encourage efficient use of water in agriculture. Optimal use of irrigation resources is essential. However, demand-side management of water resources also requires analyses of practices at the household and industrial levels. Currently, the data on per capita water availability for different users is sketchy. Emergencies, such as the latest shortage in Delhi, usually precipitate knee-jerk responses such as imposing fines for wasting water, when the need is to incentivise water conservation, reuse, and recycling. With climate vagaries imperiling the country's already-stressed aquifers, the new government should hit the ground running.

## ORWELLIAN

That George Orwell couldn't escape reduction to banality is a testament to the lasting literary impact and truth of '1984'

DOES THE WORLD owe George Orwell an apology? Think about this while doing a Google search for the term "Orwellian" and noting the frequency with which it has been used in the last six months to describe not just a system or law that seems repressive or dystopian, but also opinions and arguments that might be disagreeable or unsettling. For a writer with a well-known aversion to the "pre-fabricated" phrases that bedevil modern English, to have his own name reduced to a cliché would surely feel like an affront. But should it?

Consider what Orwell did when he published his final book, *1984*, on June 8, 75 years ago. In describing a world where memory is made false, thoughts are policed and even love is directed towards the "appropriate" object, Orwell created the language to describe what was, until then, an unimaginable nightmare of absolute loss of control over one's own life. Since 1949, the story of Winston Smith's complete subjugation by the all-powerful cult of Big Brother has given readers a means to express fears about what the 24/7 surveillance technology, stupidification of language and performative living anticipated by Orwell means for their individuality, independence and privacy.

That Orwell couldn't escape the fate of eventual reduction to banality visited upon other great writers (Dickensian, Machiavellian and Hemingwayesque) is a testament to both his lasting literary impact and the truth of his argument that a word is only as powerful as its meaning. At a time when telling facts from "alternative facts" has become harder than ever because of deep fake technology, when the clocks might well strike thirteen and two plus two might just be five, both Orwell and *1984* remain as important as ever to how the world — and its future — are imagined and articulated.

# A new federal bargain

But mere presence of regional parties in government will not strengthen interests of all states vis a vis Centre



LOUISE TILLIN

THE RETURN OF coalition politics in India will bring questions of federalism and Centre-state relations back to the fore. The BJP's greater reliance on its regional allies, and its expanded stake in southern India, offers the potential for a federal reset. But whether this will happen is unclear.

Since 2014, the BJP has introduced a number of changes in the domain of Centre-state relations. In Modi 1.0, the government began by abolishing the Planning Commission and establishing in its place Niti Aayog with a mandate for strengthening cooperative federalism. It went on to establish the Goods and Services Tax, arguably the most significant reform to fiscal federalism since the promulgation of the Constitution. In Modi 2.0, the government began its term in office with the abrogation of Article 370, a move that underlined a turn towards a deeper degree of centralisation and the use of a secure parliamentary majority to pursue one-nation policy ideas that often rode roughshod over the interests of states. The poll-eve pledge to proceed with "One nation, one election" was to be a continuation of this agenda.

Yet, going into the election, the tensions over the future of federalism were clear. The pending exercise of delimitation was the focal point for a brewing north-south divide in which less populous, Opposition-dominated southern states feared a radical redistribution of parliamentary representation to more populous BJP-dominated northern states. This threatened to throw open central elements of India's fiscal federal pact to destabilising partisan conflict. The legitimacy of the redistributive model of fiscal federalism through which taxes collected in richer southern and western states are redistributed to poorer northern states was at stake.

The return to coalition government, including regional parties as key power-brokers, as well as the BJP's greater electoral stake in south India (and the Opposition's in the north), is an inflection point at which trust and balance could be restored in matters of federalism.

Governing in coalition will introduce multiple centres of power, pushing against the

centralisation of decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office. But we shouldn't assume that regional parties themselves are strong votaries for strengthening federalism.

Regional parties in the national coalition government seek to advance the interests of their parties (with negotiation over cabinet and ministerial positions) and of their states (such as the demands for special status being asserted on behalf of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar). They have also raised questions of national interest such as the caste census, but so far little has been said about their vision for Centre-state relations or federalism.

Special-interest regional politics — if it is the price for coalition in 2024 — may threaten a wider federal bargain if it bolsters the impression that partisanship rather than principles determine the distribution of resources across regions within India. It could simply serve to extend the idea of a "double engine" *sarkar* from the BJP to the wider NDA coalition.

It is also unclear how far coalition partners will diverge from the BJP's "one nation" vision for federalism. For instance, following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, one TDP MP welcomed the fact that India would now be "one nation with one flag and one Constitution". The JD(U) has given its support to "one nation, one election". There is no *prima facie* reason to expect that the presence of regional parties in government will strengthen advocacy of the interests of all states vis-à-vis the Centre.

However, this period of political change could also be a point of reflection for a vision for a renewed federalism that resets zero-sum equations between the central and state governments. Such a reset would be in the long-term interests of all parties. With the changed north-south electoral map and the BJP/NDA's greater stake in the south, now is the moment for a more genuine, pan-India federal bargain; one that could start to strengthen trust between the Centre and the states after a period in which this has been severely eroded.

On many occasions since 2014, Prime Minister Modi has appealed for more cooperative working between the Centre and the

states in India's national interest. Strengthening the institutional space for dialogue and decision-making between the Centre and all states, not just NDA-governed states, should be a priority.

The simplest way to do this would be to empower the Inter-State Council, established following the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations in the late 1980s, but which has largely fallen into abeyance. Currently, the Inter-State Council is located within the Ministry of Home Affairs which has prevented it from developing its own identity and authority as a body trusted by both Centre and states. Giving it greater independence and statutory responsibilities would strengthen the space for both Centre-state, and inter-state, dialogue.

An independent body would have greater legitimacy in convening discussions on matters in which both levels of government have an interest. Empowering the Inter-State Council would support dispute resolution, enable greater policy learning across states and provide a platform for inter-governmental cooperation around policy areas that cannot be tackled by one level of government alone.

Further, and to build trust over the delimitation exercise when it occurs, there could be an announcement over a process to be followed to enable genuine consensus building among all states rather than a centrally imposed decision. Finding a federal solution that respects principles of representation and redistribution, without reducing the voice and autonomy of states, is in the interests of all parties. There are precedents that might be followed here such as the long process of inter-state dialogue and consensus building that led to indirect tax harmonisation, first via state-level VAT in the early 2000s and then the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax.

Harnessing this moment to offer a new vision for federalism, in which the Centre and states can build trust and work together, would be to the benefit of all parties as India looks to the future.

The writer is professor of Politics at King's India Institute and author of *Indian Federalism* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

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## FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE

In new era of politics of consensus, aspirations of Dalits, women, must come to fore



ADITI NARAYANI PASWAN

WITH THE OATH-TAKING ceremony of Modi 3.0, one could sense the maturing of our democracy. The last decade of the Narendra Modi-led government saw institutional and economic development and a culture of inclusive governance — *sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas*. With his focus on GYAN (Garib, Yuva, Annadata, Nari Shakti), Prime Minister Modi showed that he is the flagbearer of growth, youth development, gender equality and nation-building.

The Weberian concept of "charismatic authority" is particularly apt in PM Modi's context. Under his leadership, the BJP fostered the idea of one nation and strengthened nationalism by imbuing a deep sense of patriotism in citizens. Various local factors are responsible for cultivating among Dalits a bias towards the BJP, but Modi's image is central to the admiration they have for the party. This election was popularly referred to as "Modi ka election" — he is seen to be more popular and identifiable than the BJP symbol of the lotus, especially in rural India. His focus on stability, development, and progress — the "Modi guarantee" — acquired people's faith.

Through exemplary initiatives like the Ambedkar Panchteerth, our PM has honoured the legacy of BR Ambedkar. This is not a mere opinion; support for the BJP among the Dalit communities has seen a massive rise, from 24 per cent votes in 2014 to 36 per cent votes in 2019. Under Modi, social harmony and unity have taken precedence.

The PM fought the election with his track record in infrastructure building, invest-

ment, innovation, and inclusivity. From the country becoming a major exporter of toys to being on the cusp of developing indigenous semiconductor chips, the Make in India initiative is ushering Bharat towards a new level of *atma nirbharta* by making the country a global manufacturing hub. The major beneficiaries of industrialisation are now women and youth, of which Dalits constitute a major chunk. The manufacturing boom is likely to pave the way for uplifting millions of Dalits and backward classes into a new middle class. Socio-economic indicators suggest that despite reservation in education, a significant chunk of backward communities, Dalits, Adivasis and minorities still fall short of university degrees, making them ineligible for the service industry. However, the manufacturing upsurge has led to higher employment, particularly for the marginalised.

PM Modi will inevitably be compared to India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. However, this is a different era — one of assertive aspirational India, that is looking to thrive not just survive. Re-electing a PM during an era of war and economic instability is one thing and re-electing one in an era when India is at peace with its neighbours and its growth story continues to inspire is another. History will accord Modi a prominent place in the list of all those who propelled India to new heights. Modi's tenure is packed with action-oriented politics rather than rhetoric. He metamorphosed vote-bank politics into GYAN pillars. There has been a systematic shift in the

thinking of voters, not just in urban areas but also in rural areas — they are able to sift through rhetoric and fear-mongering and focus on real issues.

This election, *mahila* matters have eclipsed caste and communal flux. An outstanding 64.95 per cent women stepped out and voted. This can be attributed not only to awareness of schemes but also the increased know-how on how to access them.

The 2024 elections helped voters voice their aspirations, defining what they want from the government and their equal stake in its formation. As we usher in a new era of politics of consensus, the role of the government will be to ensure that the ideals, interests and inclusion of the marginalised are at the fore. It will be a welcome and much-awaited move.

The writer is assistant professor of Sociology, Lakshmbai College, Delhi University



## JUNE 11, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### KILINGS IN PUNJAB

SIXTEEN EXTREMISTS WERE killed in four encounters with security forces in Punjab. Also killed were 13 security personnel. Three security personnel were injured in the encounters. A Home Ministry official in Delhi said machine guns, carbines, self loading rifles and AK rifles were recovered from the slain extremists. Eighty terrorists were captured in the encounters.

### IRAN-IRAQ ON CIVILIANS

IRAN AND IRAQ reported separately that they would accept a plea from the United Nations

general secretary, and would stop targeting civilians in cities and towns along their common border. The Iranian state radio, quoting President Ali Khomeini, said that Tehran was willing to cease bombing residential areas in Iraq if the Baghdad government of President Saddam Hussein agreed to do the same.

### INTELLIGENCE SHAKE-UP

THE GOVERNMENT IS contemplating steps to streamline the intelligence set-up both at the Centre and state level. The happenings in Punjab and its aftermath have bared the hollowedness of the nation's intelligence gathering machinery. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ex-

pressed concern over the performance of the intelligence outfit when she was apprised of the magnitude of terrorists activities after the army action in Amritsar.

### BOEING 757 FOR IA

THE HIGH-LEVEL AIRCRAFT selection committee entrusted with the task of choosing a new plan for Indian Airlines, has strongly recommended that IA buy Boeing 757. The secret report of the committee, headed by the chief of air staff, Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh, was accepted by the board but it decided to wait for a week before announcing its decision on the new plane.

# 11 THE IDEAS PAGE

## To crack the exam, or not to

Controversy over NEET should lead to a rethink. Examinations based on multiple choice questions are inimical to thinking reflectively



KRISHNA KUMAR

IS THERE A relation between the potential to become a good doctor and success in the NEET (National Entrance Eligibility Test)? Going by what success in NEET demands, one can't hesitate to say, "No" — except to acknowledge the general link that both NEET and a doctor's life require hard work. Like most current entrance tests, NEET is essentially a means of elimination. It enables the NTA (National Testing Agency) to legitimately scoop a few out of the ocean of applicants. This is done by organising a mega-exam where over two million youngsters sit and answer 180 questions in 200 minutes flat.

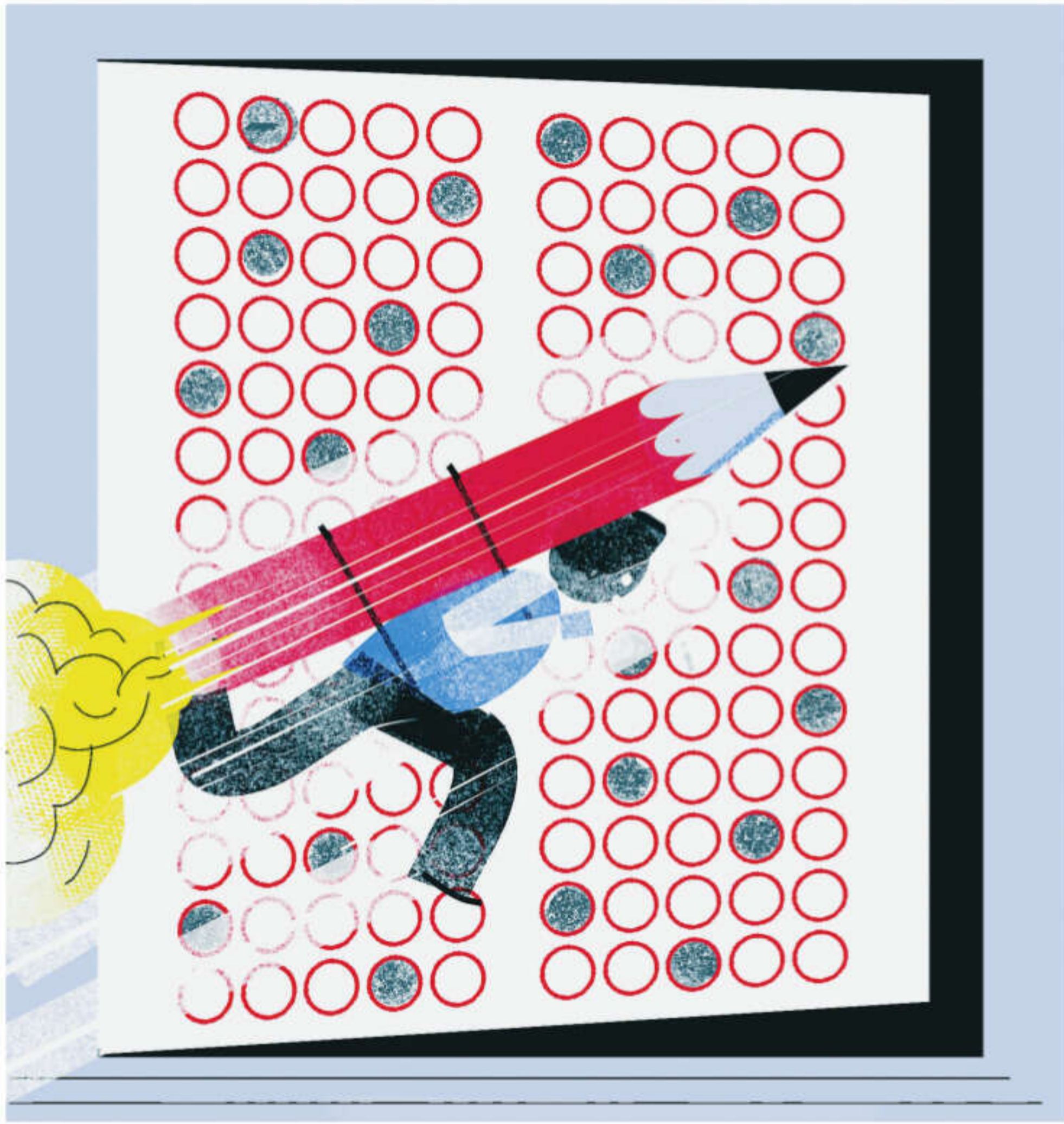
How is this impossible feat achieved? Each question has four possible answers, and the candidate must choose the correct one to score. There is no time to think why that answer is correct or why the others are wrong. Such niceties of the reflective era are now totally out of fashion. If you want to be a doctor, you must master the art of responding to MCQs (multiple choice questions) at a breakneck speed. Coaching institutes will teach you this art, and drill you into mastery of it. For this handy service, they expect your parents to pay a good sum. Eventually, you will fulfil their dream of seeing you become a doctor. Never mind if you had a different dream.

Trouble was brewing for quite some time in several centralised exam systems, but this summer the lid has blown off in the test for the medical entrance. There are just too many problems with the NEET result declared on June 4. That was the date when everybody expected to hear the Lok Sabha results. The NEET result was to come 10 days later. That's why its co-appearance surprised everyone. For a vast number of candidates, it was not a pleasant surprise. Then there are other, somewhat technical, issues. Rarely does a candidate get full marks. This time, there is a crowd at the top. Many have been given grace marks to compensate for the lack of sufficient time. Then there was a dispute about a question. The NTA is busy explaining everything away. It has denied the rumour of a paper leak.

In a mega-event like the NEET, every little detail is a potential nightmare. The paper must start at the same second at all the centres across the country. Entry rituals into an exam hall are far tougher than in an airport. The principle is clear: No cheating teenager should become a doctor. Given the scale of the operation — over two million applicants — and the fragility of the NTA, one must sympathise with it. I visited its website, hoping to find a senior faculty's number to ring up and find out what exactly is going on. I discovered that it is one of those new-age institutions that follow the dictum — "permanence mars efficiency". That permanence may also jeopardise confidentiality must be another concern.

The NTA's vision is, of course, unexceptionable: "To improve equity and quality in education by administering research-based, valid, reliable, efficient, transparent, fair and international-level assessments". That, however, is a daunting task, especially when it is to be accomplished by requesting scholars of other institutions to spare time for the NTA.

MCQ-based mass testing has gripped India's systemic imagination. Eligibility for



CR Sasikumar

research, teaching and now undergraduate admission is part of the MCQs regime. Well-designed MCQs can probe capacities such as reasoning, judgement and analogical thinking, but they can't help us inquire into capacities like reflection and review of one's own first impression. In mass entrance tests, speed becomes a crucial factor in success. Young people know that the NEET demands "cracking" and you can't crack something at a slow speed. Coaching institutes drill skills into you such as surface scanning and pattern recognition, enabling you to wade through hundreds of items without wasting a minute on thinking. If you like to think about things, letting your mind look carefully at a problem before resolving it, it seems you are unfit to become a doctor, an engineer or even a teacher in India. Mindless speed is what you must possess to enter the courses that lead to these professions. The MCQ mantra has exorcised the old ghost of quiet reflection.

If a test leaves youngsters feeling that an exam was unfair, it dents a cornerstone of education. Over the years, a vast number of young minds have felt unfairly assessed. Impartial evaluation is not merely a moral condition, it is also a key condition for equity. As it is, our system of education faces deeply entrenched problems of inequality arising from caste, gender, language and other aspects of social hierarchy. The coaching industry further compounds the problem. Mechanical testing makes it convenient to

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deal with large numbers of aspirants, but the cost is heavy.

News of suicides reminds us every now and then what sort of cost we pay as a society and nation for maintaining a system of judging eligibility that marginalises the thoughtful as a first step. It is not merely a question of putting the young mind under excessive stress — that is now happening from early childhood. Stress in early life is detrimental to learning, but the ordeal of living with the smell of injustice inflicts a deeper corrosion. It encourages a generalised cynicism which is directly hostile to democracy.

This year's NEET result may prove a bit too hard to cleanse by available technical means. The NTA has set up a committee to look into some aspects of the mess and suggest ways to mitigate it. Evidence is mounting that a great number of candidates suspect unfair treatment. Perhaps the judiciary will exercise its discernment and power. Whatever happens, a larger strategy and consensus around it must be worked out for radical changes in the prevailing system of deciding eligibility for entry into medical courses. Doctors constitute far too important an aspect of civil society to be selected on the basis of coachable capacities — cracking question after question, based on a textbook, no matter how good it is. Other capacities must be recognised and assessed.

The writer is former director, National Council of Educational Research and Training

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"After a decade of acrimony and mistrust, it is natural to tread carefully. But the ball is in India's court. If Mr Modi softens his rhetoric and extends the hand of friendship, Pakistan should respond."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

## Let the children play

If we let ourselves be led by them, could we rediscover the simple joys we have lost?



ROHINI NILEKANI

HAVE YOU OBSERVED with attention what a child does when playing on her own? She is absorbed, muttering, doing random things, putting unexpected things together. She may smile, giggle, frown. She is herself and becoming her future self.

