



Testing times

The National Testing Agency needs an overhaul to regain credibility

The cancellation of the UGC-NET examination on Wednesday, just a day after its supposed “successful conduct” by the National Testing Agency (NTA), is one more load of straw threatening to break the agency’s creaking reputation. Coming as it did after irregularities in this year’s NEET-UG (medicine), and complaints about the JEE (engineering), the NTA is under intense pressure. In some ways, the Education Ministry’s actions are in stark contrast to its response to the ongoing NEET fiasco, and seem to indicate that it has learnt some lessons. It took *suo motu* action on the basis of the Home Ministry’s cybercrime team’s inputs, even without any formal complaints from candidates, unlike in the NEET case where it has dragged its feet through committees and court cases despite multiple allegations and police complaints of paper leaks. The Ministry immediately cancelled the UGC-NET and promised a fresh examination. It has asked the CBI to probe the case, while not heeding the persistent demand of NEET aspirants for a similar probe. However, for the over nine lakh UGC-NET candidates who studied for months, and then travelled long distances to their examination centres, some taking loans to cover their costs, this is little consolation.

These young people deserve answers, and right now, most of the questions are still unanswered. For one, no one in the government’s education establishment has explained why the NET was an offline exam conducted by the CBSE till 2018, when it was taken over by the NTA and became an online exam, only to revert this year to an offline, pen-and-paper exam, which is potentially more vulnerable to paper leaks. As the investigation is carried out, full transparency is key to any hopes that the NTA can regain trustworthiness in the eyes of candidates. The second is accountability and punishment of the guilty. The government would also do well to consider a rehaul of the NTA’s systems and personnel to ensure that the technical glitches, cheating scams, paper leaks, and proxy candidates that have plagued the exams this year are not allowed to happen again. With the fate of lakhs of India’s educated youth and youngest voters at stake, it is not surprising that the testing agency’s woes have become a political hot potato. Some Opposition leaders have demanded that the NTA be dismantled and the responsibility for entrance examinations be handed over to the States instead. This may well curb the Union government’s centralising tendencies leading to examinations of enormous scale that are harder to manage in a far-flung nation. However, some all-India examinations will always remain, and the need is for the States to join the Centre in recovering the integrity of the beleaguered examination system.

New Cold War

Russia’s pact with North Korea will deepen U.S. ties in East Asia

The security pact reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang, in which both countries promised mutual assistance “in the event of aggression”, has echoes from the Cold War era. Russia and North Korea, erstwhile allies, are facing biting sanctions, but for different reasons. And, both are at odds with the West. Now, they seem determined to revive the alliance so that they can stand up to the western-led global order together. Mr. Putin’s visit to Pyongyang, his first in 24 years, itself marked a new beginning. The Russian leader has supported multilateral efforts to curb the North’s nuclear programme in the past. Moscow has also voted for sanctions at the UN Security Council against Pyongyang over its nuclear arsenals. But the Ukraine war appears to have altered Kremlin’s geopolitical arithmetic and provided an opportunity for Pyongyang to make itself useful as an ally. When the Ukraine war dragged on and Russia came under western sanctions, Mr. Putin turned to Mr. Kim for ammunition and ballistic missiles. After Mr. Kim’s visit to Russia in September 2023, North Korea reportedly supplied ammunition to Russia. Moscow stepped up supplies of food and fuel, and there was speculation that it could help the North’s defence sector with critical technologies. While both have rejected reports of weapons trade, the security pact clearly elevates ties to the level of a *de facto* alliance.

Ever since the Ukraine war, Mr. Putin has steadily expanded Russia’s cooperation with countries that are at odds with the U.S. He reportedly bought kamikaze drones from Iran. China has also emerged as a key economic, technological and energy partner. And, by promising to help North Korea, an isolated, one-family-ruled totalitarian state that is still technically at war with South Korea, in the event of an attack, Russia has signalled its readiness to play a larger role in northeast Asia. Mr. Putin, essentially a cold warrior, wants to build an axis of the “others” opposed by the West to expedite the churn in the global order. China remains cautious but seems fine with the idea of its closest partners challenging the western order. This will have far-reaching geopolitical consequences. North Korea will now have little incentive to discuss denuclearisation. Russia, which already has testy ties with Japan, could see its relationship with South Korea deteriorating. The agreement is also likely to strengthen the emerging tripartite partnership in East Asia among Japan, South Korea and the U.S., further solidifying the new cold war between great powers, which is still in its early stages.

The results of the just concluded general election may partly be interpreted as signalling a discontent with economic conditions. The substantial drop in the number of seats won by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh – which is among India’s poorest and most rural States – aligns with this view.

Discontent, its sources

Dissatisfaction with governance is bound to be high at a time of unemployment and persistent inflation. Food-price inflation, in particular, has remained elevated for five years. It is highest for cereals and pulses, which are staples. For households at the bottom of the income distribution, food constitutes close to half their household expenditure. Past experience suggests that the price of food can be a determinant of how the electorate votes. For instance, historically high food-price inflation towards the end of its decade-long tenure had preceded the end of the A.B. Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance government in 2004. When it comes to jobs, the unemployment rate has mostly been higher since 2014. The Periodic Labour Force Survey also shows a decline in the real earnings of regular employees and the self-employed, being substantial in the case of the latter. These are some of the sources of the economic discontent that may have propelled the shift away from the BJP.

In the spirit of democracy, which he constantly refers to, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must now honour the mandate given by the people. His government must address the sources of their discontent. This would require a change from the economic approach that has been followed for the last decade. We are yet to see indications that the government has this in mind. The Finance Minister has promised ‘reforms’, and some supportive commentators have spoken of how they are essential for growth. Two points spring to mind as reforms are brought to the table.

First, Mr. Modi’s much praised reforming zeal has not translated to a higher average growth rate after 2014. Reforms understood as changes in the policy regime are effective only to the extent that they affect the forces of demand or supply. Clearly, this has not happened strongly or widely enough in the economy, whatever the reforms undertaken by the present regime so far.

Second, the growth that we have seen since 2014 has not brought along with it the things that Indians aspire to. I have already mentioned the high food inflation. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that close to 75% of the Indian population cannot afford a healthy diet. This is not surprising given the extent of increase in food prices in the past



Pulapre Balakrishnan

Honorary Visiting Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram

To continue with the ‘winning formula’ – i.e., the economic policy of the past decade – would be to ignore the people’s verdict, which is a reflection of their discontent

five years and the highly unequal distribution of income in the country. Apart from affordable food, Indians aspire to infrastructure, both physical and social. Social infrastructure is constituted mainly by health care and education. Physical infrastructure is almost everything that is necessary both for everyday life and engaging in economic activity. Both are crucial for living.

The economic policy of the past decade has focused on attracting foreign investment, moving to digital payment in all spheres, building a manufacturing sector through subsidy and, in the past three years, unleashing a highway construction spree. Combined with this, there have been a host of transfers, cash for farmers and housewives and free rations for the poorest. This might appear to be a winning formula, but it has not been enough to bring the BJP back with a majority. To continue with this would be to ignore the people’s verdict. To honour it would require going beyond vague pronouncements on reforms or doubling down on welfare transfers, even if there was fiscal capacity for this. Showcasing macroeconomic stability also will not do. Till the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government had had fair success with fiscal consolidation, though not equally with inflation control, but that could not prevent growth from sliding even before COVID-19 had struck. While you certainly do not want macroeconomic instability, we can now see that it does not necessarily bring more growth or deliver the goods citizens aspire to. Continued high growth in India would require a rise in the investment rate. Private investment is guided by anticipation of demand. The private investment rate in India has not budged for a decade. Whether it will rebound at a time when its principal cheerleader, Mr. Modi, has lost his majority in Parliament is to be seen.

Glaring deficits

So, if ‘more reforms’ is not the way for economic policy to respond to the electorate, then what is? It would be to undertake specific interventions at the pressure points which currently signal a presence. The first, as already flagged, is the rising price of food. Other than the promotion of millets, agriculture has been a generally neglected aspect of the Modi economic package of the last decade. The relentless rise in prices of staple foods is the sign of an under-developed economy, and sits uncomfortably with the goal of a ‘*Viksit Bharat*’. While wheat production only experiences shortfalls in certain years, the production of pulses, a major source of protein for workers, has chronically fallen short of demand for decades. Making India self-sufficient in pulses must be taken up in mission mode. The supply of fruits and vegetables, the sources of

vitamins and minerals, is hobbled by the absence of cold-storage facilities and poor transportation.

A second pressure point in the country is to be found in the Indian Railways. Its leadership appears to have been caught unawares by the rise in long-distance migration for work. Pictures of reserved compartments on long-distance trains swarming with ticketless travellers have sent shock waves across the country. In such a situation, to treat high-end ‘Vande Bharat’ trains as a priority, not to mention the bullet train, is a serious failure of judgment when it is not actually irresponsible.

A third pressure point is the strained water supply situation in our mega cities. First Bengaluru and now Delhi have witnessed severe deficits this summer. These are India’s leading agglomerations and water shortage can cripple their economic potential, apart from endangering social harmony. ‘*Nal se jal*’ must seem a distant dream to many.

The public sector is crucial

I have selected only a small set from the many deficits in India today, but this would be sufficient to see the point being made. Expressways and a Digital Stack, which the BJP has championed, have their place for sure, but connecting cities and digitising India are not the most pressing of the country’s needs right now. The country needs infrastructure that supports both everyday life and economic activity. The first is easily understood, but the second perhaps not. Firms, including the self-employed, need producer services ranging from efficient transportation and steady electricity supply to sewerage and waste disposal facilities. When such services are unavailable, production cannot take place, and employment cannot expand.

The relatively high growth in India over the past quarter century has not delivered these services sufficiently, and they are unlikely to be supplied by the private sector within any time frame. Only the public sector can supply them at scale. Surely, this must be obvious to Mr. Modi as he travels the world to attend summits held in locations with impressive public infrastructure. His economic approach has banked too much on the private sector to take the lead in developing the country. But this has not materialised in a decade, and it is unlikely to change. The government, however, can undertake course correction now. Instead of promising, or even implementing, liberalising reforms, it should move swiftly to address the pressure points that are so obvious. It has set 2047 as the date to make the country a developed economy. However much it may grow by then, India will remain underdeveloped without the infrastructure to support life.

A progressive Indian policy on Myanmar outlined

Three years on, the military in Myanmar, which overthrew the elected civilian government in February 2021, continues to kill, maim and displace its own people. India has steadfastly maintained formal relations with this regime, which has so far murdered more than 5,000 people and displaced some 2.5 million people. In its second tenure, the Narendra Modi government did very little to engage with the pro-democracy resistance, which now has both political and military wings. Indian foreign policy scholars and practitioners have doggedly defended this policy by arguing that India needs to work with the junta if it has to protect its “interests” in Myanmar and not get swayed by an idealistic preoccupation with “values”.

How India can step out of China’s shadow

But, in foreign policy, there is no clear line between “values” and “interests” simply because neither has a standard definition. It all depends on how a country defines these terms. This is also the case with India’s Myanmar policy. New Delhi has long defined its “interests” in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms. But now, it needs to leverage a unique set of “values” to better defend its interests. It is possible for India to put in place a more progressive, values-driven Myanmar policy that works in favour, and not against, its national interests.

This new policy should have two key pivots, namely, democracy and human security. The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, therefore, needs to take four interlocking steps immediately.

First, India needs to use its credentials as the largest federal democracy in the region to sharpen its influence in Myanmar. For long, Myanmar’s pro-democracy political elites and civil society have looked up to India as a model of a federal democratic union with a well-oiled power-sharing arrangement between the centre and various subnational units. This is even more relevant today as the democratic resistance in Myanmar, which is led by the National Unity Government (NUG), dozens of ethnic revolutionary organisations, civil society organisations, and trade unions, strives to replace the military-drafted 2008 constitution with a



Angshuman Choudhury

New Delhi-based researcher and writer from Assam, and formerly an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research

New Delhi’s stance of defining its ‘interests’ in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms needs to change

federal constitution. By helping this vibrant opposition achieve its aim through capacity-building and knowledge exchange programmes, India can distinguish itself from China, its primary regional competitor in Myanmar. Both Beijing and New Delhi can sell military hardware to Myanmar, but only India can sell the spirit of federal cooperation. Here is a chance for the new Indian government to outmanoeuvre the Chinese in their own ‘backyard’.

Weapons sales and humanitarian outreach

Second, India needs to immediately halt all weapon sales to the Myanmar military. According to the advocacy group, Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Indian state-owned military hardware manufacturers have sold a range of non-lethal and semi-lethal equipment to the junta since the 2021 coup. In its most recent report, published on March 27, the group claimed that on January 2, the Indian Air Force transferred a package which had 52 items, including navigation and communication parts, to its Myanmar counterpart. Another recent investigation by Frontier Myanmar claims that India sold more than \$1.5 million worth of navy-grade diesel to junta-linked entities since the coup. New Delhi needs to immediately put a stop to these, as the Myanmar military continues to use all its three services – the army, air force, and navy – to attack non-combatant civilians using imprecise lethal tactics.

Third, India needs to immediately open cross-border humanitarian corridors to help civilians affected by the conflict along three border provinces – Sagaing Region, Chin State and northern Rakhine State. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) data, Sagaing Region has seen the largest quantum of internal displacement in all of Myanmar since the coup (as of March 25, 2024). Rakhine comes next, while Chin State sits tenth in the list. Continuing air strikes by the junta and clashes between armed groups in these areas have only pushed more civilians across the borders. New Delhi needs to first revoke its plans to fence the India-Myanmar border and reinstate the Free Movement Regime,

or the FMR, which the Union Home Ministry suspended in February 2024. Then, it should engage existing humanitarian aid networks along the India-Myanmar border to send emergency relief assistance including medicines, food and tarpaulin to the other side. Mizoram, where a multi-layered asylum and aid ecosystem is already operational, is a good starting point. India should also collaborate with local and international non-governmental organisations with experience in the field. Best practices from Thailand, which recently started cross-border aid deliveries into Myanmar, should also be adopted. New Delhi should use its clout to ensure that the aid is not distributed by the junta, which not only has a disastrous track record in this field, but is also not even in control of large areas along the India-Myanmar border. It is also possible to run cross-border aid corridors without allowing contraband to pass through, with stringent checks and pre-delivery vetting.

