



Reviving trade: There is a dire need for connectivity between India's 'mainland' and the Northeast via Bangladesh through a multi-modal approach. ■ FILE PHOTO

Call of port

Will the Northeast States benefit from Bangladesh's offer of services at the Chittagong Port?

RAHUL KARMAKAR

The story so far: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina offered India the use of the Chittagong Port when External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar called on her in Dhaka last month for an invite to New Delhi. Ms. Hasina said the port would be of benefit to India's northeastern States, particularly Assam and Tripura. The two other northeastern States bordering Bangladesh – Meghalaya and Mizoram – could also benefit from access to the port.

How did Partition affect business in the Northeast?

■ India's Northeast had easy access to the seaports, specifically Chittagong, in present-day Bangladesh via the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems before independence. The Partition in 1947 did not immediately affect the transportation of tea, timber, coal and oil through these rivers and local-level border trade, helping maintain undivided Assam's status as the State with the highest per capita income till the early 1950s. But the volume of trade began dipping with the souring of ties between India and Pakistan – Bangladesh was East Pakistan then – before the 1965 war cut the Northeast off. The movement of goods through the 'chicken's neck', a narrow strip in West Bengal, became a costlier alternative for the region after access to the river and land routes through East Pakistan was denied.

Did things change after Bangladesh was created?

■ The creation of Bangladesh with India's help in 1971 did not translate into the revival of the traditional river and land trade and communication routes for the Northeast. A degree of mistrust between the two

The need for connectivity between India's 'mainland' and the Northeast via Bangladesh through riverways and roads has been felt for a long time. Things have been changing on the ground in the last five years

countries, primarily because of the 'Bangladeshi' issue and camps established by myriad Northeast extremist groups in Bangladesh, did not help matters. Besides, the two countries did not look at trade and commerce opportunities more closely. The scenario began to change when Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government took charge in 2009 and the mistrust lessened after the

dispute-ending land boundary agreement was signed in 2015. The two countries undertook efforts to improve capacity across waterways, roadways and railroads. From a bus service between Agartala and Kolkata via Dhaka to the movement of cargo on barges, trial runs and trans-shipments have been successfully conducted.

What does the Bangladesh PM's offer mean?

■ The Northeast has been the key to the increase in bilateral engagements between India and Bangladesh in the last five years. India's 'Act East' policy that focuses on the region and a new sense of cooperation between the two countries can help the Northeast, specifically four States, explore the potential of economic activities optimally. These States – Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram – share a 1,879 km border with Bangladesh. With a special focus on railways and waterways, many of the pre-Partition trade routes are being revived. Most of these roads lead to Chittagong port, which has historically been the largest and the most convenient for trade and commerce for the region. The importance of this port made the British administrators build the Assam-Bengal Railway route to ship goods from the Chittagong port to the remotest parts of the region such as the now-defunct Lekhapani station near the Arunachal Pradesh-Assam border.

Is there any action on the ground?

■ The need for connectivity between India's 'mainland' and the Northeast via Bangladesh through a multi-modal approach has been felt for a long time. It began translating into action on the ground in the last five years following the assessment that reopening the pre-Partition trade routes would reduce the cost and time of transportation for the Northeast and generate revenue for Bangladesh. India has been working on infrastructure on either side of the border. In March 2021, the Prime Ministers of the two countries inaugurated the Maitri Setu, a bridge built over the Feni river, which has reduced the distance between Sabroom in southern Tripura and the Chittagong port to just 111 km. The government is working on a multi-modal transit hub at Sabroom inclusive of road and rail connectivity that can help goods reach the Chittagong port in a few hours. Road connectivity in Meghalaya's Dawki, southern Assam's Sutarkandi and Tripura's Akhaura linking eastern and south-eastern Bangladesh is also being improved. Mizoram is keen on bridges across the Khawthlangtuipei river (Karnaphuli in Bangladesh) for faster access to the Chittagong port. Apart from the India-Bangladesh Protocol Route involving the Brahmaputra, cargo ships from Bangladesh have reached Tripura through the Gomati river and Assam's Karimganj via the Kushiara river.

Why are India's foreign exchange reserves falling?

In what way is the rupee's depreciation vis-a-vis the dollar impacting the economic situation?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL

The story so far: The Indian rupee hit an all-time low against the U.S. dollar this week weakening past the 77 rupees to a dollar mark and selling at 77.63 against the dollar on Thursday. Many analysts expect the rupee to weaken further in the coming months to hit the 80 rupees to a dollar mark. In fact, the International Monetary Fund expects the rupee to weaken past the 94 rupees to a dollar mark by FY29.

What is happening?

■ The Indian rupee has been witnessing a steady decline this year, losing almost 4% against the U.S. dollar since the beginning of 2022. India's forex reserves have also dropped below \$600 billion, plunging by about \$45 billion since September 3, 2021, when forex reserves stood at an all-time high of \$642 billion. According to Reserve Bank of India data released on Friday, India's forex reserves dropped by \$1.774 billion for the week ended May 6 to \$595.954 billion. The drop in India's forex reserves is believed to be largely due to steps taken by the Reserve Bank of India to support the rupee. RBI officials, however, have noted that the drop in forex reserves is due to a fall in the dollar value of assets held as reserves by the RBI. For instance, if a portion of the reserves are in euros and the euro depreciates against the dollar, this would cause a drop in the value of forex reserves.

It should be noted that, as a matter of policy, the Indian central bank has usually tried to slow down or smoothen, rather than reverse or prevent, the fall in exchange value of the rupee against the U.S. dollar. The aim of the RBI's policy is to allow the rupee to find its natural value in the market but without undue volatility or causing unnecessary panic among investors. State-run banks are usually instructed by the RBI to sell dollars in order to offer some support to the rupee. By thus selling dollars in the open market in exchange for rupees, the RBI can improve demand for the rupee and cushion its fall.

What determines the rupee's value?

■ The value of any currency is determined by demand for the currency as well as its supply. When the supply of a currency increases, its value drops. On the other hand, when the demand for a currency increases, its value rises. In the wider economy, central banks determine the supply of currencies, while the demand for currencies depends on the amount of goods and services produced in the economy.

In the forex market, the supply of rupees is determined by the demand for imports and various foreign assets. So, if there is high demand to import oil, it can lead to an increase in the supply of rupees in the forex market and cause the rupee's value to drop. The



■ REUTERS

demand for rupees in the forex market, on the other hand, depends on foreign demand for Indian exports and other domestic assets. So, for instance, when there is great enthusiasm among foreign investors to invest in India, it can lead to an increase in the supply of dollars in the forex market which in turn causes the rupee's value to rise against the dollar.

Analysts believe that, over the long-run, the rupee is likely to continue to depreciate against the dollar given the significant differences in long-run inflation between India and U.S.

What's causing the rupee to lose value against the dollar?

■ Since March this year, the U.S. Federal Reserve has been raising its benchmark interest rate causing investors seeking higher returns to pull capital away from emerging markets such as India and back into the

U.S. This, in turn, has put pressure on emerging market currencies which have depreciated significantly against the U.S. dollar so far this year. Even developed market currencies such as the euro and the yen have depreciated against the dollar and the dollar index is up more than 8% so far this year. In fact, some analysts believe that the RBI's surprise decision to raise rates earlier this month may have simply been to defend the rupee by preventing any rapid outflow of capital from India. In 2013, the rupee fell 15% against the dollar in about three months after investors were spooked by the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to trim down its bond purchase programme that had helped keep long-term interest rates low.

Moreover, India's current account deficit, which measures among other things the gap between the value of imports and exports of goods and services, is expected to hit a 10-year high of 3.3% of gross domestic product in

the current financial year as predicted by Morgan Stanley. This means that India's import demand amid rising global oil prices is likely to negatively affect the rupee unless foreign investors pour sufficient capital into the country to fund the deficit. But foreign investors are unlikely to plough capital into India when investment yields are rising in the U.S. Yields on U.S. 10-year Treasuries, for instance, have risen from around 0.5% in mid-2020 to over 3% earlier this month.

The rupee, it should also be noted, has consistently lost value against the U.S. dollar for several decades now. A major reason for this has been the consistently higher domestic price inflation in India. Higher inflation in India suggests that the RBI has been creating rupees at a faster rate than the U.S. Federal Reserve has been creating dollars. So, while capital and trade flows gain a lot of attention in discussions on the rupee's value, the difference in the rates at which the U.S. Federal Reserve and the RBI regulate the supply of their currencies may play a much larger role in determining the value of the rupee over the long run.

What lies ahead?

■ Analysts believe that, over the long run, the rupee is likely to continue to depreciate against the dollar given the significant differences in long-run inflation between India and the U.S. At the moment, as the U.S. Federal Reserve raises rates to tackle historically high inflation in the country, other countries and emerging markets in particular will be forced to raise their own interest rates to avoid disruptive capital outflows and to protect their currencies. It should be noted that inflation in the U.S. hit a 40-year high of 8.5% in March. The RBI too has been trying to rein in domestic consumer price inflation, which hit a 95-month high of 7.8% in April, by raising rates and tightening liquidity. As interest rates rise across the globe, the threat of a global recession also rises as economies readjust to tighter monetary conditions.

Pardon and remission: who grants them?

How do pardon powers of the President and Governor differ from government's jurisdiction to release convicts?

K. VENKATARAMANAN

The story so far: The Supreme Court has reserved orders on the question whether a Governor can refer the State government's advice for granting remission to life convicts to the President for a decision. The court is examining a petition from A.G. Perarivalan, one of the life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, questioning the delay in his release even after the Tamil Nadu government, in 2018, recommended the release of all seven convicts in the case under Article 161 of the Constitution. The Governor, instead of acting on the recommendation, referred it to the President. In the course of the arguments, the Additional Solicitor-General of India K.M. Nataraj contended that only the President, under Article 72 of the Constitution, could consider a claim for pardon or remission, and not the State Governor, if the offence involved was based on a parliamentary law.

What is the scope of the pardon power?

■ Both the President and the Governor have been vested with sovereign power of pardon by the Constitution, commonly referred to as mercy or clemency power. Under Article 72, the President can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence in all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a court-martial, in all cases where the punishment or sentence is for an offence under any law relating to the Union government's executive power, and in all cases of death sentences. It is also made clear that the President's power will not in any way affect a Governor's power to commute a death sentence.

Under Article 161, a Governor can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment, or suspend, remit or commute the sentence of anyone convicted under any law on a matter which comes under the State's executive power.

What is the difference between statutory power and constitutional power?

■ The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides for remission of prison sentences, which means the whole or a part of the sentence may be cancelled. Under Section 432, the 'appropriate government' may suspend or remit a sentence, in whole or in part, with or without conditions. This power is available to State governments so that they may order the release of prisoners before they complete their prison terms. Under Section 433, any sentence may be commuted to a less one by the appropriate government. However, Section 435 says that if the prisoner had been sentenced in a case investigated by the CBI, or any agency that probed the offence under a Central Act, the State government can order such release only in consultation with the Central government.

In the case of death sentences, the Central government may also concurrently exercise the same power as the State governments to remit or suspend the sentence.

Even though they appear similar, the power of remission under the CrPC is different from the



constitutional power enjoyed by the President and the Governor. Under the CrPC, the government acts by itself. Under Article 72 and Article 161, the respective governments advise the President/Governor to suspend, remit or commute sentences. Despite the fact that it is ultimately the decision of the government in either case, the Supreme Court has made it clear that the two are different sources of power.

In *Maru Ram etc. vs Union of India* (1980), the Supreme Court said: "Section 432 and Section 433 of the Code are not a manifestation of Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution but a separate, though similar, power." In this case, a Constitution Bench upheld the validity of Section 433A of CrPC, which was introduced in 1978, to prevent the premature release of some life convicts before they spend 14 years in jail. It said that in cases in which the death punishment was available in law, but a person was only given a life term, and in cases in which death sentences were commuted to life, such a prisoner cannot be released unless he had completed 14 years.

The court also reiterated that life sentence meant imprisonment for life until the last breath, unless remitted by the government. This was also a landmark decision in that it declared that the President and Governor do not independently exercise their power when disposing of mercy petitions or pleas for remission or commutation, but only on the advice of the appropriate governments. This principle was reiterated in *Kejar Singh* (1988).

What is the issue in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case?

■ Seven persons were convicted by the Supreme Court in its May 1999 final verdict in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Of these, four – Sriharan alias Murugan, Nalini, Perarivalan and Santhan – were given the death penalty. The other three – Robert Payas, Jayakumar and Ravichandran – were sentenced to life terms.

In 2000, the Governor commuted the death sentence of Nalini to one of life, based on a recommendation by the Cabinet. The remaining three remained on death row and their mercy petitions were pending with the President. In

2014, the Supreme Court commuted the sentences of Sriharan, Perarivalan and Santhan to life terms.

The power of remission under the CrPC is different from the constitutional powers of the President and the Governor. Under the CrPC, the government acts by itself. Under Articles 72 and 161, the respective governments advise the President/Governor

Immediately, the then Chief Minister Jayalalithaa decided to remit their sentences. The State government wrote to the Centre, seeking its opinion within three days. It had to do so as under Section 435 of the CrPC, the State had to consult the Centre, as it was a case probed by the CBI.

However, the Centre challenged the State government's decision in the Supreme Court and obtained a stay.

Questions arising from the controversy were settled by a Constitution Bench, which said the State government could not release them without the Centre's concurrence as the Union government's opinion had primacy in the matter. Also, it made it clear that its opinion was limited to statutory remission proceedings under the CrPC, and that "the constitutional power under Articles 72 and 161 will remain untouched." The Union Home Ministry formally rejected the plea for remission in June 2018.

In September 2018, the State government decided to invoke Article 161 of the Constitution.

It advised the Governor that the remainder of the life term of the seven convicts be remitted so that they could be released. However, in the absence of a time-frame for the Governor to act, nothing was known about it for a long time. Nearly three years later, it became known that the Governor has referred the question to the President. The immediate constitutional question is whether the Governor can make such a reference to the President. The other issue that arises is whether the primacy accorded to the Centre's opinion under the CrPC in this particular case can be extended even to remission that may be granted by the Governor under Article 161.

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

FERDINAND MARCOS JR. & SARA DUTERTE

Back to the future for the Philippines

Thirty-six years after Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship was overthrown, his son, in an alliance with the Duterte family, has been elected President



ANANTH KRISHNAN

Visitors to the inner quarters of the Malacanán Palace, the grand complex on the banks of the Pasig river in Manila that serves as the official residence of the President of the Philippines, are usually taken to see two sights, without exception.

The first is an ornate hall in the inner chambers that is widely believed to be haunted. This is a belief so ingrained that it was reportedly one reason why several leaders, including current President Rodrigo Duterte, decided to not live in the palace, opting instead for another villa nearby.

The second is a small and nondescript balcony that overlooks the entrance of the Palace. The balcony itself is hardly noteworthy in the midst of the Malacanán's grandeur. But for most Filipinos, it is instantly recognisable.

For two decades until 1986, the longest ever residents of Malacanán Palace, Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda, would occasionally appear on the balcony, from where the former dictator would address rallies. Until, of course, he was overthrown by the People Power revolution, during which protesters stormed the

grounds of the palace and saw for themselves the extraordinary luxury that the Marcoses lived in, fuelled by their unprecedented corruption. And now, 36 years later, another Marcos is back at the Malacanán.

A family affair

On May 11, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr, the 64-year-old son of the former dictator, swept to power, capping a return for the once disgraced family. The return has long been in the works. The family, in a sense, has been working on it since almost as soon as they lost it, and after they were allowed to return to the country shortly after the death of Marcos in 1989.

Mr. Marcos Jr, six years ago, lost the Vice-Presidential election to Leni Robredo, a lawyer, economist and activist who was his opponent during this election. This time, having formed an alliance with President Duterte's daughter Sara, he swept to power with a strong mandate, winning 31 million votes, more than double his rival's.

For the people of the Philippines, there could not have been two more contrasting choices on offer at the polls.

The Marcos-Duterte axis between two entrenched political families openly championed hardline polit-

ics. President Rodrigo Duterte's term was defined by his sweeping anti-drug crackdown that claimed thousands of lives and alarmed human rights groups, but proved popular among many others. The Marcos-Duterte campaign also sought to whitewash the legacy of Ferdinand Marcos, downplaying the atrocities committed by his regime while portraying his two-decade rule as an imagined golden era of economic prosperity, no matter that the Marcos years were marked by growing poverty. Leni Robredo's "pink revolution", on the other hand, cautioned against a return to authoritarianism and was deeply critical of President Duterte's war on drugs and rights violations.

The strong political bases of the Marcoses and Duterteres, however, formed an unassailable coalition. Political analysts told local channel ABS-CBN that a combination of "Duterte's popularity and Filipinos' regionalism", with the Marcos base in the north and Duterte's in the south, brought them the votes, showing that "regionalism still forms a large part

of how Filipinos vote".

They were also powered by a huge social media campaign, one that was not averse to dirty tricks. For a young population, the campaign completely rewrote the history of Ferdinand Marcos. The independent media outlet *Rappler*, founded by journalist and Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, analysed Face-

The Marcos-Duterte campaign sought to whitewash the legacy of Ferdinand Marcos, downplaying the atrocities committed by his regime while portraying his rule as an era of prosperity

book posts over the past five months and found that the Marcos base and network routinely spread false claims about the elections. "This is the problem with social media: It has allowed propaganda to flourish and literally has allowed public figures like Marcos, like Bolsonaro [in Brazil] to ignore [media]

checks and balances... and to create their own realities," Ms. Ressa told *Agence-France Presse* this week. "That's not a good thing."

Mr. Marcos Jr has appointed Ms. Sara Duterte as head of education, leading to concerns that there will now be an official sanction to the rewriting of history that the Marcos-Duterte campaign carried out. Mr. Marcos Jr and Ms. Sara Duterte will not be the only representatives of their political families in positions of power. Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, a cousin of Mr. Marcos Jr, has been appointed as House Speaker. Mr. Marcos Jr's son Sandro was elected as a representative to the House after winning a seat in their northern bastion, while President Duterte's son, Sebastian, will succeed his sister Sara as Mayor of Davao city, a post their father once held.

The biggest question mark is how Mr. Marcos Jr plans to govern. He has been short on details during his campaign and largely avoided engaging with the media. Having won, he has pledged to govern with "unity".

The victory holds a broad-

er significance. It has underlined both the power of nostalgia for an electorate – the campaign rested on harking back to an imagined time of prosperity – as well as how a strong narrative can trump detail. The real test, however, begins now for the Marcos-Duterte combine, starting with reviving the economy and ensuring that investors, who were thought to widely favour Ms. Leni Robredo, do not leave the country.

Two dynasties

With two political dynasties at the helm – and signs that Mr. Marcos Jr intends to continue President Duterte's approach of spending big on infrastructure as a means to grow the economy and courting investments from China, regardless of unresolved tensions over the South China Sea dispute – some newspapers pointed to the current crisis in Sri Lanka as a warning sign.

"The new administration in the Philippines should take care not to make the same mistakes as Sri Lanka's leaders, given that there are similar circumstances here:

an inordinate amount of clan dominance in politics, economic circumstances that tempt unwise quick-fix solutions, such as subsidies and price controls, and considerable business entanglements with China," the *Manila Times* said. "None of these things necessarily have to lead to the same kind of trouble, but without diligent effort on the leadership's part, they very well could."

Meanwhile, those who still remember the Marcos years are hoping history won't repeat itself, and that the institutions that are a legacy of the movement that deposed him 36 years ago, will stand firm as his son comes to power.

"I was with the millions at People Power and do not relish a Marcos Jr. presidency," observed historian Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. in a column for *Rappler*. "Even Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is a beneficiary of the People Power Constitution, which allowed him to run and win. Marcos's election win does not obliterate People Power but is a recognition of it, even if burying the ghosts of 1986 might have been his intention."