You may remember similar moments from your childhood, when tactile observation and imagination were your magic wands, transporting you into a world of wonder.

June 11 is the first International Day of Play. A total of 140 countries were co-sponsors of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution. This is a victory for the advocacy by global *samaaj* organisations, amplifying the voice of children everywhere. Today, around the world, adults are encouraged to democratise the joy of play.

Why has it come to this, that we need a special reminder to recognise what should be common wisdom?

There are a million reasons, but one seems obvious. Ever since universal mass schooling adopted a competitive model to create workers for the Industrial Revolution, learning became divorced from play. Education became a means to an economic end. Parental attention and anxiety became vested in pushing children to be the best in class, in the examination, and hopefully, therefore, in their careers.

For middle-class and elite children, this meant less time to be left alone to play. Even long vacations had to be crammed with summer camps or serious hobbies. For the poor, play can be a luxury anyway, and often unsafe. I will never forget a scene in Khagaria, Bihar, when I saw four-year-olds splashing about in a small water body. What fun, I thought. It turned out they were catching fish for the evening meal. Across the spectrum, play is undervalued or scarce.

Then new neuroscience emerged to support what our gut already understood. Learning is sharpest and quickest in the early years. Cognition, social skills, emotional well-being and physical growth are largely developed in the first eight years of a person's life. More than a million neural connections form every second in a young brain. But growth is non-linear. There are dips and surges, many dependent on age and nutrition, others environment-related. Early childhood experiences can impact brain architecture to establish either robust or fragile foundations for lifelong learning and well-being.

Then the scientists told us that play enhances learning. Free play allows children to build explanatory systems — implicit theories or schemas — to help organise their knowledge. It also helps to develop their intuition, which theorists have long established as critical for scientific or artistic discoveries.

But play must be just that — play. The Hindi word "khal" describes it perfectly. *Khal*

is joyful, unmediated. Gowda V K, Ravi Kumar C P, Goyal R and Sidhwani S, in their article, 'Childhood Development, Learning, and Education: A Focus on Nonlinear Learning and Play' in the Indian Journal of Neurology, say, "An essential requirement of learning through play is that children should have agency over the experience and must be guided or supported rather than instructed or directed."

When children play, it can lead to more neuroplasticity in the prefrontal cortex, better information processing and behavioural flexibility. Play fosters many skills, like language development, conflict resolution, collaboration and self-advocacy. In the age of AI, where the future of work is so uncertain, free play could become the surprise differentiator, to unlock young people's creativity and critical thinking.

Through EkStep Foundation, we recently made a 90-second film called *Bachpan Manao*, *Badhte Jao* (Celebrate Childhood, Keep Growing). In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we hoped adult caregivers could turn their minds away from learning loss to the abundance of opportunity around them. Children learn from everything; it is up to us to kindle their curiosity.

Through the short film, we wanted to rekindle wonder as a public good.

One mother in Satara responded with an "aha" moment. "My childhood was free, but I don't allow my child the same freedom to explore. I will."

An urban father fretted, "I want my child to play, but where is the space?"

Increasingly, psychiatrists and biologists report dangers from a nature deficit in urban children. If this constrains the middle class, imagine the situation of children in slums. I have met children who have not even seen a butterfly. Yet these future citizens will have to learn resilience against climate change. How can we redesign our cities with more lung space and play space to reconnect children with nature?

Substantial research now confirms that a play-deprived childhood leads to negative personal and societal outcomes. Psychiatrist Stuart Brown, founder of the US-based National Institute for Play, has spent decades studying the connection between play and healthy human development. "The adaptive tolerance and empathy toward others that is learned in early preschool through rough-and-tumble play is really a fundamental part of our having tolerance for people who are different than we are," said Brown. Play is "not frivolous and not just for kids, but something that is an inherent part of human nature," he added.

Hopefully, the International Day of Play will refocus the energies of caregivers and educators around the world.

If we mindfully permit ourselves to let children be, perhaps we can lighten the burden of child-rearing. If we let ourselves be led by children in play, could we rediscover the simple joys we have lost?

Why not find out by participating in the UNICEF India and Bachpan Manao campaign — #houroffreeplay challenge — on June 11?

Come, let's play.

The writer is co-founder, EkStep, chairperson, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and author of *Samaaj*, *Sarkaar*, *Bazaar* — A Citizen First Approach

## Ab ki baar, pyaar hi pyaar

It was India's most marginalised who changed the country's trajectory



PRIYA RAMANI

A DECADE AGO, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised that he would usher in "achhe din". It looks like they might finally be here, because in a fractured age, what can bring more happiness than collaboration and diversity, even if it has been necessitated by an angry electorate? A strong Opposition and a chastened media are added incentives to ensure this new formula holds.

The time for solo photo opportunities is over, the best pictures will showcase the variety of the team in charge. No colour will get centrestage, the rainbow rules now. Forget self-congratulation and showing off your best angles. The world has seen the warts in this nation's soul. Now pause the hate, make space to heal.

"Ab ki baar, pyaar hi pyaar" (this time around, only love)," many posted, redoining a Bharatiya Janata Party slogan about a 400-seat target. The BJP and its allies got 294 seats.

No more bigoted words, weaponised laws, exclusionary policies. The people have spoken. Park the bulldozers and practise those Leonard Cohen lyrics: "There is a crack, a crack in everything/That's how the light gets in." Change the soundtrack of this country to one that signals hope and renewal. Sing along together.

Practise saying yes — to lovers of different faiths and all genders, to varied food and cultural habits, to the marginalised marching ahead, to the young who want to follow their dreams. Learn to laugh at ourselves and nurture all voices, especially dissenters. Recognise the contribution of those who spent time in jail — and release those who still languish there under false pretences. Protect the forests (and forest dwellers) and build bridges across hearts. Don't believe in foregone conclusions. Grow together, instead of crying wolf about us and them, north and south. Tell the uncles to please sit this one out.

The age of cooperation may not be exciting for the stock market, but for those who have struggled to keep pace with rocketing Islamophobia and unemployment, there are tears of relief and a glimmer of hope.

Heed economist and former chief economic advisor Kaushik Basu who recently tweeted about the "alarming" unemployment among the youth and urged the country to rethink its policies.

Get set to keep pace with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) national president N Chandrababu Naidu, who promised young people 20 lakh jobs and regular recruitment drives if they voted him to power.

Replace words and phrases such as "invincible", "pushed through", "undefeated", "unsailable", and "juggernaut" with those that have a more democratic ring. It's time to discuss and debate. No more slurs such as "infiltrators" and "anti-national" to describe equal citizens of this country. No using jihad as a suffix to distract from the real issues we face as a nation.

Practise tolerance, but don't tolerate hate. Repair, renew, recharge. Forget fatigue, it's time to sleep well and regain your energy. Restore your faith in education, in camaraderie, in progress, in inclusivity, in the kindness of strangers, the connections of neighbours and the power of the Constitution.

Disband the WhatsApp groups, or use them only for "good morning" greetings. Educate yourself, those around you, don't judge fellow citizens by their clothes or the way they look. Never forget, it was India's most marginalised who changed the country's trajectory.

Consider it poetic irony that the party whose elected representatives confidently announced they would change the Constitution has been responsible for bringing this document front and centre again. Now, more than ever in recent history, the Constitution is back in vogue. Students in

schools chant the Preamble at their morning assembly; auto drivers discuss citizenship laws; lovers marry under the welcoming shade of this document; and workers march to the beat of its powerful words.

Spread the news for those who still may not know. We have the right to equality, to freedom of speech and expression, to practise any profession or occupation, to follow any religion. Exploitation is unlawful, and enforcement is also written in the law.

Thanks to all the headlines about the Constitution, more Indians now speak the language of rights — and know what it takes to protect them. So guard against their erosion. And stand together with those who need help to guard their rights.

Do what interfaith couples do. Sign up for the year-long Diwali-Eid-Christmas bash. Always mix and match. Invite and get invited. Go equipped with sweets and love. Believe in the language of humanity. Ignore empty slogans, especially those with alliterations. Ask how you can give back in these times. Ensure this new mood endures. Don't slide back. Embrace joy and pride.

The writer is a Bengaluru-based writer and co-founder of India Love Project on Instagram

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### COALITION POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Rajdhama & coalition' (IE, June 10). The BJP can no longer hold its own and will have to rely on coalition partners who may not give in to its Hindutva agenda. Further, the Opposition parties have improved their electoral performance and are in a position to strongly resist the unconstitutional policies of the BJP. They must be cohesive, effective, and meaningful, and advance the interests of the county. The BJP has to become democratic and adhere to the Constitution. A coalition government is necessary if "the India as we know 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.

SS Paul, *Nadia*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Rajdhama & coalition' (IE, June 10). The reference to rajdhama is reminiscent of late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's advice and reminder amid 2002 Gujarat riots to then Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi to follow rajdhama. In 2024, recognising the reality of a coalition government, PM Narendra Modi, while addressing the NDA meeting, underscored the importance of consensus. This begs the question: Was consensus given any

### LEADER WITH VISION

importance during the last ten years of Modi-led BJP rule? There were hardly any signs of consensus-building with partners and the Opposition before decisions like demonetisation, farm laws, etc. This time, Modi's tone and tenor changed as he said that the Opposition is opposed to the Government, not the nation.

LR Murmu, *New Delhi*

### LEADER WITH VISION

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'We deserve better leaders' (IE, June 9). Now that India has attained the status of the world's fifth largest economy and is a respected voice in international politics, it needs a leader with a global vision. So far none of the Opposition leaders have projected such capability. Narendra Modi had raised the hopes of people through his pro-growth policies and pro-poor welfare measures. But since the Lok Sabha elections, his overconfidence bordering on arrogance, display of contempt for Opposition leaders and recourse to coarse communication in public speeches got the better of his acknowledged political wisdom. In the absence of alternatives, he is still the only choice. Hopefully, the stunning election results and collaboration with secular parties like TDP and JD(U) will chasten him.

YG Chouksey, *Pune*

# Rajan panel report on NEET, and why TN opposes the exam

**ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND**  
 NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

AMID THE uproar over the NEET-UG results that were declared on June 4, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday said that his government was the "first to foresee the hazards of NEET", and "undertook a large-scale campaign against it".

The results, published 10 days ahead of the scheduled date, have been questioned for several reasons: the unusually large number of candidates — 67, compared to at most, three in the previous five years — who secured the top rank with the maximum possible score; 'grace marks' being awarded to some 1,500 candidates for "loss of time"; and 44 of the toppers getting grace marks for getting an answer wrong only because a version of a Class 12 NCERT textbook had an inaccuracy.

The National Testing Agency (NTA, which conducts NEET-UG) and the Education Ministry have set up a committee to review the results of those who got grace marks. Congress leaders have asked for a probe su-

pervised by the Supreme Court, and Maharashtra's Medical Education Minister has asked for the results to be cancelled. Some candidates have moved High Courts.

## What Stalin said

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Stalin said: "After coming to power [in 2021], we constituted a High-Level Committee headed by Justice A K Rajan to study the impact of the NEET-based admission process. The Committee's report, based on extensive data analysis and inputs from students, parents, and the public, has been published and shared with various State Governments to expose NEET's anti-poor and anti-social justice nature."

## What Committee found

NEET is the all-India competitive examination held for admission to medical, dental, and AYUSH courses in government and private colleges across India. This year, almost 24 lakh candidates appeared for a little more than 1 lakh MBBS seats in 700-plus medical colleges.

The Rajan Committee found that after NEET was introduced in 2017-18, fewer stu-

dents from rural areas, those studying in the Tamil medium, those from families with lower incomes, and those from Tamil Nadu state board schools, secured admission in medical colleges in the state.

While English-medium students secured more seats even in the pre-NEET period, their share rose further post-NEET, while that of Tamil-medium students became smaller.

From 2010-11 to 2016-17, English-medium students got between 80.2% to 85.12% seats in medical colleges; Tamil-medium students got 19.79% seats in 2010-11, and just 14.88% in 2016-17.

In the four years from 2017-18 (when NEET was introduced), the share of Tamil-medium students in medical college seats ranged from 1.6% to 3.27%. And the share of English-medium students shot up from 85.12% in 2016-17 to 98.41% in 2017-18, and was 98.01% in 2020-21.

In the pre-NEET period from 2010-11 to 2016-17, students from rural areas secured 61.5% seats on average in government med-

ical colleges. In 2020-21, this figure had fallen to 49.91%. By contrast, the share of students from urban areas in government medical colleges rose from an average 38.55% in the pre-NEET years to 50.09% in 2020-21.

The share of students from higher-income families increased in the post-NEET period, while that of students from poorer families decreased, the Rajan Committee found.

Students whose parents had an annual income of less than Rs 2.5 lakh secured an average 41% of admissions in the pre-NEET period; this figure fell to an average 36% in the post-NEET years. For students whose parents had an annual income of over Rs 2.5 lakh, these numbers were 58% and 62% on average in the pre-NEET and post-NEET periods respectively.

Post NEET, CBSE students came to have an advantage over Tamil Nadu state board students, the Committee found.

The share of applicants from state board schools fell from around 95% on average in the pre-NEET years to 64.27% in 2020-21, while applicants from CBSE schools increased from an

average 3.17% pre-NEET to 32.26% in 2020-21.

The share of CBSE students who secured admission to government medical colleges increased from 0.13% in 2010-11 to 26.83% in 2020-21, while state board students' share fell from 71.73% to 43.13% during this period.

The report said that "the argument that the NEET mark, as opposed to HSC (higher secondary certificate of the state board) mark tests the standard of the student and signifies merit is a baseless argument". It noted that in the pre-NEET period, the average HSC score of students who were admitted to MBBS programmes was 98.16%, compared to 89.05% post-NEET.

On the impact of coaching centres on admissions, the report said that 99% of students who secured admissions in 2019-20 received training before NEET.

## Panel's recommendations

Concluding that NEET has "undermined the diverse societal representation in MBBS and higher medical studies" and favoured affluent sections of society, the Committee asked the state to take immediate steps to eliminate NEET from the admission process.

It recommended that HSC scores, "normalised" to ensure equality across boards, should be used as the admission criteria. It also said that "socio-economic and other demographic adversities" that may result in poor performance in the higher secondary examination may be identified, and "re-profiling of scores" should be done using the framework of an "adversity score".

## Following the report

In his X post, Stalin wrote: "Based on the recommendations in the report, a Bill seeking exemption from NEET was unanimously passed by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. It is now awaiting Presidential assent, after an inordinate delay from the Tamil Nadu Governor's side."

The Tamil Nadu Admission to Under Graduate Medical Degree Courses Bill was passed by the Assembly in 2021, returned by the Governor in 2022, and passed again by the Assembly the same year. It provides for admissions to undergraduate medical, dental and homeopathy courses on the basis of Class 12 marks.

## EXPLAINED POLITICS

### KESARAPALLI IT PARK, THE VENUE OF NAIDU'S SWEARING-IN CEREMONY

ANDHRA PRADESH Chief Minister-designate N Chandrababu Naidu will be sworn in at 11.27 am on Wednesday. The ceremony, which was initially planned for Amaravati, the state capital, on June 9, will be held near the Kesarapalli IT Park at Gannavaram in Krishna district.

Hyderabad is no longer the capital of AP — the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 stated that the city will be the "common capital" of AP and Telangana for a period "not exceeding ten years".

## Kesarapalli IT Park

The Kesarapalli IT Park was planned with the intention of turning Vijayawada into an IT hub. The IT Park was inaugurated by Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, the Congress Chief Minister of the undivided state, in 2006. In 2010, Chief Minister Konijeti Rosaiah, who succeeded YSR upon his demise in a helicopter crash, inaugurated 'Medha', the first of five planned towers in the Gannavaram area close to the airport.

## A convenient venue

The venue for Naidu's swearing-in appears to have been chosen for logistics reasons. Top leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and representatives from the central government, the BJP, and other political parties are expected to be present at the ceremony. The IT Park is less than 1.5 km from Vijayawada International Airport, and less than 20 km from Vijayawada city.

The IT Park ground can accommodate 50,000 people in its 18-20-acre sprawl. Thousands of TDP, Jana Sena Party (JSP), and BJP supporters are expected to attend the swearing-in ceremony.

On the other hand, Amaravati is nearly 35 km from Vijayawada airport, which presents a host of logistics issues. If the

swearing-in was to be held in Amaravati, at least six helipads would have had to be built to facilitate the movement of VIPs from the airport to Amaravati.

Also, Amaravati has seen very little development in the past five years.

## Travails of Amaravati

After losing Hyderabad — the city that Naidu had worked to develop into one of India's major IT hubs — to Telangana, the TDP chief had laid the foundation stone of the proposed new capital in Amaravati in 2015. Spread over 217 sq km, Amaravati city was Naidu's pet project during his tenure as CM from 2014-19.

But after Y S Jaganmohan Reddy's YSR Congress party secured a landslide victory in the 2019 state Assembly elections, work slowed down. Jagan came up with a three-capital formula — Visakhapatnam would be the "executive capital", Amaravati would be the "legislative capital", and Kurnool would be the "judicial capital" of AP.

Jagan's freeze on the development of Amravati was devastating for farmers who had handed over their land after being promised prime real estate in the new city, as well as for developers. Over the past five years, property prices in Amaravati tanked to as low as Rs 3,500 per square yard, but Naidu's return to power has brought new hope for the city. "The prices now are estimated to be Rs 45,000 per sq yard. The capital region is going to be the most sought-after real estate destination in Andhra Pradesh," Subhakar Vemulapalli, a real estate agent from Tullur, told *The Indian Express*.

In March 2022, the AP High Court directed the then YSRCP government that Amaravati should be developed as the state capital. The Jagan government challenged this order in the Supreme Court, where the matter is pending. **ENS**

**APURVA VISHWANATH**  
 NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

AS THE 18th Lok Sabha prepares to meet, the TDP and JD(U), key allies of the BJP in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), are said to be jockeying for the post of Speaker. After a *pro tem* or temporary Speaker administers the oath to new members, the Speaker is chosen to be the Presiding Officer of the House.

What are the powers of the Speaker and why is the post crucial for the BJP, its allies, as well as the opposition?

## Constitutional mandate

The Speaker has a key role in parliamentary democracy. The Constitution of India provides for the offices of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker who, according to Article 93, are to be elected "as soon as may be" after the commencement of the House.

The Speaker is elected by a simple majority in the House. The term ends with the dissolution of the House, unless the Speaker resigns or is removed from office before that. A motion of no-confidence can be moved against the Speaker with notice of 14 days as per Article 94 of the Constitution. Separately, the Speaker, like any other member of the House, can face disqualification.

There are no specific qualifications for becoming Speaker, which means any member is entitled to be considered. However, the post of Speaker is distinct from other members in the House.

From the placement of the Speaker's chair in the House to his having a casting vote, from effectively being in charge of the functioning of the House to having crucial constitutional functions in dealing with disqualification of members — the Speaker is evidently perched as the Presiding Officer of Lok Sabha.

The salary of the Speaker is drawn from the Consolidated Fund of India unlike for other MPs, which flow from a statute voted on by the House itself.

## Powers of the Speaker

**CONDUCTING THE HOUSE:** The Speaker, with a vantage view of the House, decides how it is conducted. The conduct of government business is decided by the



**SPEAKERS OF THE COALITION ERA:** (From left) Somnath Chatterjee, the late GMC Balayogi, and Purno A Sangma. *Archive*

SPEAKERS OF LOK SABHA			
Name	Tenure	Party	Ruling Coalition
Rabi Ray	Dec 1989 - July 1991	Janata Dal	National Front
Shivraj Patil	July 1991 - May 1996	Cong	Cong
PA Sangma	May 1996 - Mar 1998	Cong	United Front
GMC Balayogi*	Mar 1998 - Oct 1999 Oct 1999 - Mar 2002	TDP	NDA
Manohar Joshi	May 2002 - June 2004	Shiv Sena	NDA
Somnath Chatterjee	June 2004 - June 2009	CPI (M)	UPA
Meira Kumar	June 2009 - June 2014	Cong	UPA
Sumitra Mahajan	June 2014 - June 2019	BJP	NDA
Om Birla	June 2019 - June 2024	BJP	NDA

*\*Died in office*

Speaker in consultation with the Leader of the House. Prior permission of the Speaker is required for members to ask a question, or to discuss any matter.