Detention of asylum seekers

Fourth, the Narendra Modi government should immediately halt the detention and deportation of asylum seekers from Myanmar. This is especially so in the case of Manipur, where the BJP-led government has so far deported 115 asylum seekers to Myanmar – the latest round was on June 11. These are people who entered India not because they wanted to or with mal-intent, but because they were forced to. Regardless of the fact that India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is incumbent upon the government to treat them as refugees in need of humanitarian assistance and protection rather than as “illegal immigrants”. Both the Indian Constitution and international law allow the Indian state to do so. In fact, the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement discourages India from deporting refugees back to a home country where they face a threat of persecution or death. The Centre should also urge the BJP-led Assam government to release the 27 Chin refugees detained in the State and house them in a humane refugee shelter.

India, the ‘*Vishwabandhu*’, routinely claims to stand with the people of Myanmar. It should now walk the talk.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kallakurichi and policy

It is heart-wrenching that several families in Kallakurichi district have lost their breadwinners. It is likely that the Tamil Nadu government will take action against bootleggers, at least in the short term. However,

the elephant in the room – flawed liquor taxation policies – is being ignored. Liquor is viewed as an easy source of revenue for governments, as consumers are from diverse social classes and are not organised, allowing the

governments to raise taxes without much backlash. Since total prohibition has been shown to be ineffective historically, there is a need for measures to ensure a safe product. Simultaneously, efforts to promote de-addiction and

more awareness of the impact of alcohol on health must be scaled up.

Michael Jom,
Thiruvananthapuram

Examination scandal

It is a real shame and pathetic that even decades

after Independence, a competitive examination cannot be conducted in a fair and scandal-free way in India. The plight of hapless aspirants cannot be imagined. Their being demoralised is only one aspect.

Even though there are loopholes in the legal system in India, there needs to be stringent legal action and severe punishment even if the political class is found to be involved.

K.V. Ramesh Nair,
Chennai

GROUND ZERO



Actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, after being arrested in connection with an alleged murder case. MURALI KUMAR K.

Catching a falling star

The killing of Renukaswamy, allegedly by Kannada film actor-producer Darshan and his associates, has made news even in places he and his films are not popular. **K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj** and **G.T. Sathish** chronicle the horrifying series of incidents that mirror society's realities: fan-culture, alleged social media violations, and violence so brutal that it caused death

A food delivery executive out with a Sunday-breakfast parcel on June 9, was headed to one of the apartments in Sattva Anugraha, an upmarket complex on the Outer Ring Road (ORR) in Bengaluru's western suburbs. On his way, he saw street dogs pull at what looked like the body of a man in a storm water drain. He alerted the security guards, who in turn called the police.

Based on the complaint of Kevalram Dorji, the security officer of the apartment complex, the police recovered the body riddled with injuries. It was stuck on a bushy slope off the road and had not fallen into the running water. There was no identification on him.

The CCTV footage from the apartment complex gave leads on two suspicious vehicles. As is routine, the police secured the body in a morgue and put out an advertisement with photographs in newspapers that evening, seeking information. It might have ended up as one of the many unidentified bodies in the metropolis, but the police were in for a surprise on the evening of June 10.

At about 7 p.m. that day, four men walked into the Kamakshipalya police station and confessed to the murder of the man they said was K.S. Renukaswamy, 33. A resident of Chitradurga, a district headquarters in central Karnataka, around 200 kilometres away from Bengaluru, Renukaswamy worked at a retail pharmacy chain. Raghavendra, 43, also from Chitradurga; Karthik, 27; Keshavamurthy, 27; and Nikhil Naik, 21, all from Bengaluru, claimed they had a financial dispute with the deceased, had abducted and brought him to the city, beaten him up, and he had died.

Police action

The police were sceptical: "The victim did not have a profile which could have led to his murder due to a financial dispute. Such surrenders usually happen only in underworld cases," said a senior police official, who has been leading the investigation.

Following sustained interrogation, the four told a different story. "What they revealed came as a shock to us," the official said. The men said Darshan Thoogudeepa, one of the most popular Kannada cinema actors, had got the victim abducted from Chitradurga, had him brought to a shed in Rajarajeshwari Nagar in Bengaluru, and had beaten him up by his associates, leading to his death.

They said the victim had sent obscene messages to Darshan's alleged partner Pavithra Gowda on social media. The actor had sent the four to surrender, paying them to keep his name out, police say. One of the four, Raghavendra, was the president of the Chitradurga District Darshan Fans' Club.

In the next few hours, the police arrested seven more people: Vinay V., 38, owner of Stonny Brook resto-bar in Bengaluru, where the actor had been partying on Saturday afternoon. Vinay's uncle owns the shed where the victim was



Last year, we got him married to Sahana. June 28 is his wedding anniversary, and we were planning an event to mark the occasion

KASHINATH S. SHIVANAGOWDRU
Renukaswamy's father

allegedly tortured and killed. Deepak, 39, is a partner in the company running the shed and a nephew of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) city MLA. Pavan K., 29, is an employee of Darshan, working as Pavithra Gowda's helper. Pradosh, 40, is a corporate executive and has been Darshan's friend for two decades. Nandeesh, 28; Lakshman, 54; and Nagaraju, 41, were allegedly present at the shed and had assaulted the victim.

The next morning, as Gowda was arrested in Bengaluru, city police arrested Darshan, who was at a hotel in Mysuru for a film shoot.

Darshan is one of the highest paid actors in the Kannada film industry, called Sandalwood informally. "He did at least two or three movies a year earlier, and was considered a 'dependable' hero. Producers invested money in him; exhibitors felt the need for such a hero so that theatres would be busy most of the year. Both the industry and the audience admired him for different reasons," said Shashidhar Chitradurga, author and film journalist.

Darshan's most recent action film *Kaatera* is the industry's biggest hit this year so far. At election time, politicians flocked to get the D-Boss, as he is popularly known, to campaign for them, especially in southern Karnataka.

Last day at home

At about 2.30 p.m. on June 8, Renukaswamy had called his mother Rathnaprabha, 62, over the phone to tell her that he would not come home for lunch, and would return late in the evening. That was their last conversation. His body was brought to Chitradurga three days later.

Renukaswamy had left home around 9 a.m. on Saturday and parked his two-wheeler near Balaji Bar, close to the circle where the roads connecting Chitradurga with Bengaluru and Chalkalere taluka meet. As per CCTV camera footage, he

got into an autorickshaw, and the vehicle took the Bengaluru route. After a couple of kilometres, the passengers in the autorickshaw and the driver shifted to a taxi.

They have now been identified as Raghavendra, the driver Ravi Shankar, and two of his associates Anu Kumar, 25, and Jagadeesh, 36, all from Chitradurga. Raghavendra had allegedly lured them into the plot, promising them a meeting with their idol, Darshan.

Back home, his mother; father, Kashinath S. Shivanagowdr, 75; and wife, Sahana K.S., 26, waited, as the evening turned to the next day, and there was no sign of him. "We called his friends and the pharmacy, but no one knew anything," says Shivanagowdr.

As they contemplated lodging a complaint with the police on Monday, Shivanagowdr, who retired as a senior assistant from the Bengaluru Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) 17 years ago, got information of his son's death from the police. "I felt the ground beneath me cave in," recalled the father, still shaken.

Renukaswamy, who was actively involved in the activities of a few Hindutva groups, according to people in the locality, had dropped out of college, where he was studying Commerce. He secured a job in the sales section of a pharmacy company and worked at its outlets in Chitradurga, after undergoing training. "Last year, we got him married to Sahana. June 28 is his wedding anniversary, and we were planning an event to mark the occasion," said Shivanagowdr.

Instead, on June 17, the family held a ritual in memory of Renukaswamy. "Sorry, the moment I start to speak about my son, I cannot hold back my tears," Shivanagowdr said. What haunts him most are the reports of torture. "The moment I remember him, I start to imagine how he must have suffered. I imagine him pleading with folded hands, wailing in pain. He must have cried for help; he must have begged them not to torture him." Then, "His wife is five months pregnant."

Where it all happened

The now infamous shed, about 300 metres away from the road, is situated on a four-acre plot owned by Pattanagere Jayanna, who has significant land holdings in the Pattanagere village, now subsumed within Rajarajeshwari Nagar, a suburb in west Bengaluru. Intact Autoparc India Pvt Ltd had rented the land parcel. About 400 seized vehicles, including some trucks and buses, allegedly of loan defaulters, are parked in the space. It has a two-storey building at one end and is covered by at least eight CCTV cameras.

Raghavendra was allegedly instructed to take Renukaswamy to the shed, where at least one movie of Darshan had been shot. Darshan was partying at Stonny Brooks.

Gowda, who runs a boutique, had on January 24, this year, posted pictures with Darshan on so-



Barring Darshan, who had a domestic abuse case [in 2011, when he was arrested]; three others have petty cases against them; none of the other accused has any criminal record

A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER

cial media with the caption, "One decade down; forever to go. #10year. It's been 10 years of our relationship. Thank you." A sprinkling of hearts and stars was added. Gowda became a target of trolls. The message upset many Darshan fans who sided with his wife, Vijayalakshmi, and wrote messages against Gowda.

Renukaswamy was one of them. Allegedly operating under multiple fake Instagram identities, he had persistently trolled Gowda publicly. Police say he used the account @goutham_ks_1990 to send her obscene messages and pictures. Police have now found that Renukaswamy was a habitual offender and had employed a similar modus operandi with many women. One of them had brought it to the notice of a police officer in March 2024, but no action was taken.

These messages enraged Gowda, who allegedly informed her help Pavan. Posing as Gowda, he had chatted with Renukaswamy, managing to extract his mobile number and details of his whereabouts. With this information, Darshan allegedly contacted Raghavendra, seeking his 'help'. Using the photo and number, Raghavendra tracked down Renukaswamy and brought him to the shed, allegedly on Darshan's instructions.

Darshan then allegedly landed up at the shed with Gowda and several of his associates, including Pavan, the pub owner Vinay, and his friend Pradosh. Investigations have now revealed that Darshan got Gowda to beat up Renukaswamy and made him apologise. Renukaswamy was later tortured for several hours. Police claim that Deepak, a partner in the company running the shed, who had been out on work, joined them midway.

Past and present offenders

The post-mortem report says that Renukaswamy's death was "due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of multiple blunt injuries sustained," say the police. The police's remand application gives graphic details of the torture. So far, 17 arrests have been made.

Police claim Pavan took charge of the cover-up, roping in three associates. Late in the night, the trio along with four others, took the body in two SUVs and threw it into the drain. "They assumed it would be washed away, but the body got stuck in the bushes," a police official said.

Darshan claims he only warned Renukaswamy, got Pavithra to slap him, and left, and that he had nothing to do with the murder. But police say he was present for much longer. The actor has now reportedly confessed to having paid Pradosh ₹30 lakh for the cover-up. Pradosh allegedly gave ₹5 lakh each to three who surrendered before the police, taking the blame for the murder. They had been promised more money for their families. Police have recovered the money.

Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B. Dayananda said they were confident of the case against the actor, as the arrest was based on strong evidence. "Barring Darshan, who had a domestic abuse case [in 2011, when he was arrested after his wife filed a case]; three others have petty cases against them; none of the other accused has any criminal record," another senior police officer leading the probe, said. He adds this was the reason they did not know how to cover their tracks.

Fact, fiction, and the film world

Following Darshan's arrest for murder, social media is abuzz with multiple clips from his films which eerily mirror the happenings in the case. The characters Darshan plays in the movies often portray a type of masculinity that punishes those who violate women, by taking the law into their hands. At 6.3 feet and a gym-built body, Darshan's appeal was at many levels.

"In the initial years, people appreciated his screen presence and stunts, in addition to his looks. It was the time when gym culture picked up in Karnataka. Young boys who were keen on their physical appearance followed the actor," said Shashidhar.

Despite being the son of on-screen villain and character-actor Thoogudeepa Srinivas, well-known in the 1970s and 1980s, Darshan started at the bottom of the film industry pyramid, working as a light boy, when he lost his father at 18. His first break as a lead actor came with the 2002 superhit *Majestic*, in which he played an orphaned youth led astray into Bengaluru's underworld.

With his arrest after the domestic violence case, for which he got bail, his relationship with the media soured, but most of his films continued to rake in money. Days after the domestic violence case, his film *Sarathi*, in which he played an auto driver fighting to take revenge over his father's murder, became a blockbuster.

Today, fans stand outside the police station where he is being held, and the police, have had to impose prohibitory orders around the station. Social media is awash with fan support.

In recent years, Darshan had made an effort to break away from the mould he found himself in, essaying roles of freedom fighter Sangolli Rayana and the Mahabharata's tragic-hero Duryodhana in recent films. These brought him closer to family audiences. His recent films *Yajamana*, *Kranti*, and *Kaatera*, made good business and were hailed for their social messages.

Away from the blinding camera lights, Chandrappa, 60, accused person Anu Kumar's father, collapsed and died on hearing the news of his son's arrest. Chandrappa was a construction labourer; his wife Jayamma works as a domestic help. In their one-room tenement in Chitradurga, Jayamma says, "My son Anu's friend Jagadish is Darshan's fan. He forced Anu to join him for the trip," she says, weeping.