In Focus

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■ This time, having formed an alliance with Sara Duterte, he swept to power with a strong mandate, winning 31 million votes, more than double his rival's

■ Marcos Jr.'s son Sandro was elected to the House, while President Duterte's son, Sebastian, will succeed his sister as Mayor of Davao city

RANIL WICKREMESINGHE

From lone MP to PM

The UNP leader, whose party was crushed in the 2020 polls, is back in the game

MEERA SRINIVASAN

Just as it became apparent on Wednesday that Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was about to appoint Ranil Wickremesinghe as PM, in place of Mahinda Rajapaksa who resigned days earlier, an old video clip got widely shared on social media.

Clad in a back suit, a prim looking Mr. Wickremesinghe tells a journalist in a slow, considered manner: "Politics is more than chess, it is teamwork like cricket, you must have the stamina for a marathon, you must also remember it's a hard game like rugger, and a blood sport like boxing." It was just before the 2010 presidential election, in which he lost to Mr. Mahinda.

Five years later, he was back in power, cohabiting in a 'national unity' government with President Maithripala Sirisena, who controversially ousted him in 2018 and reinstated him, after a Supreme Court ruling. The internal rift in their coalition, compounded by its many failures, of not prosecuting the Rajapaksas and their allies in alleged murder and corruption cases, and failing to prevent the Easter terror bombings of 2019 despite warnings, paved the way for the rise of Mr. Gotabaya, who hand-somely won the 2019 presidential polls. In the general elections the following year, the Rajapaksas' ruling party, along with its allies, secured over 150 seats in the 225-member House. In the same election, Mr. Wickreme-



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

singhe's United National Party (UNP), the country's oldest political party, was wiped out. Contesting from his Colombo stronghold, he suffered a crushing defeat. It was his first defeat since he entered Parliament 45 years ago. But for Sri Lanka's proportional representation system, through which parties get a few seats based on the total votes they poll, Mr. Wickremesinghe would not have made to the legislature. It seemed like his political career was over.

But in less than a year after returning to Parliament, Mr. Wickremesinghe, 73, is Sri Lanka's Prime Minister for the sixth time, although he has never completed a full term in office. From being the UNP's lone MP, he has risen to Premiership in rather circumstances. Beleaguered President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose party secured a two-thirds majority in 2020, is now counting on Mr. Wickremesinghe to put the island's battered economy on a path of recovery. The President's

political manoeuvre is one of many developments after a grave economic crisis hit Sri Lanka that has emptied its coffers and left people amid acute shortages.

Meanwhile, the call for Mr. Gotabaya's resignation remains loud and clear in street protests across the country, and in front of his sea-facing office in Colombo. Mr. Wickremesinghe's appointment is hardly the solution that demonstrators want or are likely to accept.

'Deal maker'

As recently as March, Mr. Wickremesinghe said there was "no question" of him joining a national unity government. Two months later, he is struggling to put together a Cabinet and government. While ruling party MPs have promised to support him, all main opposition parties have refused to work with him or nominate members to the Cabinet. They term his appointment illegitimate, citing his poll defeat. Critics of Mr. Wickremesinghe and some

protesters are outraged by the move. They call him a "deal maker" and accuse of him "protecting" the tainted Rajapaksas. A small section of the Colombo elite, however, feels some respite in his appointment. They approve of his known pro-West, pro-market policies, and hope his international outreach can bail the country out of the economic calamity. For a while, Mr. Wickremesinghe has been pushing greater regional cooperation, especially with greater trade interaction between south India and Sri Lanka.

A lawyer by training, Mr. Wickremesinghe comes from a politically influential family. In his long career, he was rarely known to be a people's man. During the island's tumultuous 1970s and 1980s that saw two armed insurrections by Sinhalese youth led by the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the UNP was accused of grave rights abuses against dissidents. Mr. Wickremesinghe too was linked to some of the allegations. But in later years, he won the trust of many in Sri Lanka's civil society and fashioned himself as the liberal democratic alternative to the conservative, Sinhala Buddhist nationalist Rajapaksa brand.

Today, ironically, the Rajapaksas need him more than he needs the Rajapaksas. And Mr. Wickremesinghe is back in the game. As Sri Lanka descends into further economic chaos, it will soon be known if the political class will choose team play, a hard game, or blood sport.

SAGITTARIUS A*

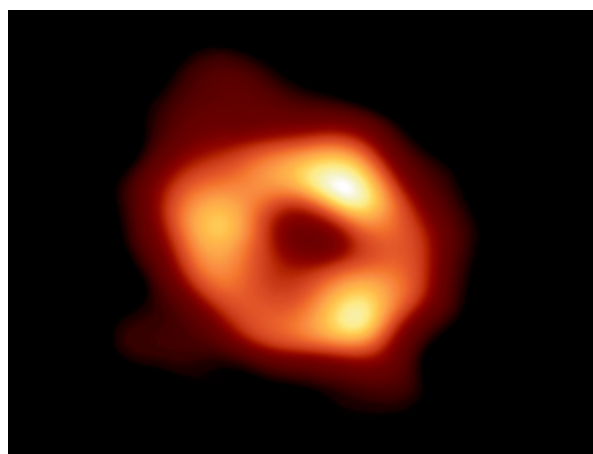
The Milky Way's dark centre

With an Earth-sized eye, researchers imaged the compact object in the galaxy

SHUBHASHREE DESIKAN

In 2020, Andrea Ghez and Reinhard Genzel were given the Nobel prize for showing that there existed, at the centre of the Milky Way, an extremely heavy, invisible object that pulls masses towards it and causes them to speed up enormously. They estimated that mass of around 4 million times the sun was concentrated in this region. Now, the Event Horizon Telescope, a collaboration of over 300 researchers from 80 countries, has published an image of this region. Known as Sagittarius A* (SgrA* for short), this region is believed to host a supermassive black hole of about 4 million times the solar mass. There have been other possibilities put forth by researchers in this context, but that of a supermassive black hole is the most likely one.

The Event Horizon Telescope is not just a single telescope. It consists of a consortium of eight powerful telescope arrays around the world, which together made up a giant eye, the size of the Earth and 3 million times sharper than the human eye. With this giant eye, the researchers gazed at this point which is about 27,000 light years away from the Earth. They observed SgrA* on multiple nights collecting data for hours at a stretch, just like a camera would use long exposure times. The technique was, however, very different as it uses a network of telescopes rather than a single one. This is



called Very Long Baseline Interferometry.

Using this technique, the Event Horizon Telescope collaboration had, in 2019, imaged a region called M87*, the black hole at the centre of the galaxy Messier 87. Despite the fact that the two galaxies are so different and that the masses of the black holes were different, the images are strongly similar.

Black hole's shadow

Although we cannot see the black hole itself, the gas moving around the black hole emits light, which takes a curved path around the black hole and this leaves a central dark portion, referred to as the "shadow" of the black hole. This effect happens because of the enormous gravity of the central region. Thus, this image is an attestation of Einstein's General Relativity theory. The ring-shaped image of SgrA*, which looked a lot similar to the one of M87*, occupied 52 micro arcseconds in the field of

view, which is as big a span of our view as a doughnut on the moon!

Challenges in imaging

Despite the fact that M87* is much further away than SgrA*, the group was able to image the former earlier. This is because SgrA* is only one-thousandth the size of M87*; the line of sight to SgrA* is obscured by a lot of intervening matter; and, lastly, as SgrA* is much smaller than M87*, the gas swirling around it takes only minutes to complete an orbit around SgrA* as opposed to taking weeks to go around M87*. The last gives a variability that makes it difficult to image. A clear imaging requires long exposure of about 8-10 hours, during which, ideally, the object should not change much.

The telescopes making up the array are Atacama Large Millimetre/sub-millimetre Array, Atacama Pathfinder Experiment, IRAM 30-metre telescope, James Clerk Maxwell telescope, Large Millimetre Telescope

Alfonso Serrano, Submillimetre Array, UArizona Submillimetre Telescope and South Pole Telescope. Since 2017, when observations were started on this, the group has added the Greenland Telescope, Northern Millimetre Extended Array and UArizona 12-metre Telescope on Kitt Peak to the set.

While there is overwhelming evidence that SgrA* contains a highly compact invisible object at its core, is the only possibility a black hole? This question has a non-trivial answer. According to Pankaj Joshi, founding director of the Cosmology Centre and Distinguished Professor of Physics at Ahmedabad University, who is an expert in this field and not part of the collaboration, "In their papers, the researchers consider various alternatives such as naked singularities and wormholes. Their report in one of the papers – paper five of the series published in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters* – claims that the JMN (Joshi-Malafarina-Narayan) naked singularity with photon sphere could be the best black hole mimicker. The point is that the central object and its nature remains a question of great mystery. This is because just as a black hole event horizon would create a shadow, similarly the naked singularity also creates a similar shadow and therefore it is impossible to distinguish between the two."

The New Generation Event Horizon Telescope collaboration is looking into these deeper mysteries.

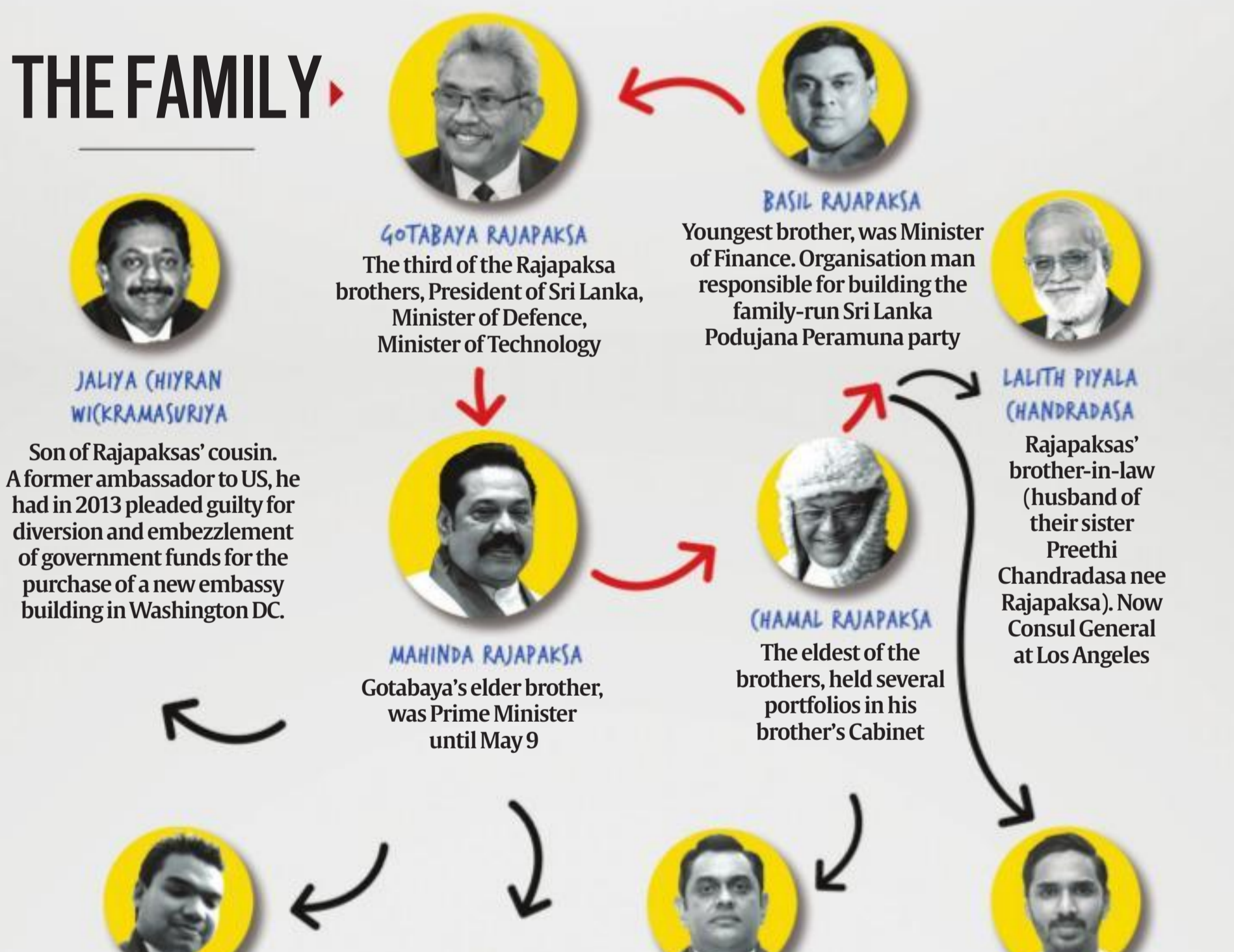
9 SUNDAY STORY



A vandalised portrait of Mahinda Rajapaksa outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office in Colombo, Sri Lanka. AP File

The hand of the Rajapaksas

They were the most powerful political clan in Sri Lanka until the recent crisis spun out of control leading to Mahinda Rajapaksa stepping down as PM and paving the way for Ranil Wickremesinghe. Mahinda has gone. But has he? NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN traces the arc of Sri Lanka's complex political history and finds that it could be hard to keep the Rajapaksas down for too long



THE FAMILY

- Gotabaya Rajapaksa**: The third of the Rajapaksa brothers, President of Sri Lanka, Minister of Defence, Minister of Technology
- Basil Rajapaksa**: Youngest brother, was Minister of Finance. Organisation man responsible for building the family-run Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party
- Chamal Rajapaksa**: The eldest of the brothers, held several portfolios in his brother's Cabinet
- Mahinda Rajapaksa**: Gotabaya's elder brother, was Prime Minister until May 9
- Namal Rajapaksa**: Mahinda's son, was Minister of Youth and Sport
- Shasheendra Kumara Rajapaksa**: Son of Chamal Rajapaksa, held several portfolios in the Cabinet
- Nipuna Ranawaka**: Rajapaksa's nephew (son of their sister Gandani Ranawaka nee Rajapaksa)
- Yositha Rajapaksa**: Mahinda's son. Former navy officer, was chief of Staff to PM
- Lalith Piyala (Chandradasa)**: Rajapaksa's brother-in-law (husband of their sister Preethi Chandradasa nee Rajapaksa). Now Consul General at Los Angeles
- Jaliya (Hiyran) Wickramasuriya**: Son of Rajapaksa's cousin. A former ambassador to US, he had in 2013 pleaded guilty for diversion and embezzlement of government funds for the purchase of a new embassy building in Washington DC.

in Parliament. Premadasa had imposed several conditions for joining the interim government, including a time bound plan for abolition of the executive presidency. He believed if he waited, he would get his way. Instead he found himself outwitted by his arch enemy, Ranil. The new PM may also be able to entice other Opposition groups that were part of the ruling coalition but had declared themselves independent when the protests broke out, or individuals within these groups.

But the bulk of Wickremesinghe's support will have to come from the Rajapaksas' discredited SLPP. On Saturday, the SLPP formally offered its support, claiming to have boosted Wickremesinghe's parliamentary strength to 117, just over the halfway mark of 113. Thus parliamentarians, who owe their political career to Mahinda, will adorn Wickremesinghe's cabinet. Mahinda may no longer be in charge, but it appears he will remain relevant.

The appointment has shocked and disappointed those who have been demanding that President Gotabaya must resign, hoping for deeper change instead of a rearrangement.

"This is business as usual. This is Sri Lankan political culture trying to squash the nascent revolt against the 'old ways', i.e. self interest disguised as 'pragmatism'," tweeted Ambika Satkunanathan, an activist and chair of Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, a rights advocacy group.

Sri Lanka's history in the first two decades of the new millennium is largely the history of the rise of the Rajapaksas. Their big comeback in 2018-2019 after a humiliating defeat just four years earlier offers insights into tenacity of a political dynasty that is arguably South Asia's biggest, perhaps its most brazenly nepotistic, one that cannot be written off even now.

Mahinda's rise to power began in 2004, when he was appointed prime minister during the presidency of Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike. The former President once said it had been her biggest mistake. He was unstoppable after that. After winning the 2005 presidential election, it was Rajapaksa who made the decision to launch an all-out war in the north and east against the LTTE, with his brother Gotabaya playing a key role as the Defence Secretary.

That victory strengthened the Rajapaksa grip on power. In the Sinhalese south, Mahinda and Gotabaya ascended to god-like levels in the eyes of the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community for freeing them from the terror of the LTTE. Mahinda won a second term, had the Constitution amended to remove the two-term bar, and was confident he would be president for life. But he had begun taking voters for granted and his arrogance had begun to grate.

Continuing as Mahinda's defence secretary, Gotabaya became a parallel power centre, wielding influence through fear. He had even given his office a regal touch, his throne-like chair placed at a level above those of his visitors in a statement of power.

On his watch, dozens of people who were known critics of the government were abducted, some never to be seen again. Lasantha Wickrematunge, editor of *The Sunday Leader* was killed in 2009. Prageeth Ekneligoda, a cartoonist, who went missing in 2010, has not been seen since. This was also the time when the Rajapaksas gave free reign to the Bodu Bala Sena, a Buddhist extremist group that triggered

several incidents of anti-Muslim violence.

The spoils system had space for the other Rajapaksas too. Their youngest brother Basil was minister in charge of economic development, and controlled all investments in Sri Lanka. Chamal, the eldest, was Speaker. At the time, according to an estimate, as many as 40 Rajapaksas held one office or the other, and between them, controlled most of the government's finances. Under their grip, media freedoms suffered.

Internationally, Mahinda's proximity to China began to worry Delhi at a time the regional giant had begun making inroads into India's south Asian neighbours. The US, too, was concerned about China's growing claims in the Indian Ocean region. There was also concern that Rajapaksa regime had shelved post-war reconciliation with the Tamil community.

An unforeseen challenge to Mahinda's candidacy in the 2015 presidential election came from within the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) that he headed at the time, leading to his shock defeat to the uncharismatic Maithripala Sirisena. A thrashing in the parliamentary elections that followed proved his defeat was no accident. But sensing that Sirisena would fall out with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, whose UNP and Colombo elite background were cheese to the chalk of President Sirisena's more modest hinterland upbringing and his discomfort with Sri Lanka's English-speaking class, Rajapaksa began plotting his comeback.

With Basil's help, Mahinda launched the Sri Lanka Peramuna Podujana, rattling the government with a massive win in the local elections. Immediately, most of the SLFP that had bandwagoned with Sirisena, started reaching out to the former boss. The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government would finally collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, its failure cruelly evident in the inability to prevent the 2019 Easter Day terrorist attacks.

Later that year Gotabaya Rajapaksa would be voted in as President — after he reluctantly gave up his American citizenship to qualify as a candidate — on the back of people's fears that terrorism would return to Sri Lanka.

Mahinda, who could not contest the 2019 presidential election because the two-term bar had been restored by the previous government, led his party to a landslide win in the parliamentary election, and became Prime Minister. Basil, who refused to give up his American citizenship to be able to contest the election, joined the government after the ruling SLPP brought in an amendment that among other things, removed the condition that those with dual citizenship cannot contest elections, enabling him to take a nominated seat.

Between the brothers, Mahinda is the politician, Basil the organiser, and Chamal the quiet elder. Gotabaya believed his planning of military strategies against the LTTE, and later the much praised beautification of the capital city, equipped him to run a country. Until Gotabaya goofed it up with his ill-informed tax cuts and his sudden edict to farmers to switch to organic farming — which together with the pandemic resulted in unprecedented economic pain of the kind Sri Lanka had never known before — Mahinda's plan was to groom his son Namal for the ultimate prize in Sri Lankan politics: the presidency.

But of all four brothers, it is Gotabaya who is still standing, defying a protest that began as, and still is, a call for him to go. According to those who have interacted with Rajapaksa family members recently, relations between the brothers have been tense over which of them could be let go to appease protesters.

A heavy drinker until a few years ago, Mahinda has been in bad health, reportedly with a serious kidney ailment. Those who have met him in recent months say he appeared barely coherent or focussed. A great believer in Hindu gods, including Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati, his wrist covered with all manner of holy threads, Mahinda is also reported to have a personal occult adviser. On a recent TV appearance, he was seen

clutching a string of beads as he addressed the nation on the crisis. Mahinda may still hope to oversee the transition to the next generation of Rajapaksas. The return of his 73-year-old friend Wickremesinghe from political wilderness to head a government powered by his party, may have reinforced his belief that in politics, there are no closed doors.