There are Rules and Procedure for the functioning of the House, but the Speaker has vast powers in ensuring these Rules are followed, and in choosing procedures. This makes the impartiality of the Speaker a crucial check and balance for the Opposition to have its say in the House.

**QUESTIONS & RECORDS:** The Speaker decides the admissibility of a question raised by a member, as well as how the proceedings of the House are published. The Speaker has the power to expunge, in full or in part, remarks that she may consider to be unparliamentary. Critical remarks against the rul-

ing party may not be published if the Speaker decides to expunge them.

**VOICE VOTES, DIVISION:** When the treasury benches seem thin in the House, the Speaker can disregard a request for division and push a Bill through by voice vote.

As per the *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha*, if the Speaker is of the opinion that is "unnecessarily claimed", simply ask the members who are for 'Aye' and those for 'No' respectively to rise in their places and decide.

In such a case, the names of the voters shall not be recorded. Vote by division is important as a record for posterity. An MP gets a chance to record dissent and show the mandate of her constituents.

**NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION:** One of the

most important times when a Speaker's impartiality impacts the Opposition is when a motion of no-confidence is moved against the government. In 2018, when the YSRCP and TDP gave notices for a motion of no-confidence, then Speaker Sumitra Mahajan adjourned the House several times before admitting the motion and putting it to vote.

**CASTING VOTE:** Although it is rare that a Speaker is required to give her casting vote, it is a crucial function. According to Article 100 of the Constitution, which talks about voting in the Houses, the Chairman of Rajya Sabha or Speaker of Lok Sabha, or any person acting as such, "shall not vote in the first instance, but shall have an exercise a casting vote in the case of any equality of votes".

Conventionally, the Speaker votes in favour of the government.

## Disqualification of members

For the Opposition, the realities of the power of the Speaker under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution are perhaps more significant than how the House is conducted.

The Tenth Schedule or the anti-defection law, introduced to the Constitution through the Fifty-Second (Amendment) Act, 1985, gives the Speaker of the House the power to disqualify legislators who "defect" from a party. In the landmark case *Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachillhu* in 1992, the Supreme Court upheld the power vested in the Speaker and said that only the final order of the Speaker will be subject to judicial review.

Defections can alter numbers in the House and cause a government to fall. If the Speaker acts in a timely manner and disqualifies such members, then the new government may not have a majority. However, a delay in deciding the disqualification petitions can vitiate the Tenth Schedule.

In 2023, the Supreme Court had directed the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar to initiate disqualification proceedings against MLAs of the Uddhav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde factions of the Shiv Sena at the earliest. At that time, the petitions were pending for over a year and a half, allowing the Uddhav-led government to collapse.

In 2020, the Supreme Court had ruled that Speakers of Assemblies and Lok Sabha must decide disqualification pleas within three months except in extraordinary circumstances.

## EXPLAINED FOREIGN POLICY & DIPLOMACY

# Significance of Maldives' pro-China President Muizzu's New Delhi visit

**ARJUN SENGUPTA**  
 NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

THE PRESIDENT of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, was one of seven leaders from India's neighbourhood who attended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday evening. Muizzu's presence was significant, given the way he has positioned himself politically vis-à-vis India, and the crucial strategic aspect to the India-Maldives relationship.

## The 'India Out' candidate

Muizzu came to power on November 17 last year on an 'India Out' plank. The India Out campaign had begun in 2020 as the Maldives opposition's protest against then President Ibrahim Solih's policies that were perceived to be friendly towards New Delhi, but had soon turned into a movement against India's alleged military presence in the archipelago, which both the Solih government and India denied.

During his presidential campaign, Muizzu repeatedly vowed to send back "foreign soldiers". Within hours of being sworn in, he demanded the withdrawal of all Indian military personnel from Maldives.

Consequently, the final batch of Indian soldiers — who were stationed in the Maldives to operate and maintain two helicopters and three Dornier aircraft India had previously gifted to the country — were replaced by civilians in May.

## Muizzu's pro-China tilt

Like his mentor, former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, under whose rule (2013-18) the India-Maldives relationship deteriorated severely, Muizzu has openly aligned his country with China, India's geopolitical rival in the Indian Ocean.

In January, Muizzu broke with a Maldivian tradition to choose Beijing over New Delhi for his first foreign visit as President. He met President Xi Jinping, and signed 20 agreements covering areas ranging from tourism to social housing and e-commerce.



**After his swearing-in ceremony, Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President of Maldives Mohamed Muizzu during a meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI**

In March, Malé signed an agreement with Beijing to obtain free "non-lethal" military equipment and training from China — the first ever military deal between the two countries.

The Chinese influence in the Maldives has increased steadily over the past couple of decades. The island nation is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has led to an influx of Chinese money and a strengthening of the relationship between the two countries — at the expense of India.

Muizzu's presidency and the anti-India sentiment fanned by sections of the Maldivian political class is a culmination of this process.

## A historical relationship

For India, the Maldives is a crucial ally, important to secure its maritime periphery and to keep an eye on the larger Indian Ocean region where China is making aggressive moves. The archipelago lies barely

70 nautical miles (130 km) from Lakshadweep's Minicoy Island, and some 300 nautical miles (560 km) from India's west coast. Several important commercial sea lanes run through the islands.

Regardless of Muizzu's pro-China, anti-India posturing, the Maldives cannot simply "let go" of India. It is heavily dependent on Indian imports in almost all important sectors, from food to life-saving medicines, and aircraft used in search and rescue missions.

India has rushed to the Maldives' aid in many crises — from being the first to send in help after the 2004 tsunami to airlifting drinking water to the country after a desalination plant broke down in 2014. During the Covid-19 pandemic, India sent medicines, masks, gloves, PPE kits, vaccines, and other aid.

The Indian Army played a crucial role in thwarting an attempted coup in Malé in 1988. "Across party lines in the Maldives, they don't criticise this operation. They will mention other issues that they have with India, but not this," Maldives expert Dr Gulbin

Sultana had told *The Indian Express* in 2021.

## Chance of a fresh start

At a time when relations between India and the Maldives are at a low, Muizzu's visit sends an encouraging signal. Some groundwork for a reset in the relationship has been done over the past couple of months.

In April, India approved the highest-ever export quotas for essential commodities — eggs, potatoes, onions, sugar, rice, wheat flour and pulses, river sand and stone aggregates — to Maldives for 2024-25 under a unique bilateral mechanism that has been in effect since 1981.

On May 9, Maldives Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in New Delhi — the first high-level visit since Muizzu came to power. The two leaders had "extensive discussions" on "bilateral relationship" and "regional security issues".

After a meeting with Muizzu on Monday, Jaishankar, on X, said, "Look forward to India and Maldives working together closely".

# Opinion

TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2024



**A CLEAR GOAL**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

“Together, we will achieve the target of ‘Nation First’ with one intention of Viksit Bharat 2047”

## A federal consensus

PM’s promise of participative decision-making is welcome, will help boost both equity and growth

**IT’S A WELCOME** shift for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to articulate his belief in the diversity of the country and state that the new coalition government would be run by consensus. A true and unflinching belief in cooperative federalism ought to bulwark the promised path of conciliatory decision-making, faster economic growth, and inclusive progress. However, a certain amount of policy continuity is necessary for retaining the external world’s guarded confidence in India’s economy and growth potential. The PM has rightly stressed this and expressed the confidence that with his 10 years of experience in governing the country, “it will be easy for us to take the work forward immediately this time”. While rejoicing in the country’s current status as the fastest-growing major economy, one must also recognise that this has much to do with its relative under-developed condition, sheer size of its population, and the current phase of slow growth in world output.

The last two Modi governments, especially Modi 2.0, came under fire for an alleged attempt to belittle the state governments, via a subtle shift towards centralisation of fiscal resources, and a resort to legislating/policy-making in the concurrent space. At a certain point towards the end of the last government, a few states even sought judicial remedy for such overreach, a rarity by itself. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. The states’ allegations aren’t entirely unfounded. Mindful of the states’ resource crunch and the fact that they undertake over 60% of total government expenditure, the 14th Finance Commission (FY16-20) raised their share in the Centre’s divisible tax proceeds sharply from 32% to 42%, and this formula was largely followed by the 15th FC (FY21-26) too. However, the states’ share in the Centre’s gross tax receipts fell from 36.6% in FY19 to a little over 29% in FY21, and improved only marginally even in subsequent years.

As regards grants, during the first four of the 15th FC’s six-year award period, states have lost around ₹65,000 crore due to riders put in by the Centre. Further, under the redesigned Centrally Sponsored Schemes, the Centre has assumed more powers to influence the states’ spending patterns, including for items on the State List like public health. The 14th FC had abolished the special category status (SCS), which used to be enjoyed by 11 states owing to their various drawbacks and inherent resource paucity, as a means of fiscal prudence. Instead, it tweaked the formula for inter-se tax distribution among states to make it more equitable. However, given the political dynamics of the new government, it can’t afford to not pay heed to the clamour for SCS from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Any revival of such differentiated treatment, however, must not upset the ongoing fiscal consolidation.

A large part of the solution to the vexed issue of SCS could be found via the 16th FC. Steps to correct regional deprivations should not grow to an extent that they become disincentives for performance. The overarching policy ought to ensure that the states as a whole get their due share of fiscal resources, and reasonable autonomy on how to use them. At the core of the scuffle over resource sharing within the government, after all, is the wide gap between the resources and the development needs of the country. The tax-GDP ratio would need to be raised by at least 8 percentage points for government Budgets to be sizeable.

OUR GOVTS SHOULD REFLECT ON THE DIVERSITY OF INDIA, ACKNOWLEDGE IT, AND RESPECT IT

## Who does the govt work for?

**EVERY ELECTION SEASON** brings with it a surge of promises, some novel and others familiar, all in a different packaging. It brings with it the citizens’ responsibility to shape the country’s mandate through decisive votes. With every election cycle comes a new definition of democracy in our country, challenging its boundaries and measuring its depths.

As the world’s longest election cycle, spanning six weeks, in the largest democracy came to a close, the country stood witness to the most nail-biting electoral match in the last decade. The world watched closely the fight between the incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rahul Gandhi, heading the Congress-led Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). The NDA is the first political alliance to form government the third consecutive time in Indian history, while Modi is only the second after Jawaharlal Nehru to occupy the Prime Minister’s Office for a third consecutive term. Even so, this victory came with a sour taste for the BJP as it failed to retain a majority in Parliament, falling short of the halfway mark of 272 seats. The INDIA’s performance stole the limelight, gaining 234 seats and forming a strong opposition after a decade.

Interestingly, one of the states that delivered a setback to the BJP was Uttar Pradesh, where the party was forced to relinquish its former strongholds, including Ayodhya and Amethi. Beyond a display of democracy, this shift in voter allegiance raises a deeper question: for whom does the government truly work? A government works for its people, and it is the people who wield the ultimate power to assess its performance through elections. The outcome of these elections largely reflects the will of the populace. It also underscores that combating anti-incumbency requires more than relying on a few

prominent figures, their speeches, politico-cultural dominance, or media presence. It necessitates addressing critical issues and curbing political feudalism. Moreover, the government must heed the simmering sentiments in rural areas rather than solely focus on urban demands. Most importantly, it must gauge public outrage over the inaccessibility of essential services, the escalating cost-of-living crisis, and the inequitable growth of wealth. What “We The People of India” truly demand is trust in the system that will work towards resilient growth, positively impacting every strata of our society, and not isolate the gains at the top.

A people’s manifesto then calls on the new government to work on the 3 Rs — rebuild, revitalise, and reinvent. The incoming government needs to focus on physical and systemic rebuilding to support long-term growth and resilience, which includes upgrading infrastructure through investing in climate- and disaster-risk resilient transportation networks and housing. Economic rebuilding would include supporting industries and enhancing ease of doing business. Similarly, focussing on social rebuilding would include strengthening social safety nets, especially targeted towards backward and marginalised communities. By revitalising, we draw attention towards injecting new energy and life into sectors like edu-

cation, where the focus should be on modernising the system to keep up with emerging technologies and the changing nature of work. Reinventing governance strategies to keep up with the changing times is necessary. This includes unprecedented attention to e-governance and leveraging technology to improve public service delivery and ensure that the right mix of technologies are adopted at the grassroots. Our governance systems must adapt to the changing nature of public discourse and awareness.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23 shows us that even when the unemployment rate has fallen (3.2%), the share of self-employed workers, including household help, own account workers, and employers, is the highest (approximately 48%). Such a trend also points towards growing informality. The focus should be on growth of the right kind of jobs in the formal sector. The survey also indicates that unemployment rises as the level of education increases, with 13.4% of the unemployment rate at the graduate level. Education and reforming the labour market must be the new government’s priorities, beginning with increasing the budgetary allocation for education. Additionally, learning from the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, the government must ensure that the goal of Digital India translates into creating infrastructure for tech-driven edu-

tion and making it accessible and affordable for learners regardless of their socio-economic background.

Similarly, increasing budgetary allocation for health is essential. We have consistently struggled with the gap between recommended budgetary targets and actual allocations, with health expenditure accounting for only 1.9% of the total budget in 2023-24 and 2.1% of the interim budget for 2024-25. We are still falling short of the target to increase health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP. Given the persistently high percentage of out-of-pocket expenses and the rising costs of private healthcare, coupled with an overburdened and stretched public system, accessing any form of healthcare in India has become a daunting challenge. Moreover, healthcare costs continue to be a leading factor in pushing households into sudden debt and poverty traps.

Who does a government work for? We ask again. There is a group of people who are constantly dejected, for whom elections and electoral participation remain tasks they undertake without hope for change. It is for these people that our governments need to work. It is this disenfranchisement that our governments need to fight. A closer look is required to trace India’s struggles with poverty, inequality, and socio-economic inequity, as these have become chronic. While promises to address these issues have always found a place in speeches and political statements, the inaction has caused a despondency that was visible in this election result. Rolling out schemes to appeal to voters without total commitment towards their implementation causes more harm than good. What we need is for our governments to reflect on the diversity of the country, acknowledge it, and respect it.

*With contributions from Jessica Duggal, senior researcher, Institute for Competitiveness*

**PEOPLE'S VERDICT**

Chair, Institute for Competitiveness and Lecturer, Stanford University



**A government works for its people, and it is the people who wield the ultimate power to assess its performance**

## It's cheaper to help migrants before they leave home

**AS TEMPERATURES RISE** around the globe, so will heatwaves, droughts, floods, pandemics, and other natural disasters along with shortages of food and water and conflicts over resources. By the nightmare logic of climate change, the countries least responsible for pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and heating the planet will bear the brunt of these impacts.

In fact, after just 1.3°C of global warming over pre-industrial averages, the countries with the most refugees, asylum seekers, and other uprooted people already tend to be among those deepest in the jaws of climate change. Most migrants likely wouldn’t say they’re fleeing climate change. They’re escaping war, economic uncertainty, social instability, and the like. But climate change multiplies those threats. It’s probably not a coincidence that 95% of conflict refugees in 2020 came from global-warming hot spots, according to the UN High Commission for Refugees.

With so many different factors influencing why people move, it can be tough to single out climate. There are some clues, however. A recent review of the scientific literature by researchers at the University of Vermont and the University of Otago in New Zealand found that high temperatures and weather-related disasters consistently trigger migration around the globe. And a 2021 study by researchers at the National Autonomous University of Mexico found the movement of low-income farmers from Mexico to the US not only tripled during times of drought but accounted for possibly a third of all cross-border migration.

Given all the complexities and the lack of data, it’s even harder to model potential future climate migration. Various algorithms have cranked out global numbers anywhere from 50 million to 1.2 billion. There could be 216 million people displaced within national borders by 2050, the World Bank has estimated. And internal migration — say from the country to the city — is usually the first step in cross-border migration. Up to 6.7 million people could flee Latin America for the US alone because of climate change by 2080, according to a 2010 Princeton study.

Encounters between migrants and border officials are at all-time highs, but those officials have become much, much better at capturing illegal immigrants in recent years. The result is a real problem but not necessarily a generational one — yet. It’s easy to imagine the political response in this country when the number of encounters doubles or triples. But simply adding higher walls and more razor wire can’t be the only answer. For one thing, it’s immoral. The US and other developed countries are responsible for the vast bulk of the greenhouse gases that have warmed the atmosphere and immiserated millions. They bear significant responsibility for cleaning up the mess they have made.

Waiting to fight the migration problem until it shows up at the border is also dangerously impractical. Trapping hundreds of millions of people in unliveable conditions will only build up impossible pressures that result in even more chaos and conflict. It will be far cheaper in dollars and lives to support these people before they leave home, especially by helping their countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. The politics of doing this are difficult now, but they won’t get any easier in the future.

Of course, there’s some \$70 billion per year’s worth of low-hanging fruit here: That’s the annual cost of servicing developing-nation debt, which can be cancelled or worked off in debt-for-nature swaps to alleviate the burden on vulnerable countries. Developed nations should also keep living up to their long-delayed promise to spend \$100 billion a year on climate aid — without resorting to tricks such as providing most “aid” in the form of more debt.

Climate migrants also deserve full protection under international law, along with a recognition that pulling up and leaving for greener pastures is not a crime but a tool of survival and adaptation that humans have used for as long as there have been humans. As the number of climate safe havens dwindle, it helps to remember that eventually the climate migrants could be us.



**RISHI RAJ**

rishi.raj@expressindia.com

## Liberty vs equality

In democracies, governments need to maintain a fine balance. Any slant is quickly spotted by the electorate, which then votes for corrective measures

**N CHANDRABABU NAIDU** was once hailed as the chief minister with an IT touch. As CM of Andhra Pradesh between 1995 and 2004, Naidu was hailed as a leader who understood technology, promoted it, and was himself its devoted user — this, during an age when most political leaders were Luddites. He made Andhra one of the tech hubs of the country and was feted by global investors as well as India Inc. as the man of the moment and also the future.

Come 2004, Naidu lost the state assembly polls. The common explanation for his defeat was that he was too IT- and urban-centric, ignored rural distress, had no connection with the agrarian masses, and was just a poster boy for the World Economic Forum variety.

Naidu once again won the assembly polls in 2014 and became the CM — by then Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated into two states. He remained the state’s CM till 2019 but during this reign, was not remembered or hailed as the tech world’s poster boy. He has once again won the polls and is set to take over as chief minister. His support to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre is crucial; but what is much talked about is the special assistance he may extract from the Centre for his state, and not his tech prowess.

The purpose of charting Naidu’s political journey is to illustrate the inherent tension between liberty and equality in societies and how this has, once again, shaped the electoral outcome in the

recently-concluded parliamentary polls. Simply put, the concept of liberty in political theory is to lay stress on individual freedom, where the individual is free to pursue his or her choices and build a career or an enterprise of one’s liking. The role of the state should be limited to providing the enabling condition for individuals to pursue their path to progress.

Equality, on the other hand, stresses the higher role of the state, which has to ensure allocation and resources equitably across all sections of the society — weak and strong — and ensure that there’s equitable development.

On the face of it, the two seem to be complementary. For the progress of any society, obviously, the common refrain will be that liberty and equality should be equally present. However, theory does not translate in a linear manner in the real world, and history shows that there’s inherent tension between the two.

Seen from the economic prism, liberty promotes individual initiative and enterprise leading to individual growth, which, in turn, leads to a nation’s growth. The inventor of the wheel did not have societal good in mind, it was done for personal achievement. Equality, contrarily, is collective in nature and discounts individualism. The long history of the Cold War aptly shows this. The US, which is seen as

the fountain of free enterprise, promoted liberty and saw huge strides in innovation and individual growth. However, in the process, an unequal society was created, leading to several problems there today.

Contrastingly, the USSR, which was the centre of communism, was all about equality. The state owned the factors of production and allocated them on the Marxist principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”, which killed innovation and private enterprise.

This had its own fault lines, which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and that of the USSR in 1991. Thus, it was viewed that liberty had triumphed over equality, only to be proven wrong in successive decades.