Police seal the shed where Renukaswamy, a fan of actor Darshan, was allegedly tortured and murdered. MURALI KUMAR K.

the hindu businessline.

SATURDAY - JUNE 22, 2024

The good(s) tax

Prioritise reforms in GST rates, procedures

Nearly seven years after its inception, there can be no denying the success of GST as a tax reform measure. Businesses have benefited from a more streamlined system after State imposts were dispensed with. Transparent e-filing processes appear to have stemmed leakages, boosting tax revenues. The gross GST mop-up in FY24 crossed the ₹20-lakh crore mark (₹20.18-lakh crore), up 11.5 per cent over the previous year. It is remarkable that GST collections have increased 71 per cent since FY19, notwithstanding the pandemic shock.



Yet, when the GST Council meets today for the 53rd time, the first under the new government, it needs to impart a push to crucial reforms – rationalising tax rates; bringing alcohol and fuel into GST's ambit; and doing away with a punitive approach to mopping up taxes. Besides rate rationalisation, a review of taxes on specific sectors is likely to figure as an agenda item. The latter includes a 28 per cent levy on online gaming; addressing inverted duty structure in sectors such as textiles, footwear, medicines and fertilizer, which stymies input tax credit claims; and surprisingly high rates of duty on items of common use such as cement and two-wheelers. The Council has, in the past, corrected genuine anomalies. However, it remains to be seen whether it makes major progress in crucial but contentious areas such as rate rationalisation and inclusion of new items, given electoral considerations and the realities of coalition politics.

The need to rationalise rates to promote ease of doing business is one of the main goals of GST. But it is apprehended as being inflationary. The move would mean a rate of 8 per cent instead of 5 per cent and 12 per cent, and 15 per cent instead of 12 per cent and 18 per cent. The 28 per cent rate can perhaps be reduced to 18 per cent. Much would depend on how the fitment committee (comprising central and State tax officials who have been meeting often of late) approaches the issue. The consensus-building skills of BJP's State ministers can play a crucial role in achieving a breakthrough. They are part of the multi-party 'group of ministers' looking into rate rationalisation, led by Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Khanna. GST marks the success of consensus building in a diverse polity; that spirit should be sustained.

It is easier to move quickly on procedural matters. GST tribunals must be set up soon to resolve disputes. Multiple reasons for delay in disbursing input tax credit should be addressed, including the cost borne by a buyer due to tax filing irregularities by a seller. These delays or denials could lead to costs being passed down the chain. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has recently issued orders to restrain overzealous tax officials, but harassment remains a concern – more so with MSMEs. Powers of arrest under Section 132 of the GST Act have been a subject of controversy. Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that GST is meant to smoothen matters for business.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Political branding: Pluses and minuses

Political branding is now a reality in Indian politics. But politicians must work hard to maintain the image they create

CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICHAMISHRA

Political branding has become a part of Indian elections and more than the symbol of political parties it is the individuals who have now become the face of the party.

For the BJP it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), once identified as NT Rama Rao's party, has N Chandrababu Naidu as its face, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has Naveen Patnaik as its face, YSR Congress Party has YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, and Rahul Gandhi is the face of the Indian National Congress (INC).

The latest elections in Andhra Pradesh are a good example of how political branding followed by individual branding works.

How does the branding of politicians happen? Does it influence the voter? Does it make a political party more individual centric?

Political branding is different from political advertising. Here the stakes run high on one individual if not the party. As experts say, the brand is an organisation's most important asset as it gives it an identity and helps create a niche.

According to Harish Bijoor of Harish Bijoor Consults Inc, a private-label consulting firm that specialises in brand

and business strategy, "The brand of a politician actually emerges slowly but surely. In the beginning there is a hunger to establish a share of view, a share of mind and of course a share of heart with the electorate."

POLITICAL PITFALLS

"A politician typically follows in the footsteps of those who have been there before and emulates typically what has been good practices of politician branding. In the bargain many of them make mistakes because one of the key issues in branding yourself is the fact that you must not look like the other, and most politicians end up looking like one another," he pointed out.

A politician's branding occurs in the minds of people and hinges crucially on the politician's actions, inactions, and acts of commissions and omissions.

"Many try and harvest family names, family work, etc. But the best thing to do would be to depend on your own work and establish for yourself a very solid high ground. In branding, occupying a

The key to political branding is differentiation. Politicians must strive hard to create a distinct political identity for themselves and make sure they don't "resemble" each other.

key high ground is very very important," he said. Look at two politicians from two ends of the political spectrum — Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi. Says Bijoor, "I think Rahul Gandhi realised over a period of time that it is not enough to look like the other, but it is very important to distinguish and look disparate from Modi. And therefore, if you look at the recent high ground occupied by Rahul Gandhi you will see that if Modi talks of religion Rahul Gandhi talks of caste and caste consolidations. If Modi talks about wealth creation, Rahul Gandhi talks about wealth redistribution. And therefore, I think the story has been learnt and there is a new brand Rahul which you and I see today."

According to Robbin Sharma, Director ShowTime Consulting, and mastermind behind brand CBN for these elections, "Branding of politicians is connected to the party he/she represents. It is simple. Face of the party represents the positioning of the party. For example, in Andhra Pradesh Jagan Mohan Reddy and Chandrababu Naidu were representing their parties."

How does it create a recall value in the voters mind? "The brand by my definition is a thought that lives in a person's mind. The politician brand is a key thought of a persona which lives in a voter's mind and establishing that key thought is the task of the politician brand. When it comes to voting day, it is this brand equity that helps swing a vote in favour or against the candidate in mention," Bijoor said.

"In the realm of politics there are two brands really — there is a party brand and then there is a leader brand. Both matter, but in most cases, it is the charisma and the persona of the individual that override the party brand. If you look at BJP, the BJP story is PM Modi, and it has done exceedingly well for the party. And Modi has ruled the roost and hearts of the voters," he pointed out.

Sharma says it is very important to create a differentiator for individuals or parties. For example, TDP was created by NTR then Naidu came in. YSRCP was close to Congress in its positioning.

"We had to work on a differentiator. So, we ensured that Naidu talks about development. A party's positioning and ideology had to be in sync. For example, if Congress starts talking about hardcore Hindutva then how will it be different from BJP? When branding a leader we keep in the crowd which is the target as well as the colour," he said.

"For TDP we chose yellow and red representing hope and energy. Naidu was being projected as coming with new energy at 74 and Nara Lokesh getting ready to take over the mantle from Naidu subsequently," he added.

So when marketing Naidu, the brand colours used were 30 per cent red, 60 per cent yellow and close to 10 per cent green (farmers), while for Lokesh 70 per cent red and 30 per cent yellow, he said.

Branding does have an impact on voters. Going ahead, political branding is going to gain momentum but for politicians and parties maintaining that image will be a challenge.

Economic agenda for the new government

Direct sops for farmers, tweaks to PLI scheme and I-T relief for some income categories can be considered

Radhika Rao

As the surprise outcome of the election wears off, the coalition government's agenda comes under focus. The first '100 days' report card, which rose to prominence during the action-packed tenure of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, will be the first milestone for the NDA administration.

A big shift in the government's priorities post the poll results is unlikely, even as we expect more emphasis on an inclusive growth agenda and deeper support for the agrarian sector.

Continuity: The core Cabinet team was kept unchanged, which signalled the status quo on the broader policy direction by introducing certainty and consistency on the decision-making front.

This was followed by plans to transfer the 17th installment of the PM-Kisan fund, likely pending due to the model code of conduct, which will amount to ₹200 billion (0.1 per cent of GDP) to 93 million farmers. Subsequently, the Cabinet also approved government assistance for the construction of 30

million houses under the PMAY programme, with two-thirds to be built under the rural component.

Consistency: The gross fixed capital formation ratio to GDP has risen to north of 31 per cent in FY24 but is still below the FY12 peak.

A large part of the increase in capital expenditure by direct government and non-corporate private (households) has been concentrated in construction (of infrastructure projects) and real estate, reflected in 'dwellings and structures' under the GDP series, with higher private corporate participation expected to provide a boost to 'machinery and equipment'.

Further tweaks to the PLI scheme and other incentives to better target the intended sectors, expand to a few ancillary segments, and ease disbursements are also likely to be under consideration. Subsidy allocations are likely to stay at similar levels as the interim budget. The revenue windfall from strong tax collections and RBI surplus transfer provides ample fiscal flexibility to not only target a small improvement in the FY25 deficit target but also accommodate additional stimulus measures.



BUDGET TIME. Policy matters ISTOCKPHOTO

Cost of living: Post-poll surveys signalled the need to address food inflation, job creation, and farm sector stress. After a record heatwave, the south-west monsoon has started with a 20 per cent deficit, posing a headwind for the agrarian sector, after farm output GVA growth averaged a weak 0.7 per cent yoy in FY24.

Direct support for farmers via inputs, including fertilisers, and a 5-10 per cent increase in MSPs for kharif crops, including rice and pulses, might be considered.

Concurrently, to contain spillover

impact on food prices, reports suggested that the government plans to add 16 new commodities to its price monitoring list, increasing the total to 38.

Income tax cuts for certain categories (for instance, on incomes over ₹15 lakh) might also be on the cards to boost disposable incomes.

Rating agency S&P recently upgraded the economy's sovereign rating outlook, opening the door to a potential upgrade within the next two years.

With the large combined fiscal deficit and debt levels being highlighted as the drags on the sovereign, we expect fiscal consolidation to be demonstrated by lowering deficits to below 4.5 per cent of GDP next year.

This is likely to be accompanied by a gradual moderation in the path of the debt levels towards 80-81 per cent of GDP over the next five years. These incremental steps are focused on achieving bigger goals, such as meeting the government's centennial goal of 'Viksit Bharat' plans by 2047 to rise from an emerging economy to developed status.

The writer is Executive Director and Senior Economist, DBS Bank.

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

Eco-friendly fashion

Apropos 'Ethical fashion is chic' (June 21), indeed fashion industry in consonance with environment protection must ensure good working conditions to their workers especially in providing protection to workers who handle dye and other chemicals. Also they must take steps to recycling practices, low emissions and reducing cotton waste. Reducing the green house gas emissions is also vital for the environment.

NR Nagarajan
Sivakasi

Rly safety concerns

The article 'Railways safety going off-track?' (June 21), depicts the painful and appalling state of affairs in the Railways. The writer rightly doubts whether gaps in information, lack of real time alert generation leveraging available data and proactive response all added to endanger safety. The slow progress of Kavach installation is also a matter of concern, especially at a time the Railways has been getting huge investments. The author's advocacy not to take shelter behind statistics of lowering of accidents and aim for 'zero-fatality' should be a creed to

all up the hierarchy: time for IR to wake up.

Jose Abraham
Vaikom (Kerala)

Apropos, 'Railway safety going off-track?', as more than 22 million passengers on an average travel in 13,000-plus passenger trains daily, we can't afford to be lax on safety. The recent disaster involving the Sealdah Kanchanjungha Express and a goods train in West Bengal shouldn't have happened. However, the much flaunted anti-collision system, Kavach, is currently operational on only 1,400-odd km of rail track, with plans to extend coverage by another 3,000

km by end-2024. Indian Railways has cited costs and practical challenges for the tardy progress but that hardly cuts any ice. There can be no compromise on passenger safety.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

RBI's valid worries

Apropos 'RBI's timely action helped moderate unsecured credit growth, says Das' (June 21). Banks need to deploy their money on high-yielding assets. Accordingly, retail lending, credit card businesses and lending to NBFCs are the areas where banks earn higher interest compared to other advances. At the same time there is higher

amount of risk involved on these unsecured consumer loans and loans to NBFCs forcing banks to make higher provisions on these loans. The banks therefore are forced to reduce their exposure to unsecured lendings resulting in declining outstanding balances under these heads as on April '24. The RBI policy is therefore certainly correct in this direction as uncontrolled lendings to unsecured loans also create recovery problems involving huge provisions to cover the potential risks associated with them. Viable and proper monitoring of lending is the need of the hour.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao
Hyderabad



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

When House gets down to business

Treasury benches and the Opposition must accommodate their respective concerns for the 18th Lok Sabha to have a productive term

The 18th Lok Sabha will assemble for the first time on Monday, when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government will take its place in the treasury benches for the third consecutive time, signifying a landmark not achieved since the Republic's infant years. Across the aisle will be an energised Opposition swollen in ranks and buoyed by its better-than-expected performance in the general elections. One by one, representatives of the world's largest democracy will be sworn in, followed by the election of the custodian of the Lower House, the Speaker, and the speech by the President laying down the government's agenda.

This session marks the first time that Parliament is meeting after the world's largest elections not only cemented India's place as the biggest democracy but also affirmed the vibrancy of its grassroots processes. The representatives who enter the home of Indian democracy will have to remember their solemn duty to not only represent their constituents to the best of their abilities but also contribute in good faith to maintaining the highest standards of lawmaking.

The last few sessions of Parliament were witness to unseemly stand-offs between the government and the Opposition and the widening of the trust deficit between both sides. The government felt its democratic mandate was being disrespected while the Opposition was upset by what it saw as the government using its numerical superiority to ram bills through, short-circuiting the parliamentary process. The new session and parliamentary officials will have to find a way to break this impasse, and open channels of communication that allow the House to function to its fullest ability.

Moreover, over the years, fewer bills were being referred to committees, fuelling the perception that the primary function of Parliament — scrutinising bills — was suffering. This impression was further strengthened with pandemonium often replacing sober debate and discussion in the House. The lawmakers and officials will need to carve out time for both sides to raise issues, and for sufficient scope to scrutinise key legislation.