Wickremesinghe had once believed he would go down in history as the leader who ended the country's civil war. His UNP's urban constituencies were deeply unhappy with how the war was affecting the economy. When he became Prime Minister at the end of 2001, Sri Lanka had experienced negative growth of 1.4 per cent. Having determined correctly that LTTE was a war machine, Wickremesinghe was determined to break it by denying it war.

As a first step, he signed off on a Norway-brokered ceasefire with the LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran (the two did not come face-to-face for this), and was prepared to put the Tigers in charge of an interim administration in the North and East. The ceasefire did bring in foreign financial inflows. But his ambitious plans were cut short when Kumaratunga, unhappy with the terms of the ceasefire and at being kept out, exercised her powers as President and sacked him before any of this came to fruition.

Now, as the new Prime Minister, Wickremesinghe has another chance at going down in history as the leader who steered Sri Lanka's economy back on course from its worst ever crisis. In established business and political elites, there is a sigh of relief that Wickremesinghe, considered a safe pair of hands when it comes to the economy, is back in charge. In interviews, he has said that as Prime Minister from 2015-2018, he had done much to stabilise Sri Lanka's economy which was in bad shape when he took over. He negotiated a \$1.5 bn package from the IMF, implementing a set of reforms in return for the bailout.

For India, his return to the helm is a welcome development. Many Indian projects in Sri Lanka that saw the light of day between January to March this year had been agreed upon in 2017. Though the 2015-2018 government ended in disappointment for Delhi, Wickremesinghe is viewed as easier to work with than any of the Rajapaksas.

With four decades in public life, the well-read Ranil is far less insular than many other Sri Lankan politicians. He is also the quintessential establishment man. He may even see this as a chance to become the President, an office he has always coveted but never managed to win. "The young people protesting on the streets were demanding a system change. Now they have a Prime Minister who is the system himself," said a lawyer who did not wish to be named.

But his moody leadership of the party, and poor success rate at winning elections has diminished the UNP. Even as he focuses on economic repair, Wickremesinghe will be watched by the people of Sri Lanka for how he deals with the Rajapaksas. In his last term from 2015-2018, Wickremesinghe was criticised for dragging his feet on action against the Rajapaksas on charges of corruption and money laundering. Adding to the discontent over the new arrangement, rumours are swirling in Colombo that Wickremesinghe may allow the brothers and their families to leave the country. The protests at Colombo's Galle Face Green demanding Gotabaya's resignation are ongoing.

In his first remarks to the press, Wickremesinghe triggered much speculation by saying the GoGotaGo protesters would be allowed to continue camping at GoGotaGama (gama is the Sinhalese word for Village) at the Galle Face Green, outside the presidential secretariat. Some of the protests have now shifted to the road outside Temple Trees. The new camp site is called NoDealGama. It's not over yet.

WHAT NEXT FOR RAJAPAKSAS: 2 SCENARIOS

1 NOTHING CHANGES in the present arrangement. PM Ranil Wickremesinghe manages to cool down the streets over the coming days and weeks, Gotabaya brings Mahinda Rajapaksa and his family back to Colombo. Other than Mahinda, Basil and Chamal, three next-gen Rajapaksas are parliament members, including Mahinda's son Namal and with an eye to the future, one or more may return to take up their seats in the House

2 GOTABAYA RESIGNS, goes back to the US where his son lives, paving the way for Wickremesinghe to become President. Manages to reunify his UNP before the next parliamentary election

Across THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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THE NATIONAL Family Health Survey-5 was conducted during 2019-21. The previous survey (NFHS-4) was conducted in 2015-16. Both were periods when the NDA government was in office; therefore the changes between the two surveys reflect the impact of the policies that were followed until 2014-15 as well as the policies of the government of Mr Narendra Modi.

Like in the previous survey, the key indicators of NFHS-5 are on issues such as the population and the profile of households, literacy, marriage and fertility, maternal and child health, vaccinations, quality of medical treatment, anaemia, women's empowerment and use of tobacco and alcohol. The numbers are statistical estimates based on the two surveys separated by four years. Since the methodology adopted in the surveys was the same, the change in the numbers — what statisticians call the DELTA — conveys very useful lessons. Some changes will make us proud, some will depress us and some will raise doubts and questions.

GOOD NEWS

The big, 'breaking' news is that the Total Fertility Rate has fallen from 2.2 (children per woman) to 2.0. The 'replacement rate' is 2.1. The number 2.0 has good as well as negative implications that require a separate essay. Therefore, for the present, we may take comfort that India's population is not growing at an

The big, breaking, bad news is that a little more than one-half of India's population did not complete 10 years of school education — 59 per cent of women and 49.8 per cent of men. This means that, after 75 years of Independence, one-half of the population cannot be engaged in jobs and businesses of the 21st century that require higher education, advanced technology and superior skills

Good, bad and doubtful

alarming rate and may stabilize earlier than anticipated.

Firstly, the good news. 88.6 per cent of children were born in an institution (meaning under some kind of medical care) — up from 78.9 per cent. More girl children are being welcomed into families, especially in rural India. The sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) has climbed from 991 to 1020. While 88.0 per cent of the population lived in households with electricity in 2015-16, the Modi government has added 8.8 per cent to make the proportion 96.8 per cent (Rome was not built in a day, as claimed). Fewer women and men married before the legal age of 18 and 21, respectively, but with 23.3 per cent of women marrying before age 18, there is still a long way to go.

NOT-SO-GOOD NEWS

The big, breaking, bad news is that a little more than one-half of India's population did not complete 10 years of school education — 59 per cent of women and 49.8 per cent of men. This means that, after 75 years of Independence, one-half of the population cannot be engaged in jobs and businesses of the 21st century that require higher education, advanced technology and superior skills.

India's population is still young (26.5 per cent are below age 15), but the proportion is declining — meaning that the

proportion of old people is growing. The 'demographic dividend' that we boast of will not last forever. A majority of women were anaemic: 57.0 per cent in the age group 15-49 and, more worryingly, 59.1 per cent in the age group 15-19. Both proportions have increased since NFHS-4. The other bitter news is that only 11.3 per cent of children of age 6-23 months received an adequate diet. The result is that 32.1 per cent of children under 5 years were underweight; 35.5 per cent were stunted; 19.3 per cent were wasted; and 7.7 per cent were severely wasted. The infant mortality rate (IMR) at 35.2 per thousand and the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) at 41.9 per thousand live births are still too high and way above the lowest in the world.

NEWS THAT RAISE QUESTIONS

Some data raise more questions on the aspects they are supposed to clarify. The data claim that 95.9 per cent of the population live in households with 'an improved drinking water source'. The footnote defines an 'improved drinking water source' as including piped water, a public tap or a tube well. These are fine, but when the definition includes 'a protected dug well, a protected spring and rainwater', it is evident that an elaborate attempt was made to include age-old, un-

protected sources of water to arrive at an impressive proportion like 95.9 per cent. I suspect this will be the penultimate step before declaring that the goal of providing individual household taps to all households has been achieved by the target year of 2024!

The data on using an 'improved sanitation facility' is also questionable. The improved sanitation facility includes flush to pit latrine, flush to don't know where, pit latrine with slab and twin pit/composting toilet — that is, everything except Open Defecation (OD) is an improved sanitation facility!

Despite the hype about Ujjwala Yojana only 58.6 per cent of households (up from 43.8 per cent) use clean fuel for cooking. The percentage actually relates to LPG or piped gas connections, not the actual number regularly using LPG cylinders.

Thanks to indifferent growth rates, many millions are poor and many may be living in absolute poverty. Let's take just one indicator, namely, consumption of food. Food is the first charge on a household's income. If a large proportion of women are anaemic and a significant proportion of children are underweight or anaemic besides many children stunted or wasted, that is due to lack of adequate nutrition. Lack of food, to my mind, is a decisive indicator of poverty. Those poor people — the children of a lesser god — have been forgotten by the present government.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

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Small things that matter

ONCE MORE last week the bulldozers rolled in Delhi destroying the lives and dreams of ordinary people. Once more battles raged over which mosque was a Hindu temple. Into this rectification of historical wrongs were dragged the Qutub Minar and the Taj Mahal. This is a topical column, so both events necessitate a comment. On bulldozers may I say I wait eagerly for the day when bulldozers smash down the homes of those corrupt officials who permitted illegal construction on such a scale. On the triumphalist Hindutva movement that now claims that the Taj Mahal was a Hindu monument, I have one question: when do bulldozers arrive to demolish the most famous mausoleum in the world?

For those of you who think I am being frivolous about serious things, I have one response: enough is enough. For weeks, if not months, we appear to have talked of nothing else but matters of this kind, so I am going to spare you yet another piece on either bulldozers or majoritarian madness. Little more can be said that has not already been said in endless, repetitive primetime debates and endless, increasingly repetitive ponderings by political pundits.

So, this week I plan to talk of what are considered things so inconsequential that they never make headlines. My reason for doing this is that on the inside pages of newspapers appeared what to me was the most important news of all, and this is that 89% of Indian children are malnourished before they reach their second year. This information came in the recently published report of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). The report concluded that there has been only marginal improvement since their findings five years ago. This is heartbreaking and shameful. Malnourishment in a child's most formative months means that they will grow up stunted and unable ever to reach their full potential either physically or mentally.

When I asked myself why Narendra Modi who has paid so much attention to rectifying negligence of many kinds during Congress rule, I noticed that Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh were the worst offenders when it came to malnutrition in infants. Clearly, this is something he has never paid attention to. Can we hope that after this latest NFHS report from his own government, he will pay as much attention to malnutrition as he did to sanitation in his first term? Swachh Bharat achieved levels of rural sanitation on an impressive scale because Modi put his weight behind it. If he did the same to ensure that India's children were no longer malnourished, then we might one day reap the full benefits of having the world's largest population of young people.

There are other 'small' things I would like to draw attention to this week. I use the word small deliberately because Modi has shown that what he really loves are big things. The 'tallest statue' in the world has come up in his time. The 'largest vaccination programme' has been successfully achieved and these are things that the Prime Minister loves to boast about. On the day I sat down to write this piece I drove past the new Parliament building and, without being allowed to get close enough for a real inspection, can report that it already towers over every other building in its vicinity. The old Parliament, repository of so much of India's democratic history, resembles an anthill in its mighty shadow. But I digress.

The most ignored and most horrible news of the moment is that a garbage mountain that is estimated to be more than seventeen stories high remains on fire in Delhi. It spews poisonous gases into the city's dangerously polluted air and reminds us that although we dream of putting a man on the moon, we have failed to learn how to deal with waste. On the edge of every village, we see ditches filled with rotting garbage and nearly all our small towns have main bazaars that are, in reality, just garbage dumps. Is this not shameful at a time when we are so proudly celebrating the seventy-fifth year of India's Independence?

Those who yell Vande Mataram and Jai Shri Ram with every breath need to read the Ramayana more carefully to discover the description of Ayodhya on the eve of Ram's coronation. And, while they are about it, they can also pay careful attention to the road that Bharat built to go to the forest in which his brothers were forced into exile. The methods used to build the road were as modern as they are today and Ayodhya more beautiful than any modern Indian city. While Hindu revivalism is so fashionable, can we please revive some of these things? Is it not time that we ensured that Bharat Mata was no longer covered in rotting garbage? And what could be a finer tribute in this year of our Amrit Mahotsav than to ensure that no Indian child lacks the basic nutrients they need to grow to their full potential? Can I end with a question? What happens now that a court has declared that it will not begin to discuss whether Hindutva activists should be allowed to start meddling around in those alleged 'twenty-two sealed rooms' in the basement of the Taj Mahal? Will Hindutva troops be unleashed in Agra to start attacking Muslims for the 'sins' of their ancestors? Seriously, what happens now?

In search of a house for Mr Wrong Caste

Dalitality

MUKKERA RAHUL SWAERO



EXHORTING DALITS to urbanise, Babasaheb Ambedkar had famously said "What is a village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism." While several positive strides have been made over the last 75 years in independent India, has urban India recovered from the "sink of localism" and "narrow mindedness"?

A joint study from 2015 to 2017, conducted by Savitribai Phule Pune University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies shows that 22.3 per cent of forward caste (FC) Hindus own 41 per cent of the country's wealth. Using nationally representative surveys, Nitin Bharti of the Paris School of Economics has empirically demonstrated the wealth dominance of the forward castes. The top 10% (1st decile) owned nearly 60% of the urban wealth in 2012. Calculating "representational inequality", which measures the extent of social segregation within a wealth bracket, Bharti shows that FCs dominate the richest 10% while Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims are over-represented in the bottom 50%. It would, therefore, be fair to say that property ownership by caste has merely shifted locations from rural to urban areas without commensurating socio-economic mobility of backward castes. Consequently, the rental housing market in so-called "good neighbourhoods" in urban India continues to be dominated by FCs.

I am a Dalit and I studied at the Telangana Social Welfare Residential School and then completed my Masters in 2020 from Azim Premji University. Subsequently, I started working in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, where my quest to find a rental accommodation started. Initially, I met a doctor via an online housing app. Given that I am from Telangana, he had trouble gauging my religion and caste from my surname. I acknowledged that I am a Hindu when he asked about my religion. He then veered towards my food preferences and wanted to know about my parents' occupation. Feeling uncomfortable, I started lying and put on a mask of an upper caste person. With

much difficulty, I ended the conversation. Frightened, I did not approach him again.

My search continued and the general trend became obvious soon. First, I would be asked if I am a Hindu and then there would be follow-up questions about my food habits. Some were less subtle, and asked directly: 'Kaunsa jaati hai tumhara (What is your caste?)'. I also had trouble answering questions about my 'gotra'. In one instance, after a conversation about my native place and marital status, I said I am a Christian when the landlord asked me about my caste. Soon he said that he had already rented the house to a Brahmin family.

After numerous knocks on many multi-coloured doors, a new friend assured me that he had found a house for me. Within a few minutes of our meeting, and with no sense of irony, the house owner said: 'We are only looking for Brahmins. Are you a Brahmin?' Before I could say anything, my friend jumped in and said "Yes, he is." I said my mother is a school teacher and that I am a pure vegetarian. Then, the house owner asked, "What is your caste?" I mentioned a south Indian Brahmin caste name of an old friend.

The landlord then called a Brahmin couple and they asked me, "Do you belong to OBC or SC?" I responded with a plain face: "No, General Category." After probing further, the couple finally gave up and said "Ok. Don't cook eggs or other meat in the house." The landlord then asked me to bring a copy of my Aadhaar card. I left with a sense of fear and repeatedly looked at details on my Aadhaar card to ensure that my caste was not mentioned on it. When I returned with my luggage, the couple came to examine my Aadhaar. I got anxious as the address on my Aadhaar said 'Ambedkar Nagar'. But soon I realised that they could neither read English nor Telugu.

Finally, after finding a place to stay, I had to live like a typical Brahmin as people observed me all the time. But, I realised the power of being able to speak in English. Since the people around me didn't understand the language, I started speaking in English all the time and now their questions have also reduced.

My true identity remains hidden.

Mukkerah Rahul Swaero is a Programme Coordinator with LibTech India in Rajasthan

Suraj Yengde, author of Caste Matters, curates the fortnightly 'Dalitality' column

history HEADLINE

LEENA MISRA



A DISTINCT memory for any visitor to Vadodara is likely to be of students of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSUB) with their sketch pads and pencils at the railway station, at Kamatibaug (now Sayajibaug) or at the Khanderao market, sketching away. If you waited long enough at the train station, you might even become the muse of a budding artist. Such was the omnipresence of the student of the Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA) in Vadodara.

For those of us in other Faculties, getting to dance at the garba hosted by the Fine Arts Faculty during the Navratri was a privilege. Students wore everything from denims to chania cholis as they danced to the dhols. That's how we left our university — with memories of a free and happy space. Of the time spent hanging out on the steps of Central Hall, of the arguments with our professors, of the boisterous campaigning during student body elections and of sipping over-boiled tea in cracked cups at the college canteen.

Then May 9, 2007, happened. A mob stormed the FFA to protest against allegedly obscene depictions of Goddess Durga and Jesus Christ by a 26-year old student from Andhra Pradesh's Mandapalli village. Srilamantula Chandramohan work was displayed as part of the evaluation for his Master's in Visual Arts (MVA) degree. Chandramohan's works remain sealed in the faculty as a crime scene, unevaluated. And he, without a degree, facing two criminal cases, one for his art that allegedly promoted "enmity between different groups on grounds of religion etc" and another for attempted murder and arson in 2018, when he allegedly set fire to the V-C's office out of frustration for not getting his marksheet.

In a sort of déjà vu, FFA saw another round of vandalism when, on May 5, an MSU syndicate member, Hasmukh Vaghela, targeted Kundan Yadav, a first-year Master's student from Bihar for "objectionable" depiction of Hindu Gods and the Ashoka Pillar.

Leading artistes who have been associated with the FFA since its inception in 1950 as one of independent India's first and finest schools of art, find these episodes "painful".

They talk wistfully of a time when the late NS Bendre, who taught painting at the faculty, set up the 'Baroda Group' in 1956, thus shaping a generation of artistes known for their "regional modernism", who stood out from among their peers who had trained in British-era Indian art schools. Apart from Bendre, the FFA also saw teachers such as K G Subramanyam, Bhupen

MSU, where freedom was once a lived reality



The Faculty of Arts building at Maharaja Sayajirao University. Bhupendra Rana

Khakkar, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh and Ratan Parimoo, each of whom came with a distinct style and school of thought.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Dadasaheb Phalke, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Kanhaiyalal Munshi, former RBI governor I G Patel and the 2009 Nobel laureate Venkatraman Ramakrishnan are among the university's distinguished alumni.

Founded as Baroda College in 1881 by the ruler of Baroda State, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, the university was established in 1949 by his grandson Pratapsinh Rao Gaekwad, who was also its first chancellor. Vadodara soon came to be known as a city that patronised the arts, one where freedom of thought and expression was a lived reality.

It was Sayajirao III who invited the famous Raja Ravi Varma of Travancore — the artist who is known to have been the first to give human form to Hindu Gods and Goddesses through his art — to Baroda state.

The city has a gallery dedicated to Ravi Varma in the Maharaja Fatehsinh Museum. The city's various museums, market places and offices running out of artistic spaces designed by European architects, its palaces, its railway, its artists and its alumni, make Baroda (now Vadodara) a living gallery, somewhat like Paris's Montmartre.

MS University's most imposing structure is the Central Hall in the Faculty of Arts whose dome, inspired from the Gol Gumbaz of Bijapur, was designed by British architect Robert Chisholm in the Indo-Saracenic style. The original Baroda College ran out of this building.

Drawing from German universities and Banaras Hindu University, MSU is among the few unitary universities. Unlike other state universities where the governor is the chancellor, MSU, though

supported by government grants, has a member of the royal family as its chancellor. The current chancellor is Rajmata Shubhanginiraje, wife of the late Ranjitsinh Gaekwad, an FFA alum himself.

The university campus, in the heart of the city in Mandvi, stretches from the Music College, now the Faculty of Performing Arts, on the banks of the 18th century Sursagar lake, to Pratapgunj, 3 km away, where the hostels are. In between are the Kalabhavan, a 1892 palace housing the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, the Faculty of Fine Arts on the banks of the Vishwamitri river, and the Faculty of Science in Pratapgunj.

There is hardly a student who has not seen the room used by poet-philosopher Sri Aurobindo in the Faculty of Arts when he was Sayajirao III's speech writer and principal of Baroda College from 1893-1906. Aurobindo's house in Vadodara's Dandia Bazaar is now a national memorial.

The university is also home to the Oriental Institute, a post-graduate teaching and research space that preserves rare manuscripts with their translations.