In the Indian context, by adopting the socialist pattern of society post-Independence, the stress was on equality. Though liberty was not curtailed, the balance tilted towards the former. Thus, economic enterprise suffered. That changed in 1991. The stress on liberty thereafter is what’s termed as liberalisation in economic parlance.

The period since 1991 in India has been a see-saw battle between liberty and equality, which has fashioned electoral results. It won’t be wrong to conclude that in

**The period since 1991 in India has been a see-saw battle between liberty and equality, which has fashioned electoral results**

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

### What will be the new budgetary direction?

Apropos of “The road ahead for new government” (FE, June 10), the annual budget needs to shift to a regional push while continuing its allocation for infrastructure. Tax buoyancy relies on multiple factors, but mainly on high manufacturing growth. While goods and services tax rates always have scope for rationalisation for products manufactured with green energy and

higher engagement of labour and ancillary units, self-reliance in active pharmaceutical ingredient in pharma sector, health infra in remote areas, reforms easing taxation of a large base of micro, small and medium enterprise retailers and manufacturers are imperative. Optimising current account deficit, interest rates, and the performance-linked incentive are priority policy matters tuned by exports, inflation, trade deficit in manufacturing, services purchasing

managers index, etc. —Vinod Johri, Delhi

### Pay heed to rural voters

Apropos of “A message from the rural voter” (FE, June 10), urban India has no idea of the acute distress faced by those living in the rural parts. Real incomes have not kept pace with inflation and consumption levels have dropped. The electoral results are the strongest message sent to the Bharatiya Janata Party that rural India

was not happy with them. Like Sharad Pawar from the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, Shivraj Chauhan from the National Democratic Alliance has a good track record in dealing with issues related to agriculture. The PM must make him the agriculture minister to convey that his government is serious about improving the lot of the farmers. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

the last five years, the balance has tilted towards liberty, at least in the public perception. The reduction of corporate tax in 2019 with no similar tax sops for people in the lower income bracket; not acknowledging rural distress and unemployment enough; regional imbalances; and harping excessively on the growing premiumisation are some signs of it.

Within big businesses, this tension prevailed as well, with some firms seen to be getting a larger share of the cake and the freedom to scale up at the cost of others, while several struggled with regulatory battles, even needing state support. Such a view may be contested, but the public perception was certainly strong on these lines.

The battle between liberty and equality is not only raging in India, but also across developed nations in the West. The US, which championed liberal economy, is seeing ethnic strife largely because its political system has not been able to strike the right balance between the two. The Indian electorate has sent the message in clear terms: big businesses are not bad, but the benefits of growth should flow equitably. In a democracy, political liberty determines the shape of economic liberty, and if the benefit of reforms or economic growth does not trickle down in an equitable manner, the clamour for equality rises. With Naidu returning to the government, the lesson for the NDA is clear: repeat the mistakes Naidu committed during his first reign as CM at your own peril.

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

## High-Rise Skyline of The Property Market

Developers must improve their delivery time

India's property market is in a multi-year upcycle since the pandemic, when affordability had reached a new low. A decade of incomes outpacing house prices saw demand shoot up for larger, better-appointed living spaces during WFH. Real estate prices have climbed since then. But demand is being led by the wealth effect of stock market returns as households shifted savings out of stimulus-induced low interest rates on bank deposits. The interest rate cycle has turned, which makes bank deposits attractive again while making housing loans costly. This has, however, had little effect on demand for premium housing where inventory is moving at an astounding pace. At the other end of the market, incentives for affordable housing are keeping demand firm.

Although housing prices are now rising faster than incomes, the wealth effect and subsidies are yet to play out completely. Middle segment of the market, where neither of these forces is particularly strong, could be the first to feel the squeeze of rising house prices. This has been the mainstay of India's property market for decades and deserves policy attention in case stress develops here. Regulatory improvements in real estate have eased supply bottlenecks that caused the previous bust. Increased supply of quality housing stock that is neither in the luxury nor affordable categories should address concerns of the mid-segment buyer.

Housing is a direct beneficiary of GoI's infra push. The property market is now developing spatially beyond its top urban clusters. Housing developers may be able to improve their supply response with state-level improvements in releasing land, facilitating clearances and lowering stamp duties. The construction industry could benefit from more rational GST rates. As the stock of unsold housing inventory tapers off in big cities, housing developers need to be able to improve their delivery time, which is primarily dependent on the municipal administration's sensitivity to demand. State governments should step in to improve these outcomes.



## Europe Turns Right With Feet in Centre

European Parliament (EP), comprising 720 members and elected every five years, has shifted centre-right, with the Ursula von der Leyen-led European People's Party (EPP) tightening its grip after the June 6-9 elections. Far-right parties have made key gains, delivering defeats to the parties of German chancellor Olaf Scholz, French president Emmanuel Macron, and Austrian chancellor Karl Nehammer. Macron has called for a snap poll. But the far-right can't control parliament due to disunity among its ranks. Broadly, EP results signal broad policy continuity, but with pushbacks in green policies and migration.

Key concerns for voters included the economy, cost of living, the Russia-Ukraine war and its impacts, and immigration. Response to these concerns will determine how the majority coalition shapes its policy agenda. Stability is crucial, and will influence EPP's choice of partners in forming a majority coalition.

Given the divisions within the far-right, EPP, with 184 seats, is likely to ally with centre-left socialists and democrats group, with 139 lawmakers, followed by the drastically pared-back liberal Renew group, with 80 seats. The coalition needs 361 seats for a majority. The state of play shows the outgoing European Commission's signature Green Deal won't be dismantled, but it may no longer be the centrepiece. Instead, it will be mediated by concerns about cost of living, energy price crisis, risk of deindustrialisation and rising inequalities. From a global perspective, this 'right turn' will mean Europe focusing on competitiveness and trade, and addressing migration. India's growing economy and favourable geopolitical conditions provide an opportunity to cement a mutually beneficial partnership with the EU.



## JUST IN JEST

The book, film or song kept out of reach has a special pull for us

## Oh, Thrill of Reading Dangerous Books!

What is common to 'I Broke My Butt!', 'Larry the Farting Leprechaun', 'Being Jazz: My Life As a (Transgender) Teen', 'Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents', and 'They Called Themselves the KKK: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group'? All are books that found themselves, along with 12 other books, removed from Texas school libraries, and reinstated last week, for supposedly extolling 'pornographic filth'. Victorian morality is alive and well in the Lone Star State. But even as we, liberally comfortable with naughtiness and unpleasant truths, welcome the reinstatement of the books, something larger may be lurking on those quivering shelves in Texas and beyond.

Does the thrill of reading/watching/listening to content deemed contraband diminish when they are no longer deemed contraband? The Iranian or Texan or Indian surreptitiously reading Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses', Dawn McMillan's 'I Need a New Bum' or Hamish McDonald's 'The Polyester Prince' experiences a natural frisson. Make it kosher, and the forbidden fruit can suddenly become unexciting breakfast khana. True, with the 'hype' of being haraam removed, a book, film or song can be gauged for its 'true' value. But humans, especially young humans, revel—and should revel—in doing harmless don't's. For, without Victorian morality, where would teenage rebellion be?

A change of process is needed for Americans beyond expats and PIOs to actually take to cricket



Anand Vasu

In 2019, when the cricket World Cup was held in England, there was a joke doing the rounds. This was India 'reverse colonising', one cricket ground at a time. At every ground, irrespective of which two teams were playing, Indians and people of Indian origin dominated the stands.

India's cricket fans were more persistent at the online ticketing ballot, using ingenious methods, and enrolling the help of family members. They were also willing to pay exorbitant sums on the black market for tickets. It reached a point where the event had a distinct feeling of an Indian World Cup being played in Britain. That was not entirely unexpected given the strength of the Indian diaspora. And cricket is, anyway, an English game.

The first recorded serious game of cricket may have taken place between the United States of America and Canada way back in 1844, but the game certainly did not catch on in what has long been a target market of the International Cricket Council (ICC). The Civil War saw the growing popularity of the more easily organised, shorter bat'n ball sport of baseball. The hosting of the current men's Twenty20 World Cup in the US and the Caribbean happens to be ICC's latest attempt to plant its flag there.

"Why?" you might ask. Well, for the dollars, obviously. But this is not just a case of administrators being greedy. The game has become so India-centric now that the cricket economy would collapse should India decide to go rogue in some manner.

And it's not simply a matter of gliding gracefully into the country, building temporary stadiums and trotting out the finest players, as ICC is finding

**When India beat Pakistan in a thriller on Sunday — with 34,000 in attendance, some paying \$5,000 for seats that came with beer and samosas — it barely caused a ripple**

# Run, USA, Run, Between The Wickets



In some corner of a foreign field

out the hard way. There is little genuine native interest in the game, with stands largely being filled by expats from traditional cricketing countries.

One look at the composition of the US team tells the story. Most of its players are of Indian origin. At the next level, there are players of Pakistani, Sri Lankan, West Indian and, occasionally, South African origin. This suggests that holding an event is one way to grab some eyeballs — and that will certainly happen after the US won against Pakistan last week. But it takes a long time for any genuine progress to be made.

A change of process has to happen for Americans to actually take to the game. If you do not play it in the backyard as children, in makeshift alleyways and outside the gates when the school bell has rung, it's impossible for

cricket to take root in any meaningful sense. This is not a process that can be engineered from top to down.

Earlier, ICC had China in its sights as a major market. The feeling then was that if they could take one yuan, just one, from each member of the popula-

**If you don't play it in the backyard as children, in makeshift alleyways, it's impossible for cricket to take root in any meaningful sense**



tion, it would rapidly and significantly beat the coffers of the game. But the world does not work like that. Hundreds of companies have come to India thinking similarly — 'gigantic market!' — and very few have lived to tell the tale.

The idea that cricket is a global game is much exaggerated. On a scale of 1 to 10, if football is at 9, cricket should count itself lucky to come in at 3. It's a sport played largely by former British colonies, and there are obvious historic reasons for this. That being the case, there is growing interest in the game in other parts of the world. Within the sport, there are those who want to see it grow. Attempting to get it into the Olympics is clearest evidence of this ambition. And, yet, cricket has not yet put in the hard yards where it should.

The likes of Ireland, Scotland, Nepal and other countries who have shown that they have the appetite to build the infrastructure and grow the game, have not received anywhere near the kind of support they need.

It's well worth asking if the game would be better served with money being poured into those territories rather than targeting a market, the US, the bulk of whose people have neither interest in the game nor the appetite for it in significant numbers.

When India beat Pakistan in a thriller on Sunday in the biggest cricket facility in the country — Nassau County International Cricket Stadium on Long Island in New York — with 34,000 in attendance, some paying \$5,000 for seats that came with beer and samosas, it barely caused a ripple. The New York Times had a report that focused more on what happened in the stands and around the ground than the actual action itself.

After a slow start, India came back strong to win, 119-113, and when Pakistan's Naseem Shah hit the last ball from India bowler Arshdeep Singh, the India fans erupted in cheers, 'the newspaper reported. No cricket fan, no cricket lover, no one familiar with even the rudiments of the game would report a score 119-113, as though it was a basketball game.

But, then again, the men that matter believe that the game must be taken to this territory at great expense.

It may happen one day. But it's unlikely that you or I will be alive to see it happen.

The writer is former joint editor-in-chief, Wisden India

## PE-VC Sector's Laapataa Ladies



Nupur Garg

A heartwarming narrative nestled in India's hinterlands, the underlying message of Kiran Rao's latest film Laapataa Ladies that's been grabbing national attention is the significance of a woman's self-realisation and self-identity subtly setting in. This focus on female agency — or the prevailing lack of it — offers a poignant lens to examine the reality of many sectors that lack female representation today.

Take the PE-VC landscape. Venture capital is still a man's game, and underrepresentation of women at the helm translates into a missed opportunity for the entire sector. Several groundbreaking ventures go untapped because the room lacks the perspective that resonates with a significant portion of the market. There is gross underrepresentation of women, both as

entrepreneurs and investors. Private market financial platform PitchBook's data updated to June 4 highlights that US companies funded solely by women received 2.1% of all VC investments. According to a 2020 study by business information firm Crunchbase, women accounted for less than 15% of cheque-writers.

Similarity, affinity bias, or a tendency to depend upon someone who looks the same, talks the same, has the same social circles, etc, has been found to influence up to 80% of our decisions. Research has also found that 75% of investors hire and invest through their networks. Quite obviously, therefore, in an industry dominated by men, the probability of women getting hired and women-led ventures finding backing, is rather low.

So, we have a problem with fewer women in positions of influence and power, leading to fewer women finding their way in. And thus goes the circle.

Stereotypes play a large part when we look at factors influencing low participation of women in India's workforce, no matter what sector. Which is why the role model or mentor who can enable self-confidence and indepen-



A waste to keep them under wraps

dence is so important in fixing this skewed situation.

The strength of female camaraderie can be an effective way to highlight how a strong community and network can create success for women. Even more significant is the fact that talent and ambition are qualities that largely remain unrecognised and unappreciated. Research shows that the presence of women in an investor's team itself has a positive correlation with the presence of women-led companies in the investment portfolio.

Women can offer a fresh perspective and lead to a solution with better outcomes. It is essentially about disrupting groupthink and status quo. Importance of the female perspective in decision-making has gained recognition with investors in sectors such as con-

sumer products, where women have significant influence as consumers. However, many ideas that look at untapped opportunities with women as target customers continue to struggle in convincing the male investor.

The industry is a long way from appreciating and building the value of diverse perspectives in decision-making across the board. The story doesn't end there. Just as Laapataa Ladies effortlessly integrates various lessons on the journey of women in entrepreneurship, there is also a solid message on the role that men can also play in creating equity and equality for women.

The PE-VC sector today has many such male allies, champions for change, who are pushing the DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) agenda within their firms and portfolios. We need a lot more. As we look to the future, it's imperative we work together to dismantle the barriers that constrain women. By promoting women's participation and fostering an inclusive environment, the PE/VC industry can unlock its full potential.

The writer is founder, Winpe

## Miss the Hows, Whys for the Whats?



Aditya Sinha

AI is increasingly enhancing the speed and scope of discoveries by helping in hypothesis generation, experimental design and analysis of large datasets. Recent breakthroughs, such as self-supervised learning and geometric deep learning, have improved training on unlabelled data and utilised the structural knowledge of data to boost accuracy and efficiency, respectively. GenAI has also been pivotal in designing complex entities like drugs and proteins by analysing data forms, including images and sequences, thereby revolutionising traditional scientific methods.

But it also raises larger philosophical issues about AI use in scientific enquiry. These concerns delve into the epistemology of AI-assisted knowledge, questioning the authenticity and reliability of AI-generated insights, compared to those derived through conventional scientific methods.

Incorporating AI challenges traditional paradigms of scientific discovery, which are grounded in empirical observation, experimentation and critical analysis by human intellect. There is a debate on whether AI's capacity for processing data and identifying patterns beyond human discernment leads to a genuine expansion of knowledge, or merely a superficial semblance of under-

standing. Many AI algorithms, particularly in deep learning, are often seen as 'black boxes', because their decision-making processes are not easily understandable by humans. This opacity can make it difficult for researchers to understand how AI reaches its conclusions, potentially undermining the scientific goal of knowing what happens and why it happens.

Scientific method relies heavily on the ability to replicate and validate results. However, AI algorithms' complex and sometimes proprietary nature can make it difficult to replicate studies, challenging the foundational principles of scientific validation and peer review.

Relying heavily on AI for scientific discovery can lead to deskilling, where human researchers may lose their ability to perform specific scientific tasks without the aid of AI. This dependency could make science more about managing and interpreting AI outputs than innovating and understanding at a fundamental level.

This larger debate of AI in scientific enquiry touches on 'scientific realism vs instrumentalism', questioning whether AI-enabled discoveries represent true underlying realities of the natural world or are merely useful tools for predicting phenomena. A paper by Lisa

Messeri and M J Crockett, 'Artificial intelligence and illusions of understanding in scientific research', published in Nature in March, examines the epistemic risks associated with over-reliance on AI.

AI's allure in scientific research is rooted in its promise to augment human capabilities, improving productivity and objectivity. AI tools are indispensable for automating the analysis of large datasets and generating novel hypotheses. However, this dependence on AI introduces risks, notably the 'illusion of understanding', where scientists may believe they comprehend more than they do. This misapprehension can lead to a homogenisation of scientific inquiry, where dominant methods and perspectives eclipse alternative approaches, potentially stifling innovation and diversity in scientific thought.

Messeri and Crockett have created a taxonomy of AI roles in scientific research, each with unique epistemic implications.

► **Oracles** synthesise and interpret data, helping researchers navigate the complexities of extensive scientific literature.

► **Surrogates** simulate real-world processes or beings, allowing researchers to conduct experiments and gather data in virtual settings. This avoids the limitations of traditional research methods.

► **Quants** specialise in analysing and making sense of large and complex datasets, uncovering patterns and correlations, and thereby aiding in extracting meaningful scientific knowledge.

► **Arbiters** assess the validity and quality of scientific research, offering objective evaluations that can guide the peer-review process and

help maintain the integrity of scientific publications.

However, these can inadvertently lead to a scientific ecosystem, favouring methodologies and enquiries best suited to AI's strengths, thereby marginalising the diverse methods and questions vital for comprehensive understanding.

► **Oracles** may skew research towards areas with abundant data, neglecting less-documented fields.

► **Surrogates** could oversimplify complex phenomena, favouring research that fits their simulation capabilities.

► **Quants** might cause a shift towards quantifiable research questions, sidelining qualitative insights.

► **Arbiters** could enforce standardisation that overlooks unconventional but insightful research.

The risk of AI-centric scientism, which prioritises data-driven insights over human interpretative acumen, calls for a pivot towards epistemic humility, acknowledging limitations of our knowledge paradigms. The philosophical remedy lies in a symbiotic integration of AI within scientific processes, enhancing, rather than eclipsing, the human intellect's interpretative and contextual prowess.

This approach advocates for pragmatic realism, recognising AI as a powerful tool for pattern recognition, but insisting that the substantive interpretation of these patterns necessitates human sagacity. A concerted push for interdisciplinary collaboration is imperative to counteract the potential monoculture due to AI's ascendancy, blending AI's analytical capabilities with human scientific inquiry.

The writer is OSD, research, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)



THE SPEAKING TREE

## Laughter, the Best Medicine

PRITHWI DATTA

As we all know, laughing has multiple physical and psychological benefits. It releases stress, fosters bonding and friendship, and makes all participants feel good about life, elevating them, albeit temporarily, into a world of good humour. Laughter is a universal language of well-being for all — if we are all laughing with each other and not at someone's expense.

There is another use of laughter in that it can effectively transform a confrontation into amicability. When faced with a problem, we often get so engrossed that we miss the big picture. It is possible to see a point of humour in the overall context and sublimate hostility into mirth.

To give you an example, I saw the other day two drivers were angling for only one remaining parking slot, and tempers were fraying. When one changed tack and said to the other, 'You go ahead, but after you're done, help me move that 'No Parking' banner stand before that other empty slot, to that far corner,' high fives and guffaws followed!

But the most profound therapeutic value of laughter is derived when you laugh at yourself. This happens when you can see your own idiosyncrasies, your foibles, your pettiness in clear perspective, and have a good laugh at yourself. This laughter cleanses your soul and makes way for constructive emotional rejuvenation. It is true that, for most of us, taking a good, honest look at ourselves is painful, but once you have gone through the process and can laugh at your drawbacks, you emerge a better, more self-aware person.



PARANORMAL ACTIVITY Paragraphs From Fiction

## Netherland

Joseph O'Neill

Chuck and I met for the first time in August 2002. I was playing cricket at Randolph Walker Park, in Staten Island, and Chuck was present as one of the two independent umpires who gave their services in return for a fifty-dollar honorarium. The day was thick as a jelly, with a hot, glassy atmosphere and no wind, not even a breeze from the Kill of Kull, which flows less than two hundred yards from Walker Park and separates Staten Island from New Jersey.

Far away, in the south, was the mumbly of th- under: It was the kind of barbarously sticky American afternoon that made me yearn for the shad-

ows cast by scotching summer clouds in northern Europe, yearn even for those days when you play cricket wearing two sweaters under a cold sky patched here and there by a blue tatter — enough to make a sailor's pants, as my mother used to say. By the standards I brought to it, Walker Park was a very poor place for cricket.