The first session will mark an epoch. After two consecutive terms of single-party majority, the Indian public has voted for continuity but also judiciousness, certainty, and collaboration. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is well short of a majority on its own for the first time in a decade, though it has a majority as part of the NDA, and the Opposition is strengthened by its revival. This can easily slip into confrontations and face-offs, but all lawmakers must prioritise careful deliberation. At the heart of the issue is the willingness and sincerity that needs to be shown by all parliamentarians to lawmaking. They have to prioritise discussion over acrimony, debate over disruption. This will need accommodation and sagacity from both sides, as well as a commitment to showcase the best of India's hallowed tradition of parliamentary procedures, speeches and rebuttals.

The upcoming session will likely see the balance of power between the government and the Opposition being recalibrated in the 18th Lok Sabha. In the balance will hang key issues that affect millions of people, such as irregularities in premier examinations, the climate crisis that has upended lives across the country, and a better deal for India's vast poor. The government, Opposition and parliamentary officials will need to remain flexible, and create a compact on allowing Parliament to function. Nothing less will befit the nerve centre of the largest democracy in the world.

{ THIRD EYE }

Barkha Dutt



NEET fiasco is a test of the govt's outreach skills

A dispensation known for smart political communication has allowed the ground to slide

The government's first big misstep, in its third term, has been its response to the student agitation over the NEET medical entrance exam. Less than a week ago, Dharmendra Pradhan, the Union education minister, called the protests "motivated" and rubbished the charge of a leak. When arrested students in Bihar confirmed otherwise, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) tried to turn the tables by claiming a link between the accused and an aide of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav. The RJD retaliated by targeting the BJP over its purported links to an examination centre in Haryana from where, suspiciously, six of the perfect scorers sat for the paper.

That India's examination system is broken — reports suggest at least 40 paper leaks in five years — is obvious. That this cannot happen without a nexus between politics, the bureaucracy, and an underground mafia is obvious. What's less obvious is why the government believed it could be so contemptuous of an issue that impacts 2.4 million students, some of them who are sitting for the exam for the fourth or fifth time. If you add the 900,000 young Indians impacted by the cancellation of the UGC-NET examination, we are talking about nearly 3.3 million Indians.

Can any government afford to be this cavalier about young voters? Especially in a country where more than 65% of Indians are below the age of 35. The answer to the BJP should be obvious from the fact that among the agitators out on the streets are its party affiliates and supporters. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad is among student union groups demanding a Central Bureau of Investigation

inquiry into "the entire mechanism" of the National Testing Agency, which is entrusted with the tests.

At his latest press conference, Pradhan took "moral responsibility" for the fiasco. So, why did he not strike a more conciliatory, less abrasive note to begin with? And why would the Prime Minister (PM) not address the issue? A statement from PM Modi, a sideways reference in a public speech, or even a comment on social media, would have gone a long way in containing the upsurge of anger and anguish. Instead, Modi kept his focus on the International Yoga Day, seeming oddly out of sync with the zeitgeist of the moment. Effective political communication — an effective personal narrative, powerful oratory, smart use of social media and a constant awareness of the power of the image — has been a key chapter in the Modi playbook in his first two terms as PM. I once described Modi as India's "influencer-in-chief" to make a point about his acute understanding of an increasingly digitised voter base.

But right from the campaign of the 2024 elections, through the first weeks in government, this prowess appears to have not been deployed. Modi's Hindu-Muslim speeches at the stumps did not go down well with his own

MODI'S HINDU-MUSLIM SPEECHES AT THE STUMPS DID NOT GO DOWN WELL WITH HIS OWN VOTERS. THERE IS ENOUGH POST-POLL DATA AVAILABLE TO SHOW THE LIMITATIONS OF HINDUTVA RHETORIC ON THE GROUND IN THE HINDI-SPEAKING STATES

Road ahead for PM Modi, India in a China +1 world

Though his party didn't win the landslide victory he hoped for, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has secured a rare third five-year term as India's PM. It wasn't an easy win. High inflation and unemployment helped a more unified Opposition portray Modi as too cosy with big business to cut into the victory margin of his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led alliance. The wealth inequality this has exacerbated forced Modi to lean more heavily on the appeal of an often-ugly Hindu nationalism pitch, a burden he has allowed subordinates to carry in the past. In addition, India's media environment has become more polarised as many more people get their news online than when Modi was first elected a decade ago.

But Modi himself remains far more popular than his party. He has built a reputation for personal integrity, and after a decade in office, his name recognition is uncontestable. That matters in a country where dozens of different languages are spoken by millions of people. Once the votes were counted in the world's largest and longest-running election, Modi emerged again as man of the moment.

India needs a popular leader, because the long-term challenges it faces are formidable. Within 10 years, India will face serious water shortages, and there is no obvious fix. He must work with weak local governments, many of

which depend for political support on farming interests that rely too heavily on water-intensive agriculture in areas where water is already in short supply.

Then there is the climate crisis. India has already set temperature records this summer, and hundreds of millions of Indians have no way to escape the heat and humidity. Add some of the world's worst air quality, a problem that will become much worse given the country's expected robust economic growth, and the enormous power requirements needed to sustain it, including with the use of huge amounts of coal generation. The result will be an expansion of human suffering in a nation with more than its share of environmental damage.

There is also a major structural problem with India's economy: Not many women contribute to it. Fewer than one third of employable women are now in the workforce. There are very few female CEOs or corporate board members, and a tiny fraction of the country's venture capital funding goes to startups founded or led by women. The World Economic Forum's most recent gender gap report ranked India 127 out of 146 countries, behind Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. To solve this problem, Modi and other local officials must contend with a high rural population, crippling poverty, and conservative social values.



Ian Bremmer

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare



Male feminist allies: Why every woman needs one

When I decided to quit my full-time job with this newspaper and go freelance so that I could spend more time with my then school-going daughters, my father-in-law was appalled. But he didn't want to directly question my decision and, so, told a friend that he would make sure my children were well looked after at home.

I knew that but quit anyway. When I wrote a 12-part series on women's declining workforce participation that went on to win a national award, Baba, which is what we

called Murlidhar Bhandare, couldn't have been prouder — though he continued to believe that I could, and should, have dodged the "motherhood penalty", one of the barriers to workforce participation that I had written about.

Baba was my feminist ally, the sort of man every woman should have in her corner. Someone who believes in her thinks twice before questioning her decisions, and remains her most enthusiastic cheerleader.

After the death of his wife, a Delhi high court judge, he had started the Justice Sun-

anda Bhandare Foundation with the goal of "gender equality". In truth, it was as much his goal as it was hers. "The freedom to choose, the right to excel" was the motto he chose. Ever the optimist, he believed that given the opportunity, there was no reason why women could not flourish. The challenge lay in creating the right environment.

Sunanda Bhandare had married young. To say that her husband was responsible for her success would be to undermine her grit and brilliance. But he was the catalyst that ensured she not only completed her law degree but went on to a successful law practice while raising two children with him.

We don't talk enough about the value of male allies. The wrestler from Haryana who trains his daughters and nieces in defiance of social norm. The airport loader who sells his land to finance his daughter's education. The shop owner who is assisted by his daughter when she returns from college.

This is not an avuncular benevolence but an ingrained belief that everyone around

you regardless of gender, sexuality or circumstance is deserving of dignity and freedom. That society cannot advance without taking everyone along. And that everyone gains when women and girls gain.

At 95, Baba might not have been up to date on issues like gender identity. He could be anachronistic about his choice of words — preferring lady to woman, for instance — and was unquestionably paterfamilias. But his feminism shone through his actions and the way he lived his life.

Where families are so often the gatekeepers of gender roles and morality, particularly of daughters, he had thrown away the key. He was happy to be challenged and proud to follow the budding careers of his granddaughters.

Every time my column was published, he would call with feedback — not always positive — but always willing to listen. What a loss for me then that I will not be receiving his call after this one.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal



Can any government afford to be this cavalier about young voters? Especially in a country where more than 65% of Indians are below the age of 35
SANCHIT KHANNA/HT PHOTO

voters. There is enough post-election data available to show the limitations of Hindutva rhetoric on the ground in the Hindi-speaking states. And oddly, the BJP, otherwise an agile and adaptable election machine, did not tweak or replace the Hindutva messaging with more imaginative narratives, even when it had time to do so.

Modi was the first to understand that politics is, above all, about powerful storytelling. And, as we in the media know only too well, storytellers constantly need to adapt to shrinking attention spans, new formats, new messages and also, the competition. Modi's personal story as the self-made son of a tea vendor who rose to be chief minister and PM on his own merit was powerful. It worked as a put down of entitlement, old elites and pedigree in politics. But nothing in politics remains constant. The Congress, at first defensive about the dynasty charge, is today all set to have three members of the Gandhi family in Parliament. The party is confident that the two Bharat Jodo Yatras, to borrow a phrase from Yogenendra Yadav, ensured that people now feel Rahul Gandhi has earned his inheritance.

Modi, meanwhile, has not added new per-

sonal stories to the original one. His challenge is not unique to him, it is the challenge of many incumbents. But there is some evidence to show that where the PM has opted not to communicate at all, or where others in his party have smeared people's movements (good or bad, fair or unfair notwithstanding), there have been political costs to pay. The Congress won both seats in strife-torn Manipur. In Haryana, CSDS post-poll data shows that amongst farmers, 61% voted for the INDIA bloc. And in states with strong martial traditions, the contentious Agniveer recruitment scheme made its electoral impact felt.

While the economy, livelihood and jobs and managing allies will be the inevitable priority of Modi's third term as PM, he will also need more weapons in his communication arsenal. If 2014 was a vote for change and 2019 about national security, the message of 2024 has some layers of ambivalence. Listening, with empathy, to the "mann ki baat" of ordinary Indians may be a good way to refresh the communication strategy of NDA 3.0.

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

own right.

India's domestic infrastructure investment continues to lag behind China, but the gap is narrowing. In Mumbai, major new highways, bridges and tunnels are easing some of the world's worst urban traffic. There are fewer interruptions of electricity, data and the internet. India is not China, but its day-to-day business operations are no longer regularly disrupted. India has also made gains in higher-end manufacturing, with the export of more motorcycles, cars, and other goods that meet an international quality standard once unknown in India.

India's biggest foreign-policy challenges are on its borders — in China, Pakistan, and Myanmar. All three create security problems for Delhi. But outside India's neighbourhood, Modi looks abroad and sees important opportunities. That's true not only in relations with the United States — India is one of the few countries that can expect increasingly close ties with Washington no matter who wins the November US election — but especially in the Global South, where Modi has earned a leadership role. As we saw last year when India hosted the G20 Summit, Modi wants India to become a vitally important bridge between the developed and developing worlds. Since the Cold War's end, no country's rise has been welcomed by so many other governments.

In short, India still faces enormous long-term challenges. But Modi's personal appeal at home and the inroads he has helped open for India abroad make this country's development one of the most important stories of the next decade.

Ian Bremmer is the founder and board president of Eurasia Group Foundation. The views expressed are personal

{ EDITOR'S PICK }

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

DECODING THE HEATWAVE PHENOMENA

Delhi registered its highest minimum temperature on Wednesday, at 35.2 degrees Celsius, the highest in 60 years. The national Capital is not the only region affected by extreme heat, with prolonged heatwaves claiming 143 lives to date across the country. In the face of extreme weather events, understanding the dynamics of the climate crisis is vital.

This week, we recommend *The Weather of the Future* by Heidi Cullen, which offers a sobering look at the future of our planet as the climate crisis worsens. Cullen examines the increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves, hurricanes, droughts, and floods, with real-world examples and projections. She provides case studies from various parts of the world, such as the Sahel region in Africa, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, to highlight how different areas are uniquely affected. *The Weather of the Future* underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to safeguard our planet's future.



The Weather of the Future: Heidi Cullen Year: 2010



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

In the name of merit

Patna High Court striking down expansion of quota is in line with SC rulings. But 50 per cent cap seems selective



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

QUOTAS AND EQUITY

Patna High Court's order striking down 65 per cent reservation should lead to debates on creative approaches to end inequality

THE BIHAR GOVERNMENT is weighing its options after the Patna High Court struck down its decision to raise the quota cap from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. The Nitish Kumar government's move to increase the reservation ceiling in employment and entrance to educational institutions was based on the Bihar Survey Caste Report, which showed that OBC, EBC, SC and ST communities together comprised about 85 per cent of the state's population. But in response to petitions against the hike, the HC's two-judge bench has said that the "state proceeded on the mere population of different categories as against their numerical representation in government services and educational institutions". The verdict aligns with the judiciary's more or less consistent approach towards the 50 per cent ceiling. However, in 2022, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld the EWS quota on the ground that the cap applied only to SC, ST and OBC communities. The apex court is also reviewing a challenge to the quota ceiling. At the same time, political parties, especially Congress, have demanded raising the reservation limit. The Bihar government has said that it will press for including the enhanced quota cap in the Ninth Schedule to obviate legal challenges. Removing entrenched inequalities will require multiple measures and the issue should be thoroughly debated. The political class will do well to be more creative, and not harp on a one-track approach of extending reservations.

In the past two decades, Bihar has shown appreciable improvement in both economic and socio-economic indicators. The state's economy has grown faster than the national average and the Nitish Kumar government's measures have resulted in the state closing the gap on welfare indicators — life expectancy, infant mortality, the sex ratio at birth, drinking water and sanitation, access to electricity. However, Bihar remains amongst the poorest in terms of per capita income. The average person in the state earns about a third of the national average. Data from the 2021 NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that 51 per cent of Bihar's population is poor, the highest among all the states. The state also has the country's highest fertility rate. It is among the states with a high outmigration rate for low-paying jobs.