Yet, it's FFA that stands out as the university's biggest centrepiece. An academic catalogue on the MSU website says FFA has produced some of the "best-known artists of the country". It goes on to say: "Emphasis is laid on creative identity of students and teachers to foster an approach to the study and practice of art which is inquiring, experimental and research minded".

But with every clash, every assault on creativity such as the recent one, that space for "experimental and research-minded" art shrinks somewhat.

Misra, Resident Editor, Gujarat, is an alumna of MS University

On the LOOSE

LEHER KALA

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IN THE last 10 days, the lurid fascination for Rahul Gandhi's private life has spurred Op-Ed pieces in newspapers, righteous Tweets and drawing room debates on what exactly constitutes propriety for public figures. Everyone has an opinion on the WhatsApp forward that showed RG gazing at his phone while music was blaring and liquor flowing, ostensibly, at a nightclub in Nepal. Despite his shaky political future, the dimpled Congress scion remains mass media's darling — a generation brought up on Instagram sees nothing wrong in compulsively trespassing on the personal space of famous people.

The toxic glare of limelight

be easy being Rahul Gandhi. To have your every move dissected (and invariably) criticised in front of all and sundry — it makes one feel grateful for a humdrum existence. I know from experience that a nasty remark can weigh on one's mind for weeks. The famous have to get used to sneering opinions cascading in relentlessly on social media; people who would probably be fawning if they came face to face become vicious, emboldened by anonymity. The jeering RG has been subjected to, is, at a deeper level, indicative of Indians' collective fear of failure. If the Congress had been winning elections, RG's attendance at a wedding wouldn't be cause for comment. Since they are not, the expectation is that he should be shamefacedly hanging his head down, in hiding.

There is a tendency to believe that those born with the proverbial silver spoon are

happily insulated from the vagaries of life. And they are, considering 99% of humanity is toiling away in obscurity, attempting to climb an arduous ladder to success that's nowhere near guaranteed. Stardom, acquired or inherited, comes with significant benefits: a family name opens avenues to make money. Admiration is a boost to the ego, a great armour of defence against our embedded fears of rejection. So, considering the advantages, simplistic thinking goes, the 24/7 spotlight is a fair trade-off for awesome privilege. The desire for fame is so ubiquitous that society barely acknowledges the serious downsides.

It's so much harder for the rich and powerful to form genuine friendships. People are either sucking up to you or basking in the glow that comes from having access to an important connection.

Life without real conversations, surrounded instead by obsequious sycophants, sounds like it would be a dreadful bore. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of fame is that nobody tells you the truth, so you start believing in the myth of your own greatness. That megalomania can insidiously creep up and take over was best articulated by Denzel Washington to Will Smith recently: "At your highest moment be careful, that's when the devil comes for you."

Ironically enough, the truly famous are ambivalent, rather, distraught, by constant adulation. Taylor Swift has said her greatest wish is to drive around alone. In a poignantly illuminating interview, Britney Spears related how she wore the same clothes every day, hoping that would make her "uninteresting" to paparazzi. Prince

Harry fled from England. At the height of their popularity, the Beatles retreated to an ashram in Rishikesh, disillusioned by the hysteria surrounding them. All these people discovered that fame just means you get a lot of (hollow) attention. It can't match feelings of well-being that come from being appreciated in close relationships, built the old-fashioned way, over time.

These days it's so much easier for everyone to be famous. Exclusivity has been democratised. Sooner or later, the question is bound to arise, when everyone's lighting up Google Trends — is anyone? It's good that so many get to experience cheap thrills of quasi-celebrity-dom. Perhaps, it's only after a craving for prestige is satisfied, that one has the clarity to reject it completely.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

Opinion

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2022

THE NATIONAL FAMILY Health Survey-5 was conducted during 2019-21. The previous survey (NHFS-4) was conducted in 2015-16. Both were periods when the NDA government was in office; therefore the changes between the two surveys reflect the impact of the policies that were followed until 2014-15 as well as the policies of the government of Mr Narendra Modi.

Like in the previous survey, the key indicators of NFHS-5 are on issues such as the population and the profile of households, literacy, marriage and fertility, maternal and child health, vaccinations, quality of medical treatment, anaemia, women's empowerment and use of tobacco and alcohol. The numbers are statistical estimates based on the two surveys separated by four years. Since the methodology adopted in the surveys was the same, the change in the numbers — what statisticians call the DELTA — conveys very useful lessons. Some changes will make us proud, some will depress us and some will raise doubts and questions.

Good news

The big, 'breaking' news is that the Total Fertility Rate has fallen from 2.2 (children per woman) to 2.0. The 'replacement rate' is 2.1. The number 2.0 has good as well as negative implications that require a separate essay. Therefore, for the present, we may take comfort that India's population is not growing at an alarming rate and may stabilise earlier than anticipated.

Firstly, the good news. 88.6% of children were born in an institution (meaning under some kind of medical care) — up from 78.9%. More girl children are being welcomed into families, especially in rural India. The sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) has climbed from 991 to 1020. While 88.0% of the population lived in households with electricity in 2015-16, the Modi government has added 8.8% to make the proportion 96.8% (Rome was not built in a day, as claimed). Fewer women and men married before the legal age of 18 and 21, respectively, but with 23.3% of women marrying before age 18, there is still a long way to go.

Not-so-good news

The big, breaking, bad news is that a little more than one-half of India's population did not complete 10 years of school education — 59% of women and 49.8% of men. This means that, after 75 years of Independence, one-half of the population cannot be engaged in jobs and businesses of the 21st century that require higher education, advanced technology and superior skills.

India's population is still young (26.5% are below age 15), but the proportion is declining — meaning that the proportion of old people is growing. The 'demographic dividend' that we boast of will not last forever. A majority of women were anaemic: 57.0% in the age group 15-49 and, more worryingly, 59.1% in the age group 15-19. Both proportions have increased since NFHS-4. The other bitter news is that

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Good, bad and doubtful



Women from rural areas stage a protest over alleged shortage of doctors and health facilities in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

FILE PHOTO: PTI

only 11.3% of children of age 6-23 months received an adequate diet. The result is that 32.1% of children under 5 years were underweight; 35.5% were stunted; 19.3% were wasted; and 7.7% were severely wasted. The infant mortality rate (IMR) at 35.2 per thousand and the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) at 41.9 per thousand live births are still too high and way above the lowest in the world.

News that raise questions

Some data raise more questions on the aspects they are supposed to clarify. The data claim that 95.9% of the population live in households with 'an improved drinking water source'. The footnote defines an 'improved drinking water source' as including piped water, a public tap or a tube well. These are fine, but when the definition includes

'a protected dug well, a protected spring and rainwater', it is evident that an elaborate attempt was made to include age-old, unprotected sources of water to arrive at an impressive proportion like 95.9%. I suspect this will be the penultimate step before declaring that the goal of providing individual household taps to all households has been achieved by the target year of 2024!

The data on using an 'improved sanitation facility' is also questionable. The improved sanitation facility includes flush to pit latrine, flush to don't know where, pit latrine with slab and twin pit/composting toilet — that is, everything except Open Defecation (OD) is an improved sanitation facility!

Despite the hype about *Ujjwala Yojana* only 58.6% of households (up from 43.8%) use clean fuel for cooking.

The percentage actually relates to LPG or piped gas connections, not the actual number regularly using LPG cylinders.

Thanks to indifferent growth rates, many millions are poor and many may be living in absolute poverty. Let's take just one indicator, namely, consumption of food. Food is the first charge on a household's income. If a large proportion of women are anaemic and a significant proportion of children are underweight or anaemic besides many children stunted or wasted, that is due to lack of adequate nutrition. Lack of food, to my mind, is a decisive indicator of poverty. Those poor people — the children of a lesser god — have been forgotten by the present government.



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FIFTH COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Small things that matter

ONCE MORE LAST week the bulldozers rolled in Delhi destroying the lives and dreams of ordinary people. Once more battles raged over which mosque was once a Hindu temple. Into this rectification of historical wrongs were dragged the Qutub Minar and the Taj Mahal. This is a topical column, so both events necessitate a comment. On bulldozers may I say I wait eagerly for the day when bulldozers smash down the homes of those corrupt officials who permitted illegal construction on such a scale. On the triumphalist Hindutva movement that now claims that the Taj Mahal was a Hindu monument, I have one question: when do bulldozers arrive to demolish the most famous mausoleum in the world?

For those of you who think I am being frivolous about serious things, I have one response: enough is enough. For weeks, if not months, we appear to have talked of nothing else but matters of this kind, so I am going to spare you yet another piece on either bulldozers or majoritarian madness. Little more can be said that has not already been said in endless, repetitive primetime debates and endless, increasingly repetitive ponderings by political pundits.

So, this week I plan to talk of what are considered things so inconsequential that they never make headlines. My reason for doing this is that on the inside pages of newspapers appeared what to me was the most important news of all, and this is that 89% of Indian children are malnourished before they reach their second year. This information came in the recently published report of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). The report concluded that there has been only marginal improvement since their findings five years ago. This is heartbreaking and shameful. Malnourishment in a child's most formative months means that they will grow up stunted and unable ever to reach their full potential either physically or mentally.

When I asked myself why Narendra Modi who has paid so much attention to rectifying negligence of many kinds during Congress rule, I noticed that Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh were the worst offenders when it came to malnutrition in infants. Clearly, this is something he has never paid attention to. Can we hope that after this latest NFHS report from his own government, he will pay as much attention to malnutrition as he did to sanitation in his first term? Swachh Bharat achieved levels of rural sanitation on an impressive scale because Modi put his weight behind it. If he did the same to ensure that India's children were no longer malnourished, then

we might one day reap the full benefits of having the world's largest population of young people.

There are other 'small' things I would like to draw attention to this week. I use the word small deliberately because Modi has shown that what he really loves are big things. The 'tallest statue' in the world has come up in his time. The 'largest vaccination programme' has been successfully achieved and these are things that the Prime Minister loves to boast about. On the day I sat down to write this piece I drove past the new Parliament building and, without being allowed to get close enough for a real inspection, can report that it already towers over every other building in its vicinity. The old Parliament, repository of so much of India's democratic history, resembles an anthill in its mighty shadow. But I digress.

The most ignored and most horrible news of the moment is that a garbage mountain that is estimated to be more than seventeen stories high remains on fire in Delhi. It spews poisonous gases into the city's dangerously polluted air and reminds us that although we dream of putting a man on the moon, we have failed to learn how to deal with waste. On the edge of every village, we see ditches filled with rotting garbage and nearly all our small towns have main bazaars that are, in reality, just garbage dumps. Is this not shameful at a time when we are so proudly celebrating the seventy-fifth year of India's Independence?

Those who yell *Vande Mataram* and *Jai Shri Ram* with every breath need to read the Ramayana more carefully to discover the description of Ayodhya on the eve of Ram's coronation. And, while they are about it, they can also pay careful attention to the road that Bharat built to go to the forest in which his brothers were forced into exile. The methods used to build the road were as modern as they are today and Ayodhya more beautiful than any modern Indian city. While Hindu revivalism is so fashionable, can we please revive some of these things? Is it not time that we ensured that Bharat Mata was no longer covered in rotting garbage? And what could be a finer tribute in this year of our Amrit Mahotsav than to ensure that no Indian child lacks the basic nutrients they need to grow to their full potential?

Can I end with a question? What happens now that a court has declared that it will not begin to discuss whether Hindutva activists should be allowed to start meddling around in those alleged 'twenty-two sealed rooms' in the basement of the Taj Mahal? Will Hindutva troops be unleashed in Agra to start attacking Muslims for the 'sins' of their ancestors? Seriously, what happens now?

No defence

Phil Mickelson has withdrawn from the PGA, the scene of his greatest career triumph

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



"WHAT'S AT STAKE?" The response to that—coming from a new playing partner who you've been paired with—can be an even more metaphoric question: "What are we playing for?" For many golfers, like your columnist, this is a binary question. I don't like to play stakes because I want to compete against myself. Or at least that's what I tell myself. Truth be told, I'm just too keen to tinker with my golf swing on the golf course and couldn't be bothered with beating someone else as long as I'm hitting the ball well.

Then there's the other—and it must be said, the more popular—camp. These are players who'll never play a round without a bet in play. It could be a reasonable sum of money—although that's a subjective thing—or a modest one. The idea, these players say, is to create pressure that'll bring out the best in their game. You can't be blab about your game if you know there's money to be lost. While casual betting is all pervasive, it's the norm amongst most professional

golfers. It stands to reason: for them—players who rely on the game to make a living—recreating realistic playing conditions in practice means putting money at stake. Pros will often take this exercise to (what seems to amateurs like us) somewhat ridiculous lengths. Observe this the next time you see two pros practicing together on the range. Amongst the top pros in the world, Phil Mickelson's penchant for high wagers has been well-known for a while now. Those six-figure-bets he placed with playing partners at 'The Match,' (that some of us dismissed as publicity stunts), made big news. Sporting men aren't limited in their milieu, and Mickelson famously cashed in on a near-half-million bet he placed during the Super Bowl in 2001.

All of this came back to me as I read an excerpt from Alan Shipnuck's upcoming biography of Mickelson. The biography claims that the reported losses the player incurred during a four-year stretch from 2010 to 2014 totalled more than \$40 million. The writer proffers that given Mickelson's annual income during this period was \$10 million, that's pretty much all the money he made. The excerpt also claims that Mickelson's abrupt parting of ways with longtime caddie (and now golf television commentator) Jim 'Bones' MacKay, was



Phil Mickelson famously lost a dollar bet to a patron at Augusta National in 2014

a result of, among other factors, overdue back pay to Mackay.

All of this suggests an implausible situation: is it possible that Phil Mickelson, one of the most successful golfers in history, is in financial trouble? It might sound bizarre, but, as a Mickelson fan,

this explanation is almost a reassuring one. It's a relief to know there might be an entirely reasonable explanation for Mickelson's somewhat inexplicable, self-destructive, trajectory over the past few months. Shipnuck has emerged as Phil Mickelson's bete noire by revealing

details that the player insists were uttered off-the-record. The slide began earlier this year when an excerpt from the book revealed Mickelson's disparaging comments about the PGA Tour and, somewhat puzzlingly, the new Saudi league's financiers—the Saudi Arabian government. At the time it was widely believed that Mickelson would be amongst the biggest names to leave the PGA Tour to join the rival league. After the revelations, and the massive blowback that ensued, Mickelson went underground—announcing an unspecified sabbatical from the professional game. Now that the dust has settled somewhat, fans were hoping to see Mickelson back to defend his PGA Championship title this month.

It was the man's crowning glory in 2021. Rolling the rock like a demon, while rocking shades that would sit right on a pop star, Phil Mickelson's triumph at last year's PGA Championship was a big 'take that,' to people who'd written him off. And with so much attitude too—where did Mickelson find all that swag, we thought. And who would have ever thought the man could pull off a style statement? Or win the PGA Championship at 50 years of age. But he did, and delivered a win for the ages.

I was rooting for him all right. And even more so when he got the wrong end of the stick in the media with commentators calling him 'old,' or worse, the 'oldest ever,' to win a Major that is.

It almost felt like Mickelson was being congratulated for winning the lot-

tery, not a Major golf championship.

What a windfall! You won a Major at 50!

That was last year. Mickelson continued to be out there in 2022, not paying attention to the ageist jokes, getting his teeth knocked out by younger players, struggling with this game, but refusing to buy a yacht and sail to the Bahamas. Bravo we all chimed. Now, with this series of unfortunate events there's an alternative picture emerging. It's not beyond the realm of possibility that Mickelson needs to play just to get his financial affairs in order. If there is a modicum of truth in that, then Lefty's fans will hope that he can get his act together. In so many ways Mickelson has been such a role model. He doesn't throw clubs, or mouth profanities on air, and, given the number of times he's come up short, he's mostly been quite gracious in defeat.

Mickelson is the man with the wry grin who used to walk around burdened by expectations that had gone from promise of success to the sadistic certainty of imminent failure. You only have to glance at the odds on punters' websites during the Majors to understand, truly, the unshakeable faith that bookies have had in Phil's uncanny ability not to win, and just how much money they're willing to stake on that. It's time for the man himself to pick up the pieces and bet big on himself. Phil the hustler—he needs to make a comeback.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

The Sunday Statesman

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Uncertain prologue

To summon a variant of a Shakespearean tragedy, two tales are told as a prologue to the "swelling act" of the Sri Lankan theme. The first was the appointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe as the impoverished nation's Prime Minister for the fifth term. The second has been the ban imposed on his predecessor, Mahinda Rajapaksa, and 15 others from overseas travel in view of investigations against them for the mortal attacks on peaceful anti-government protesters in Colombo this week. Contextualised with the economic blight, Mr Wickremesinghe has undoubtedly succeeded to a depleted inheritance. The current crisis is his greatest challenge yet. As he sets about to helm a coalition government, it will be imperative to address the financial chaos and heal the political ruptures. "We are facing a crisis and we have to get out it," was his terse message to the media after the swearing-in ceremony. He has forged relationships with India and China, the key investors and lenders who vie for influence over the island nation that lies along busy shipping routes linking Asia to Europe.

Sri Lanka survives on a direly stuttering economy, indeed the fallout of economic mismanagement, the Covid-19 pandemic, and ballooning energy costs following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The country is somehow surviving on inadequate fuel and essential medicines, not to forget the daily power blackouts. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose elder brother, Mahinda, was replaced by Wickremesinghe, has called nationwide curfews and given sweeping powers to security forces to shoot anyone involved in looting or putting people's lives at risk. His strategy perhaps appears to be decidedly drastic considering the general privation. Nor for that matter can the President evade responsibility for the economic collapse, a creation of his family. Mahinda Rajapaksa, who resigned on Monday, has gone into hiding on a naval base.

The people, by and large, have grown increasingly frustrated over disruptions to normal life. That Sri Lanka has hit the bottom economically is the general refrain. It is imperative for the new coalition to devise a prescription that will heal the torpid economy. The value of the Sri Lankan rupee, most particularly in relation to the dollar, must of necessity be restored. The people will have to access life's essentials ~ food, medicines and cooking gas ~ and at affordable rates. The economy, in a word, cries out for a drastic overhaul, with the new administration riveted to the welfare of the populace and not to the preservation of the elite. Monday witnessed a phase of peaceful demonstrations that erupted into violence after supporters of Mahinda Rajapaksa attacked an anti-government protest camp in Colombo. Days of violent reprisals against government personalities aligned to the powerful Rajapaksa clan followed. Sri Lanka needs welfare ~ *not pop* ~ economics for survival.

Finland in Nato

Quite the most critical diplomatic fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war has been Thursday's signal of intent from Helsinki, specifically that Finland must apply to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation "without delay". It thus comes about that Finnish leaders have announced a significant policy shift triggered by Russia's war that is seemingly without end in Ukraine. The announcement by Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, and Prime Minister Sanna Marin was made three days before neighbouring Sweden was expected to follow suit. Finland, which shares a 1,300-km border and a difficult past with Russia, has gradually stepped up its cooperation with Nato as a partner since Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014. But until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, the Nordic country had refrained from joining in order to maintain friendly relations with its eastern neighbour. "Finland must apply for Nato membership without delay," Niinisto and Marin said in a joint statement. Nato's Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, said any accession process would be "smooth and swift" and that Finland "would be warmly welcomed". Russia warned on Thursday it would have to take "military-technical" steps in response to Finland joining Nato. "The expansion of Nato and the approach of the alliance to our borders does not make the world and our continent more stable and secure," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. When asked whether Finland's membership would be a threat, Peskov answered, "definitely". "Everything will depend on how this process takes place, how far the military infrastructure will move towards our borders," he said. Russia's foreign ministry said Moscow would be "forced to take reciprocal steps, military-technical and other, to address the resulting threats to its national security". It accused Nato of seeking to create "another flank for the military threat to our country". "Helsinki should be aware of its responsibility and the consequences of such a move," the foreign ministry said.