The playing area was... half the size of a regulation cricket field. The outfield is uneven and always overgrown, even when cut (once, chasing a ball, I nearly tripped over a hidden and, to cricketers, ominous duck), and whereas proper cricket, as some might call it, is played on a grass wicket, the pitch at Walker Park is made of clay not turf, and must be covered with coconut matting....

## Chat Room

### When Turncoat Wore Bandhgala

Apropos 'Witness to a Sweating Bandhgala Ceremony' (Just In Jest, Jun 10), some attendees at the PM's and his Cabinet's swearing-in ceremony wore winter attire, from coat and suit to bandhgala, in hot and humid weather for various reasons. Ministers who took oath wore them to control shivering arising from the nightmare of the government collapsing due to the presence of turncoats in the alliance. The elected representatives who were not sworn in wore them to suppress the shivering due to the thoughts of recovering the amount spent on their campaign without a minister's berth. Guests wore them to avoid shivering from the actions of security, which rigorously checked their identities since they were common persons.

O PRASADA RAO Hyderabad



Yes, you're right, I can't think straight



## A thought for today

One must beware of ministers who can do nothing without money, and those who want to do everything with money

-INDIRA GANDHI

## Portfolios &amp; People

BJP, with all the big ministries, should know what message voters sent in these elections

The question most loudly raised by Modi returning to office without a majority is, how he will run a coalition govt. But the other takeaway of the LS 2024 verdict is arguably even more significant: governance matters and voters reject political branding that is out of whack with reality. It is through both these lenses that the allocation of portfolios for the Modi-led NDA govt should be assessed.

**Line of continuity** | Home, defence, finance, foreign affairs, road transport and highways – there has been no reshuffling in these top cabinet jobs. Endless speculation about Shah being downsized or Sitharaman getting replaced has proved wide of the mark. The message is that howsoever others may read the election result as a mandate for change, BJP and Modi are still solidly occupying the GOI driving seat. But these Modi 2.0 ministers must refresh their toolkit in response to all the distress that surfaced in LS elections, from Agniveers' to self-employeds' anxieties.



**Scramble of allies** | Eknath Shinde's Sena, which won seven constituencies, is not pleased. With only a junior ministership, its MPs have drawn comparison with the allocation of cabinet berths to other allies – Manjhi was made Union MSME minister with just one seat in Bihar; LJP's Chirag Paswan with five seats in Union sports minister. JDS has two berths, HDK has got the heavyweight steel ministry.

**Line of trust** | Rijiju, who was removed as law minister after protracted tensions with the judiciary, has now been handed the parliamentary affairs portfolio, where he should contribute to coalition management. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who could have headed to retirement after being removed as MP CM, has two ministries: agri and rural development. Not only did farmer distress take a toll on BJP across many states, the first file Modi has signed after becoming a third-term PM relates to a farmer welfare scheme. Chouhan walks into a job with high stakes, for Indians and their govt.

But even those who consider continuity a necessary condition for stability, must admit that it is not sufficient by itself. This does not merely refer to allies, who look restless with their 11 ministerial berths. It's also about all the socio-economic factors that contributed to BJP dropping 63 seats this time. About how macro numbers actually impacted lived realities – incomes, consumption, healthcare etc. It is at this level that the new council of ministers must deliver.

## A Flight Scare Too Many

Mumbai airport infra is woefully short. Navi Mumbai airport should be made operational asap

A close shave involving two aircraft at Mumbai airport on Sunday morning has rightly sparked serious outcry. New civil aviation minister K Ram Mohan Naidu needs to take note. An IndiGo aircraft landed at the airport before a departing Air India plane had cleared the runway. The serious breach of SOP endangered hundreds of lives.

DGCA has derostered the ATC official on duty. But reports say pilots of both departing and incoming aircraft may have contributed to the botch-up. There was also a fourth party involved: the huge infra constraint faced by India's second busiest airport.

**Infra deficit** | Mumbai airport has just one runway operational at any given time. As against a declared capacity of 46 aircraft an hour, it often caters 'unofficially' to as many as 55. This makes ATC's job highly stressful. It also increases the chances of misjudgment.

The only foolproof way to avoid such incidents is to speed up work at the city's second airport at Navi Mumbai. Civil aviation ministry has said it may be operationalised by March next year. Sunday's incident is reason for the timeline to be met.

**Metro airports under pressure** | High air traffic movement remains a concern at other metro airports as well. Delhi airport, among world's 10 busiest, saw a similar near-miss last year. India is world's fastest growing aviation market, and Indian carriers have an order book of more than 1,500 aircraft. This means pressure on airport infra in metros will only increase.

The ministry has proposed developing six 'Twin City' airports in metros by 2030. National Capital Region is likely to have its twin airport before year-end. Authorities would do well to get started on second airport projects in other metros before the situation turns alarming there.

## Reviewing reviewers

To be or not to be in a critic's good books

Shinie Antony



Books may come and books may go, but reviews live forever. Anyone can go online and leave a rating or comment behind in spectacular typos. No sooner is a book out than reviewers rush at the author, offering glowing reviews for a fee. But the real critic is hidden behind a paywall, reviewing free of charge or for peanuts because reviewing is a sacred duty. They are the gatekeepers between readers and writers, constantly taking a bullet. You can recognise reviewers by their martyred expression and memorised quotes from the one classic they read in college. They carry books much like Christ did the cross, bent over by the weight of all that terrible prose they must critique. Sometimes the difference between a good review and a bad one is the coffee they missed.

AI will one day write books, but will it write a book review? Nah. Reviews require the hands-on human touch of literary snobbery and the primal urge to draw blood. The reviewer is faced with two choices: gush or gibe. When in doubt, the reviewer gives us the whole plot. Most of the tiny double-column space is swallowed by laborious displays of the reviewer's intellectual prowess and command over the language. Many Indian novels are ignored back home until they make a short-list or longest abroad, making critics scramble. Second novels are especially snubbed; the nerve of the writer!

Blurbs, trusting a lazy reviewer to quote them in lieu of a review, are breathless self-praise. This book will change your life, you won't be after you finish reading it... If it is not a stunning coming-of-age debut, it is a mesmerising bestseller from a master storyteller. Writers get into the act, lauding each other's work as 'magical masterpiece' or 'a prescient work of sublime brilliance' in a 'you scratch my back, I scratch yours' world out there. Suddenly, two authors are each other's biggest fans.

If one claims to sum up an author by his book, it is equally true that a review reveals the reviewer. You only have to read a review to guess the reviewer's childhood trauma, inner demons, and the book they think they should have written. Serious critics only scoff – dismissing is the more successful genre. If a book is worth reading, they will write it themselves. Reviews are where a reviewer and his pretentiousness go to have good sex.

## NIRMALA'S TO-DO LIST

Back as FM, Sitharaman's new challenges include economic costs of climate change, low job creation & tepid private investment

Dharmakirti Joshi



The new NDA govt has been formed on the back of largely healthy macro-economy. Nirmala Sitharaman returns as finance minister. Last fiscal, growth came in at a higher-than-expected 8.2%. Yet CPI-based inflation has been easing gradually.

Healthy balance sheets of corporate houses and banks mean both lenders and borrowers are equipped to support India's growth journey. The infra-led pick-up in the private sector investment cycle is engendering logistical improvements and efficiency that should raise our growth potential. India's current account deficit is narrow and foreign exchange reserves are healthy, which lend a good cushion against external shocks.

Strong external buffers are crucial now because global risks – stemming from geopolitical uncertainties, and tariff and trade wars – have only increased. These, along with high global debt, elevated interest rates and increasing climate challenges, signify the turbulence underneath. On the domestic front, stubborn food inflation, addressing consumption demand and employment generation are the challenges.

Given this landscape, govt should focus on five areas:

**Greening Domestic Product** | The ongoing heatwave is a grim reminder that climate risks are real and present. A study by Council on Energy, Environment and Water shows that monsoon patterns are changing. Inclement weather has been largely responsible for persistently high food inflation. This has been holding back RBI from cutting rates. So, increasing budgetary allocation and frontloading spending are important, as is improving early warning systems, developing weather-resistant crops, improving storage and food processing to curb wastages.

While the interim budget did increase the allocation for climate action – aimed largely at mitigating impacts during the journey towards net zero by 2070 – recent weather events show more spending will be necessary, particularly on adaptation measures.

**Stay faithful to reforms** | Past experience with economic reforms, be it 1991 or the introduction of GST in 2017,

informs us that their benefits manifest with a lag. The next ones – in complex areas such as labour, land and agriculture – will require relentless consensus building because they come under the concurrent list. States and central govts will have to cooperate for a successful implementation. These reforms are important for improving the growth potential of the economy on a sustainable basis. To be sure, coalition govts have driven major reforms in the past.

Support to consumption need not be directly from the budget but by creating more employment opportunities.

Policy focus on job creation and bridging the skills gap, both at entry level – especially in manufacturing – and in light of disruptions from generative Artificial Intelligence (both positive and adverse) should be a priority. Given low wage costs in India, opportunities can be created in labour-intensive manufacturing by promoting segments such as textiles, gems and jewellery, food processing. Services such as healthcare, hospitality, and education, too, are employment-intensive.

**Juice up private investment** | Govt-led infra investments have been the bulwark of the investment cycle. Private sector corporate investments, despite healthy balance sheets, govt-supported PLI schemes, and a competitive corporate tax regime, are improving only gradually. Govt investments in infra and revival of the housing sector have certainly bumped up private investments in linked sectors such as steel and cement, but a broader 'animal spirits driven' revival of private investments is awaited. Steps such as improving the ease of doing business and clarity on tariff regime will support investment decisions by the private sector.

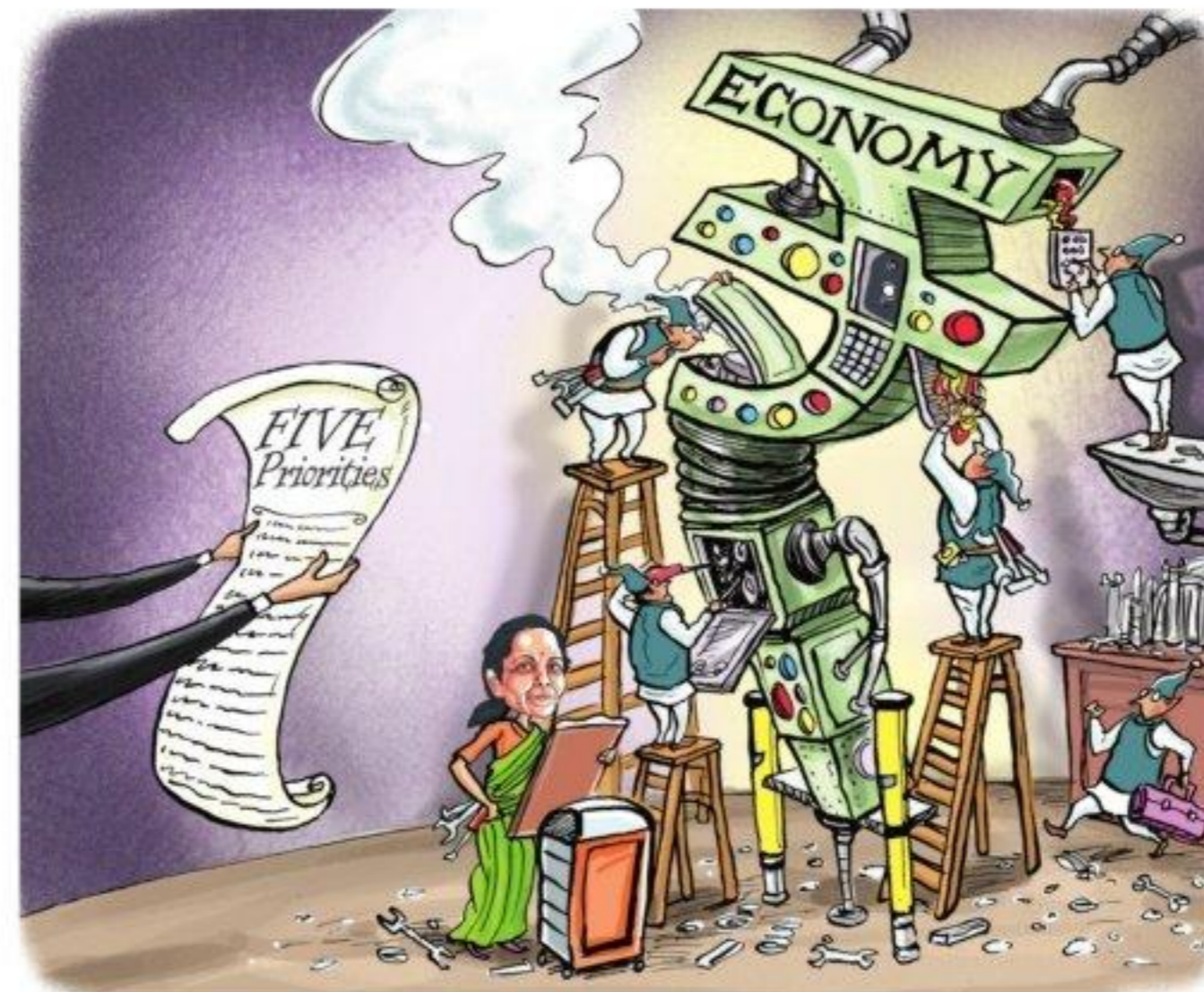
**Maintain fiscal discipline** | NDA govt has been fiscally conservative through its past two terms. S&P Global's revision of India's outlook to positive is premised on strong growth and improving quality of govt spend. The pre-election interim budget has stuck to the fiscal consolidation path as well.

The spending needs of GOI may rise to provide durable support to rural demand, climate adaptation agenda and so on.

But since the interim budget, some of the fiscal realities have become favourable due to faster growth and the surprise ₹2.1L cr dividend transfer from RBI, which affords govt incremental leeway to spend without compromising on the committed path of fiscal consolidation. That will support growth, keep the cost of govt borrowings in check and support the efforts of RBI to come closer to its medium-term CPI-based inflation target of 4% on a durable basis.

Fiscal consolidation is crucial as India has the highest debt/GDP ratio among similarly rated sovereign nations. GOI should, therefore, stay on that course.

The writer is chief economist, Crisil



**Solve the jobs riddle** | India's recovery after Covid has been led by investments, which are now 27% above the 2019-20, or pre-pandemic, level. In contrast, private consumption expenditure is up only 17%. Policies to drive up investments are essential to sustain medium-term growth. On the flip side, private consumption demand has been a nagging worry.

Rural consumption likely suffered in 2023-24 due to anaemic farm output amid capricious rains and other weather events. This could change as a normal monsoon can stoke rural demand. But urban consumption may slow due to the impact of high interest rates and drying of pent-up demand for services. RBI's April survey of consumers shows a mild softening of consumer confidence.

## How BJP Survived Karnataka's Battle Of Runa

Majority of voters ultimately voted for the party that stood for 'nation and faith'. But welfare guarantees worked wonders for Congress too

A Narayana



BJP losing 8 seats to Congress in Karnataka shows an electorate divided between a party that styled itself as the defender of 'nation' and 'faith' and another that promised 'justice', backing this up with a glut of welfare schemes. Voters faced a tough choice. This is how they negotiated it.

**Obligations hang heavy** | Electoral choice for many in India is, in fact, a negotiation of a complex web of competing moral obligations. This year's Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka put this process on vivid display. Congress was determined to secure votes through the five flagship welfare schemes it promised, and rolled out promptly, after its 2023 assembly election win. In the run-up to the LS polls, party leaders spoke of their beneficiaries' runa, or obligation, to the party that helped them out in times of distress.

A rumour circulated in the corridors of power that Congress kept postponing local elections, which were long overdue, for fear that should the schemes' beneficiaries vote for the party in local elections, they would feel spared of the obligation to vote for Congress in general elections. The runa had to be saved for the crucial LS polls.

In this regard, a full-page advertisement released by Congress at the peak of the campaign appealed to the metaphor of the *chombu*. In Kannada, the *chombu* is a round metal container with a narrow neck, and to 'give *chombu*' is to deliver empty promises. The message was that Karnataka was under no obligation to BJP, whose govt was supposedly 'unjust' to the state by denying it its rightful share of tax revenue and disaster relief.

**Region vs nation** | A senior state minister reasoned that people could not appreciate the gravity of the 'injustice' suffered by the state from the formal language of Finance Commission award or GST-sharing formula.

This is why the party needed the *chombu*, which carried a larger message that this year's elections were a battle for 'justice' between Karnataka and BJP, not merely an electoral contest between BJP and Congress.

*Chombu* was not, however, for urban voters, who needed a different idiom and medium of communication. State revenue minister Krishna Byre Gowda filled this gap. In what is possibly a first in Indian electioneering, he used PowerPoint presentations in public meetings to narrate the story of 'injustice' to urban audiences.

In Karnataka's polyglot landscape, linguistic nationalism never worked, but the story of alleged 'injustice' meted out to the state was the best fit to pit the regional narrative against the mighty nationalism of BJP.

*Chombu* rattled BJP, putting it on the defensive. The party responded with an advert that reminded voters of their runa to reject Congress, which it claimed appeased the 'dangerous other religion'. The message was simple and direct: your nation and religion are under threat. You have no obligation to support the party implicated in these threats.

**Gender split** | Civil society volunteers who went to urban and rural hinterlands to remind voters of their obligation to protect the Constitution, above all else, found themselves speaking to people struggling to choose between multiple competing obligations. One volunteer described a fisherwoman on the west coast, Karnataka's so-called laboratory of Hindutva, who received ₹2,000 a month from the *Gruhalakshmi* scheme for poorer women, one of the five welfare guarantees

provided by Congress. She found this cash transfer, along with free rice and free power supply she received under two more schemes, immensely helpful in managing her household budget. But she was also being constantly reminded by those around her about her obligation to save the 'nation and religion' from 'the dangerous other'. She struggled to settle on a priority.

Many women across the state were confronted with this dilemma, exacerbated by a whisper campaign that a Congress loss could even lead to the discontinuation of welfare schemes. Volunteers reported that men



often failed to convince women about the need to place the *runa* to the protector of the 'nation and faith' – BJP – above the *runa* to Congress – the provider of welfare and fighters against so-called regional injustice. In some cases, men tried to prevent women from voting, knowing that women would be susceptible to voting Congress.

**Advantage BJP** | And so they did, with BJP losing 8 and Congress picking up 9 seats – 8 pulled from BJP and 1 from JDS. As the results reveal, however, most decided to discharge their obligation to the protector of 'nation and faith'. Whatever the voters' reasoning, anyone who observed how people negotiated this moral web in Karnataka is sure of one thing. While Congress schemes worked wonders, BJP was able to hold on to a majority in the state because no opposition narrative countered the party's claim to being the sole protector of 'nation and faith'.

The writer teaches policy and governance at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru

## Calvin &amp; Hobbes



## New Cabinet? Heck, I've A New Cosmic Address

Narayani Ganesh

Had I been a child, I would have sat and written out postcards to all my friends, updating them on my revised coordinates. For who knows, otherwise, snail mails might get delivered to another galaxy. Why the change? Well, I just re-read a decade-old report in *Nature* that Earth has a new address: 'Solar System, Milky Way, Laniakea.'

Astronomers have discovered that the local supercluster of galaxies – which includes the Milky Way and Earth – is, in fact, one hundred times bigger in volume and mass than it was previously thought, '160 million parsecs (520 million light years) across and contains the mass of 100 million billion Suns'. They have mapped the huge region and decided to name it Laniakea, a Hawaiian word that means 'immeasurable heaven'.

I can see myself writing out my address after my name, door number,

street, city, and country coordinates, to finish with a flourish as follows:

The Earth,  
Solar System,  
Milky Way,  
Laniakea – Immeasurable Heaven.

So what if it sounds like something out of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Alice in Wonderland*, or *Cosmic Tales From Here?* At least it gives you the much-needed respite from yammering over, say, jail terms, the general election results, political parties slinging mud at each other, Ukraine and Russia, Palestine and Israel at loggerheads, or even climate change and global warming. Turning towards the universe out there is so much more edifying than subjecting oneself to missile fire exchanged between insufferable netas, think-tankers, and rude talk-show hosts.