About 50 per cent of Bihar's workforce is involved in agriculture, which contributes less than 25 per cent of the state's GDP. The big challenge for the state — like in several other parts of the country — is to reduce the dependency on farms by drawing investments in more productive sectors. It must also increase the educational pie, address skill deficits and bring Bihar's fertility rate close to the national average. In doing so, the Nitish Kumar government should give special attention to marginalised and deprived communities. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the Patna High Court's verdict should occasion discussions on more expansive approaches to end historical inequalities.

THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION promises social justice and permits the state to make special provisions in favour of the underprivileged. Governments of all political parties, including the BJP, have tried to expand reservation — more out of electoral compulsion than due to constitutional principles. However, a closer look at the judicial response to these reservation policies demonstrates that our judiciary, through the "strict scrutiny" doctrine, has been quick to nullify such policies with respect to Jats, Gujjars, Marathas, Patidars and Muslims. The judiciary has seemed more concerned with "merit" and "efficiency in administration".

An 87-page judgment by Chief Justice K Vinod Chandran and Justice Harish Kumar of the Patna High Court struck down 65 per cent reservation in Bihar. This expansion was based on the much-discussed Caste Survey of 2023. The verdict is consistent with the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court. It is a setback for the Congress party, which has promised a Caste Survey in all states, removal of the 50 per cent upper limit of reservations and giving a proportionate share to the Other Backward Classes. The High Court did opine that the only consideration that the Nitish Kumar government weighed in with was that the Backward Classes constitute a major part of the state's population and their representation is not proportionate in the unreserved category.

The judgment has categorically rejected the "proportionate representation" of Backward Classes and held that the term "proportionate" is alien to Articles 15 and 16. The expression "proportionate representation" has been used in Articles 330(2), 243D and 243T with respect to the representation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Lok Sabha, panchayats and municipalities, respectively.

Article 16 uses the term "adequacy of representation". The High Court rightly relied on *Indra Sawhney* (1992) in which the SC had observed that "adequate representation cannot be read as proportionate representation". But then adequacy is indeed related to the poor proportion of representation of any backward class and the impugned reservation was not really proportionate as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward castes constitute 84.46 per cent of Bihar's population. And the SC has acknowl-

edged in *Indra Sawhney* itself that "proportion of population of backward classes to the total population would certainly be relevant". Is it not a fact that prior to extending EWS reservation on the eve of the 2019 general elections, no survey was done to examine the inadequacy of representation of the EWS category? True, the policy was brought in through a constitutional amendment, which restricted its judicial scrutiny only on the basis of "basic structure". However, *Janhit Abhiyan* (2022) is a unique pronouncement in which the consistent judicial approach of strict scrutiny was diluted.

The other major ground for striking down the Bihar reservation amendment is the breach of the 50 per cent upper ceiling for reservation. In *MR Balaji* (1962), the SC came up with the judicial innovation of the 50 per cent limit, holding it per se violative of the right to equality. It has been consistently followed in a catena of judgments such as *Devasdasan* (1964), *N M Thomas* (1976) and *Indra Sawhney* (1992). But even *Indra Sawhney* said that this limit need not be religiously adhered to in far-flung or remote areas or in areas that remain out of the mainstream of national life.

The High Court refused to accept that Bihar is not in the national mainstream. Bihar has indeed been at the epicentre of national politics. But the government did not inform the court that Bihar has the lowest per capita income (less than \$800) in the country — 30 per cent of what the average Indian earns — and the highest fertility rate. Only 12 per cent of its population lives in urban areas compared to the 35 per cent national average. The state's college density is the lowest in the country and every third person lives below the poverty line. These are compelling reasons. In fact, one was surprised by the apex court's judgment in the EWS case (2023), applying the sacrosanct 50 per cent upper ceiling for reservation only for SCs, STs and OBCs, and not the EWS category.

The High Court has rightly observed that the recommendation of the National Backward Classes Commission or the State Backward Classes Commission was not necessary but its insistence on the so-called "analysis" of the Caste Survey and consultation with the experts would in the future put additional restraints on the government's affirmative ac-

tion policies. *Indra Sawhney* (1992) did refer to consultation with experts led by sociologist M N Srinivas (who, along with two other experts, Yogender Singh and B K Burman, disowned the report). But since Mandal's 11 yardsticks of backwardness had been approved by the SC, there was no need for experts' inputs after the massive exercise of surveying a population of 11 crore. The government was well within its rights to act on the report and then the assembly unanimously passed the amendment enhancing reservation. Even the BJP, which had opposed the Caste Survey, supported the reservation amendment.

The 50 per cent rule is justified in the name of efficiency and merit. The Patna High Court too observed that "merit... cannot be sacrificed completely". No scientific or empirical research has proved that SC/ST/OBC employees, in the performance of their duties, are less efficient than employees recruited under the general category. Justice Chinnappa Reddy in *Vasanth Kumar* (1985) demolished the efficiency argument when he stated that "efficiency is very much on the lip service of the privileged whenever reservation is mentioned. Efficiency, it seems, will be impaired if reservation exceeds 50 per cent; efficiency, it seems, will suffer if the carry forward rule is adopted; efficiency, it seems, will be injured, if the rule of reservation is extended to promotional posts." He went on to say that "the underlying assumption that those belonging of upper castes and classes who are appointed to non-reserved posts because of their 'presumed merit' naturally perform better than those who have been appointed to reserved posts and the clear stream of efficiency would be polluted by the infiltration of latter into the sacred precincts is a vicious assumption, typical of superior approach of elitists classes."

Justice Chandrachud in *B K Pavitra II* (2019) observed that we need to redefine our notions of merit in terms of a more inclusive and plural society. Merit cannot lead to exclusion. He rightly held that the transformative vision of the Constitution cannot be buried by the myths around "merit". Merit must be measured in terms of social good.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal

CLEAN AIR FOR THE YOUNG

India has the most number of children dying due to emissions. Their well-being must be at the core of pollution policies

IN YET ANOTHER reminder of the severity of the problem, the State of Global Air (SoGA) Report 2024, released this week, shows that air pollution has become the second leading global risk factor for death. More alarming is the finding, which drew on data from 2021, that air pollution is the second leading risk factor for death among children below the age of five, with 709,000 out of 8.1 million of those who died that year belonging to this demographic. For India, where 2.1 million died due to air pollution, according to the SoGA report, the statistics are sobering: With 1,69,400 of those dying being children under five, the country recorded the highest total number of deaths in this category.

For over two decades now India's air pollution has led to much hand-wringing, especially during the winter months when a thick layer of smog blankets a vast swathe of the country. Action, however, has mostly taken the form of piecemeal panic-induced measures, like spraying water to minimise dust on the roads and imposing the odd-even scheme for vehicles. Even with the adoption of clean air plans by most cities, the failure at the policy level to link pollution with public health has meant that the long-term damage it can cause has not received adequate attention. The heaviest price for this oversight is paid by the most vulnerable, especially, as is clear now, by children. They inhale more air per kilogram of body weight and absorb more pollutants compared to adults. With their lungs, brains and other organs still developing and their body's defence mechanisms still relatively weak, exposure to pollution sets them up for ailments like asthma, upper respiratory tract infection, childhood leukaemia and high blood pressure.

Still, there is hope. The report notes that since 2000, the global death rate linked to air pollution, among children under five, has dropped by 53 per cent. This is mainly the result of expanding access to clean energy for cooking, improved healthcare access and nutrition as well as building awareness. The measurable impact of implementing stricter air quality policies and encouraging the shift to hybrid or electric vehicles in Africa, Latin America and Asia also holds lessons. With 42 out of the 50 most polluted cities in the world and where a 2022 study found that even municipal employees — who should be among the frontline workers driving the change — had little awareness of air pollution's link to cancer and heart diseases, the challenge for India is steep. To face it, the health of its citizens, especially the young, must be at the heart of any solution.

THE DIL IN DILJIT

Diljit Dosanjh embodies a Punjabiyaat that is less controversial — but no less deep



CHAHARIKA UPPAL

PUNJABIYAAT HAS BEEN a site of much contestation — over nationalism, religious identity, and even language. However, with the emergence of Punjabi artists on international platforms, and a growing diaspora in the West, the flexibility of Punjabiyaat has allowed it to evolve into a global phenomenon where it is celebrated.

Earlier this week, Diljit Dosanjh left a mark with his debut on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. He was unabashedly Punjabi. Despite Fallon's introducing the star as a "poon-jabi" artist, the Punjabi in question seems to have taken over the show — through his music, traditional attire and bhangra breaks. But Dosanjh's commitment to "wearing his Punjabiyaat on his sleeve" doesn't limit his reach. It makes him more accessible. Punjabi lyrics, merged with modern genres like hip-hop, transcend borders and language barriers, pulling crowds even at Coachella.

Dosanjh's music remains true to its linguistic roots. This sets him apart — his thrust towards the modern and contemporary without abandoning the traditional. His contemporaries, those with similar levels of fame like A P Dhillon or Sidhu Moose Wala model their appearance on Western rappers and delve into darker themes of Punjabi culture — guns, violence and objectification of women. Dosanjh's music, for the most part, as

seen from his Coke Studio song, 'Magic', has an elusiveness and sense of yearning. He navigates themes of love and desire in a way that's reminiscent of traditional Punjabi folklore, a la *Heer-Ranjha*. Older works like his collaboration with Gurdas Maan in 'Ki Banu Duniya Da' evoke a similar sense of Punjabiyaat as he sings about the need for a cultural renaissance to inspire the region's youth, using the motif of the five rivers commonly seen in Partition poetry.

Dosanjh's recent film, *Amar Singh Chamkila*, also looks at this celebration of Punjabiyaat. But his character does so differently — celebrating his Sikh identity but not ignoring its uncomfortable realities, like the moral condemnation from upper castes, reprimanding the double meaning of Chamkila's lyrics, which act as a commentary on social ills during one of Punjab's most turbulent periods.

Dosanjh isn't the only one engaged in this celebration of Punjabiyaat. As popularised by Rahul Gandhi's refrain during the recent Lok Sabha election campaign, Sidhu Moose Wala's '295', also holds deep meaning in the context of Punjabiyaat. The song was appropriated by the opposition as a commentary against the misuse of religion for a cynical politics (the song is a reference to Article 295 of the IPC) and the dilution of truth in the public eye. Although the late Moose Wala has

been criticised for his penchant for AKs and fast cars, his work is permeated by rural woes and the distresses of Punjab. Moose Wala's identity holds a duality, of violence and peace, of separation and unity — a mirror of the contestations within Punjabiyaat. He is a lover and a fighter.

Diljit's identity, on the other hand, is less mired in controversy. He, much like his song suggests, is just a lover. Punjabiyaat is often saddled with the contentious themes — of Sikh secessionism, transnational unity, and distinct religiosity, before even reaching the cultural aspect. But Dosanjh carries Punjab with a spring in his step — not haunted by its history of violence and militancy. He emphasises its "softer" aspects — language, literature and tradition. That doesn't mean he is divorced from its politics but points to a more playful messaging. As with his song 'Riri', which was released conveniently around the time Rihanna tweeted about the farmers' agitation. That's what makes Diljit a global favourite, his palatability and his attempts to not be weighed down by Punjab's past. Instead, he uses it as a way to be nostalgic about the promise of a future.

The writer is a third-year student at Delhi University. She is currently interning at The Indian Express

NUSRAT RETURNS

An album of the maestro's lost recordings could be just what a world riven with conflict needs

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS after Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's death at 48, the maestro's sublime voice that had once drawn the world to the qawwali's wisdom will feature in a new album. On September 20, British record label, Real World Records, will put out four tracks by Khan, alongside his eight-piece ensemble, that were recorded in 1989, when British composer Peter Gabriel signed him on. Gabriel was struck by the intensity of Khan's voice when he heard him at the WOMAD Festival of 1985 and was keen to work with him. That meeting would lead to Real World Records, which specialises in world music, releasing a lot of Khan's music through the '90s. But somehow, one tape, with four recordings, got lost in the warehouse's storage. It was only discovered when the record label decided to relocate its archive in 2021. Now four pieces, one of which has never been heard, will see the light of day in an album aptly titled, *Chain of Light*.

Known for tracks such as 'Mun kunto maula', 'Halka halka suuro' and 'Dum must', Khan's music transcended borders, finding admirers across the world. The recovery of the recording is therefore not only thrilling for them but also an opportunity to introduce newer generations to the ecstasy of his music. Those who have not heard Khan before will find a voice at the pinnacle of its sonic capabilities, replete with sparkling vocal cadenzas. While Khan's music was a refuge for many, its symbolism and lessons in humanity and peace came from the poetry of the Sufi saints from different centuries.

Chain of Light could be a conduit between the past and present, nudging a world riven with conflicts and suffering to look within. This is a time when the world needs the Sufi message in Khan's sublime voice more than ever before.



JUNE 22, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDO-PAK ARMS TALKS

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi does not rule out the possibility of India having a discussion with Pakistan over arms smuggling. In an interview to an independent television channel in London, Gandhi said some of the arms had come from across the Pakistani border but it was "difficult to say who is involved."

NORMALCY IN PUNJAB

WITH THE SITUATION returning to normalcy in Punjab, the state government on June 21, lifted the ban on the movement of vehicles,

with the exception of two districts. All gurdwaras, except the Golden Temple and Gurudwara Muktsar, were opened to all devotees.

JUDGES' PENSION HIKE

THE GOVERNMENT HAS decided to provide enhanced pensions to all judges of the Supreme Court and high court, who retired prior to October 1, 1974 as well as payment of arrears to legal heirs, and family pensions to widows of retired judges. The Supreme Court Judges Act, 1958, and the High Court Judges Act, 1954, were amended in 1976 to enhance the pension for judges who retired

on or after October 1, 1974.