The view among Finns on Nato is said to have changed rapidly after Russia initiated what it calls a "special operation" in Ukraine. Finnish public support for joining Nato has risen to record numbers over recent months. The latest poll by public broadcaster YLE showed 76 per cent of Finns in favour and just 12 per cent against it, while support for membership used to linger at only about 25 per cent for years prior to the war in Ukraine. While military non-alignment has long satisfied many Finns as a way of staying out of conflicts, Russia's invasion of sovereign Ukraine has led an increasing number of Finns to view friendly relations with Russia as a shaky premise. Ukraine's fate has been particularly disturbing for Finland to watch as it fought two wars with Russia between 1939 and 1944, repelling an attempted invasion but losing approximately 10 per cent of its territory in the subsequent peace agreement.

Contemporary Paradoxes

Probably, we have a colonial heritage of subordination; we are good servants but bad masters. As servants, we meticulously carry out orders given to us in writing (which should be sealed and signed) while as masters we avoid giving directions; if issuing orders becomes inevitable, we seek justification in some manual or circular. If precedents are not available, decision makers would lapse into masterly inactivity



Socrates' debate with the sophist Thrasymachus, narrated in the Republic, wherein Thrasymachus claims "Justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger". Though strongly refuted by Socrates, this rings true even today. Glaucon, Plato's elder brother, goes on to explain the Thrasymachean position in Republic II saying that one who pursues a life of injustice must at the same time be courageous and crafty, strong and shrewd, power-driven and persuasive. But most importantly, the unjust individual must be dastardly and deceptive, yet seemingly just. Unfortunately, this definition would perfectly fit most Indian politicians.

The anomaly gets even more interesting when we note that most of our lawmakers are law-breakers too; 233 Lok Sabha MPs (43 per cent) face criminal charges, with nearly 29 per cent being charged with serious crimes like rape, murder, attempt to murder or crime against women.

One BJP MP faces terror charges and a Congress MP faces 240 criminal cases. Disturbingly, the number of MPs charged with serious crimes has risen by 109 per cent since 2009. The position in State legislatures is even worse.

The malaise of criminality has now gone up by a degree; two cabinet ministers of Maharashtra Government are in custody. A PIL has been filed, seeking to arraign a Union MoS in a murder conspiracy. Remarkably, one of the Maharashtra ministers has refused to resign and so has the MoS. Then, there was Jayalalitha who was sentenced to five years in jail, while holding office of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The list goes on. As a small mercy, the obdurate Karnataka minister who had refused to resign in the face of the FIR against him for abetment of suicide, has finally seen reason and resigned.

To recapitulate, a contractor had publicly allegedly that he was being harassed by the minister for a 40 per cent commission. Totally frustrated, the contractor committed suicide, because no official was prepared to listen to his story, much less help him.

Despite recent reforms, a police station is not a place one visits except in a dire emergency. The reason is not far to seek; police stations that are supposed to be bulwarks against criminals are themselves, sometimes, dens of criminality. In the last few days,

a rape survivor was again raped in a police station by the SHO, a woman was killed by policemen in a police station and another woman was tortured to within an inch of her life, again by policemen inside a police station. No worthwhile action appears to have been taken against the delinquent policemen and their supervisory officers. On the other hand, we have hyperactive police personnel who go careening thousands of miles, across States, to catch someone who posts an objectionable tweet.

Similar is the experience of a common man in a court of law; in most instances his case would come up for hearing when the remedy sought by him had lost its meaning. About 75 per cent of prison inmates are undertrials, who may be innocent, but are undergoing the rigours of jail because of a faulty legal system. The fault for such miscarriage of justice does not lie with over-worked District Courts alone but with higher courts also. The Supreme Court observed: "... the total number of criminal appeals in such High Courts which have been pending for 30 years or more is 14,484. Criminal appeals which have been pending for over twenty years and up to thirty years are 33,045; criminal appeals which have been pending for over ten years, up to 20 years are 2,35,914." On the other hand, most courts grant immediate hearing to politically well-connected people.

As Goswami Tulsidas said in the Ramcharitmanas: "Like the Sun, the Wind and the Ganga, the powerful are never at fault," which is the Indian equivalent of the Roman law maxim: "The King can do no wrong." No wonder, law makers the world-over believe that they are above the law. This belief is not restricted to Indian politicians alone; a police enquiry into the Partygate scandal in England revealed that the British PM and his ministers were regularly holding parties at the PM's official residence at the time when Covid restrictions were in force in the entire country, and about 150,000 persons had been fined for flouting Covid protocols. Last year, the British Health Minister

had to resign when he was found breaking Covid-19 rules by kissing and embracing an aide (not his wife) in his office.

These are dangerous portents: a democracy could degenerate into an oligarchy of the elite if citizens were unable to curb the irresponsible behaviour of the high and mighty, which is easier said than done. More so, because evasion of responsibility for unpleasant occurrences and claiming credit for successful ones is a uniquely Indian trait.

For example; everyone under the sun, the Indian Government, the Punjab Government, the Pakistan Government, the Pakistan Army, all rushed to claim credit for the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor for Sikh pilgrims. However, just a few months prior to the opening of the Corridor, when Navjot Singh Sidhu

had broached this subject with the Pakistanis, he was branded as a putative traitor by almost everyone, including his own Chief Minister. Interestingly, the same dramatis personae had appeared in different roles, at the time of the Amritsar train tragedy. To recapitulate: Sidhu's wife, a Minister at that time, had inaugurated Dussehra celebrations near the railway tracks, for which a large crowd had congregated. The crowd did not notice an approaching passenger train which ran through them, killing sixty people. Everyone, the organisers, the police, the Railways, the municipality and the Sidhus, all successfully shirked responsibility claiming that the crowd should not have trespassed on the railway tracks, which shows that (a) escaping responsibility is not very difficult, and (b) one's reaction depends on the side one is on.

Bureaucrats instinctively shun responsibility, framing rules in a manner that no action can ever be attributed to a defined person. Any decision on any file in any Ministry bears the signatures of half a dozen officials so that no one can deduce who was the moving force behind the decision. Mostly, the file would show that a decision was unanimous, absolving everyone of responsibility. If at all responsibility was fixed, it would be on the junior-

most functionary who would be charged with presenting facts wrongly. The political executive, the Ministers, act through Departmental Secretaries, placing them outside the scope of legal responsibility. Probably, we have a colonial heritage of subordination; we are good servants but bad masters. As servants, we meticulously carry out orders given to us in writing (which should be sealed and signed) while as masters we avoid giving directions; if issuing orders becomes inevitable, we seek justification in some manual or circular. If precedents are not available, decision makers would lapse into masterly inactivity. Following in this tradition, Prime Minister Narsimha Rao while making the right noises, allowed the Babri Masjid to be demolished, leading to communalisation of the Indian polity.

Far from frowning upon attempts by the Executive to escape responsibility, the Courts, too, appear to be victims of the same syndrome, often using delay as a weapon for killing deserving but inconvenient cases. Sometimes, Courts discuss and deliver verdicts on tangential issues, omitting more important disputed questions, like the Madras High Court judgement that made singing of Vande Mataram compulsory in schools when the question before it was awarding of one mark in a question relating to Vande Mataram in the Tamil Nadu's Teachers Eligibility Test. In the celebrated National Anthem case, a PIL was filed to restrain the use of the National Anthem for commercial purposes; however, the Supreme Court issued interim directions that made the playing of the National Anthem mandatory before all film shows.

Public representatives, probably realising their own weak moral position vis-à-vis ordinary citizens, have recently passed a slew of legislation criminalising individual preferences in the matter of drink, diet, religion and marriage, designed to make criminals of ordinary citizens. As Ayn Rand had written: "There's no way to rule innocent men. The only power any government has is the power to crack down on criminals. Well, when there aren't enough criminals, one makes them. One declares so many things to be a crime that it becomes impossible for men to live without breaking laws."

Probably, citizens would, one day, attain enlightenment and fix responsibility where it belongs.



DEVENDRA SAKSEENA
The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Breath of fresh air

SIR, The article "Junking Jargon" by Moin Qazi published on 12 May 2022 is a breath of fresh air and has certainly hit the nail on the head.

The use of language in this article to throw light on the use of language in everyday society is unique and brilliant.

It is true that we have become a society of modernized mediocrity, where external camouflage is repeatedly used to hide internal poverty and where genuine, original ideas are only accepted when placed from positions of money and celebrity power.

Even Rabindranath Tagore eloquently expressed that "the clear stream of reason" should not lose its way into "the dreary desert sand of dead habit".

A social mindset attracted to anything tinsel is prevalent all

around. Intellectual imbecility reigns supreme as the noise of words silences the blooming of authentic action. I couldn't agree with the author more when he



writes "The world is facing a dearth of revolutionary ideas".

Such articles hammer home the need for the search towards original, unbiased thoughts which may lead to constructive produc-

tive endeavors. I thank *The Statesman* for publishing such an article
Yours, etc., Dr Souparna Roy,
Kolkata, 13 May.

HEATWAVES

SIR, India is gripped by a punishing heatwave. What is most alarming about this heatwave is that the effects of global warming have pushed India and its neighbouring countries to levels where the climate is a core threat to human health. Heatwaves around the world have become more common and hotter because of climate change, according to Friederike Otto, a climatologist at the University of Oxford. And Ms Otto adds that the heatwaves will continue to get hotter until humans stop burning fossil fuels.

Experts say that before climate change such intensity of heat would have only been seen about once in every 50 years in India. However, it is now expected to oc-

TAJ MAHAL

SIR, Kudos to the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court which outrightly rejected a petition sought to prove the Taj Mahal was built after demolishing a Hindu temple. The Honourable court cautioned the petitioner not to "make a mockery" of the public interest litigation system.

The petitioner Rajneesh Singh's claim was that there were 22 locked underground rooms in the Taj Mahal that purportedly contained idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. In reply, the court directed the petitioner to do his research work properly.

The court has got sufficient hint from petitions pending in various courts that attempts are being made to prove that Islamic structures were built after pulling down Hindu temples.

The present propensity among a section of people to foment troubles between the two communities has to be thwarted.

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 13 May.

cur once every four years. The heatwaves have led to cascading impacts not just on human health, but also on ecosystems like agriculture, water and energy supplies. Experts say that climate change can definitely be controlled, which

will involve a substantial reduction in fossil fuel use, improved energy efficiency, and use of alternative fuels such as hydrogen.

Yours, etc., Ranganathan Sivakumar,
Chennai, 13 May.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

When a head of state becomes a nation's nightmare

It is not unknown in history that a single ruler was the cause of a nation's downfall, the obvious case in modern times being Adolf Hitler - an elected leader - one of the best known among a collection of reviled names scattered throughout history as examples of the evil that power can degenerate into. In each case they mercifully failed to prevail in the end. In Sri Lanka, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has become that nightmare for its people, just two years after he was elected as head of state, a feat not easily achieved.

Before he resigned, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, miffed at his brother's attempts to scapegoat him for the country's increasing instability, brought in thousands of his supporters from the provinces to the city on May 9, proclaiming their demand for his continuance in office. They rioted violently in the streets, clashing with the original, peaceful protesters, smashing the temporary structures that those young people had erected in protest sites in front of the PM's residence and at the Galle Face Green. They succeeded in putting some of them in hospital. The police intervened with tear gas and water cannon to stop the marauding hordes of MR supporters from their scorched-earth intentions at Galle Face

The Daily Star

Green and beat them back for now. The peaceful protest at GotaGoGama was finally invaded, not by law enforcement but by provincial politicians of the MR camp with their supporters. Escalation of the situation is now inevitable. The president owes it to the people to prevent this emerging situation from deteriorating into further blood-letting in a land that has already seen far too much of it. He, and only he, can end this nightmare, instead of continuing to embody it. Meanwhile, the parties of the parliamentary opposition need a deep-going reckoning to understand why some of them were rejected violently at the protest sites, and some welcomed, as they attempted to solidarize with those young people under attack from MR supporters. As the aspirant government, they need to self-examine and re-position fast, just as the protesters must not descend into anarchy by rejecting even those on their side in parliament.

The predictable trajectory into an economic abyss at Gotabaya Rajapaksa's hands, starting with a whimsical overnight ban on chemical fertiliser, following a massive centralisation of power in the presidency, to other eccentric policies, leading to multiple dysfunctions in every sector, saw the hapless citizenry plunged into sudden poverty, dying in gas and fuel queues, as everything, from milk powder to printing paper, became scarce commodities very quickly due to a dearth of dollars in the treasury.

Despite all his attempts to divert attention to other factors, including through pressure for his brother the prime minister and the cabinet to resign, the people he rules over saw, clear as day, that the president himself was the primary cause that plunged a once middle-income country into such privation and despair that children in neighbouring India began breaking their tills to send a few thousand rupees to alleviate this country's needless misery. The continuing nightmare for the people, however, is that despite the desperate protests in every province, with one clear message contained in a single ubiquitous slogan of "Gota Go Home", the president appears to have no intention of doing the one thing that could instantly commence the country's rapid recovery.

Gotabaya the nightmare that Sri Lanka lives with

SANJA DE SILVA JAYATILLEKA

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Meanwhile, the parties of the Parliamentary Opposition need a deep going reckoning to understand why some of them were rejected violently at the protest sites today, and some welcomed, as they attempted to express solidarity with those young



people under attack from MR supporters. As the aspirant government, they need to self-examine and reposition fast, just as the protesters must not descend into anarchy by rejecting even those on their side in Parliament.

The predictable trajectory into an economic abyss at his hands, starting with a whimsical overnight ban on chemical fertiliser, following a massive centralisation of power in the Presidency, to other eccentric policies, leading to multiple dysfunctions in every sector, saw the hapless citizenry plunged into sudden poverty, dying in gas and fuel queues, as everything, from milk powder to printing paper, became scarce commodities very quickly due to a dearth of dollars in the treasury.

Despite all his attempts to divert attention to other factors, including through pressure for his brother the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to resign, the people he rules over saw as clear as day that the President himself was the primary cause that plunged a once middle-income country into such privation and despair that children in neighbouring India began breaking their tills to

send a few thousand rupees to alleviate this country's needless misery.

The continuing nightmare for the people, however, is that despite the desperate protests in every province, with one clear message contained in a single ubiquitous slogan of 'Gota Go Home', the President appears to have no intention of doing the one thing that could instantly commence the country's rapid recovery. It is not as if every mode of protest, every possible platform, traditional and digital, has not been used to ensure that the message reached him.

A recent social media post of some women, from Chilaw, ranting against the President in absolute rage, showed them employ swear words that probably had not been strung together in quite that manner against any ruler anywhere. Most of it was disturbingly bloodcurdling, being the more pitiful due to her claim that as a cancer patient, she no longer had the medicines to treat her condition. In her invective, the rage extended to the President's many relatives in Parliament but left little doubt as to who would be strung up in public by a nether body part if one

of those women got her hands on him. Exacerbating the already crumbling situation are those Members of Parliament and officials loyal to the President who excuse his every blunder with inane explanations. Delivered with sycophantic fervour, they only serve to incense the people even more.

The President's rapidly decreasing supporters' solution is to demand that the Prime Minister leaves and the Cabinet with him. They claim that there would be no point in the President resigning because his replacement will have to be appointed from the now despised 225 MPs in Parliament who failed to prevent the country's decent into bankruptcy. They refuse to see that such a replacement, any replacement, would be welcomed with cheers and firecrackers by the people. Those protesters at the many GotaGoGama sites made that amply clear by promising that as long as the President stays, so will they.

Every day now, people gather on the city streets with their empty gas canisters, blocking the roads in protests. Feelings are running high and the tension among the crowd is

palpable, as minor skirmishes break out intermittently. A 100 gas cylinders were forcibly acquired recently by people who waited for days for a sighting of the trucks carrying them and pounced on it to grab one any which way. People have also turned on each other as they stand in line for essentials. It is clear that serious rioting is only a hair's-breadth away.

What does the President see when he surveys the land? His pet initiative, the organic fertiliser decision has collapsed, and taken a land once self-sufficient in rice with plentiful vegetables, a thriving, world-renowned tea industry and a prosperous rural community into irreparable failure in the short to medium term. Similarly, the economic mismanagement has resulted in the desperate shortage of dollars in the Treasury, impacting every aspect of life. The permanent protests have now passed a month and continue to grow.

The trust in this regime's integrity is dwindling as the Easter bombing of April 2019 which instantly lifted the chance of this President's election to office as the candidate of law and order, is now increasingly being seen as having been used to propel the candidacy on the fears of the people. The Cardinal himself has expressed his misgivings of a possible grave conspiracy, endangering the Catholic community and other worshippers engaged in prayers on that fateful Easter Sunday. The Cardinal's entreaties to the Pope himself have evoked concern in Rome about the massacre. The many bereaved and injured who suffer to this day have yet not had justice delivered, despite the powerful presidency and a security apparatus with a huge portion of the nation's budget.

The President has been unable to appear in public since the protests started.

The existentially besieged People ask only that the President makes the all-important decision to resign, together with his regime, if he has any regard for them or the country. They are convinced that the solutions to all else will flow from that.

The Island/ANN.

NOW AND AGAIN

The deity of Fraser Town

N J RAVI CHANDER

One of my earliest memories of Fraser Town (Mootocherry earlier) in Bengaluru was the Mootomariamman shrine on Standage Road. We believe the deity derived her name from the locality - the shrine came up on an encroached land. A Thigala (traditional growers of flowers and vegetables) ran the unauthorised shrine. Devotees came here to seek blessings and pay their gratitude in return for favours received from the town goddess. During my childhood days in the 1960s, I recall accompanying my parents for the special Friday pooja, and the deity decked in finery made for an impressive sight!

The poojari would chant mantras and gently stroke our heads with holy neem leaves - they always placed these beside the goddess - to ward off the evil eye or drive away sickness. We had easy access to the kovil through a small gate on the street, parallel to our lane - Maiganda Deva Mudaliar Road. Old-timers living in the area recall that the temple existed before the 1940s.

The property belonged to a Mudaliar family - the community held large parcels of land in Bengaluru. But for decades, nobody dared to question the erection of the unauthorised structure. Instead, an elderly Thigala man performed sacred rituals. Following his demise, his significant other, Dhanakotiammal, doubled as a poojari - a rare sight in days of yore.

Over time, the shrine gained popularity, and devotees flocked to it. A visit here always gave me an adrenaline rush because of a snake burrow. I longed to see it but never got to. As the years rolled on, the shrine became a part of our lives, but suddenly one day, a drama unfurled!

It all began when the owner sold the property to a member of the minority community. The new owner showed a great heart in requesting the temple authorities to move the shrine to a corner in the compound, but the latter refused. Instead, they sought possession of the entire property, claiming it was temple land, sacred space and the works. The owner braved many pressures and threats as miscreants close to the temple management hurled false charges that included a case of grabbing temple land. The case dragged on in the courts for a marathon fourteen years before the landlord reclaimed his property.

The unexpected turn of events made the landlord seek vengeance, and he evicted the idol and dumped it on the roadside. The deity found temporary refuge on 7 Standage Road before moving to a makeshift shrine near the Tannery Road-Bore Bank Road junction close to the Sweepers Colony. She hung on there for a few years before the temple authorities scrambled to find a new spot to house her.

The goddess who had developed the reputation for 'going places' finally found refuge in a building on Kenchappa Road Cross. She is adorned in gold and garlands, placed upon a wooden chariot, and hauled through the town on festive nights for the devotees to offer worship. The roadside shrine still attracts the pious who flock to the deity to pay obeisance. The ghosts of the past exorcised, the revered Mootomariamman now sits prettily in her fortress!