Therefore, let's return to my revised cosmic coordinates: There's another twist in the tale. Researchers say that this address, too, is not permanent (naturally!), for these "massive cosmic structures" tend to be free-floaters.

Moreover, it is very difficult to ascertain where one supercluster ends and another begins! But they do say that one can attempt to chart galaxy movements by inferring the "gravitational landscape of the local universe and then redraw its map". That would involve a lot of math, computing velocities of thousands of galaxies, and subtracting from that the average rate of cosmic expansion. But even that kind of mathematical model would fall short of the whys and wherefores and still not be able to give an exact figure or position.

Researchers at Hawaii University led by Brent Tully used an algorithm to

translate these velocities into a three-dimensional field of galaxy flow and density, reports *Nature*. "We really can't claim to have a good understanding of cosmology if we cannot explain this motion," says Tully.

The point is: why split hairs, reducing the cosmos to algorithms and grids, when the macro picture is incredibly beautiful? Embrace your new cosmic coordinate while it lasts, a temporary but charming reprieve from all earthly shenanigans and tragedies, conflicts, and miseries. Enjoy, at least for a while, before you get your hands dirty once again with boring earthly affairs.

One more thing: once we map and chart, and explain everything there is, will that signal the end of human imagination? It will certainly end mystery, magic, and wonder, leaving us with only cold maps and tables, models and grids to chew on. Ouch.

## Sacredspace

The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff.

Carl Sagan



THE SPEAKING TREE





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Restive Valley

There has been a sudden uptick in terror incidents, coinciding with the plans to hold elections in J&K

Terror-mongers in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) don't share the enthusiasm and optimism of the local population and political parties, nor of the Election Commission's, to hold polls in the Union Territory anytime soon. There has been a noticeable increase in terror attacks in the region aligning with the conduct of the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections. The stability and security of the region, which has a protracted history of conflict and violence, are seriously threatened by this escalation. There have been several insurgency stages in the area, especially since the late 1980s, when militant organisations wanted to combine Kashmir with Pakistan or grant it independence. A turning point was the Indian Government's abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, which gave J&K special autonomy. This action resulted in heightened tensions and an upsurge in militant activity. There are various reasons for the revival of militancy in the strife-torn region, which had only recently started



limping back to normal. Militant groups have been actively seeking new members, frequently using social media to draw in young Kashmiris. Furthermore, despite intense surveillance, cross-border infiltration continues to be a problem. For their part, militant organisations frequently seek to sabotage elections in order to cast doubt on the authority of the State machinery and to express opposition to the democratic process that the Indian Government wants to nurture in the region. The J&K security and administration are severely impacted by the rise in the incidents of terror attacks.

Additionally, these accidents cause disruptions to daily life, which hinders the growth of the region by impacting tourism, education and economic activity. In response to the increase in violence, the Indian Government and security services have taken a number of initiatives. In an effort to drive away militants, there has been a rise in cordon-and-search operations. These activities are intended to reduce collateral damage and are frequently predicated on particular intelligence inputs. Also, increased efforts have been made to win over the hearts and minds of the local population. Conversations with local authorities, youth involvement initiatives and development projects that enhance livelihoods and infrastructure are among other similar initiatives. In terms of politics, the Government is eager to hold elections in J&K to install a local Government, which it views as essential to ensuring long-term peace and stability. However, the current state of security presents considerable obstacles to this undertaking. Even while the Government and security services are working hard to pacify the area, there are still many obstacles in the way of long-term development and stability. In order to achieve enduring peace in J&K, it is imperative that the underlying reasons of alienation are addressed, effective governance is ensured and a sincere dialogue with all stakeholders is fostered.

### PICTALK



Clouds hover over the skyline, in Bastar district

# What actually upset the Modi appplecart

There is a long list of people-centric achievements, both at home and abroad, that defines Modi 2.0. But then, public perception inexplicably turned against him



PRAFULL GORADIA

What would Prime Minister Narendra Modi be feeling? So little recognition for doing so much! Why?

Did he err somewhere to have endured the reduction to 240 seats from the erstwhile 303? Was aspiring for his country to join the First World by 2047 wrong? Or was promising that Bharat would enlarge its GDP to be the third largest in the world before long, a mistake? Or introducing the GST, which laid the foundation of transforming the national economy? Indirect tax collection is rising and reducing the transport time by 40 per cent. Isn't that a gift to the economy? Maybe asking for beyond 400 was misunderstood as having already won the election and therefore no pressing need to go out to cast one's vote, especially when the weather is very hot. Perhaps the schedule of seven phases of voting was phased out over too long a period of 43 days, enough time for possible mischief. Some might have resented the abrogation of Article 370, but the economy of Jammu & Kashmir has prospered substantially.

Modi's Government over the last 10 years has pulled out some 25 crore out of poverty. Whatever was given to them was directly to the individuals, not through village headmen. According to the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, only 15 paise of a rupee reached the poor people, while 85 paise were eaten away by the middlemen. Such corruption significantly explained the contemptuous expression coined by the Nehruvian acolytes "Hindu rate of growth". India's economists used to proudly claim that 40 per cent of the Indian economy was black or 'informal' and 60 per cent was white or 'formal'. The back of this black economy began to be broken on the night of November 8, 2016, when Modi demonetised ₹1,000 and ₹500 currency notes. The measure was not confided even to his Finance Minister for the sake of secrecy. Public opinion in India was divided down the middle; those who lost money con-



demned the measure. Those who did not lose, praised the move as having taught the tax evaders a lesson.

What most people did not know was that a former regime was getting Indian currency notes printed by the same supplier who printed Pakistan's and Bangladesh's currency notes as well. These neighbours could thus import India goods without spending any foreign exchange, in fact any money, except the purchase price of the fake notes. Until this demonetisation, our neighbours were financially comfortable. Not long after November 8, 2016, news came that Pakistan was moving towards shambles. Later, we had to loan Bangladesh \$9.5 billion. One cannot deny there is still black money in the economy today, but at least half the original quantum is gone. Implementation of GST and digitalisation has also helped in this objective. White money is wealth that can be invested, lent out; it can be used for expanding the economy. Black money, on the other hand, is largely unproductive and, in private hands, a source of fear from thieves and income tax raids. It cannot be lent with confidence or even a minimal lack of worry.



MAYBE ASKING FOR BEYOND 400 WAS MISUNDERSTOOD AS HAVING ALREADY WON THE ELECTION. PERHAPS THE VOTING SCHEDULE WAS PHASED OUT OVER TOO LONG A PERIOD

Do all these deserve only 240 seats? This is indeed a painful question. While voting, many Hindus forgot that it is this Government and this Supreme Court that enabled them to see the magnificent temple of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya become a reality, considering five centuries had run their course since Mughal invader Babar's henchman Mir Baiqi had destroyed the original temple that had immortalised Shri Ramjanmabhoomi. The splendid new temple has been built in the flash of a year. This was a revival, recovery and replacement of a lost temple and civilisational ethos. This Government has also made history dance. I doubt whether any religion has enabled another religion to build its place of worship in its own country. This Government has been able to charm the Sultan of Abu Dhabi to donate 27 acres of land on the main highway to Dubai for Hindus to build a grand temple in what most Muslims would consider a violation of the forbidding of *butparasti* or idol worship. This was the Sultan's celestial endeavour to atone for all the temples desecrated in India over the centuries. As a wag

put it, this was a magnificent reconciliation that should have gifted, as it were, a thousand seats. All Hindus should pray for having overlooked this unique sacrifice on behalf of Islam.

The only excuse that can hold was yet another omission, like many others. Only two days ago, an acquaintance from Lucknow dropped in to explain why the Lok Sabha seat that contains Ayodhya was lost. A number of shops and houses was demolished to broaden the main street. Compensation was offered, although at the old rates.

With the rapid construction of the temple, real estate prices went up much faster than expected. As a result, the old rates seemed like peanuts and, therefore, unacceptable to the old-time residents and shopkeepers. Meanwhile, lakhs of pilgrims had come, gone and enriched the shopkeepers, who weren't really short of money. In the process, they not only protested but also voted for the opposite side. When asked by journalists what they gained by voting against the temple, they had no answer.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### WATER CRISIS IN THE CAPITAL

Madam — Apropos the editorial "Parched Capital," published on June 10, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, it's alarming to witness Delhi's worsening water crisis. The refusal of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh to supply water during these scorching months significantly impacts millions in the NCR. The Supreme Court's directive for these states to uphold water-sharing agreements is crucial, but enforcement appears weak. The Delhi BJP's call for a special Assembly session is a necessary step to prioritise this dire issue.

Delhi's 35 million residents face severe water shortages, exacerbating public health risks and forcing reliance on unreliable private tankers. This situation demands a multi-faceted approach: strict adherence to water agreements, improved infrastructure and public education on water conservation. Investing in treatment plants and reservoirs, along with enhancing wastewater recycling and rainwater harvesting, could provide long-term relief. It's imperative for states to cooperate and ensure a stable water supply to prevent further hardship and potential health crises.

Meera Rao | Raipur

#### VIGILANCE FOR FOOD SAFETY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Protecting health through food safety," published on June 10, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, I'm alarmed by the state of food safety today. We often overlook the quality of what we eat, leading to chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Street food stalls, which are popular in many places, frequently lack hygiene standards and even supermarket food is not always trustworthy. The inconsistency between food labels and actual ingredients is troubling.

The WHO's statistics are staggering: 600 million people fall ill annually from contaminated food, with 420,000 deaths. This year's World Food Safety Day theme,

#### Modi's historic third term



Apropos the news story "Narendra Modi sworn in as Prime Minister for the third consecutive time," published on June 10, this is my response. As a daily reader of the newspaper, it's clear that Narendra Modi's third consecutive term as India's Prime Minister marks a significant chapter in the nation's political history. Mirroring the legacy of Jawaharlal

Nehru, Modi's repeated electoral success underscores his enduring popularity and political acumen.

The swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan was a testament to India's vibrant democracy, drawing participation from key political figures and foreign dignitaries. This underscores India's growing influence on the global stage. However, the BJP's reduced Lok Sabha seats highlight a more complex political landscape, necessitating greater reliance on NDA allies. The strategic inclusion of allies like the TDP and JDU in ministerial positions suggests a pragmatic approach to coalition politics. As Modi 3.0 unfolds, it will be interesting to see how the government balances internal dynamics while continuing developmental policies. The next few years will be crucial in determining the trajectory of Modi's legacy and India's future.

Saanvi Jain | Jamshedpur

"Prepare for the Unexpected," highlights the urgent need for robust food safety measures. The globalisation of our food supply chain complicates these efforts, making contamination harder to trace. Technological advancements like blockchain for traceability and IoT sensors for real-time monitoring can help. Ensuring food safety is a proactive commitment necessary for public health. We must innovate and stay vigilant to protect humanity from foodborne illnesses.

Vihaan Sharma | Udaipur

#### ATTITUDE SHAPES HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Madam — Apropos the news story "Factors that influence our attitudes," published on June 10, this is my response. Reading about the *Mahabharata* and its timeless narratives offers profound insights into human nature. The epic, attributed to sage Veda Vyasa and transcribed by Lord Ganesha, vividly portrays the complexities of human attitudes. It showcases a spectrum of emotions and standpoints that drive actions, often influenced by external factors.

Duryodhana, a prominent character, exemplifies how arrogance and anger, fueled by his uncle Shakuni and others, lead to destructive behaviour. This mirrors historical atrocities like the Nazi genocide, highlighting the dangers of prejudice and hatred.

Conversely, the story of the Zen Master and the Thief underscores the transformative power of compassion. The Master's forgiveness and understanding helped the wayward student reform, illustrating that empathy can foster positive change. Human attitudes, shaped by social interactions and experiences, can lead to either constructive or destructive outcomes. This continuous learning process underscores the importance of compassion and understanding in shaping a better society. Harold S Geneen aptly encapsulates this, emphasising that leadership is reflected in attitudes and actions, not just words.

Aarush Kapoor | Vijayawada

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Sunshine on shoulders, a spring in my step!

We still have time to take a step back to pause, reflect and act, to leave a better world for the generations to come

Summers have been harsh this year. I do not recall Delhi temperatures shooting to 50 degrees plus in the 26 years since we shifted to the national capital. Advisories have been issued by the state governments to avoid venturing out in the afternoons. However, a month down the line, we would forget the harrowing days, and long for a glimpse of sun as monsoon clouds darken the skies.

A few months back, I looked out of my window one morning. The sun was struggling to light up the day with just a pale glimmer of its full-blown glory. It transported me back a few decades when I was posted in a railway production unit in east India. One afternoon in March or April, while driving me back to the office after lunch, the driver commented, "Sir, I don't like this month. The days are so sad." His observation was a revelation to me. The afternoon during the two months is often dull in the eastern part of the country, with a haze of moist air shrouding everything. I have travelled to England a couple of times for vacations.



We were chilled to the bones during the first visit as we braved the heavy rains lashing us. We walked with a spring in our steps as bright sunshine greeted us the second time. We noticed that on such rainy days, even the locals longed for the sun to peep out of the clouds. This welcome respite would be enough for the parks to get filled with screaming children, sedately walking adults, and sprinting health enthusiasts.

Sun plays an important role in our lives in other ways also. My wife, and even others, insist on drying clothes under the sun. I have also witnessed this in other countries. I have often wondered about the reasons despite the availability of devices serving the same purpose. The argument

is that no equipment can impart the antibacterial properties or the fresh smell and crisp feeling that exposure to sunlight does. I would tend to agree, as even I do not like the smell of moist clothes left indoors to dry under the fan during rainy months. There are health benefits too. We are told to spend a few minutes under the sun to get the sunshine vitamin, most essential for our health. Sunshine is also celebrated through numerous phrases that compare the people in our lives or even their attributes to the bright light. A friend calls an octogenarian friend, 'sunshine', simply because the older person is ever smiling. There are several other similar compliments like 'You are the sunshine that brightens my world with love'

or 'Smiles are little rays of sunshine' and many more. Eulogies have been paid to other celestial bodies as well, but they pale when compared with the brightest star in our firmament. Sun Temple in Konark is a testament to the importance accorded to the life-giver. Many cultures, religions, and earlier civilizations were based around sun worship.

All these myriad thoughts flitted through my mind as I sat sipping my tea that pale morning. I realised that the feeble sunlight was also due to our self-serving desires without paying heed to the need to create a pollution-free environment.



SANJAY CHANDRA

We still have time to take a step back to pause, reflect, and act, to leave a better world for the generations to come! They also have the right to hum the timeless opening lines of the beautiful song by John Denver, "Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy. Sunshine, almost always, makes me high."

(The writer conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. Views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## A TREASURE TROVE OF TIMELESS WISDOM

The Puranas, with their vast and varied content, are living texts



SWAMI CHARNASHRIT

The Puranas are a vast genre of ancient Indian literature that holds a significant place in the cultural, religious, and philosophical tapestry of India. These texts are not merely historical or mythological accounts; they are rich repositories of wisdom, encompassing a wide array of subjects that continue to resonate with and inspire people across generations.

## Origin and Structure of the Puranas

The term "Purana" is derived from the Sanskrit word "pura," meaning "ancient" or "old." Traditionally, the Puranas are attributed to Vyasa, the sage who is also credited with compiling the Mahabharata and the Vedas. There are eighteen major Puranas, known as the Mahapuranas, and an equal number of secondary Puranas, known as Upapuranas. Each Purana varies in length and content but generally follows a similar structural format comprising five main topics: the creation of the universe (Sarga), the secondary creation (Pratisarga), genealogies of gods, sages, and kings (Vamsa), the reigns of Manus (Manvantara), and the history of dynasties (Vamsa Charitra).

## Cosmology and Metaphysics

The Puranas offer a profound exploration of cosmology and metaphysics, detailing intricate theories about the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe. The concept of cyclical time, as opposed to linear time, is a central theme, with the universe undergoing endless cycles of creation and dissolution. This perspective provides a holistic view of existence, emphasizing the impermanence of the material world and the eternal nature of the soul.



## Ethical and Moral Teachings

At their core, the Puranas are repositories of ethical and moral teachings. They emphasize the principles of Dharma (righteousness), Artha (prosperity), Kama (pleasure), and Moksha (liberation). Through various narratives and parables, the Puranas highlight the importance of living a virtuous life, the consequences of actions (karma), and the ultimate goal of attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

## Theistic Devotion

The Puranas are rich in devotional content, promoting Bhakti (devotion) towards various deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess. They provide detailed descriptions of the forms, attributes, and stories of these deities, fostering a personal and emotional connection between the devotee and the divine. This devotional aspect underscores the idea that sincere love and devotion can lead to spiritual enlightenment and liberation.

## Social and Cultural Insights

The Puranas play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the cultural and religious traditions of ancient India. They serve as encyclopaedic texts, containing information on rituals, festivals, pilgrimages, and social customs. By doing so, they have helped maintain continuity in cultural practices and have provided a sense of identity and continuity to generations.

## The Arts and Sciences

The Puranas are remarkable for their integration of art and science. They include discussions on astronomy, astrology, medicine, architecture, and even the performing arts. For instance, the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagavata Purana provide elaborate accounts of cosmology, while the Agni Purana offers insights into various scientific disciplines, reflecting the comprehensive knowledge system of ancient India.

(The writer is a spiritual guide, views are personal)

## The long and short of Modi's welfarism



UTTAM GUPTA

The Govt is doing a good job of supplying food, fuel and fertiliser at subsidised cost but the largesse recipients are unlikely to make space for other deserving people

An overarching policy instrument Prime Minister Narendra Modi uses in relentless pursuit of a welfare State is his unflinching commitment to ensuring adequate supply of three essential items, namely fertilisers, food and fuel, to the target beneficiaries/consumers at 'throwaway' price or even for free.

In fact, he tells them about his intentions in this regard well in advance. Look at these facts: Urea is a widely used fertiliser that supplies primary nutrient nitrogen or 'N' and constitutes nearly half of India's total fertiliser consumption. To make it affordable to farmers, the Union Government controls its maximum retail price (MRP) at a low level unrelated to the cost of production/import and distribution, which is much higher. The excess cost over MRP is reimbursed to the manufacturer/importer as subsidy which varies from unit to unit, depending on its cost.

During its first term, under a comprehensive New Urea Policy 2015 announced on May 13, 2015, the Modi Government had frozen the urea MRP of ₹268 per 50 kg bag for a period four years till 2019-20. Even thereafter, the price remained unchanged at ₹242 per 45 kg bag (currently, urea is sold in 45 kg bag; so on pro rata basis, the price is the same as earlier). This price is nearly one-tenth of the cost of making it available leading to huge subsidy payout. On June 28, 2023, Modi announced its continued availability to the farmers at this price for three years, up to FY 2025-26.

As for food, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) enacted by the erstwhile UPA Government in 2013 had provided for giving wheat, rice and coarse cereals to eligible beneficiaries at a throwaway price of ₹3/2/1 per kg respectively. The excess of minimum support price (MSP) paid to farmers plus handling and distribution costs over this price (read ₹3/2/1 per kg) was reimbursed to the State handling agencies such as the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as subsidy.

Even as the NFSA had frozen the price to be paid by beneficiaries for three years, ie till 2016, the then Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, Ram Vilas Paswan, announced that the price won't be increased for three years. In 2020, due to the Corona pandemic, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), the Government also started giving 5 kg of rice or wheat per person per month for 'free' to all the 820 million beneficiaries under the NFSA.

Meanwhile, the pandemic-induced PMGKAY was withdrawn from January 1, 2023. However, from the same date, the Government started giving regular supplies under the NFSA for 'free' (instead of ₹3/2/1 per kg charged earlier). This modified scheme was renamed as PMGKAY. Later in the year, in November 2023, addressing a poll rally in Chhattisgarh, Modi announced extension of the PMGKAY for another five years, ie till 2028.

In case of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), ever since 2015, the Government remains committed to making it available for household consumption at a low price although unlike in fertilisers and food, Modi hasn't announced as to 'for how long'. At present, over 100 million poor households who have been provided free gas connection under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) are eligible to receive subsidy at the rate of ₹300 per cylinder (14.2 kg) for 12 fills per annum.