ORISSA'S BRIDGE FEUD

A CONTROVERSY OVER the construction of a river bridge has brought the Orissa chief minister, J B Patnaik, and his wife, Jayanti Patnaik, member of Lok Sabha from Cuttack, on a collision course. The controversy started because Jayanti Patnaik wanted the proposed bridge to be constructed at Salepore, which falls under her constituency, whereas Basant Biswal, minister of state of public works wanted the bridge to be constructed in Cuttack district's Patkura.

Opinion SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2024

SMART AGRICULTURE
Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan
There is a need to develop climate-resilient varieties and short-duration varieties so that the effects of climate change could be countered

Missing animal spirits

Industry’s pre-Budget wish list hardly reflects the real issues that are acting as stumbling blocks for investments

THE PRIORITIES OF the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in its third term no doubt include facilitating a private investment-led revival to boost the India growth story.

The pre-Budget consultations would have been more fruitful had industry frankly told the ruling dispensation why their animal spirits remain dampened and what it takes to ensure that corporations drive the growth process.

This hesitancy of India Inc was observed by the late economist IG Patel who presciently wrote about this tendency of many in private business “who think even now that rather than incur the displeasure and unpleasantness of opposing government policies and all that, it is much simpler, much cheaper, much more comfortable to be on its right side”.

It is also striking that India Inc does not forcefully advocate a bold and ambitious reforms agenda to trigger a private capex upswing by implementing deep-going structural reforms to free up the land and labour markets.

Zyn won't save big tobacco

PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL Inc. has stopped online sales of Zyn in the US after receiving a subpoena in the District of Columbia related to flavoured products that are banned there.

It’s the latest example of the popular nicotine-pouch brand hitting the headlines, and raises further questions about not just the fast-growing product, but Big Tobacco’s ability to shift from cigarettes to potentially less risky alternatives.

Philip Morris said this week that it had received a subpoena from the attorney general of the District of Columbia, requesting information about Zyn owner Swedish Match’s compliance with the sale of flavoured tobacco and nicotine products, which were banned in the region in October 2022.

The company said it had investigated, and its preliminary findings indicated that there had been sales of flavoured pouches — which do not contain tobacco — in DC, predominantly related to certain online platforms and some independent retailers.

Nevertheless, it said it faced an unspecified “material liability” if there was an “unfavourable outcome” related to the matter. But the incident could mean further scrutiny of Zyn’s sales and marketing practices, and in the longer-term, greater regulation.

Philip Morris has asked Swedish Match to conduct a full review of its sales and supply-chain arrangements in DC and other US states and municipalities where flavour bans may apply.

That looks far off for now. But what happens at Zyn — both in the DC case and beyond — has huge ramifications for the tobacco industry. While Philip Morris is the market leader in modern oral tobacco as it’s called, British American Tobacco Plc and Altria Group Inc. are also marketing the products.

Zyn looks like just that, as does Philip Morris’s other market leading alternative, the IQOS device that heats rather than burns tobacco. Indeed, the company has been the most vocal in moving to what it calls a smoke-free future.

But the DC subpoena to Zyn is a stark reminder that giving up smoking is easier said than done.

(Michael R Bloomberg, founder and majority owner of Bloomberg News parent Bloomberg LP, has been a longtime champion of tobacco control efforts and has campaigned and given money in support of a US ban on flavoured e-cigarettes and tobacco.)



KEEPING STOCK

AN ESTIMATED ₹86,207 CRORE MIGHT BE UNDISTRIBUTED TO THE GOVERNMENT IN FY24

Simplify RBI risk accounting

LAST MONTH, THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shocked the market by announcing a ₹2.10874-trillion surplus for government distribution — 141% higher than the FY23 surpluses of ₹87,416 crore, and much higher than the ₹50,000 crore budgeted in FY25.

An analysis of RBI accounts
The RBI’s FY24 income statements indicate an annual interest income of ₹1.88605 trillion, with ₹1.03177 trillion coming from foreign assets.

The RBI’s accounting policy involves daily marking-to-market (MTM) of foreign and rupee securities, with unrealised gains recorded in the IRA-FS and IRA-RS accounts.



the RBI’s accounting policies do not reveal the full picture.

The RBI also maintains a Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA) to manage currency risk, interest rate risk, and gold price movements.

Holding appropriate risk capital
For the RBI to manage its risk sufficiently, the Bimal Jalan Committee (BJC) recommended a policy of having a CF of around 5.5-6.5% of its total balance sheet assets (BSA) as of year-end.

RBI must hold economic capital at 20.8-25.4% of BSA. At the close of FY24, its economic capital was ₹15.89059 trillion (22.43% of BSA).

Pvt investment key to India’s 2047 goal



ARADHNA AGGARWAL
Professor at Copenhagen Business School and senior advisor to Team ‘Skill, Technology and Trade’ at NCAER. Views are personal

Addressing institutional shortcomings, promoting human development, and strategically leveraging regional economies are necessary to realise growth potential

NARENDRA MODI HAS taken charge of the office of Prime Minister at a time when India is poised to become a \$5-trillion economy, propelled by growth rates of 7-8% in most years over the past two decades.

Reaching the high-income threshold of \$13,845 GDP per capita (as of 2022) within 25 years from India’s current GDP per capita of \$2,090 (2022) requires substantial growth acceleration over an extended period.

This mediocre growth performance is directly linked to a steady decline in private gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) as a percentage of GDP since 2011-12, dropping from 31% to 25% by 2021.

Sustained growth requires the economy to transform from an agrarian into an industrialised economy, which hinges on mobilising private investment.

Commission-National Eligibility Test, there have been far too many errors, and big questions marks on the integrity and competence of the testing agency.

NTA accountability

While fixing accountability in the National Testing Agency (NTA) is now a rightful government concern, no change for the better can happen without raising tough questions on the entire process of centralised exams.

Weak private investment has impeded the structural transformation of the economy, perpetuating structural underdevelopment.

Sustained and substantial growth requires the economy to transform from an agrarian into an industrialised economy, which hinges on mobilising private investment.

Geopolitical tensions
The Putin-Kim pact is bound to add to geopolitical tensions in the world.

Leadership irrespective of the need, potential impact, and reactions. Rectifying these issues is imperative for fostering a conducive environment for investors.

Weak policy implementation: This can erode the effectiveness of the most well-crafted reforms.

Addressing institutional shortcomings, promoting human development, and strategically leveraging regional economies are necessary to realise growth potential

Human development: This emerges as a crucial focus area with India’s competitive advantage shifting towards skill-intensive activities.

Regional economies: In a globalised world, these garner increasing attention, necessitating spatial policies that leverage local competencies and target areas with high productivity potential.

While India’s growth trajectory holds promise, realising its full potential requires concerted efforts towards fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

time will tell if it has anything to do with the upcoming US elections.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

new team will not be effective without fixing the flaws of the old system.

Geopolitical tensions
The Putin-Kim pact is bound to add to geopolitical tensions in the world.

Leadership irrespective of the need, potential impact, and reactions. Rectifying these issues is imperative for fostering a conducive environment for investors.

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The Putin-Kim pact is bound to add to geopolitical tensions in the world.

Weak policy implementation: This can erode the effectiveness of the most well-crafted reforms.

Judiciary-military discord worsening in Pakistan



RANA BANERJI
FORMER SPECIAL SECRETARY,
CABINET SECRETARIAT

DESPITE the tabling of a forward-looking, even tough budget designed to satisfy the International Monetary Fund and conclude a staff-level agreement for Pakistan's next aid tranche by July, the Shehbaz Sharif government is looking increasingly insecure and lacklustre in its day-to-day functioning.

After the Supreme Court advised incarcerated former Prime Minister Imran Khan to seek avenues for political negotiations, he has resorted to the devious stratagem of pushing in Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party veteran Mahmood Khan Achakzai to be his frontman for any possible contact with either President Asif Ali Zardari or the Sharif brothers. These negotiations are going nowhere as Imran has told the sizeable contingent of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) legislators to continue agitating for the restoration of the February 8 electoral

mandate. They are threatening street protests, with possible roping in of disgruntled Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JuI-F) cadres of Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), while supporting the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) from the outside, has expressed unhappiness at not being consulted in the budget formulation. It has been demanding space in the provincial government in Punjab, but Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz seems to be in no mood to oblige.

Meanwhile, ever since six judges of the Islamabad High Court wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) in March this year, alleging interference and intimidation by Pakistan's omnipotent Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the judiciary has been up in arms to rid itself of the age-old taint of being a handmaiden of the military establishment. Partly, this bravado stems from support among the younger judges for deposed PTI leader Imran's populist narrative.

The Army leadership has been disapproving of these moves. Addressing a passing-out parade at Pakistan Air Force's Risalpur Academy on May 2, Army Chief Gen Syed Asim Munir observed that the army was "well aware of its constitutional limits" and "expected others to prioritise the Con-



EVENTFUL: Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa (right) administered the oath of office to President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad in March. Isa's tenure as CJ has been marked by travails. AP/PTI

stitution as well". On May 7, as the anniversary of last year's 'Black Day' violence (May 9) approached, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) clarified that any dialogue with the PTI could happen only if it "earnestly apologises publicly in front of the nation", promises to adopt "constructive politics" and forgoes "politics of anarchy".

After the May 29 Formation Commanders' Conference, the ISPR reiterated that without bringing the planners, perpetrators, abettors and facilitators of the May 9, 2023, violence to justice, there would be no stability in the country. It noted with

The Pakistan People's Party has been demanding space in the provincial govt in Punjab, but CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif seems to be in no mood to oblige.

concern that politically motivated and vested digital terrorism unleashed by 'conspirators' (read Imran's troll bands) was inducing despondency and discord among national institutions, especially the armed forces, which would not be tolerated.

Despite these warnings, the courts have been ruling in favour of Imran, holding the procedures and haste employed to imprison him before the February 8 elections violative of natural justice. His indictment in the cipher leaks case was struck down. All these cases have been appealed against. A seven-member larger Bench

of the Supreme Court led by CJ Qazi Faez Isa is hearing a suo motu case regarding agency interference in judicial functions. No hearings have been scheduled in the past couple of months. Another CJ Isa-led Division Bench is set to hear the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) petition challenging the Lahore High Court's decision to appoint six more tribunals to settle election disputes in Punjab.

Sargodha Anti-Terrorism Court judge Muhammad Abbas has complained to the Lahore High Court Chief Justice, Malik Shahzad Ahmed Khan, about the alleged role of the ISI in damaging water and electricity meters outside his house. CJ Ahmed Khan, whose elevation to the Supreme Court was announced only recently, has issued showcase notices to police officials concerned. He did not hesitate to profess at a public gathering in Islamabad recently that the days of 'agency intimidation of judges' would soon be a thing of the past. He was summoned before the Supreme Court Chief Justice a few days later for a possible admonition.

The Election Commission's decision not to assign reserved seats of the National Assembly to the Sunni Ittehad Council, to which elected PTI legislators now adhere, was upheld by the

Peshawar High Court, but it has been challenged by the PTI in the Supreme Court. Deliberations by a full court Bench there have remained inconclusive. If the SC upholds the ECP's decision, reserved seats in Parliament and provincial legislatures will be allocated to the ruling parties and the JUI-F, enabling the government to pursue constitutional amendments. Reports are rife about the government planning to extend the tenure of the Supreme Court CJ and other judges by two years.

Isa's term of office as CJ lasts up to October 25. Ascending to this post has not been without travails for him as he had to face references against his integrity before the SJC, brought at the behest of Imran, prodded perhaps by military leaders of the day (Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and then Director General, ISI, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed). His January 13 ruling, depriving the PTI of its election symbol (cricket bat), has also been under adverse public scrutiny. He has been responding in a restrained manner to all this venting of ire against the agencies by judges from lower courts. After the Eid vacation, all eyes will be on how the Supreme Court deals with these cases, which could have significant implications for Pakistan politics.

The govt must commit itself to undoing injustice



NEERA CHANDHOKE
POLITICAL SCIENTIST

THE first International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture was held in Paris from June 21 to 25, 1935. Writers aligned with the Left, surrealists, the avant-garde, liberals and pacifists denounced the rising tide of fascism in Europe before an audience of thousands. The speakers were 'engaged writers' — those who believe that art and politics go hand in hand and that one cannot exist without the other. Held at the Palais de Mutualite, a traditional meeting site for the Left Bank and progressive intellectuals, the conference was swamped by Parisians. This was the same city that had witnessed anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affair in the late 19th century.

By the 1930s, political solidarity among intellectuals could no longer be confined to cafes of radical neighbourhoods. Anxiety over fascism in Europe produced international solidarity. André Gide, a famous French writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for litera-

ture in 1947, memorably said that each one of them had a "right to inspect his neighbour's territory".

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights delivered the same message. When regimes violate the basic rights of a section of their citizens, other states and international agencies have the "right to inspect their territory". In effect, the declaration legitimised concern for the rights of all people, even if they live in faraway lands. Rights are universal. Intellectuals, wherever they may be, must speak up against fascism and the harm it causes to vulnerable groups.

Over the past decade, a number of international organisations have reported that the authorities in India have violated the rights of minorities, jailed civil liberty activists and journalists and suppressed civil society. In September last year, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues described the deteriorating rights situation in India as 'massive, systematic and dangerous'. At a meeting of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the rapporteur, Fernand Varennas, stated that India risked becoming one of the world's main generators of instability, atrocities and violence. He described the massive scale of violations and



DISCRIMINATORY: The Citizenship Amendment Act rules were notified earlier this year. ANI

abuses that targeted Muslims, Sikhs and Christians as symptomatic of religious nationalism. He especially referred to major violations of basic rights in Manipur, particularly the degrading treatment meted out to two women from the Christian Kuki community.