100 YEARS AGO

DEVONIAN SOCIETY OF CALCUTTA

To The Editor Of The Statesman
SIR, - In the year 1901 the Devonian Society in Calcutta was formed with the object of promoting a common County bond of friendship amongst Devonians in India and of rendering aid to distressed Devonians. The Society had a successful career for many years but, in the early stages of the war, the whole of the accumulated funds were utilised in the assistance of Devonians on leave or invalidated from the war and when these funds had been exhausted, it was decided to leave the Society in a state of suspended animation. Representations have now been received from many quarters indicating that the time has arrived when there is every prospect of reviving the Society with success. Provided a reasonable assurance that the necessary support will be forthcoming is received a general meeting of all those interested will be convened at an early date with a view to determining the steps to be taken to resuscitate the Society.
GERALD HAPLEON.
Calcutta.

STALE FOODSTUFFS ON RAILWAYS

To The Editor Of The Statesman
SIR, - The travelling public will generally admit the risk attending the consumption of purchased foodstuffs on railway journeys; and many ailments, as also epidemics, can be attributed to the sale of stale sweetmeats, etc., at stations on Indian Railways. Though a highly qualified staff of Sanitary Inspectors is maintained by the N.W. Railway, yet for unexplained reasons the vendors are under the Traffic Department; and since the officials, are unqualified on the one hand, and too busy on the other, is it not time that the Agent of that Railway saw fit to remedy this deplorable state of affairs? I am informed that Sibi station on the Quetta section has an excellent system, and the sanitary official of the place has been given full control. The sooner the Traffic Department makes over charge of so important a matter as the sanitary supervision over the manufacture and sale of foodstuffs the better will it be for all concerned.
HALWA-POOREE.

POLITICAL DIARY | KALYANI SHANKAR

Challenges before new Lankan PM

Sri Lankan leader Ranil Wickremasinghe became the prime minister for the sixth time on Thursday. He is not new to Sri Lanka, the region, or even the world. Sri Lanka has been on the boil for some time, facing a political and economic crisis. With the pandemic, rising oil prices, tax cuts, and foreign exchange crises, the 22 million people of the island country are looking to lead a normal life after the present turbulence.

Blaming the Rajapaksa clan, there is public pressure for the removal of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Mahinda, Prime Minister and elder brother of the president was forced to resign along with his cabinet on Monday. The people have taken to the streets amidst curfew and shoot out orders. The "Go Gota Go" slogan is catching on fast.

Opposition leader Sajit Premadasa is for the abolition of the presidency. He heads the 52-member UNP faction that formed a new party, Samagi Jana Balawehaya. An alliance led by the Rajapaksas has 100 seats in the 225-member Parliament. Premadasa declined the Prime Ministership, after which Ranil was the next choice.

It is a bizarre situation as the 73-year-old Ranil is the only lawmaker from his United National Party and has no backing in Parliament. Each of the new prime minister's earlier terms had been truncated. Twice he



was dismissed - in 2004 by President Chandrika Kumaratunga and in 2018 by Gotabaya. His running feud against Chandrika was well known, and his relationship with Rajapaksa was not cordial.

Ranil has to face many challenges. The first is to take along all the political parties. He has no mandate and no other member from his party in Parliament, and he needs help from other parties.

Ranil has good equations with both Beijing and New Delhi. He has already met envoys from China and India. The Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Gopal Baglay, has

tweeted that India is looking forward to working with the new regime. The US envoy to Sri Lanka, Julie Chang, has welcomed the new PM. Sri Lanka will get support from other countries. But his challenge will be domestic politics, with the opposition parties pulling in different directions.

Secondly, the economic chaos had been coming for some time, mainly due to the policies of the Rajapaksas. There is an acute power shortage and also a scarcity of essential commodities. There is a foreign exchange crisis. India and China have come to Colombo's rescue, but that is not enough. Ranil had shown his

abilities earlier by negotiating for a \$1.5 billion IMF bailout. Sri Lanka is again trying to negotiate an IMF loan to come out of the present crisis. Once the IMF gives a loan, Sri Lanka will be forced to take up economic reforms. All these require bold decisions. Thirdly, President Gotabaya has acquired vast powers, and he has hinted he might shed some of them. But that is a long process. What Ranil needs is complete backing to negotiate political and economic reforms.

Fourth, is the minority question. How will Ranil deal with the Tamils? The Tamil question has been dogging the country for decades, first with the

LTTE militancy and then with the civil war. The Tamil reconciliation process has been going on since the wiping out of the LTTE. New Delhi has been insisting on a speedy resolution.

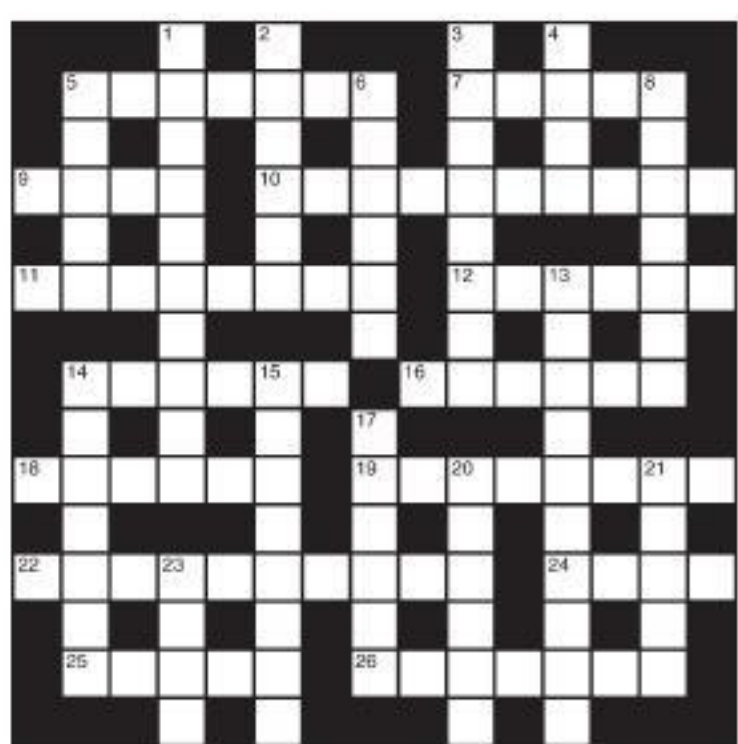
Fifth is corruption. Even in 2015, corruption was a huge issue when Ranil took over. The public is angry at the massive corruption in the government and blames the Rajapaksa clan for this. When the system is deep-rooted in corruption, it is not easy to find a solution.

Last but not least is balancing between the two giants - India and China. Ranil has good equations with both. The Rajapaksa regime had been leaning more towards Beijing. But Ranil must walk a tightrope as he needs both the powers to bring back normalcy. There is every possibility of enhanced support from India as it has welcomed the democratic process in the island country.

New Delhi needs to utilize this opportunity and mend fences with Sri Lanka. Helping the island country in every possible way to stabilise is indeed an opportunity and in line with Modi's "Neighbourhood first" policy. Unfortunately, the South Asian region is facing unrest by and large. There is political and economic instability in Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Maldives, and Afghanistan. Sri Lanka is strategically important for India and needs all the support.

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SOLUTION FOR 08 MAY

K A D P D W B B
E S P L A N A D E A O R T A
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R E I G N R I C K S H A W S
F C Y T T E R E

- ACROSS**
- 5 Men must vacate rank Portalo (7)
 - 7 See you start to rub on behind (5)
 - 9 Tory leader mostly fit, judge admitted (4)
 - 10 Creating union and groaning is disgusting (10)
 - 11 Live sex could result in this hit (8)
 - 12 One on bed that might secure a tug? (6)

- (6) Virginal blokes will get help inside (6)
- 16 City abroad almost unable to see touring queen (6)
- 18 Opportunity to get around court for drug supplier (6)
- 19 Chap who measured wind of a brute letting rip (8)
- 22 One near cocaine bundles: future queen, perhaps (10)
- 24 Anger The Daily Mail, possibly with bit of erotica (4)
- 25 Granny in the thrall of Botswana naturist (5)
- 26 Say no to bit of coke after last month! (7)

- DOWN**
- 1 Some might say Hoskins is immortal on drugs (10)
 - 2 U2 member hugs old boy and promiscuous primatel (6)
 - 3 Teen messing with gaol gets stretch (8)
 - 4 Books one brought to southern soul singer? (4)
 - 5 Adore getting to the bottom of cold Bud (5)
 - 6 Book of records omits large and small tools (6)
 - 8 Tired and sad chasing game woman ultimately (3-4)
 - 15 Needing rehabilitation, if Carol in a state (10)
 - 14 Give a cheeky display around republican diplomat and flapper (7)
 - 15 Old Italian person sure can't put out (8)
 - 17 A poet inhaling bit of opium on a train? (6)
 - 20 Dope stashed in a hollow cavity in bureau (6)
 - 21 Regret drinking shot served up for villain (5)
 - 23 A church covering up new outbreaks? (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Don't ever doubt yourselves or waste a second of your life. It's too short, and you're too special.
— Ariana Grande



There is a wide recognition that the creation of the IAS was one of the cardinal follies of the wise. It is irrelevant to the people at large but it has made itself hugely useful to the political class, writes **MANOJE NATH**



HAS THE COUNTRY FAILED THE IAS?

Officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) who demonstrate the capability to make money from the system, and make it fast, inevitably endear themselves to people in power. So, whatever the outcome of the ongoing investigation against Jharkhand Mines and Industry secretary Pooja Singhal, IAS, it will not interfere with the chances of her appointment as Chief Secretary of Jharkhand, when her time comes. In its brief history of twenty years as a separate state, Jharkhand has honoured three such IAS officers by appointing them as Chief Secretaries. Among officers so appointed was a gentleman who was facing trial in two cases related to financial irregularities in purchase of fertilizer. Another one had spent many months in jail on charges of forcing entrepreneurs to donate money to his NGOs and finally won a reprieve from the Supreme Court. A third officer who was convicted in an animal husbandry case, and perhaps died in jail, had two stints as chief secretary of Jharkhand. Jharkhand's case may be an exception, but in popular imagination IAS officers can make money not only with impunity but with honour.

There are two standard explanations for the steady diminution of the stature and prestige of the IAS. The first consists of playing down the well-founded criticisms of servility and capitulation, corruption and chicanery. Even though sometimes the merit of the criticism is granted, its significant contribution to the polity and society is dwelt upon at great length; distortions and aberrations that may have crept in are laid at the door of the many extenuating circumstances.

If the IAS has failed it is because the country has failed (or is failing at an accelerated rate). It is only the extreme formulation of such an approach. The other strategy is to deflect and devalue - the criticism by outwitting and silencing the critic with a more vehement self-critical diatribe, an anguished self-loathing of their own, as if the act of advertising could, in itself, absolve the service of all the sins that were being advertised.

The IAS, according to one view, requires a particular kind of society to function to its full potential, something like the idylls of Nehruvian era. The post-Independence leaders and influencers like Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Ambedkar, Madan Mohan Malviya, T T Krishnamachari, Acharya Kripalani, Jyoti Basu, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Jaiprakash Narayan (to mention just a handful); industrialists like JRD Tata, Jamnalal Bajaj, Dinshaw Petit and GD Birla; editors like Desmond Doig, Arun Shourie, Sunanda K Dattaray, Kushwant Singh, Frank Moraes and Russi Karanjia have been mostly replaced by pygmies and carpet baggers. These people may win elections, make billion of dollars in one year or run up huge TRP ratings, but they are incapable of promoting public values or morals, or establishing ethical corporate standards, or writing an editorial (let alone investigating a story).

But that is hardly the case. The IAS has not only been quick to limber up to the changed political realities, it has scripted an even more indispensable role for itself in the era of "pygmies and carpet baggers."

Politics, to appropriate Balzac's remark, has become like, "Soldiering, ... chiefly a finan-



Jharkhand Mines and Industry Secretary Pooja Singhal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case.

cial undertaking, you need gold in order to do battle, and you need to do battle in order to get gold." Some governments are (were) headed by leaders from newly emergent political classes for whom English was not the language of choice, who did not feel constrained by rules, regulations etc and were quite upfront about their intentions to abuse their office for personal gains.

The longevity of governments challenged the myths that the IAS had forged out of isolated life stories of a young collector telling off a CM,

“

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”

a chief secretary recording his dissent in days long gone by, myths that made them intelligible to themselves, provided them with their reassurance during times of self-doubt. Governments were there to stay; they were here today, they were going to be here tomorrow. How long could they wait out in the cold?

Though supposed to be unaligned, personally free and subject to the executive authority only within a defined area, they choose to be incorporated in the apparatus of political power. Commitment to rule based governance, are pragmatically abandoned by such officers. They are for the government, the government is for them.

An interesting example from marine biology will serve as an apt metaphor. In the Bay of Naples, a common sea slug medusa, and a snail, start off as independent organisms but on close encounter become conjoined in such a manner that both the jellyfish and the snail shed off a lot of themselves. A small portion of the snail gets permanently affixed to the ventral surface near the mouth of the jellyfish to become one single organism. They get along nicely in a symbiotic arrangement, exploiting each other's biological capabilities and yet retain their specific otherness.

A clutch of trusted officers-the drastically edited version of service, the cadre may have hundreds of officers, in an arrangement

reminiscent of the medusa and the snail, handle the core sectors of the governments as also the entire range of political purpose. The others are kept in a state of idle splendour. But like an Englishman the IAS is "never at a loss for an effective moral attitude ... you will never find ... them in the wrong." It is responsible for the marginalisation of its own service and yet persists with the complaint of political interference.

There is a wide recognition that the creation of the IAS was one of the cardinal follies of the wise. It is irrelevant to the people at large but it has made itself hugely useful to the political class. In an unusual consensus, cutting across their ideological divide, they have found them to be even more valuable after retirement than they are in service. As heads of all the accountability institutions, all those roadblocks to arbitrary exercise of executive power, they render them defunct. In many states you can find officers recruited in the 60s, 70s, 80s making themselves useful to their political masters in a myriad ways. To stand an old saying on its head, "the dead lion is even more valuable than the living donkey."

The alliance of these two major institutions has significantly altered the balance of power much to the detriment of democracy.

Manoje Nath is a retired Government servant.

IF YOUR BODY'S NOT RIGHT, THE REST OF YOUR DAY WILL GO ALL WRONG. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. —V.L. ALLINEARE



PREVENT HIGH BP FOR GOOD

Every year, on May 17, **World Hypertension Day** is observed in order to educate the public and create awareness on high blood pressure (BP) or hypertension which has no symptoms or warning signs. The HEALTH PIONEER reports

An alarming one in four Indian adults has high blood pressure. Known medically as hypertension, many people don't even know they have it, because high blood pressure has no symptoms or warning signs.

"But only about 10 per cent of them have their blood pressure under control," according to a report by the India Hypertension Control Initiative. Releasing the report, Indian Council of Medical Research Director-General, Dr Balram Bhargava, emphasised on making hypertension a national priority.

Prashant Mathur, director of ICMR's Na Mathur, director of ICMR's National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research, Bengaluru, and corresponding author of the study chips in that "recognising the low awareness and high rates of drop-outs between the diagnosis of hypertension, its treatment and control calls for better planning of providing continuum of care for high blood pressure."

For both women and men, the prevalence increases sharply with age. The increase is for all categories of hypertension, including pre-hypertension, for both sexes. About one-fourth of women and men aged 40-49 have hypertension, says the study.

The recent National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5) too presents an alarming picture of the chronic disease. It shows that when it comes to treatment, only 7 per

THE SILENT KILLER IS CAUSED BY STRESS AND SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE. IT CAN LEAD TO A RANGE OF DISORDERS SUCH AS STROKE AND DEMENTIA BESIDES HEART AND KIDNEY DISEASES. THE UNION HEALTH MINISTRY IS PUSHING TO LOWER THE PREVALENCE OF RAISED BLOOD PRESSURE BY 25 PER CENT BY 2025.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

you can prevent it

- Reduce salt to less than 5g daily
- Eat fruits and vegetables regularly
- Avoid saturated fats and trans fats
- Avoid tobacco
- Reduce alcohol
- Be physically active every day

cent women and 6 per cent men who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure are on medication.

The survey also found that 33 per cent of women and 46 per cent men have never got their blood pressures measured. Based on the blood pressure measurement, the NFHS-5 found 21 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men are having hypertension marked by the blood pressure measurement of 140/90 or above.

When elevated blood pressure is accompanied by abnormal cholesterol and blood sugar levels, the damage to your arteries, kidneys, and heart accelerates exponentially. According to a study presented at the American Stroke Association's International Stroke Conference recently, hypertensive young people between the ages of 20 to 40 could experience brain problems in their midlife.

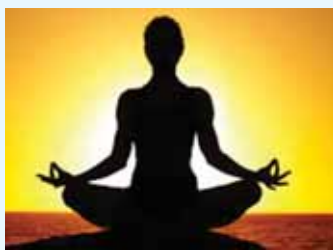
Last year, the World Health Organisation modified its blood

pressure control guideline, suggesting that a systolic pressure of 130 should be the threshold to start medication in people with a history of heart complications or other risk factors whereas for others such a threshold would be 140/90.

Fortunately, high blood pressure is easy to detect and treat. Blood Pressure can be kept under control in a healthy range simply by making lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, increasing activity, and eating more healthfully, say doctors.

YOGA REMEDY

Ishwar V. Basavaraddi, Director of Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) tells you, "We have a range of yoga asanas, pranayama and meditation that help to open up the chest cavity, improves lung capacity and increases cardiopulmonary function, which lead to maintain physical activity for longer." According to him, some of the Yoga



asanas that can help in beating high blood pressure are: Tadasana without heel raise/ Katicakrasana/ Ushtrasana/ Gomukhasana/ Uttanmandukasana/ Bhujangasana/ Ardha halasana/ Shavasana / Yoga Nidra/ Abdominal Breathing (30 times)/ Nadi shodhan pranayama/ Sitali pranayama/ Bhramari pranayama and Dhyana.

BEYOND THE STETHOSCOPE

When not pursuing their profession, a breed of doctors prefer to wear different hats to keep themselves fit and centered. The HEALTH PIONEER tries to catch up with them every week.



Doc's Iron Will For Iron Man

What started as a pastime activity in 2010—participating in the 5K category at the Airtel marathon—has now become a passionate hobby for this 48-year-old medico. Dr. Hariprasad G, Additional Professor at Department of Biophysics, AIIMS, Delhi, has since then even successfully completed the Olympic Triathlon (1.5 Km swim; 40 km cycling; 10 km run) a few times in under three-and-a-half hours.

His thirst for a bigger challenge unquenched, he is now preparing for the Half-Iron Man Triathlon (1.9 km swim, 90 km cycling and a 21 km run) championship to be held this year-end at the Talkatora-SPM Swimming complex. In between this journey, Dr Hariprasad has graduated from a 5 km run to a 10 km and then half marathon and finally a 42 km Full marathon, which he comfortably does in four-and-a-half hours.

He has participated in several marathons including Mumbai, Standard Chartered Singapore, New Delhi and Omaha to name a few. The most recent one was the Hyderabad Marathon, which Dr Hariprasad recalls, was quite a challenge considering the number of steep flyovers in the city all along the route.

Hundreds of colorful medals from all these events and the many glittering gold medals decorate the walls of the living room of this clinician-scientist who along with his team are currently investigating the A-Z of Omicron virus.

The father of two sons who balances out work-family-friends-endurance training shares, "I mix-up of a lot of physical activities like walking, jogging, sprinting, swimming, cycling, stair climbing, yoga, core exercises, skipping to get the best out of my heart, mind and body."

Every event is a learning curve and the challenge only gets bigger and more significant with each passing year, says the doctor who has done his MBBS from a Karnataka Medical College, Hubli and later did his post-graduation MD and subsequently a PhD from AIIMS, Delhi. His inspirations are sports legends such as Phelps, Dressel, Ledecky, Djokovic, Federer, Nadal, and Kipchoge!

Of course, behind all these achievements is his rigorous efforts, a strong-will and most importantly the support of his family, particularly his better half Roopa, a doctor herself who is into cervical cancer prevention at National Institute for Cancer Prevention and Research, Noida. She doubles up as his nutritionist and a personal chef, and ensures he gets the right blend of food in the weeks leading up to the endurance event, during the race and post-event. As a general rule he usually consumes wholesome unprocessed food cooked at home and avoids fast-packaged foods. Even delicacies be it Pani puri, dosas, tacos, pasta, pan cakes, waffles and desserts are given a yummy but healthy twist at Dr Roopa's kitchen, and it is this that helps him in 'the long run', he chuckles.