WE COULD END UP WITH A SCENARIO WHERE CRORES OF PEOPLE DON'T NEED TO EARN THEIR LIVING AND SIMPLY WAIT FOR THE STATE FREEBIES TO TAKE CARE OF ALL THEIR NEEDS

If the welfare scheme beneficiaries are assured that they will continue to receive the benefits perpetually, all the more when these concern essential items such as fertilisers, food, fuel and that too with zero or near-zero price tag, they couldn't have asked for more. They can use the money thus saved for spending on other things, say education, health etc that can help them enhance their productive capacity and improve the quality of living. But, this may not happen in all cases. What if they fritter away the savings on unproductive stuff?

A bigger risk has to do with complacency that this could give rise to amongst the recipients of the benefits. When the Government arranges their basic needs for free (in Delhi, the State Government gives electricity and water free), it could trigger a feeling as to 'why should they work at all?' We could end up with a scenario where crores of people don't need to earn their living and simply wait for the State freebies to take care of all their needs.

Such an approach also comes in the way of extending the benefit of welfare schemes to other deserving persons who are currently not included in beneficiaries list. For instance, the current list of PMGKAY beneficiaries being based on the Census of 2011, over 100 million persons who became eligible post-2011 don't have access to

free food.

Giving them access without deleting equivalent number from existing list will require more allocation for food subsidy. If fund constraints don't permit hike in the budget, those 100 million will continue to be denied access.

Under the current system of giving fertiliser subsidy, farmers are prone to excessive use of urea leading to imbalance in fertiliser use, drop in crop yield, deterioration of soil health and adverse impact on the environment. Even as there is a dire need to reduce imbalance by curbing excess use of urea, its availability at throwaway price won't let that happen.

For this very reason, there is rampant leakage/diversion of urea for industrial uses. Further, because manufacturers and importers get full reimbursement of the excess of cost over the MRP as subsidy on 'actual' basis, there is no incentive to reduce cost and improve efficiency in operations. The existing system of giving food subsidy also suffers from leakages, misuse and inefficiency in operations.

When Modi says the supply of fertilisers and food for free or at throwaway prices will continue perpetually, dubious operators too get to continue with their illicit gains. To address these anomalies, the Government needs to drastically restructure its welfare schemes. First, there should be an exit clause

for a beneficiary under the scheme. The clause can be triggered when she crosses the poverty threshold. For instance, 250 million persons who have come out of poverty shouldn't be eligible for free food under PMGKAY.

Two, our political brass should do away with the 'free' tag to any item even if it is food. While no one can deny the need for some subsidy to make it 'affordable' to the poor, insisting that the commodity be given for free or at small fraction of the cost (as in case of urea) is a risky idea. It is an invitation to all kinds of wrongs such as fictitious claims, diversions, inflated cost and so on.

Three, instead of delivering a commodity at a low price, the Government should deposit the subsidy in the account of the beneficiary. The latter can buy her needs from the market where prices are determined in a competitive manner, thereby ensuring that the gains of efficiency improvements and cost reduction accrue to all consumers. In this scenario, there won't be any scope for misuse or diversion.

Four, a plethora of subsidies under different heads can be merged and given as a single lump sum amount as income support. This can save a lot of administrative work and associated costs involved in running multiple schemes.

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

## Canada in covert talks with India over Nijjar's killing

India and Canada share a complex relationship, shaped by historical ties, diaspora influence and geopolitical interests

In the intricate dance of international diplomacy, Canada's intelligence chief, David Vigneault, embarked on clandestine visits to India earlier this year, delving into the shadowy realms of the Khalistani activist's controversial demise. These covert exchanges, veiled in secrecy, unfold against the backdrop of heightened tensions between the two nations, as a parliamentary report unveils India's ranking as the second most significant foreign threat to Canadian democracy, closely trailing behind China. With Prime Minister Trudeau's pledge to confront foreign interference head-on, Canada grapples with safeguarding its democratic integrity amidst the swirling currents of global power struggles.



SANTOSH MATHEW

India and Canada share a complex relationship, shaped by historical ties, diaspora influence, and geopolitical interests. The Indian diaspora in Canada, particularly the Sikh community, has played a significant role in shaping Canadian society and politics. However, issues related to Sikh separatism and human rights in India have often been contentious points in bilateral discussions. Nijjar's assassi-

nation has brought these issues to the forefront once again, reigniting debates about the treatment of minorities in India and the extent of Canada's involvement in addressing these concerns. The Indian diaspora in Canada is significant and steadily growing. It's estimated that there are over 2 million people of Indian origin in Canada, making the Indian community one of the largest and most influential ethnic groups in the country. Over the years, the Indian diaspora has made significant contributions to various sectors of Canadian society, including business, politics, academia, and culture. This demographic's influence is a testament to the deep-rooted connections between the two nations.

Nijjar's assassination has prompted a range of reactions from both Indian and Canadian officials. Canadian officials have condemned the act and called for a thorough investigation, while also reaffirming their commitment to dialogue and cooperation with India. However, the incident has undoubtedly strained relations between the two countries, with potential implications for trade, investment, and strategic partnerships. Some argue that Nijjar's death underscores the need for greater attention to human rights violations in India, while others caution against jumping to conclusions and emphasize the importance of evidence-based investigations. At the diplomatic level, the fallout from Nijjar's assassination



has led to increased scrutiny of Indo-Canadian relations. The alleged involvement of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and a close aide of Ajit Doval in covert operations underscores the complex interplay between intelligence, diplomacy, and geopolitics. As India seeks to assert itself on the world stage, it must navigate these challenges with

caution, ensuring that its actions are guided by principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for international law. For Canada, the incident has highlighted the delicate balancing act it must perform in managing its diverse population while upholding democratic values. The Canadian government's response has been measured, focusing on ensuring justice for Nijjar while maintaining diplomatic channels with India. This approach is crucial for preserving the multifaceted relationship that exists between the two countries. While differences may exist on certain issues, there are also areas of common interest where cooperation can flourish. Moreover, the tragic loss of Jaswinder Singh Nijjar serves

as a reminder of the importance of upholding democratic values and protecting the rights of all individuals, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds. This commitment to justice will not only honour Nijjar's legacy but also reinforce the values that both nations espouse. Moving forward, Indo-Canadian relations will likely face challenges as both countries navigate the aftermath of this incident. However, with mutual respect, dialogue, and a commitment to shared values, there is hope that they can emerge stronger and more resilient than before. In conclusion, the assassination of Jaswinder Singh Nijjar has cast a spotlight on the intricacies of Indo-Canadian relations, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities

that lie ahead. It is a pivotal moment for both nations to reflect on their shared history, reaffirm their commitment to justice, and work towards a future marked by cooperation and mutual respect. The road ahead may be fraught with difficulties, but with a concerted effort, India and Canada can continue to build a relationship that is both robust and resilient, benefiting not only their citizens but also contributing to global peace and stability. Indo-Canadian relations are like a symphony, where each note, no matter how different, contributes to the harmony of the whole. Let us play our parts with respect, understanding, and a commitment to peace.

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## PM's team

Coalition considerations influence choices

At the helm of a genuine coalition government for the first time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is heading a 72-member Union Council of Ministers, which has been formed after taking several factors into consideration — experience, youth, caste matrix, upcoming Assembly polls and representation of the BJP's partners in the NDA. The PM's team includes 30 Cabinet ministers, four of whom are from Bihar. This is no surprise as the BJP has three important allies in that state — CM Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi-led Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) and Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas). Two allies in southern states, Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party and HD Kumaraswamy's Janata Dal (Secular), have also got one Cabinet berth each.

Among the first-timers are three former chief ministers — Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Madhya Pradesh), Manohar Lal Khattar (Haryana) and Kumaraswamy (Karnataka); Suresh Gopi, the BJP's first Lok Sabha MP from Kerala, has also made the grade. Over 40 ministers are from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is significant in the light of the poll reversals suffered by the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, where the Samajwadi Party made major gains on the back of its outreach to the 'PDA' — Pichhra (backward), Dalit and Alpsankhyak (minorities). Maharashtra and Haryana, which go to the polls later this year, have a noticeable presence in the Council of Ministers.

The induction of former Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu as a Minister of State shows that the BJP is keen on staging a revival in Punjab after its disastrous performance in the recent Lok Sabha polls. The party contested all 13 seats but drew a blank, with Bittu losing from Ludhiana. It is apparent that the BJP is looking to groom this relatively young leader with an eye on the 2027 Assembly elections. All in all, the BJP has performed a delicate balancing act.

## Terror attack in J&amp;K

Foreign elements pose renewed challenge

The tragic incident in Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir, where a bus carrying pilgrims was attacked by terrorists, resulting in the loss of nine lives, underscores a renewed and disturbing wave of terror in the region. The attackers, armed with AK-47s and M4 carbines, targeted the bus driver, causing the vehicle to plunge into a gorge. Intelligence reports indicate a shift from local to foreign terrorism in the Valley, with nearly 80 foreign terrorists currently operating in the area. This poses a significant challenge for security forces, as the foreign elements bring a new level of sophistication and brutality. The use of advanced weaponry in the Reasi attack is an indicator of this escalating threat. The broader implications of this attack are profound as it disrupts the peace and stability of J&K and also instils fear among local residents and visitors.

Even as the swift deployment of security forces and the launch of a comprehensive search operation demonstrate a proactive approach, the incident calls for a deeper examination of security protocols, especially in vulnerable areas frequented by civilians. The recent uptick in terrorist activities, including ambushes on military vehicles and attacks on civilians, signals a strategic effort by terrorist groups to destabilise the region and undermine the government's efforts to restore normalcy, including the democratic process. In this challenging environment, the role of local communities and village defence guards becomes crucial. Their prompt efforts to rescue bus victims underline the need to strengthen community-based mechanisms as they can serve as a vital line of defence against attacks.

As J&K navigates these turbulent times, the government must enhance security measures and foster a sense of unity and resilience among the populace. Terrorism must not be allowed to derail the aspirations of the local people.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 1924

## A Pyrrhic victory

HOWEVER much Sir Michael O'Dwyer and his friends, both in England and India, may congratulate themselves on the victory they have won in the famous suit that has just been disposed of, no impartial man, no man at any rate who takes into account the cost at which this victory has been won will for a moment join in the congratulations. It has been literally a Pyrrhic victory. So far as the parties are concerned — their respective positions in respect of the matters in dispute in this suit, in the eyes of India, of England and of the world — there was no new question of victory or defeat. No one, whether Englishman or Indian, thinks worse of Sir Sankaran Nair today than he did before the judgment in this case was delivered. Nor does anyone think better of Sir O'Dwyer's administration of Punjab generally or of the Martial Law horrors in particular or finally of Gen Dyer's infamous action at Jallianwala Bagh than he did a week ago. These are not matters in respect of which the judgment of nations depends upon the verdict of a judge or jury with necessarily limited commissions and having their full share of national and racial prejudice. Had the case been tried in India by an Indian judge and jury, the verdict would in all human probability have gone as decisively against Sir O'Dwyer as it has in this case gone against Sir Nair, but who among Sir O'Dwyer's friends and admirers would have attached any importance to that verdict, or revised their opinion in any particular of the late Lieutenant Governor and his administration?

## How Modi 3.0 looks from South Asia

The region will hope the PM will move towards rapprochement with Pakistan and revival of SAARC

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN  
SENIOR JOURNALIST

IN 2014, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi first took up office as the head of a National Democratic Alliance government in which the BJP had a majority of its own, South Asia saw promise in dealing with a strong leader in Delhi for the first time since 1989. Against the background of growing Chinese influence in the region, Modi's invitation to the SAARC leaders, including then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was hailed as a grand gesture of goodwill. South Asia saw in it a sign of new beginnings.

Five years later, when Modi invited another group of leaders from the neighbourhood and beyond for the inauguration of his second innings, he had already stamped India and the region with his strongman style of leadership. He was at the peak of his political power, having achieved an even bigger victory on the nationalist wave following India's strike inside Pakistan after the Pulwama attack. And to the dismay of many smaller South Asian nations, Modi had dumped SAARC.

On Sunday, as the leaders of five South Asian nations — Pakistan and Afghanistan were not invited — and two Indian Ocean countries, Mauritius and Seychelles, assembled at the Rashtrapati Bhavan forecourt at Modi's invitation to watch him being sworn in for a third term, they came fully aware that much had changed since he first took up office. In their own countries, China's influence has grown deeper roots, and their polities have undergone massive churns. And this time, it was almost as if a politically weak Modi needed their presence to bolster the signals being sent out from June 4 that nothing has changed in Delhi.

They would, of course, have sized up the new arrangement for themselves, of what has changed



SHIFTING SANDS: As leaders of South Asian and Indian Ocean countries assembled to watch Narendra Modi being sworn in for a third term, they came fully aware that much had changed since he first took up office. PH

and what remains.

But for the diverse people of a region that has seen — and seen off — its share of strongmen and who have held India's pluralism and its secular democracy in admiration, Modi's democratic downsizing is an inspiring moment. There was concern at the erosion of these values in India over the last 10 years and for the fallout on their own polities. They have greeted India's 2024 verdict with relief. Especially in countries struggling with the authoritarian creep of their own leaders, it has restored faith in India's democracy. Across South Asia, there is admiration for the Indian voter.

In Bangladesh, where five-time PM Sheikh Hasina won a fourth successive term in January in a controversial election marred by an Opposition boycott and a crackdown on dissent, Mahfuz Anam, the editor of *The Daily Star*, noted, somewhat wistfully, that in "Bangladesh... voters aspire for the same power".

In Sri Lanka, voters had used the ballot to send the authoritarian Mahinda Rajapaksa packing in 2015, only to bring him and his brother Gotabaya back in 2019. After helplessly watching them preside over the country's economic meltdown, Sri Lankans came out on the streets in 2022, and, in a dramatic show of people's power, unseated the Rajapaksa family. But they believe their efforts to bring about real change have been thwarted by the coun-

## The BJP's willingness to throw under the bus its 'Neighbourhood First' diplomacy for its own majoritarian aims has not helped.

try's entrenched political elite, who have clawed back into positions of power after small rearrangements among themselves.

*The Daily FT* said the Sri Lankan people could "take heart from the election results in India, where voters have pushed back against powerful forces using the power of the ballot". It pointed to the communal malaise in its own polity and said, "the Mahinda/Gotabaya Rajapaksa brand of politics which brought Sinhala Buddhist supremacy to the fore and demonised ethnic and religious minorities is a replica of what the Modi government has been practising in India since taking power in 2014".

In Pakistan, where the struggle for democracy is ranged not so much against politicians as the powerful army, Modi's seemingly unstoppable rise as a Hindu majoritarian leader was seen as mirroring Pakistan's own descent into the Mullah-military alliance. "Tum bilkul hum jaise nikley," a line from Pakistani poet Fahmida Riaz's eponymous poem, was often used

to describe India's embrace of Hindutva in the last 10 years.

In a country still smouldering from the two-year-long intercaste competition among political elites for the army's patronage and an election in February that resolved none of its problems, there is now surprise, if not admiration, that India's democracy is in the safe hands of its voters. Writing in *Down*, columnist Mahir Ali noted that "Indian voters have now indicated that they resent [the religious fundamentalism] formula in the Hindu context, particularly when it fails to deliver the promised levels of employment and levelling up."

Nepal has had its own concerns about Hindutva, on aggressive display along its border in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Columnist Namrata Sharma, writing before the election in *Rising Nepal*, observed the "unease" in the former Hindu kingdom at how a third-term BJP government in Delhi might impact Nepal's own hard-won secular republic with a Constitution that took several years to frame. She also flagged the presence of RSS leaders from India at protest demonstrations for a return to a Hindu monarchy.

After the Mohamed Muizzu government came to power in the Maldives against a background of resentment against New Delhi and 'India Out' protests, it has been hard for Indians to understand how a small country can stand up to the region's biggest country, that

too, a generous one. But even Muizzu's openly Delhi-friendly predecessor, Ibrahim Solih, struggled to explain to voters in this Islamic republic the bigoted shenanigans of a hate-mongering functionary of India's ruling party or the commandeering of locals by the Indian Embassy in Male for a yoga day event.

At a time when India is trying to push back on China's large footprint in these countries and in countries such as Seychelles and Mauritius in the wider Indian Ocean region, the BJP's willingness to throw under the bus its 'Neighbourhood First' diplomacy for its electoral gains has not helped. The blockading of Nepal just before the Bihar election of 2016, Amit Shah's description of Bangladeshi migrants as 'termites' in 2018, the PM's 'bheekh ka katota' jibes at Pakistan's economic woes and the gratuitous raking up of India's Katchatheevu agreement in this poll campaign speak of a reckless disregard in the top BJP leadership for how India is perceived by the people of the neighbourhood.

Why has Shehbaz Sharif not congratulated Modi yet, some Indians ask, in response to why Modi left out the Pakistan Prime Minister for his inauguration. After Modi's taunts, Sharif would be risking the little credibility he has left from his tainted election victory to risk any outreach to the new government. India will need to make the first public move, but can a weak Modi do what a strong Modi could not, after signed hands in 2015?

Still, South Asia will hope that Modi 3.0 will move towards a rapprochement with Pakistan and a revival of SAARC. After all, it was an NDA coalition government that made the big peace move in 1998 and 2003, which was taken forward by another coalition, this time the UPA, in 2004. South Asia will also hope that Modi 3.0 finds it less easy to denigrate neighbours, or use his social media clout to boss over them, or swing secret deals with their unpopular leaders for Delhi's favourite businessmen. It will hope for an Indian foreign policy that understands the people of the neighbourhood and their aspirations better.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Leaders must invoke an alchemy of great vision. — Henry Kissinger

## When belching is a gesture of appreciation

SUMIT PAUL

EVERY country has its set of cultural preferences and idiosyncrasies, which may be embarrassing or bizarre to people belonging to other cultures.

In China, you shouldn't ask for a second helping of soup because it's deemed to be against table manners. Soup is served as an appetiser almost everywhere. Asking for a second helping means that you are deliberately avoiding the main course. So, if you keep asking for soup in Southeast Asian countries, it will be seen as an insult to the main items on the table. Myanmar also follows this rule. But if you go to France and ask for second or third helpings of soup, the host will be very pleased.

In Burkina Faso, if the boy asks for his soup bowl to be filled again, it is a sign that he has liked the girl who prepared the soup! Soup is served after the main course in Zaire. The culinary belief is that the heavy food is washed down with the liquid soup (not with wine).

In Japan, eating is tantamount to meditation. It's no less than a prayer and is considered to be equivalent to the Zen meditative process. So, the Japanese don't talk while eating. Utmost silence is observed. This caused a tragedy in 1960 when India's illustrious Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee choked on a piece of bone while having dinner in a Tokyo restaurant and rushed to the washroom to take it out; he died while attempting to do so. Moreover, he had bolted the washroom. He was aware of the fact that the Japanese didn't talk during meals. They relented after this episode and now they talk, though very little, while eating. The practice is prevalent in India as well. Many residents of villages and towns don't utter a word while eating.

Belching in public, like breaking wind, is universally looked down upon, barring in Arab countries. The Arabs believe that belching (and even 'adding air', an Arab euphemism for breaking wind) after eating is a sign of relishing the food. It's a mark of appreciation for the food and the host. But it is regarded as a faux pas in many countries — a gaffe in cultured gatherings.

I once took an Arab friend, a research student, to a retired IAS officer's place in Pune. The food, mainly non-vegetarian, was otherworldly. My friend ate merrily and then belched loudly. It was embarrassing for all because no one was aware that this was a gesture of appreciation and gratitude in the Arab culture. I knew that the Arab might belch, but had stopped short of warning him. I still remember the unease over the student's innocuous but thunderous belching. Yet, I thank my lucky stars that he didn't go on to show his gratitude and satisfaction in a more extravagant way.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Kangana is overreacting

Apropos of the editorial 'Kangana slapgate', the CISF constable slapped newly elected BJP MP Kangana Ranaut over some abhorrent remarks previously made by her on the farmers' stir. Violence by someone in uniform to make a political statement is reprehensible. It is unfortunate that certain farm outfits have thrown their weight behind the erring CISF staffer. However, what Kulwinder did cannot be called an act of terror. Soon after the episode, Kangana took to social media and voiced concerns about what she described as a "rise in terror and violence" in Punjab. She is clearly overreacting and wrongly describing a case of physical assault on her as a terror attack, which is condemnable.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

## Don't celebrate violence

Apropos of 'Kangana slapgate', PM Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. In 2011, Salman Taseer, then the Governor of Pakistan's Punjab, was assassinated by his own security detail. These assassinations were condemned worldwide. But unfortunately, some sections of society are celebrating the attack on actor-turned-politician Kangana Ranaut. The attack on her came just days after the son of one of Indira Gandhi's assassins won the Lok Sabha election from Faridkot, meaning that he has been made out to be a hero. The assault on Kangana was not just about her. It smacks of the mentality of anti-social elements who don't want to live in peace and harmony.