Numerous human rights organisations have expressed concern about hate speech against Muslims, the destruction of their properties and the fundamentally discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act. The Human Rights Watch, in its World Report 2024, stated that India had undermined its

Reparative justice demands that the balance between social groups be re-established, relationships repaired and fraternity rebuilt.

aspirations for world leadership as a rights-respecting democracy with persistent policies that discriminated against and stigmatised religious minorities. We find more of the same in other reports that assert a legitimate right to "inspect their neighbour's territory" to identify injustice.

The leadership and the cadres of the ruling party should learn a lesson from its diminished mandate in the recent General Election. Hopefully, the government will launch a project of reparative justice to right the wrongs committed in the past 10 years in

the name of Hindu nationalism. Reparative or corrective justice is different from the principle of redistributive justice. Redistributive justice is a norm that governs the fair allocation of resources in a society. Reparative justice concentrates on the harm done to citizens — violation of physical integrity through lynching and murder and affronts to human dignity caused through slurs and hate speech — and tries to rectify the wrongs. This avatar of justice identifies the offender as well as the person or group that has been harmed. The offender in this case is the government, which inflicted harm through the indiscriminate imprisonment of dissenters and condoned violence unleashed on citizens.

The concept establishes a relationship between power elites who harm or tolerate harm and those who have been harmed. It focuses on the restoration of justice in a society that is composed of many social groups, many of whom are extremely vulnerable to majoritarianism. The logic of reparative justice is to repair the harm done to the minds and bodies of citizens. Reparative justice is, thus, the conceptual companion of redistributive justice. In the case of the former, the government accepts responsibility for past wrongs done for moral-

ly arbitrary reasons.

Throughout history, many regimes have apologised for the harm done. But an apology is not enough. An erring government has to commit that these harms will not be repeated and that the dignity and physical integrity of all citizens will be respected. Reparative justice demands that the balance between social groups, fragile at best, be re-established, relationships repaired and fraternity rebuilt.

This is important because, as BR Ambedkar told the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, liberty, equality and fraternity "form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy... Without fraternity, liberty and equality would not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them." Indian society, he said, lacks fraternity: "What does fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians — of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life." The results of the General Election have resoundingly established that the people of India do not want this trinity to be disturbed. The NDA government has to understand the popular mood and launch the project of reparative justice.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Confirm formally (6)
- Contemptuous (8)
- Pen for livestock (6)
- Taught to a select few (8)
- Chief part in play (4)
- Spiteful (5)
- Lacking cordiality (4)
- A boost (4,2,3,3)
- Spotlessly clean (5,3-4)
- Sympathetic sorrow (4)
- Sealant for window-glass (5)
- Rebuff (4)
- Machination (8)
- To inconvenience (3,3)
- Delicate filmy material (8)
- Of mixed origin (6)

DOWN

- Foolhardy (8)
- Pungent culinary herb (8)
- Unweave at the edges (4)
- Be very expensive (4,3,5)
- Rebuke angrily (4)
- Deep wrinkle (6)
- Site (6)
- High fashion (5,7)
- Chilly (5)
- Unrefined (5)
- Unrestricted admission (4,4)
- Without loss of force (8)
- Espionage (6)
- Relative importance (6)
- Capital of Peru (4)
- Small and weak (4)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Spool, 4 Scratch, 8 Rut, 9 Barefaced, 10 Taffeta, 11 Ethos, 13 Meadow, 15 Strain, 18 Padre, 19 Opossum, 21 Underfoot, 23 Abe, 24 Potency, 25 Notes.

Down: 1 Stratum, 2 Out of hand, 3 Fibre, 4 Serial, 5 Reflect, 6 Tic, 7 Hades, 12 Head start, 14 Overrun, 16 Numbers, 17 Colony, 18 Plump, 20 Often, 22 Dot.

SU DO KU

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

EASY

FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR
JUNE 22, 2024, SATURDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Aashadh Shaka 1
- Aashadh Parvishte 9
- Hijari 1445
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 6:38 am
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 1, up to 5:14 am
- Shukla Yoga up to 4:45 pm
- Moola Nakshatra up to 5:54 pm
- Moon in Sagittarius sign
- Jyesth Purnima
- Sant Kabir Jyanti
- Gandmoole ends 5:54 pm

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	40	29
New Delhi	42	29
Amritsar	40	25
Bathinda	40	27
Jalandhar	40	27
Ludhiana	39	26
Bhivani	40	31
Hisar	40	25
Sirsa	41	27
Dharamsala	29	20
Manali	22	13
Shimla	26	17
Srinagar	26	14
Jammu	40	25
Kargil	19	10
Leh	18	06
Dehradun	37	25
Mussoorie	28	17

SUNSET: SATURDAY 19:29 HRS
SUNRISE: SUNDAY 05:23 HRS



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Yoga for self and society

PM Modi celebrates International Yoga Day in Kashmir, emphasising Yoga's role in fostering peace and unity

On June 21, 2024, International Yoga Day gave new meaning to the people of Kashmir as the Prime Minister celebrated it with them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a momentous occasion by celebrating International Yoga Day in the scenic valley of Kashmir. This event was not only significant as a global celebration of yoga but also as a powerful symbol of peace, unity and cultural heritage in a region that has seen its share of strife and conflict. Kashmir, often referred to as 'Paradise on Earth' due to its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural tapestry, was chosen by PM Modi as the venue for this year's International Yoga Day celebration. The event was held at the iconic Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar. International Yoga Day, celebrated on June 21 each year, was established in 2015 following a resolution proposed by PM Modi at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The day aims to raise awareness about the benefits of practising yoga, a 5,000-year-old tradition that originated in India. It emphasises the integration of body, mind and spirit, promoting a balanced and harmonious lifestyle. This year's theme, yoga for self and society resonated deeply in Kashmir, a region known for its complex socio-political challenges.



By celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir, PM Modi aimed to convey a message of reconciliation and the potential for a peaceful future. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi has always used the symbols very effectively and conveyed the message to the people, celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir was no exception. The choice of Kashmir as the venue for this significant event is

laden with symbolism. The region, which has faced decades of conflict and unrest, witnessed an outpouring of support for the celebration, reflecting a desire for peace and normalcy. PM Modi's presence and the enthusiastic participation of residents is a step towards healing and bridging divides. This was PM Modi's first trip to the union territory since being re-elected for a third consecutive term. During this visit, PM Modi launched several significant developmental projects and participated in International Yoga Day 2024 activities. PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for various developmental projects valued at over Rs. 1,500 crores. The Prime Minister addressed the gathering. He underscored the importance of yoga in promoting health and unity. The Prime Minister took this occasion to send a strong message across the border that all acts of terrorism would be thwarted. Indeed, the trip did reinforce the confidence of the people as it came just weeks after the Jammu attacks. This would also be a message to the security forces also to beef up the security. PM Modi's visit underscored his commitment to the development and integration of Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, the event was not just a display of yoga poses but a concerted effort to promote wellness and unity of the State.

PICTALK



People perform yoga in the Yamuna river on the 10th International Day of Yoga, in New Delhi

NEET: Malice extends beyond a flawed exam



SIDHARTH MISHRA

The Supreme Court's recent directive to the Govt to meticulously address any lapses in the NEET examination underscores the critical nature of the fiasco

Plans do go awry. Who could say this better than Modi Sarkar 3.0? Prime Minister Narendra Modi had planned a blitzkrieg of the first 100 days of good governance. It doesn't seem to be happening as of now. First the number of BJP members elected to Lok Sabha did not sufficiently pile up, forcing a toned-down department of the Government.

Worse has been the marks manipulation controversy generated around the results declared by National Testing Agency (NTA) of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to the undergraduate courses in the medical colleges across the country. The Supreme Court on June 18 told the Union Government and the NTA to ensure that even '0.001 per cent negligence' in conducting the NEET-UG 2024 exams be looked into with all seriousness considering the immense labour that the candidates have put in for preparing the nationwide examination. Thankfully, we have a mature leader like Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister, who is expected to steer through the crisis and not a Smriti Irani or a Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank camping at the Shastr Bhawan, the seat of the Ministry of Education. Pradhan has so far shown the patience and perseverance in handling this gargantuan-like crisis.

The mess around NEET is much deeper than just the alleged malpractice in the conduct of the examination and the manipulation of marks. It's a question of the very high financial and emotional stakes involved, given the limited number of the seats available in the medical colleges. Over 15 lakh students appear for the NEET annually to fight over about 83,000 seats available. Less than half of these seats are available in the Government-run colleges. More than half of the seats in these colleges are allotted under various quotas. Thus, many deserving candidates are unable to secure admission to Government colleges. The fees in the private medical colleges in India are unbelievably



expensive, often touching Rs one crore for the entire course. For middle-class families, these costs are untenable, prompting them to look for more affordable options abroad.

Thus the medical college market in countries like China, Ukraine, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Here the cost of education at the best is less than half of what the private medical colleges charge. No wonder if there is COVID happening in China, war happening in central Asia or hooliganism in Kyrgyzstan, miserable State of the Indian students makes news. The problems of these students don't end here. Even on the successful completion of the course, an uncertain future awaits them. The medical degrees obtained from foreign universities must be recognised by the National Medical Commission of India (NMC). Even if the college is recognised, the medical graduates need to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE) conducted by NMC to practice in India. The pass rate for FMGE is relatively low.

This shortage of seats explains the repeated noise of corruption around the medical entrance tests for several years

now. The most prominent among the many fallouts of this situation are higher prices, long wait times and increased competition for the limited available resources.

When shortage occurs, an environment is created where individuals or stakeholders may be willing to pay bribes to secure access to the limited resources. Today, in the NEET ecosystem, there aren't just the students and testing agencies who are participating. It can be safely said that the financial stakes at this examination is much higher for the horde of coaching centres and admission counsellors than the students themselves.

Then there are the people who manipulate the system to make entrance into an Indian college 'convenient' lest the candidate ends up selling family silver for an admission in a private college in India or go through the rigmarole of enrolling in a foreign medical college and face an uncertain future.

The expected role of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in the current crisis would be to provide an immediate relief to the injury and pain caused to the lakhs of students by the NTA, which con-

ducted NEET 2024. The larger relief would only come by investment in the health infrastructure sector.

Increasing the number of medical seats in Government and private colleges, in the higher numbers in the former category, would lessen the need for students to seek education abroad or the manipulators having a field day. This requires substantial investment in medical infrastructure and faculty.

This would not come by the mere initiative of either Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan or the newly-appointed Health Minister JP Nadda. There has to be a Government vision and more importantly the political will to break the cartel of the private medical colleges.

The management of these colleges maintains a Octopus-like stranglehold over the medical education system through its various arms like the coaching centres and the counsellors. The 'costly' admission process is the first step towards the crass commercialisation of the medical sector in this country. About it on some other day.

(The writer is author and president, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice, views are personal)



THE SHORTAGE OF MEDICAL SEATS IN INDIA, COUPLED WITH HIGH FINANCIAL AND EMOTIONAL STAKES, FUELS CORRUPTION IN ENTRANCE EXAMS AND DRIVES STUDENTS TO SEEK MORE AFFORDABLE EDUCATION OPTIONS ABROAD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UGC to revamp higher education



Madam — Apropos the news story "UGC set to revolutionise higher education in India," published on June 21, this is my response. The recent wildlife fires in Uttarakhand highlight a pressing environmental and societal issue. These fires are not just a natural calamity but a reflection of human irresponsibility and systemic failures. Environmental pollution, an unrestrained culture among youth and weak law enforcement have contributed to these destructive events. Global warming, largely driven by hydrocarbon fuel use, has exacerbated the situation, similar to patterns seen in Australia and the USA. Local industries and vehicular pollution have significantly warmed the atmosphere, making the naturally fire-prone Chir Pine forests even more vulnerable. Additionally, reckless behaviour, such as setting fires for social media fame and illegal activities like unauthorised construction and tree felling, further fuel these disasters. The media often needs to delve more deeply into such incidents' root causes and preventive measures. A more profound understanding, perhaps through the lens of Vedic Physics, could offer comprehensive solutions by integrating ancient wisdom with modern scientific approaches.

Kundan | Delhi

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

Madam — Apropos the news story "Benefits of integrating offline and online channels," published on June 21, this is my response. The management of offline and online channels often operates in silos, with little intersection in their strategies. This separation ignores the fundamental fact that consumers are people whose decision-making spans both realms. Consumers today engage with brands through multiple touchpoints—retail stores, social media, online reviews and influencer videos—making integrated channel management essential. The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Decision, Action) highlights the need for a coherent strategy across channels, as purchases

Mitali | Noida

WOMEN AND UNPAID WORK

Madam — Apropos the news story "The Unseen Burden of Women's Unpaid Labour," published on June 21, this is my response. The early 60s saw Canadian writer Alice Munro dismissed as a mere "housewife who finds time to write short stories." Munro's eventual Nobel Prize in 2013 underscored the absurdity of this condescension. Economist Claudia Goldin's research reveals that women's careers are often constrained by societal expectations that idealise their roles as unpaid caregivers. This has tangible impacts: women global-

ly spend 76.2 per cent of their time on unpaid care work, three times more than men. In regions like the Pacific and Asia, men contribute the least. The burden of unpaid care work keeps 606 million working-age women out of the labour market, compared to just 41 million men. This disparity is reflected in economic metrics; for example, women's unpaid work could be worth up to 40 per cent of GDP in some countries. Additionally, the "motherhood penalty" persists, reducing women's career prospects and earnings. Conversely, men often receive a wage bonus upon becoming fathers. To bridge this gap, significant investments in childcare and care industries are crucial. Research shows that such investments could create millions of jobs and significantly boost women's employment rates. Meeting these needs is essential to achieving gender equality and fulfilling global commitments to women's economic justice.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

India's solar industry is a goldmine for investors

The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India



GAUTAM MOHANKA

India's solar energy sector is shining brighter than ever, emerging as a goldmine for investors and entrepreneurs. The market, valued at \$38 billion in 2021, is set to grow exponentially, reaching \$238 billion by 2032, driven by an impressive 40 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India. With supportive Government policies, technological advancements and an increasing shift towards sustainability, the solar energy sector is witnessing unprecedented growth. Entrepreneurs and investors capitalise on this momentum, prioritising their goals to reap substantial benefits in the coming years.