"We always have a choice and end up with the easier one. I decided to change that," the doctor quips, adding that "Don't give up on your dreams, because you have no idea what all you are capable of."

(Medicos may write to us at healthp100@gmail.com)

NEWS BRIEFS

CUT DOWN BAD MICROBES

Healthy adults who eat a diverse diet, with at least 8-10 grams of soluble fibre such as grains, beans, lentils, nuts and some fruits and vegetables daily, have fewer antibiotic-resistant microbes in their guts, according to a study by Agricultural Research Service scientists and their colleagues in mBio.

'AYURVEDA AAHARA' ON THE PLATTER

The Union Ministry of Ayush and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), India's apex body for food regulation has formulated regulations of safety and quality standards for food products under 'Ayurveda Aahara' category. This comprehensive initiative will ensure manufacturing of quality Ayurveda food products and help in expanding the international market for Make-In-India products.

NEW THERAPY FOR BREAST CANCER

The world's first subcutaneous therapy for breast cancer that is effective and reduces treatment time by 90 per cent has been launched in India, Roche Pharma said recently. The treatment by Roche called PHEGO is the first ever fixed dose formulation in oncology that combines two monoclonal antibodies: Perjeta (pertuzumab) and Herceptin (trastuzumab) with hyaluronidase. It is administered via an under the skin injection in combination with intravenous (IV) chemotherapy for the treatment of early and metastatic HER2-positive breast cancer.

'ONE STEP' PORTAL FOR HEALTH INFO AT INDIAN EMBASSIES

Soon facilitation centres at Indian embassies across the world will be set up for people wanting to travel to India for treatment, said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya while addressing a roundtable conference with senior IFS officers on 'Building Brand India' in Delhi.

Three-layered healthcare system to aid common man

Prevention is better than cure. Its significance can be witnessed in the tri-layered healthcare mechanism introduced by the Governments. The mechanism encompasses Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs), Community Healthcare Centres (CHCs) and District Healthcare Centres (DHCs) after which big hospitals comes into play, whenever needed, says Gaurav Pandey

The objective of this mechanism is to ensure that larger number of ailments shall be diagnosed at the initial stage in rural pockets or small towns and effective medications may begin to uproot it.

The importance of PHCs is considerable as the locals receive medical aid the moment symptoms appear. Also, such Centres are responsible for spreading awareness about and bringing various government healthcare measures to the locals through Aanganvadi workers and Asha workers.

If one does not get cured at the PHCs, s/he is referred to the CHCs which has adequately equipped Diagnostic Laboratory as well. The consultations and investigations may help him to get fully cured. But if there is no respite, s/he may be sent to District Hospital and to higher referral hospitals like All

India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

It is essential for every resident to understand the nuances and structure of this mechanism. Talking of private sector, a person visits a General Physician also known as Family Physician, usually an MBBS degree holder. In case of common diseases, a person gets cured there itself. There are Polyclinics where Specialists dealing with various body parts and related ailments are available and a patient may get synergized expert opinion of these Consultants in case of two-three ailments.

Then there are Nursing Homes where the patients can be admitted. It falls under primary healthcare. The bigger Nursing Homes equipped with Operation Theatre (OT) and Intensive Care Unit (ICU), they are considered as second-level or Secondary care Centres.

The big hospitals with more



The writer is an expert in health care management

than hundred beds, fully-equipped with latest machines, contemporary Modular Operation Theatres, ICU,

facilities of CT Scan, MRI, in-house pathology and Consultants related to every speciality are available fall under the category of Tertiary Care Hospitals.

The hospitals where Robotics Surgery, Proton Therapy, Heart Transplants, Lung Transplants and other advanced solutions are possible are known to be Fourth-level Healthcare Hospitals which are at the zenith in terms of providing medical solutions.

It may be true that these mechanisms and levels come into play once someone falls ill but it is important for all of us to be aware of these structures so that the illness can be diagnosed at the initial level through investigations and doctor's interventions and prescriptions and can be contained before it may cause serious damages.

In abroad, the cost of keeping every citizen healthy lies with the

Insurance Companies and the Governments. There exist Diagnostic Related Groups where annual medical tests are carried out so that contagious ailments can be contained in time and the burden of paying for cure and recovery may get lessened from the shoulders of the Insurance Company or Government.

Many Insurance Companies offer annual health check-ups to those who hold their mediclaim policies. The private hospitals also play their active part and offer significant rebates on various investigation packages.

The government-run and private hospitals organize free camps continually and the people in remote locations are investigated through mobile vans and people must take benefit of it without second thoughts as many serious ailments get diagnosed in time. More such drives are needed which is possible by effective Public Private People Model.

Sinn Fein a game changer in Northern Ireland

The Sinn Fein's historic win in the Assembly election is signaling a much-awaited change in the power corridors in Northern Ireland. It is the beginning of a new era. The old guards (Democratic Unionist Party) were forced to give way to a new political dispensation (Sinn Fein) in last week's election. Once again what has come to the forefront is that for long the Sinn Fein has been linked to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a paramilitary group that used violent tactics to free Northern Ireland from British control. Once it used to be the Catholics vs the Protestants that led to a series of violence for decades in Northern Ireland. The IRA is a Catholic and nationalist organisation that conducted an armed insurgency against the state for a united independent Ireland whereas the DUP mainly evolved from Protestant Unionist Party that itself came out of the Ulster Protestant Action Movement.

This election has spearheaded a new debate, a new narrative and a new future in this part of the UK. The total number of seats in the Assembly is 90, but constituencies are only 18. The Sinn Fein won 27, DUP 25, Alliance Party 17, Ulster Unionist Party 9, Social Democratic and Labour Party 8, and the rest of the smaller parties and independents one each.

In the 2017 election, the DUP won 28 seats and Sinn Fein 27. The margin of victory between the two main rival parties was very narrow. In 2017, the Social Democratic and Labour Party won 12 seats, the Ulster Unionist Party 10, the Alliance Party 8, the Green Party 2, while the People Before Profit and Traditional Unionist Voice had one seat each.

What does this victory of Sinn Fein mean for Northern Ireland? It means a lot for the party as it has won a majority for the first time in the Assembly election. And for the DUP, it is a loss of face. The Sinn Fein has received the most first preference votes in

the election. The party said that the Brexit move unleashed by the Boris Johnson Government in Britain accelerated the debate on reunification with the EU member Ireland because most of the Northern Irish people voted to remain with the Union. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 recognises the right of the people on the island of Ireland to reunify if border polls in Ireland and Northern Ireland support it. Whereas the existing British law says that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should order a vote if it appears likely that a majority of voters want a united Ireland but is unclear on how that should be decided. However, the Irish Government must also agree to the same.

Michelle O'Neill, the First Minister of the Northern Ireland Government, is the first nationalist politician to occupy that position since its creation. During the election, the DUP and the Sinn Fein were battling hard for the top post because it offers an entitlement to nominate the next First Minister. But it must be noted here that the office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is an equal office with joint powers in Northern Ireland. But what has been termed as symbolically important is the allocation of the titles.

Why was it so important for the DUP to win the Assembly election in 2022? It was indeed crucial for the DUP to win the election as it has been the most dominant and largest political party since the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921 as a Protestant majority province. Earlier the Assembly was known as the Stormont Parliament in the name of the Stormont Estate in East Belfast where the building is located. Generally, the Stormont is the commonly used name to refer to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

What is Sinn Fein all about? Why is its win so significant for Northern Ireland? The Irish phrase "Sinn Fein"



From left, Sinn Fein's John Finucane, deputy leader Michelle O'Neill, party leader Mary Lou McDonald, and Conor Murphy speak to the media at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, on May 9

refers to "We Ourselves" or "Ourselves". The party was formed by Arthur Griffith in 1905 when the very ideology of Sinn Fein was brought into practice. Originally Griffith was the leader of the Cumann na nGaedheal i.e. "Party of the Irish". But the current form of Sinn Fein emerged only in the 1970s. The policy of Sinn Fein enunciated by Griffith highlighted passive resistance to the British, non-payment of taxes, the formation of an Irish ruling council and independent law courts.

Untill the rise of the Easter Rebellion or Easter Rising in the month of April (24-29) 1916 in Dublin by the Irish republicans, the Sinn Fein was not in the limelight around the world. This rising was all but to challenge the colonial rule of Britain over Ireland and to establish an independent Irish Republic.

It was an armed insurrection launched for the first time during the Irish revolutionary period. After this rebellion, the Sinn Fein became the rallying point for a new brand of

ultranationalist sentiment which is also known as "Republicanism". The fury of the nationalists could well be gauged from the historic proclamation of the Republic published in 1916. The proclamation known as the "The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the People of Ireland" clearly says: "Irishman and Irishwomen, in the name of God, and of the dead generations, from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom... We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and inalienable..." This clearly hints that the Irish people wanted to come out of the colonial yoke of British imperialism when the latter was fighting the First World War in Europe.

Sinn Fein's basic objective is to unite all the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland and 6 counties of Northern Ireland under the umbrella of a

Democratic Socialist Irish Republic. For many years, this part of Ireland had the "Troubles" or better known as "Northern Ireland Conflict" that ravaged the land from 1968 to 1998. It was clearly a bloody flight between the Catholic and the Protestant community of Northern Ireland about their relationship with Britain.

Against this background, the historic win of the Sinn Fein is to be taken seriously by the people of Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and of course by Britain. Now the political situation in Northern Ireland has become fragile. It seems the unionist DUP will not join the new government until the post-Brexit custom arrangements.

The Sinn Fein, the single largest party, now has the right to occupy the post of the First Minister. But a functioning Executive cannot be established without the DUP taking the role of the Deputy Minister in the new government. As per the constitutional mandate of Northern Ireland, the DUP

has to take the required role of the Deputy in the power sharing agreement. If this power sharing does not take place, it could trigger a constitutional crisis in Northern Ireland.

After the withdrawal of Britain from the 28-member European Union (EU) in 2020, the relationship between the UK and Northern Ireland and between the EU and Northern Ireland has come into question. And to set it right, what has emerged is known as the famous Northern Ireland Protocol or post-Brexit Customs Arrangement Deal. Under the protocol, checks are needed on goods coming into Northern Ireland from the UK. Since it came into force from the beginning of the 2021 when Britain formally left the EU, the protocol became a bone of contention between the UK and the EU.

Many wonder why the Unionists are against the deal. The Unionist parties are opposed to the protocol as to them placing physical border across the Irish Sea absolutely undermines the longstanding

union they advocate between Northern Ireland and the UK. Paul Givan of the DUP in fact resigned over this matter as the First Minister of Northern Ireland in February. Just before the Assembly election, in a public debate Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the leader of the DUP, made it clear that his party may not take part in the new government unless the outstanding issues around the protocol are solved amicably.

Today, leaders like Donaldson have voiced concerns about a decisive action on the protocol at the earliest. Indeed, this protocol is very necessary as the border is too sensitive an issue which can't be ignored.

One must flash back on the fragile history of Northern Ireland and how the past peace efforts came after decades of armed fighting by the IRA against the UK. And clearly, the agreements to bring back peace to this part of the UK also included the removal of visible signs of border. Now, if any physical border is erected between Northern Ireland and Britain, this could rightly threaten the historic peace deal known as the Good Friday Agreement or the 1998 Northern Ireland Peace Deal.

It is very clear that Sinn Fein's victory will not push for the union of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, but it has simply started the process. Britain's future measures towards this part of its territory may be more cautious in the days to come. Politically speaking, the Sinn Fein has to go a long way to muster a clear majority as the roots of the DUP are still very solid in many areas across the island.

(Dr Makhan Saikia has taught political science and international relations for over a decade in institutions of national and international repute after specialisation in globalisation and governance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He is the chief editor of the Journal of Global Studies, an international research journal)

It is very clear that Sinn Fein's victory will not push for the union of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland at once, but it has started the process. Britain's future measures towards this part of its territory may be more cautious in the days to come. Politically speaking, the Sinn Fein has to go a long way to muster a clear majority as the roots of the DUP are still very solid in many areas across the island



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

Islam and nation-state: Are they compatible?

Many scholars claim that there is no inherent issue whether textual or practice, within Islam that makes it incompatible with the nation-state system or even democracy. The case of liberal democracy is a separate category as many argue that Islam is inherently opposed to such ideas

Any discussion on the compatibility between Islam as a faith and the idea of the nation-state as a political, social and economic reality has been exhausted in the hegemonic Islam and western modernity debate. The text and practice distinction has been a historical reality in Muslim societies, and it remained equally significant with the rise of the nation-state system. The question of the separation between religion and politics has been a different historical reality in the pre-scientific world.

The religious experiences among all faiths and societies have a different trajectory. However, there has been a homogenised notion of such division in Islam. The core vision of Islam doesn't make any distinction between sacred and secular, and political and temporal. The argument is that politics can't be separated from Islam as its core value.

Propagators of such ideas were not just orientalist but have been equally among Muslim scholars. The division between *din* (religion) and the *dawla* (state) has been a usual practice in Muslim societies since its origin, notably after Islam emerged as an organised form of life and the emergence of Islamic empires. But the question remains "why is it a contested concept, and are they compatible?"

The nation-state system is a few centuries old idea born in modern Europe. The nation-state system came to Muslim societies only in the 20th century, under two separate circumstances: the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rubric of European colonialism.

The gaze of orientalism has been a central episteme in creating a sustained knowledge power discourse over western understanding of Islam and thus the idea of the Muslim world and idea of Islam has been categorised as a singular category. There is a vast generalisation over the accordance given to Islam and nation-state compatibility.

With failing democracies and the rising number of failing states in the current world system, and the authoritarian structure in the majority of Muslim states, there is a discussion whether Islam and nation-state are compatible.

Religion and politics: An Islamic context

The boundaries of religion have always crossed the boundaries of politics and vice-versa, both in practice and in the language of Muslim empires. James Piscatori argues that Islam and the nation-states debate has been broadly discussed under two schools of thought: Conformists and non-conformists.

The non-conformists' refutation is based on the thrust that comes directly from the Quran, shaping the whole human sphere of life; spiritual, physical, individual, social, economic and political through the divine law called Shariah. The non-conformists' holy will is supreme, and God's sovereignty doesn't allow the human will to trespass God's divine decree.

After all, the human will is the core idea of the nation-state system, which defines the whole sphere of life.

Therefore, God's decree under the command of the

Quran and Shariah would decide the do's and don'ts for humans, which is insignificant in the nation-states system. In this regard, the case of Saudi Arabia is significant. The Saudi Arabian case is essential for two critical reasons: It's where Islam finds its origin, and for Muslims worldwide, it's the heart of Islam.

And secondly, the Saudi State's behaviour since the state's formation in 1932 under the command of the King has been an institutionalised form that foretells the contemporary image of Islam in Saudi Arabia. This is to understand the making of an institutionalised form of Islam or official Islam as many categories in Saudi Arabia under the aegis of the nation-state system.

This makes the case further critical to know how the state has dominated this space despite being considered the most conservative that follows a strict religious command in controlling the Saudi society, its religiosity and the everydayness of life.

In short, Saudi Arabia defies the core nature of the conformists' view, and therefore, the question of legitimacy needs serious analysis. The idea that despite being the most conservative country in the world that follows the Wahhabi brand of Islam, Saudi has managed to create a dominant space for the idea of the nation-state.

Therefore, the core assumption of an Islamic state is that authority, regardless of the status of exercising power over the subjects, is legitimate according to the Islamic juridical theory if it follows divine sources like the Quran and

Sunnah.

In that scenario, can a Muslim majority state necessarily become an Islamic state, or it can only become genuinely Islamic only by applying the Quran and Sunnah and Shariah laws in the realm of the socio-political feature of the nation as a basic constitution of the country?

The two critical elements of the Islamic state are command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*). However, the juridical sphere of the state follows the command and prohibition based on jurisprudential (*fiqh*) traditions based on the interpretations of the divine command of the Quran and sayings of the prophet.

Islamic philosophical/theological and legal enquiry creates a fundamental difference in the contested aspect of *fiqh* traditions that have been divided among four schools in Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali)

On the issue of Shariah, the vital principle for an Islamic State has four primary dimensions: First, enforcing ordinances of Shariah.

Second, for an administrative position, any stipulation of Shariah is unacceptable. Third, a properly constituted Islamic government is a Muslim's religious duty. People's consent is a part of forming an ISIS; fourth, the government comes into existence based on the people's free choice of the Quranic expression, "from among you."

"As Muhammad Asad helps in understanding these significant distinctions in the rulings of Shariah based on *Fard* (obligatory-omission of which is a sin) and *Mubah*

(allowed) omission of which doesn't make a man sinner.

Mandub (recommended) has merit in it, and the deletion doesn't lead to sin. *Makruh*: Undesirable but committed acts can't be a sin. *Mutlaq*: Neither meritorious nor sinful. This significance of the diversity of ruling Shariah directs the Muslims to accept the divine law (Shariah) and an open road (*Minhaj*) where *ijtihad* comes as a free enquiry despite the place for Shariah as divine law is the basis of the Islamic state system for fulfilling all spheres of life.

The practice, however, through *fiqh* rulings, is based on *Qiyas*. The room for the state to create its dominance comes from *fiqh* traditions in the absence of no strict divine commands.

The source of the state sovereignty in an Islamic State as a political framework for Muslim unity and cooperation and means for equity and justice is based on three guiding principles: Injunctions of the Quran and obey God, obey the Apostle and those in authority.

The injunctions, "He who follows me, obeys God; and he who disobeys me disobeys God. And he who heeds the Amir (head of the state) observes me, and he violates the Amir and disregards me."

Therefore, a Muslim, nature wise and superior ineligibility is a qualification under Shariah for the head of the state. In this sphere of a philosophical-technological and legal aspect, the Saudi state commands its legitimacy and creates a space for an official and institutionalised form of Islam.

Understanding official Islam and its multivariate dimensions

Despite the structural differences, the genealogy of Muslim societies and the historical processes overwhelmingly have placed Islam as an ideology.

This whole idea of putting Islam as an ideology is the root of the concept of Dar-ul Islam (House of Islam) and Dar-ul Harb (House of war) and the violent form of *jihad* as a language of the Islamic empires more than a Quranic command for Muslims against non-Muslims.

This has been a galvanising force for Muslims on the question of brotherhood and social justice. Second, the idea is Islam needs to be politicised. This has been a core factor of Islamic revivalism. The Islamic movement in the name of pan-Islamism started during the end of the Ottoman empire and the rise of the western intervention of colonial enterprise in the heart of the Muslim world.

This notion reached its more politicised form after the height of the Muslim Brotherhood and found a revolutionary expression in the 1979 Iranian revolution. The argument here is that politics in Islamic colleges lag in institutional development because Islam lacks an organised priesthood.

This has had two consequences. One is that there was no effort of reformation in Islam in the absence of institutional efficiency and the second consequence is that the *ulama* or clergies were never established sufficiently to wield real power and lacked the ide-

ology and organisational characteristics.

It might be assumed therefore the future stability of Saudi Arabia may well depend on how the government balances demands for political participation and the traditional concentration of power within the Saudi elite. On the ideological factor, a tendency in orientalist tradition is that Islam is antithetical to modernisation.

If the 1950s and the 1960s were dominated by Arab nationalism, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of "Islamic fundamentalism," challenging secular ideologies and Muslim governments by appealing to religious dogma, symbols, and rhetoric.

Democracies are failing across the world under the reign of authoritarianism, but no other religious group receives so much attention on the question of compatibility as Islam.

Hence, the final point that many scholars offer is that there is no inherent issue whether textual or practice, within Islam that makes it incompatible with the nation-state system or even democracy.