SUBHASH CHANDRA CHHABRA, BY MAIL

## Coarsening of public discourse

With reference to 'Use of violence to vent anger condemnable', I wholeheartedly agree with the writer's take on the issue. Besides, the author has rightly emphasised as an Indian, Sikh and Punjabi that there is no contradiction between any of the three identities. But the fact that a member of a minority community has to even say it while making a valid argument is a sad commentary on the state of public discourse in the country. There is no doubt that the CISF staffer was at fault, which reflects poorly on the federal police organisation and raises questions about the kind of

training that officials are undergoing. However, our leaders too need to be responsible, abide by the rules and lead by example.

RUPINDER SINGH BRAR, BY MAIL

## Political instability is looming

India is a country rich in diversity — be it religion, region, caste or language. The Lok Sabha election results are telling. The BJP lost in states where it had strongholds and bagged seats in those where it was not expected to have a good showing. The factor of anti-incumbency was at play only in some states. The Hindutva ideology failed to impress the voters, and the 'Abki baar 400 paar' slogan backfired by sparking concerns about the possibility of the NDA altering the Constitution if it got an absolute majority. It remains to be seen if the NDA coalition or the INDIA bloc will stay intact. The country should brace itself for a period of political instability.

VINAY KUMAR MALHOTRA, AMBALA CANTT

## Modi must lead by example

Refer to the report 'Be humble, rise to people's hopes, PM tells ministers'; Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an important point in his address. It is commendable that he urged his ministers to be humble, work for the people and live up to their expectations. But as a leader, he must walk the talk and set an example. This time, unlike his previous two terms, he is at the helm of a coalition government. The dip in the BJP's tally this time should be seen as a warning to the PM and his party and prompt them to go for course correction.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

## Remembering Ramoji Rao

Ramoji Rao, the renowned chairman of the Eenaadu media group and founder of the Ramoji Film City, passed away recently. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his tribute to the media baron, rightly praised Rao as a visionary who had revolutionised the Indian media. There is no doubt that he made a rich contribution to the field of journalism and left an indelible mark on the world of films. Through his noteworthy efforts, he set new standards for innovation and excellence in the media and entertainment industries.

RUKMA SHARMA, JALANDHAR

# Let's make India a knowledge powerhouse by 2047



**LT GEN S S MEHTA (RETD)**  
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**T**HE clarion call for *Atmanirbharta* is for India to become a knowledge hub, discard the colonial mindset and move from a 'labour arbitrage' economy to a 'knowledge arbitrage' economy. Our destination is a 'knowledge powerhouse'.

For this, we have the potential, the size and the demographic dividend, and now the growing economic muscle. With the prospect of a sustained 8 per cent GDP growth and the new-wave boost to 6G, chip design and chip manufacturing, new fuel, hydrogen and bio, wind and solar energy, a clutch of unicorns and startups — all have the potential to carve out a wave of environment-friendly and indigenous products. While 6G and chips will be strategic tools that would lead the digital revolution, it is also time to move away from just being a technology follower. It is time to rise to our potential and lead. We have to be a technology provider.

Corporates, both public and private, will need to invest with a mission-mode mind-

set. The greatest spinoff will be security, national and citizen; both add to make Comprehensive National Power.

Before that, a reality check. There are some critical sectors in the transition journey. As per the Global Knowledge Index report (2023) of the UNDP, our ranking among 133 countries in some critical areas is (the US's corresponding ranking is in brackets): Pre-university education, 96th (ninth); technical and vocational education and training, 119th (second); higher education, 106th (fourth); research & development and innovation, 54th (fifth); information and communication technology or ICT, 83rd (second).

Innovation and development are the key. Innovation is a process of one idea building on another, resulting in a novel product, process or service, which is commercialised and put to practical use. Development is one step at a time in the realm of science and technology, striving to instil in future generations an innovative spirit. For this, there is a need to shed the 'rote' model to that of 'inquiry and innovation', which challenges the standard rote answer. Yes, 50+40 makes 90, but when a child says that the total is less than a hundred, he/she has given you an acceptable answer and more. Rote learning is the antithesis of innovation.

The Garden City of Bengaluru is our Silicon Valley, nay Colony. We labour, others do a markup, aggregate our work, and we pay for the finished



**WAY FORWARD:** We need to build a comprehensive innovation system to harness the talent of our GenNext. ISTOCK

product. It was good for starters; it was good to showcase our skill to the world. It got a boost with Y2K; that era is well past its shelf life. Bengaluru is changing, but ever so slowly. It needs to hasten its pace and be one of a dozen knowledge hubs (Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and many others) as we journey to 2047. Bengaluru needs to upgrade itself as the 'Chip Net Integration Capital' and lead the way to be the next-wave Silicon Hub.

Constraints notwithstanding, we need to build a comprehensive and rewarding innovation system to harness the talent of our GenNext. We have it in abundance at every level. We need to find ways to tap it. Untapped genius is a national loss. GenNext awaits opportunities to be tapped. For when they get them, not just India, entire humanity will benefit. GenNext, wherever it may

It should be our contribution to the East wind that blows in all directions to bridge the yawning happiness gap for all those left behind.

be, outside India or on MNC campuses within, has untiringly and repeatedly proven that its contribution is world-class. Don't rein it in; loosen the reins and empower it. Get rid of rote learning. How to think is more important than being told what to think.

For the Knowledge Powerhouse Mission, five initiatives are essential. First, raise the quality of education. The National Education Policy (NEP) is a start, but its implementation is slow and it does not have the mechanism to learn and adapt. 'One size fits all' is not workable. NEP as a scaffolding is fine. That's it. It will enable pan-India student and labour mobility. Beyond that, states need to innovate to suit their needs and then execute plans. Second, reduce the bureaucratic control over science and technology to facilitate an environment of easy funding that

challenges the status quo, encourages creativity and rewards innovation. Third, improve law enforcement to check IPR (intellectual property rights) pilferage and theft. Fourth, introduce accountability for grant applications, with linkages to job promotion and citizen wellbeing as a part of proposals for the grant/subsidy. Fifth, create norms to kindle the animal spirits in corporates.

A genuinely Indian, globally marketable product has evaded us for too long. It could be a product or a service. The 6G mission is a very good start.

Interestingly, the World Bank had suggested a four-pillar framework that analyses the rationale of human capital-based economies:

- An educated and skilled labour force is required to establish a strong knowledge-based economy.

- A dense and modern information infrastructure that provides easy access to ICT resources to overcome the barrier of high transaction costs.

- An effective innovation system to support a high level of new technology, keep up with the latest and deploy it for the domestic economy.

- An institutional regime that supports incentives and encourages entrepreneurship.

Now, with the basic building blocks in place, we need to recalibrate and integrate a five-fold path. First, within the scaffolding of NEP, develop and execute state solutions. Second, add depth to higher education — quantum computing, photonics, chip design

and the like. Third, upskill for chip manufacturing and other knowledge generators at all levels in the value chain. Fourth, relentlessly pursue our innovation mission in 6G. R&D and innovation places you on the global high table, setting standards and specifications. Fifth, adopt Industry 4.0 and harness 3D printing.

Quoting Mao Zedong, TN Ninan said in his recent article in *The Tribune*, "The East wind prevails over the West wind" and "in the global power balance — the East wind is blowing harder than before." He is right.

However, as the world's largest democracy located East, we in India need to make a stronger contribution to the East wind. A globalisation of Indian thought — non-aggressive, benign, non-threatening, sharing and caring — blowing East and West — with knowledge as the legal tender. A renaissance, not a revolution, a tide that raises all boats, within and without.

With the Indian contribution of the concept of 'zero', our wind blew East and West. Imagine where we would be without it. Now, it is time to generate the next wave — knowledge.

China's Deng Xiaoping said in 1987, "The Middle East has its oil, China has its Rare Earths". Come 2047, GenNext should be confident of saying: "... and India has its knowledge".

It should be our contribution to the East wind that blows in all directions to bridge the yawning happiness gap for all those left behind.

## Our republic's future hinges on democratic education



**AVIJIT PATHAK**  
SOCIOLOGIST

**A**S a teacher/educator, I have always felt that there is something more to democracy than the ritualisation of periodic elections. Of course, these elections are important and we must reflect on the ever-changing nature of power equations, the formation of new political alliances and the questions relating to ideology, politics and governance. But then, amid this intense debate on whether Narendra Modi's popularity has somewhat eroded or whether Rahul Gandhi is emerging as a new icon in Indian politics, I experience the absence of what I would regard as the most important concern: Are our youngsters — the new generation that will shape the destiny of India — getting the kind of education that truly empowers them and makes them capable of sustaining, nurturing and living with the fundamental spirit of democracy?

In order to find a meaningful answer to this important question, let me identify

three fundamental features of democratic education, and then enquire whether the prevalent practice of education is in tune with this spirit. First, the capacity to engage in a meaningful dialogue is a distinctive feature of democratic education. After all, democracy is not the assertion of a monologue — even the monologue of our 'supreme leader'. Democracy is not the cult of majoritarianism, even if the mathematics of numbers tends to sanctify it. Instead, democracy means the acknowledgement of diverse, plural, subaltern and even conflicting perspectives. In other words, it requires the cultivated skill that sharpens the faculty of mindful observation, promotes the delicate art of listening, and encourages the elasticity of consciousness needed for expanding one's mental horizon, or becoming empathic to others. Although this sort of dialogue does not necessarily guarantee a consensus, it means humility, or the courage to change and amend one's position, if one is convinced by counter arguments. In fact, authoritarian masters all over the world demand 'certainty' or 'homogeneity'; they are afraid of differences, plurality and ambiguities. The subtlety of dialogic education, it has to be realised, is an antithesis of all sorts of



**PARTICIPATION:** There is more to democracy than the ritualisation of periodic elections. TRIBUNE PHOTO

authoritarianism.

Second, the cultivation of the faculty of critical thinking is immensely important for democratic education. And critical thinking is not merely about solving a mathematics riddle or a physics numerical; it is essentially about the ability to pose new questions, see beyond the 'taken-for-granted' world, celebrate what Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire would have regarded as a 'problem-posing education', and interrogate, say, the normalisation of patriarchy, caste hierarchy, religious bigotry and heightened economic inequality. The question is whether we are really prepared to accept the spirit of critical pedagogy in our classrooms in order to

The cultivation of the faculty of critical thinking is immensely important for democratic education.

create intellectually alert, active and awakened citizens — not merely a set of 'toppers' or 'products' with fancy salary packages.

Third, it is impossible to sow the seeds of active and participatory democracy without encouraging the kind of education that nurtures the ethic of care. As hyper-competitiveness is becoming the order of the day, we tend to worship aggressive, self-possessive and narcissistic warriors — not compassionate citizens filled with the ethic of love, compassion and egalitarian/democratic living. It is sad that even the educational arena has begun to look like a battlefield — 'exam warriors' running neurotically after mythical 'success'. Can we

learn a couple of lessons from the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and American feminist pedagogue bell hooks, and initiate a movement to save education from the virus of the recklessly aggressive culture that keeps reproducing patriarchy, casteism and racism?

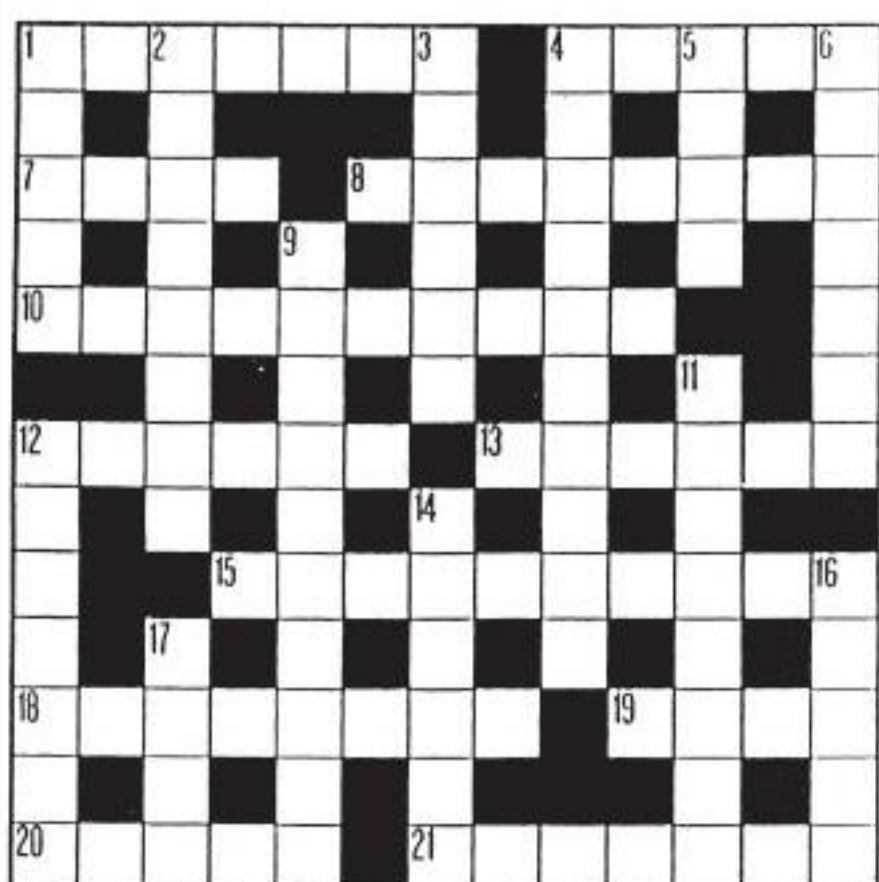
These three ideals indicate that a truly libertarian/democratic education ought to free itself from the discourses of neoliberal market fundamentalism as well as religious fundamentalism implicit in the ideology of hyper-nationalism. If we equate education solely with the acquisition of a set of technical skills that the market demands; or, for that matter, if we think that the primary objective of education is to manufacture a brigade of hyper-masculine 'nationalists' intoxicated with the zeal to eradicate the cleverly constructed 'enemies' of the nation, we will end up negating the very purpose of a life-affirming and emancipatory education.

Well, these days, political pundits are continually debating and reflecting on the implications of the results of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections — the dialectic of the 'NDA vs INDIA' politics. But then, these debates miss what really matters — the realisation that unless the new generation evolves as truly alert and awakened citizens with the

vibrancy of democratic education, the future of the republic will be in danger. In fact, if there is democratic education, the new generation will not remain content merely with the ritualistic act of casting their votes and choosing the 'lesser evil' every five years; nor will they transform their representatives into their 'masters'. Instead, they will remain perpetually alert and active; and succeed in making their 'representatives' accountable. Yes, they will refuse to be just passive spectators of the dramaturgical performances of the political bosses; they will not be hypnotised by the propaganda machinery; they will come to the street and ask them many difficult questions — can India really become a *vishvaguru*, particularly when its rank on the Global Hunger Index is 111 out of 125 countries? Is the set of 'fundamental rights' our Constitution prescribes in tune with our lived experiences, and that too at a time when India's score on the World Press Freedom Index is far from satisfactory? Is there reason to be proud of the prevalent political culture when the latest report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms reveals that 251 of the 543 newly elected Lok Sabha MPs have criminal cases registered against them?

Is anybody listening?

### QUICK CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- Arrears of unfinished work (7)
- Sprang (5)
- Stare open-mouthed (4)
- In original condition (8)
- Cease trading (4,2,4)
- Quiver (6)
- Brawl in public (6)
- Aristocracy (5,5)
- Wild marjoram (8)
- Furtive glance (4)
- Slow learner (5)
- A crustacean (7)

#### Yesterday's solution

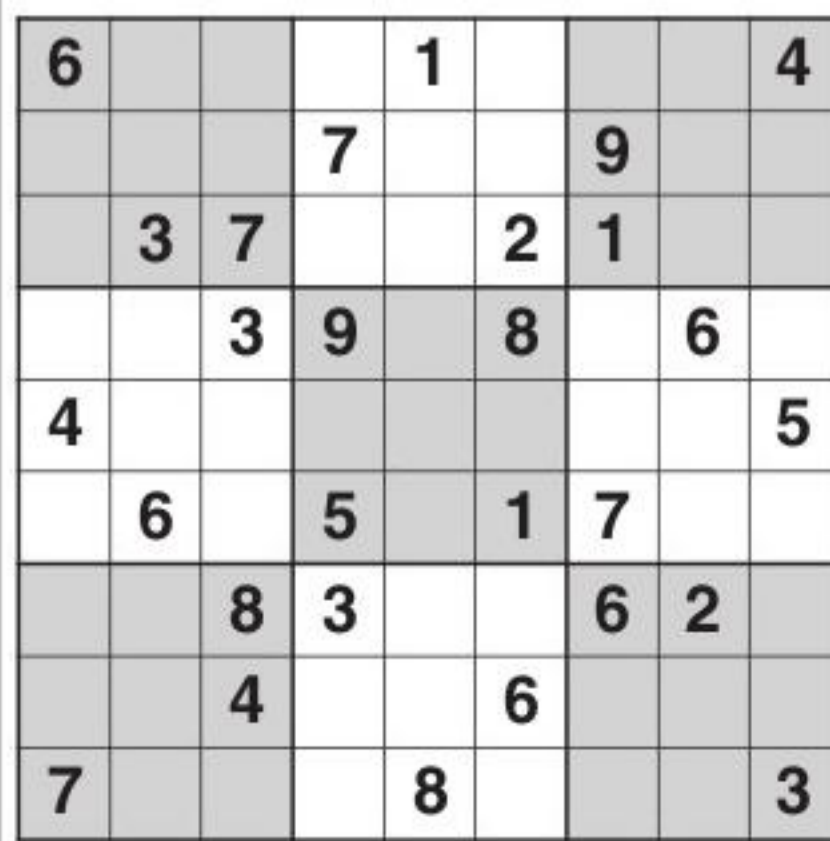
**Across:** 1 Fifth column, 9 In force, 10 Mania, 11 Earn, 12 Stand off, 14 Unique, 16 Nuance, 18 Reprisal, 19 Stir, 22 Evade, 23 Dribble, 24 Third person.

**Down:** 2 Infer, 3 Tum, 4 Create, 5 Luminous, 6 Monsoon, 7 Give quarter, 8 Half-hearted, 13 Mutineer, 15 Impeach, 17 Hard up, 20 Taboo, 21 Liar.

#### DOWN

- Sham (5)
- Taken prisoner (8)
- Obtrusively bright (6)
- Humiliation (4,2,4)
- Surrounded by (4)
- Curative treatment (7)
- Inappropriate (3,2,5)
- Contentious exchange of views (8)
- Slight footing (7)
- What follows as result (6)
- Thin candle (5)
- Kind of oven (4)

### SU DO KU



MEDIUM

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

### CALENDAR

#### JUNE 11, 2024, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Jyeshtha Shaka 21
- Jyeshtha Parvishite 29
- Hijari 1445
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 5, up to 5.28 pm
- Vyagatha Yoga up to 4.47 pm
- Aashle Nakshatra up to 11.39 pm
- Moon enters Leo sign 11.39 pm

### FORECAST

CITY	TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	44	28		
New Delhi	45	30		
Amritsar	43	25		
Bathinda	45	27		
Jalandhar	43	27		
Ludhiana	44	26		
Bhivani	43	30		
Hisar	44	27		
Sirsa	44	30		
Dharamsala	37	22		
Manali	29	12		
Shimla	30	19		
Srinagar	30	12		
Jammu	43	24		
Kargil	28	12		
Leh	21	05		
Dehradun	41	25		
Mussoorie	30	19		

TEMPERATURE IN °C