Tech Advancements Technological innovations are at the heart of the solar industry's success. Commercial solar panels have gotten way better at turning sunlight into electricity, cranking up the power they can produce per square foot. The switch from polycrystalline to more advanced bifacial solar panels, which can generate power from both sides, shows how



the industry is focused on squeezing out as much efficiency as possible. In recent years, PERC (Passivated Emitter and Rear Cell) technology has been predominant in India's solar panel market. However, due to efficiency limitations in mass production, there is a gradual shift towards more advanced technologies like TOPCon (Tunnel Oxide Passivated Contact) and HJT (Heterojunction Technology). **Government Policies** The Indian Government's policies have played a crucial role in transforming the solar energy landscape. The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, with substantial financial allocations (PLI-I with Rs. 4,500 crores and PLI-II with Rs. 19,500 crores), are designed to boost domestic manufacturing of solar components.

Further bolstering the "Make in India" initiative, the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) was reinstated on April 1, 2024, ensuring quality control and encouraging the use of domestically manufactured modules. Various projects by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), such as the CPSU Scheme Phase-II, PM-KUSUM Component B and the Grid-connected Rooftop Solar Programme Phase-II, mandate the use of Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) solar panels, providing subsidies to promote the adoption of solar energy.

Environmental Impact The solar industry in India isn't just about fulfilling energy requirements - it's also helping the environment. By using more solar power and relying less on fossil fuels, the solar industry is assisting in eliminating greenhouse gas emissions and fighting climate change. Shifting towards renewable energy, like solar power, is super crucial for India's climate goals and ensuring a sustainable future. **Market Potential and Investment Opportunities**

India's solar energy market presents a plethora of opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs. The sector's rapid growth and the increasing acceptance of solar power for both commercial and personal uses underscore its potential. With Government support and ongoing technological advancements, the barriers to entry are diminishing, making it an attractive proposition for new ventures. Besides, technological advancements enhance efficiency and reduce costs, increasing profitability. Entrepreneurs can explore various segments within the industry.

On a larger front, the global shift towards sustainability ensures a steady demand for solar energy solutions, providing businesses with a long-term growth trajectory. Moreover, India's solar industry's robust market potential, Government support and technological innovation make it a compelling opportunity for those looking to invest or start a venture in renewable energy. (The writer is the CEO, of Gautam Solar, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE ART OF ANGER MANAGEMENT

Anger or an outburst is an emotion which invariably leads to antipathetic results



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago lived a sagacious teacher who adopted unusual techniques as part of his pedagogy while imparting knowledge to his students. One day he provided his students with an empty jar and a bagful of pebbles.

He directed them to fill the jar with as many pebbles as they could. The students fretted as they struggled to insert the pebbles in the jar, but eventually managed to insert them.

Subsequently, the teacher gave them a bag of sand and guided them to pour it into the jar. The sand filled in all the gaps between the rocks. Eventually, the teacher gave them a pitcher of water and asked the students to pour it into the jar which filled in all the remaining gaps. It was then pronounced that the jar represented our lives and the pebbles, sand and water typified what we live with.

The teacher went on to State, "If we fill our lives with anger (represented by the pebbles), there will not be any room for anything else. But if we focus on the important things (represented by the sand and water), we could discover a State of happiness and balance."

Among the students lived a boy who was disposed with a foul temper. He would get angry at every little issue. One day, the sagacious teacher gave him a bag of nails and told him, "Every time you get vexed, hammer a nail into that front wall." And thus began the activity. On the first day, the boy hammered 50 nails. The following day, he hammered 40. Each time he went up to the wall, he repented being piqued.

It was quite a challenge to hammer a nail into the bricks of the wall! Slowly, the stripling discovered that controlling his rage was easier than hammering countless nails into the wall. The strapping youth had already become a laughing stock of his batchmates performing this wasteful exercise. Over a period, the number of nails hammered began to diminish much to the amazement of the student and his friends.



Eventually, came a day when he was not cross and became joyous about the fact. The perspicacious teacher assigned the student yet another task, "If you do not get provoked the entire day, remove one nail from the wall." After many days, eyebrows were raised as all the nails were extricated from the wall.

Finally, the teacher took the student near the wall and asked him what he saw. The student replied that he could view holes in the wall. "These holes are like the scars that one leaves on individuals when a person gets exasperated. No matter how many times you apologise, the scar does not vanish."

"Thus, I suggest you to do two things; realise that words once uttered linger on. Your irascibility hurts others and leaves a dampener on all." He continued, "Each time you feel outraged, 'hammer a nail' in the wall. The simplest thing you can do is to carry a pocket diary and draw a line each time you get annoyed. At night, count the number of lines drawn for that day. If you make this a habit, each time you would become waspish, you would be reminded to note it down."

"Once you follow this regimen, your awareness and memory muscle about the damage you were inflicting among the people with whom you interact would increase." The student had learned his lesson, through this ingenious teaching imparted by his teacher.

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

India faces a severe groundwater crisis

The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same



KOTA SRIRAJ



According to the India Water Portal, India uses 25 per cent of all groundwater extracted globally, ahead of the USA and China. Nearly 70 per cent of the water supply in Indian agriculture today is groundwater. For a resource that is under such heavy use, India still lacks a contingency plan when it comes to dealing with groundwater depletion and over-exploitation. Predictably, the writing on the wall is becoming increasingly clear. On June 19th, 2024 the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) dropped the shocking news that Delhi has already extracted 99 per cent of its available groundwater.

The latest CGWB report revealed a decline in both annual recharge and available groundwater for extraction in the city. According to the CGWB's findings, Delhi's net annual groundwater recharge in 2023 was measured at 0.38 billion cubic meters (bcm), with only 0.34 bcm available for extraction. Shockingly, nearly all accessible groundwater has already been extracted, totalling 99.1 per cent. The concerning aspect here is the increased rate of extraction despite reduced groundwater recharge.

These trying conditions come at a time when Delhi is already reeling under the worst heatwave in the last 120 years which has claimed 192 lives so far. Sadly the issue of water distressed cities is becoming a worrying trend across India. Bangalore hit rock bottom earlier this year with over 500 million litres of water deficit daily with over 7000 borewells running dry. Coupled with abnormally harsh summers the water scarcity conditions can not only take a toll on human lives but also bring the urban economy to a grinding halt.

This trend of drying up groundwater may, unfortunately, become the norm for



INDIA'S WATER RESOURCES FACE A BLEAK FUTURE; THE GOVERNMENT MUST ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH A NATIONWIDE WATER BODY CENSUS, RAINWATER HARVESTING AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

most cities in India unless urgent remedial measures are taken. But sadly, most of the action taken is at best knee-jerk and impulsive with neither long-term strategy nor investment attached to it. Consecutive Governments, both at the State and central levels have always dealt with groundwater-related issues on a passive basis instead of a proactive basis. As a result every year the nature of the problem not only becomes complex but also more difficult to solve.

The future of India's water resources looks bleak and the Government must deploy a plethora of measures to ensure that the future generations have enough of this precious resource. As a first step, the central Government must conduct a nationwide satellite-assisted natural water body census along with the measurable extent of the water body. This will not only quantify the number of water bodies but will also capture any encroachment of the same. Additionally, steps have to be taken to rejuvenate and revive these water bodies.

This can be done by removing the vegetation and setting up artificial groundwater recharge points such as percolation wells. Apart from this, the roping in of local municipal authorities, especially the anti-encroachment departments can help remove unauthorised occupation from the water body area.

The central Government in association with State Government authorities can work on measures

such as metered borewells to monitor and regulate groundwater extraction. The concept of metered borewells is not new. The State of West Bengal has metered borewells for a while now and as a result, the State has been experiencing better levels of groundwater. The same can be replicated across India, especially in Karnataka which is witnessing over-exploitation of groundwater. Yet another measure that needs sincere application is rain-water harvesting (RWH). Even though a much-talked-about concept, RWH has seen minimal implementation in India.

Bangalore is an apt example of the abysmal application of RWH. According to Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) data, only 1.8 lakh out of the 19 lakh eligible properties in Bengaluru have installed rain-water harvesting systems. Experts have opined that the city harvests only 10 per cent of the rainwater while the rest 90 per cent drains away wasted. Conditions such as these point towards the unfortunate reality of hyped concepts that receive very little implementation. The Government must try and understand the latent potential of RWH and ensure that not only residential but commercial properties across India implement RWH and the same must be enforceable by law.

However conventional remedial measures may still not be able to rein in the runaway groundwater scarcity problem. Since the scale of the problem has risen, the Government must explore invest-

ments in innovative technologies to bolster the efforts to revive and boost the groundwater table in India. Efficient farming technologies that rely less on water for instance can make a huge difference.

Investments in precision agriculture for the usage of groundwater for irrigation are an ideal solution for providing optimal water usage. This saves water compared to traditional flooding methods which increases output while conserving resources and reducing water wastage.

Similarly, App-driven water meters that automatically regulate extraction and smart groundwater pressure sensors that maintain critical and minimum water levels can all help alleviate the burdens weighing on groundwater. With water scarcity spreading region-wise across India and with a rapidly increasing water use the structural imbalance between water supply and demand continues to widen. Therefore it is time that the Governments in association corporate under corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR) must increase capital expenditure on smart technologies that can actively provide solutions to water scarcity and water quality issues besides improving sustainability of water resources.

The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same.

(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

Generative AI revolutionises smart wearable technology

By leveraging AI for coaching and healthcare, wearables are setting new standards in user experience and functionality

A decade ago, wearable technology was just taking early strides. Today, generative AI — a subset of artificial intelligence — is making its presence felt across diverse domains such as fashion, health, entertainment and more.

With smart wearables gaining greater popularity worldwide, the fusing of fashion and innovative technology is permitting smart devices to function as icons of personal styling, connecting every element of users' lives. As these aspects play out, generative AI is steadily showcasing several novel dimensions of personalisation and functionality.

Personalised Insights
The rising popularity of AI-enabled wearables is partly because of their ability to offer



C P KHANDELWAL

personalised insights and recommendations based on the user's data. Through sensors embedded in the wearables, data is analysed to provide real-time advice and feedback that helps users improve performance, maximise productivity and prevent injuries. In an era where most people want to stay fighting fit, generative AI goes beyond merely counting the steps taken and monitoring their heart rate. By

employing AI algorithms, advanced fitness trackers analyse the user's data to provide personalised insights and coaching. A dynamic, bespoke approach is adopted in managing the user's health and well-being as the smart device adapts to each person's preferences, goals and individual fitness levels.

For instance, an AI-driven coaching algorithm, Zepp Coach, offers customised guidance so its users can train and recover more effectively. A user simply needs to enter his or her physical characteristics, exercise experience level and preferred number of training days each week into the app. The app then builds a personalised training regime for every user. As the days progress, the Zepp Coach app monitors

each person's fitness level, fatigue threshold and current training status. Based on this data, it recommends a reduction (or increase) in training intensity.

Wearables in Healthcare
Besides personal training, generative AI-linked wearables are deployed in healthcare with a similar model of leveraging user data to provide personalised counsel and insights. For example, the WHOOP Coach app uses a generative AI feature to offer extremely personalised, precise advice and suggestions by using GPT-4 — the most advanced generative AI system of OpenAI. Thereby, WHOOP can discover patterns and connections in the data of users and then offer instant, conversational, customised responses to their



queries concerning fitness, health and overall well-being. Since they come equipped with generative AI, such smart wearables are revolutionising the field of healthcare monitoring. Instead, they deploy predictive analytics to forecast potential health problems based on historical data. Thanks to this proactive approach, both users and

healthcare practitioners can employ preventive measures. Propelled by the power of predictive analytics, smart wearables are driving a steady shift from a purely reactive to a proactive healthcare model. Taking these capabilities one level higher, generative AI is empowering wearables with the capability to sense and react to the emotions of users. These emotion-sensing algorithms can analyse facial expressions, monitor heart rate variability and check other physiological cues to assess the emotional State of users.

Immersive Reality
Then there is smart clothing with adaptive features that respond to environmental circumstances and user preferences. Such smart clothing offers temperature-regulating

textiles and dynamically adjustable apparel tightness for maximum comfort, especially when users engage in physical activities. Or consider language translation earbuds that offer contextual understanding. Backed by generative AI, these language translation earbuds go way beyond mere word-for-word translations. Through advanced contextual understanding, these earbuds can comprehend the idioms, cultural references and nuances of a specific language. By eliminating language barriers, this smart innovation facilitates seamless and efficient cross-cultural communication.

Another exciting wearables category is immersive AR (augmented reality) glasses. Generative AI has allowed

these glasses to take a giant leap forward by delivering immersive experiences for users, seamlessly blending the virtual realm with real-world surroundings.

This is not all. Generative AI has even revolutionised navigation-aiding wearables for visually impaired people. Through AI algorithms, smart navigation devices can interpret the environmental data to offer real-time details about any obstacles, the surroundings or necessary directions. With these wearables, visually challenged users can enjoy enhanced mobility and a certain level of independence that is not possible otherwise.

(The writer is CEO of PR Innovations, brand custodian of Amazfit India, views are personal)