The case of liberal democracy is a separate category as many argue that Islam is inherently opposed to such ideas. Still, even Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Algeria have classic compatibility cases between Islam nation-state and their multiple forms of expression, including constitutional democracy.

(The writer is PhD from Centre for West Asian Studies, JNU, New Delhi, and is a former journalist)



PREM ANAND MISHRA



The present turn of events may dampen the credibility of the BPSC



Protesters burn an effigy against the 67th BPSC preliminary exam paper leak in Patna



Security personnel check vehicles near BPSC office in Patna

AUTHOR



DHIRENDRA KUMAR

It was May 6 and it was Friday. Over six lakh aspirants of the 67th Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) were in a mad race to reach their examination centre at least a night before the examination day – Sunday (May 8).

Aspirants were struggling to get a seat in already overcrowded buses and trains to make it to their examination centres which were allotted across 38 districts of the state, as they were heading towards scripting a new success story for themselves, their villagers and, of course, for their role models cum parents by cracking the first step of the three-step-based state's prestigious exam.

It's a general self-generated 'travel protocol', which is followed by most of the aspirants appearing for any competitive exam, to reach the examination centre on the intervening night of the examination day by using common means of transportation such as train and bus.

The same travel protocol was followed by almost all BPSC aspirants who were all prepared to appear for the prelims exam of the BPSC scheduled on May 8. They crisscrossed different districts of the state to 'locate' their examination centres situated in urban and semi-urban areas.

Everything was as normal as it was 'supposed' to be by the 'setters', who had full faith in their 'fool-proof plan' to 'leak' the paper and distribute it among 'caretakers' of 'fixed beneficiaries'. It seems God was not kind to setters and their beneficiaries as the leaked question paper of BPSC PT reached the mail inbox of the District Magistrate of Bhojpur, who was informed that the paper got leaked from Veer Kunwar Singh College, Ara centre.

As the leaked question paper started circulating on different social media platforms, the exam was cancelled on the same day, just after it was conducted on Sunday at 1,083 centres.

The moment the Bihar

government announced the cancellation of the exam, it raised questions about Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's zero tolerance for corruption, by putting the whole system under the scanner. For the first time in the over 15-year-long regime of Nitish Kumar, the question paper of state's premier examination – BPSC – got leaked, forcing the state government to cancel the exam without any mention of the next date to conduct the exam.

If you are surprised by this type of 'heinous' corruption, which could not be possible without the involvement of top-ranked officials, then you have to take a pause as it seems nowadays it has become a new normal in Bihar. It's also a fact that you may get tired of counting the weird cases of corruption, but you wouldn't find any decline in the incidents of dishonesty despite the state having a huge number of upright and dedicated IAS officials at every position.

"Question paper leak is not new in Bihar. It has become a regular phenomenon in the regime of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. You take the name of any exam, you will find the question of that exam leaked and the government doesn't even bother to inquire about it," said Dilip Kumar, who heads Rashtriya Chhatra Ekta Manch – an organisation of aspirants of competitive examinations, including BPSC.

Kumar, who is also a BPSC aspirant and was registered to appear for the PT exam, brought the paper leak matter into the notice of Bhojpur District Magistrate Roshan Kushwaha – a 2014 batch IAS officer – soon after the question paper of the PT started circulating on the social media.

Putting the role of incumbent BPSC chairman RK Mahajan under the lens, the students' leader said, "The credentials of Mahajan is not so good as when he was in the Education Department, the paper of teachers' eligibility test was leaked."

However, Dilip Kumar further said that it's a huge exam racket running in connivance with 'big shot' political leaders and officials sitting at different influential positions in the state government.

Expressing his sympathy while getting nostalgic, Yudhyavir Singh – Assistant Professor at AIIMS-Delhi – said, "It's a catastrophic incident for several aspirants belonging to economically backward sections of society. It's like dreams of students getting shattered as it has put the whole system under the scanner. It also raises questions over the sanctity of the exam to be

Invidious slippage

Bihar Public Service Commission paper leak at VKSC centre in Bhojpur district represents a routine occurrence and raises serious questions over the role of the government, involvement of administrative officials and credibility of the BPSC at large



The paper leak is a 'catastrophic incident' for students who made all out efforts to prepare for the exam and reported to the exam centres

conducted in future. Under the given circumstances, the credibility of the BPSC would always be under the lens."

"BPSC is Bihar's pres-

tigious examination and it is conducted to select the best officials for exhibiting their administrative acumen in strengthening the good governance agenda of the state as well as central government. Students belonging to weaker sections of society get into the preparation for BPSC by going through several hardships. The cancellation of the BPSC exam is like faith and dream breaking into pieces," said Singh, who had also witnessed paper leak incidents during his preparations for medical entrances.

Agreeing with Singh, BPSC aspirant Praveen Kumar, who hails from a remote village in Gaya district, said, "I was hopeful of clearing the PT exam as I had scored well. I belong to a poor family and my father is a farmer. The cancellation of the exam has left me in a lurch as I'm not able to find a way forward to move on."

Praveen, who is a postgraduate and is currently pursuing a degree in Law, takes tuition classes to meet his expenses.

"As I'm an elder son in the family, it looks awkward for me to take money from my parents. I'm managing the expenses of my studies, coaching classes, food and accommodation on my own," he said.

Praveen is not the only such case. The list is very long. Take the example of another aspirant Sanjay Rajak, who is in a great shock as he had wished to clear the exam for his parents to provide them a respectful life. His mother washes utensils to meet the expenses of his studies while his father works as a farm labourer.

As the matter has been handed over to the Economic offence Unit (EOU) to investigate the whole scam, officials have found very surprising facts associated with the BPSC paper leak case.

EoU officials are surprised to know how and why Veer Kunwar Singh College (VKSC) in the outskirts of Ara Town was identified as an exam centre by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC).

Officials have claimed that the exam centre, which is a college of a powerful politician, had nothing in order and brazenly ignored BPSC guidelines. "The college was never meant for an exam of this magnitude and it took things very lightly, making its own rules – be it deliberately to suit a selected few or out of sheer ignorance. The CCTV was also not functional. Besides, some 25 selected candidates were seated in one room and all handed over Set-C questions 25 minutes ahead of the start of the examination, which was next to impossible," the officials said, adding that other students kept waiting for the OMR sheet and question papers till 20 minutes after the scheduled start.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has seized the OMR sheets of candidates and sought the details of the candidates from the BPSC for their interrogation. "There may be involvement of people at various levels. Those arrested are not attributing a

strong and convincing reason for the mess at the centre and have given contradictory statements. The alleged beneficiaries need to be identified. Some insiders may also be involved. Such tampering cannot happen at the level of a few, as the repercussions are known to all should the plan go awry," the officials said.

"Nobody is answering why only Set-C was supplied in a room and at whose instructions. Besides, why was the FIR not immediately lodged in the case once the discrepancy was detected? It happened only after one and a half days," the EoU official said, adding that the arrest of four persons, including the BDO who was the static magistrate, was just the beginning.

Commenting on the proceedings, ADG (EoU) Nayyar Hasnain Khan said that 40 persons have been involved with the probe. "We are confident to crack it very soon and nab the kingpin. I am monitoring the case on a daily basis. Technical and forensic experts are also examining some numbers to unravel the modus operandi," Khan said.

It was also a matter of investigation as to why the complaints of irregularities emerged from Ara centre only, though there were around 1,083 centres across the state. "It needs to be ascertained if the question was available anywhere before Ara and that requires establishing backward linkages to find out the first time the question paper was uploaded. It also needs to be found out if there was any conspiracy hatched exclusively for Ara centre to benefit a selected few," he added.

As of now, the EoU has arrested four persons – BDO Jai Vardhan Gupta who was deputed as a static magistrate to oversee the examination in the district's Veer Kunwar Singh College (VKSC); Yogendra Singh, principal-cum-centre superintendent; Sushil Kumar Singh, lecturer-cum-controller and Agam Kumar Sahay, lecturer-cum-assistant centre superintendent of VKSC.

Even though the affiliation of VKSC with Veer Kunwar Singh University was valid till 2017, the college management managed to get the BPSC examination centre at VKSC. The investigating agencies are probing the matter from all the aspects to find out the mastermind behind the paper leak scam.

During the investigation, SIT found that the BPSC examination controller received one set of the leaked paper at 11.43 am on Sunday, 17 minutes before the paper was to begin at about 1,083 centres in the state's 38 districts.

More than six lakh candidates enrolled for Sunday's examination conducted for recruitment to 802 posts in Bihar's civil services. The preliminary exam was earlier postponed on two occasions.

The SIT also spoke to the individual who forwarded the 22-page question paper to the exam controller. This person, an official said, had received the question paper at 11.33 am. It is not clear who sent him the leaked paper, but an official underlined that WhatsApp tagged the document on his phone as one which had been "forwarded many times".

The initial probe indicates that all the versions of the leaked examination paper circulating on social media appeared to have originated

from a single point.

The team, which visited Ara's VKSC, also came across complaints from aspirants that a select group of students were placed in a separate room and given the question papers 15 minutes before the examination started at 12 noon.

The college is linked to a noted contractor Surendra Singh who comes from a political family and was earlier involved in the fake stamp paper case. Surendra Singh, who is the husband of a former JD (U) MLA from Barhara constituency, said that the VKSC was established in 1978 after his family members donated five acres of land in the name of the state governor in 1987 to construct the college. However, he refused the allegation that the question paper leaked or went viral from the VKSC premises.

The former secretary of VKSC, however, admitted that more than 900 aspirants appeared for the BPSC PT and created a ruckus over the delay in distribution of OMR sheets and question papers.

Meanwhile, experts have raised doubts over the change in the pattern to appoint BPSC chairman by the state government as a key factor in the paper leak. Earlier, academicians were given the task to lead BPSC as its chairman but Nitish Kumar's government changed that system and created re-employment opportunities for retired bureaucrats by appointing them as BPSC chairman. The paper leak incident is the first in the tenure of the incumbent chairman RK Mahajan. Besides, there is another major interesting development that has taken place in Nitish Kumar's regime. The government has suddenly found that private schools and affiliated colleges would have better facilities for aspirants than government-owned schools.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar has also given a strong message to perpetrators. "We took immediate action in the matter. We are checking where and how the paper was leaked. An enquiry has begun. Police are investigating. I have asked them to speed it up. Anyone found involved would be punished," Kumar had said after the paper leak was reported.

Calling the paper leak "unfortunate, sad and condemnable", Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Assembly Tejashwi Yadav said, "Such incidents have happened multiple times in various exams, including school papers. But no one learns. We have taken this up several times but to no avail. Students' lives are being played with."

Noting that the BPSC's question papers often leak in Bihar, Tejashwi quipped that the state government should rename it the Bihar Public Leak Commission (BPLC). In Bihar, the BPSC never holds exams on time, he added. "BPSC is a prestigious examination in Bihar. It has a specific institution to conduct the examination. Still, question papers are frequently leaked here. You could imagine what would happen to other examinations. As question papers are frequently leaking in Bihar that means somebody is sitting in the system and repeatedly doing such acts. State government should compensate every student with Rs 5,000, especially those who came to the examination centres from remote areas," Yadav said.

Views expressed are personal



Condemning the routine paper leak incidents, Tejashwi Yadav quipped that BPSC should be renamed as Bihar Public Leak Commission (BPLC)

Thriving through partnership

AUTHOR



DIPANKAR DEY

Owing to its high import dependency, the household- and transportation-driven consumption of natural gas has been on a decline but, riding on the success of Indo-American Strategic Partnership, a market is being created for LNG and CNG by replacing LPG

Gas usage pattern

India's domestic consumption of natural gas is dominated by the fertiliser (34 per cent), electric power (23 per cent), refining (11 per cent), local distribution (11 per cent), and petrochemical (8 per cent) industries. In recent years, the GoI has undertaken initiatives to make imported LNG more attractive, especially to the power and fertiliser industries. For electricity generation, the Ministry of Power, along with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, directed natural gas pipeline companies to reduce their tariffs to support greater natural gas use in electric power generation. In 2015, the GoI instituted a gas pooling policy to provide natural gas at a uniform price for all fertiliser plants.

Gas consumption is presently around 174 mmscmd. Of this, 49 per cent is met by domestic production and the rest through imports in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Demand for city gas is likely to rise to 140 mmscmd in eight years from 35 mmscmd now while gas use in refineries is expected at 58 mmscmd from about 14 mmscmd now. As per a report by *Business Standard*, LNG, as a transport fuel in India, is predicted to touch 14 million tonnes by 2035. The fertiliser industry had the highest share of natural gas consumption across India during the fiscal year 2021. Along with the fertiliser industry, petrochemicals, sponge iron, and LPG shrinkage constituted the non-energy consumption of natural gas that amounted to 35 per cent of the total consumption. The IEA forecasts that India will register the third-highest growth in natural gas vehicles through 2040, after the United States and China. Indian companies are currently experimenting with ways to integrate natural gas into the transport industry. For example, Petronet and IOC are running a trial programme of long-haul buses that run on LNG.

An ORF study (December 2021) shows that between 2013-14 and 2019-20, consumption of natural gas in power generation fell marginally by over two per cent and consumption in the fertiliser segment increased only slightly by just over one per cent. These two segments that accounted for over 42 per cent of consumption in 2019-20 are showing flat or negative growth which explains the slow growth of gas consumption. However, other segments have shown phenomenal growth during the same period. CNG (compressed natural gas) consumption (including transportation) grew by over 1,700 per cent, industries by over 160 per cent, refining by over 96 per cent, petrochemicals by over 40 per cent and sponge iron by over 310 per cent. Unlike other countries where gas consumption is driven by power generation, India leans heavily on growth in household and transportation segments served by CNG.

To understand this contradiction, we have to discuss the natural gas pricing policy of the Government



India leans heavily on growth in household and transportation segments in terms of gas consumption

of India. An Expert Group was set up by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas on August 31, 2009 to suggest "a viable and sustainable system of pricing of petroleum products" for India. The Expert Group, under the Chairmanship of Kirit Parikh, submitted its report on February 2, 2010. One of the major recommendations, among others, of the Expert Group was to phase out administered pricing mechanism (APM) and allow prices of most of the oil products to be market-determined.

On the recommendation of the Expert Group, the Government of India decided, on June 25, 2010, to allow the pricing of a few major petroleum products on the basis of a free-market mechanism. After deregulation, on that very day, the price of petrol was increased by Rs 3.5 per litre, kerosene by Rs 3 per litre, diesel by Rs 2 per litre and LPG per cylinder by Rs 35. Since then, prices are moving to the north.

Gas pricing policy

Till the mid-1980s India could not formulate any gas pricing policy. A substantial amount of gas was flared. Even at the end of 1989, 30 per cent of the produced gas could not be utilised, hence flared. It was reported that flaring of gas in Northeast was as high as 50 per cent in 1987-88 due to low offtake by consumers and absence of any proper planning by the government.

It was difficult to develop a fair pricing architecture for a vital energy resource like gas. At the heart of the issue was a long-known dilemma for policymakers — whether to link gas prices to an 'assessed' price, determined by the government or private Indian participants, or link it to an international market-based price. The Administered Pricing Mechanism (APM) price set by the government for gas and used by the power and fertil-

iser sectors, is an example of the 'assessed' price, while the price that Indian companies pay for imported gas is an example of the market-linked price. Unfortunately, neither model accurately reflects the physical market — the actual demand and supply — for natural gas in India.

The RIL KG-D6 gas pricing is an interesting case study of how pricing has oscillated between the two models. The price of USD 2.34/mBtu proposed by Reliance Industries in 2006 to sell gas to Reliance

Natural Resources Limited (RNRL) was not accepted by the government even though it was the same price as RIL. The government claimed that the price was not an 'arm's length' price for RNRL.

To make it fair, the pricing was then linked to the international price of crude oil. This resulted in the revised price of USD 4.2 per mBtu for RIL and was eventually accepted by New Delhi in 2007. Since then, India has moved to an international market-linked pricing model for gas which is linked to average gas prices in the markets of the US, the UK, among others, for our private and public sector players. This was done based on the recommendations of a 2012 committee headed by C Rangarajan. The aim was to incentivise domestic exploration.

In October 2014, the Modi government introduced a new natural gas pricing formula, which was linked to

grouping of various prices on the international market. This new arrangement has kept the price in a range acceptable to domestic gas-consuming sectors, but many gas-producing companies have argued that this scheme does not offer sufficient financial incentives to expand investments in exploration and production, particularly in the offshore.

The price of natural gas in India is determined twice each year by the government through a weighted average of the Henry Hub (the United States), National Balancing Point (the UK), Russian gas, and Canadian Alberta gas prices. The distribution of domestically produced gas is set by the government through its "Gas Utilisation Policy" which rations domestically produced gas and distributes it to certain priority sectors before it is released for sale to the general public. This is intended to benefit the so-called "Tier-1" industries (city gas for households and transport, fertiliser plants and grid-connected power plants).

The government notified the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) on March 30, 2016, and formally put it in operation w.e.f. July 1, 2017, with notification of the Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) and operationalisation of the National Data Repository (NDR). HELP is a paradigm shift from the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) regime to the Revenue Sharing Contract (RSC) regime which completely overhauled the regulatory regime for the future Exploration and Production (E&P) activities by reducing the regulatory burden based on the principle of "Ease of Doing Business". It provides for a single License for exploration and production of conventional as well as non-conventional hydrocarbon resources, pricing, and marketing freedom, reduced rate of royalty for offshore blocks, etc.

In another significant step to move towards a gas-based economy, 'Natural Gas Marketing Reforms' were announced on October 15, 2020. The objective of the policy is to prescribe the standard procedure for determining the market price of gas to be sold in the

market by gas producers, through a transparent and competitive process; permit affiliates to participate in the bidding process for the sale of gas; and allow marketing freedom to certain Field Development Plans (FDPs) where production sharing contracts already provide pricing freedom.

The GoI has increased the domestic natural gas price by 62 per cent from USD 1.79 per mBtu to USD 2.9 per mBtu under the domestic gas price regime, which was introduced in 2014. The new price, effective from October 1, 2021 resulted in an increase in electricity tariffs from gas-fuelled power projects and pushed up the cost of fertiliser production. Subsequently, the Union government has more than doubled the price of domestically produced natural gas for the six months beginning April 1, 2022 due to a surge in global prices. Due to this, the price of gas from regulated fields of state-owned ONGC and Oil India Ltd will also rise to a record USD 6.10 per mBtu from the current USD 2.90, reported *Mint*.

The unrealistic gas pricing policy with a very high weightage on international gas prices is hindering the acceptance of natural gas as a greener alternative fuel or feedstock.

Indo-US strategic partnership

India first began importing LNG in 2004, and by 2015, it had become the world's fifth-largest importer of LNG behind Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan. In February 2016, India received its first LNG shipment from the United States. GAIL has signed an agreement with the Cove Point LNG facility in Maryland, which is under construction, for 50 per cent of its capacity.

In order to strengthen its energy relations with the USA, India launched Strategic Energy Partnership with the country in April 2018. In a short span of three and a half years, India's hydrocarbon trade with the US has exceeded USD nine billion and Washington has emerged among the top ten sources of crude oil for India, holding 5th position in the current Financial Year.

Indo-US ties got further strengthened when the Indian Prime Minister visited Houston — the capital of the US oil and gas industry — in September 2019. During his visit, Petronet LNG — an Indian state-private partnership — signed an MoU with Tellurian, a Houston-based oil company, to invest USD 2.5 billion in Tellurian's proposed Driftwood LNG export terminal, in exchange for the rights to five million metric tons of LNG per year over 40 years, reported *Hindustan Times*.

In 2020, Indian companies have together contracted 6.6 MMTPA of LNG from the US. Indian PSU, Gas Authority of India (GAIL), has signed two long-term (20 years) LNG sourcing contracts with Dominion Energy Cove Point LNG LP and Sabine Pass Liquefaction LLC for 5.8 MMT. Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) has signed an LNG Sale and Purchase Agreement with Diamond Gas International Pt. Ltd for the supply of 0.7 MMTPA of LNG from the Cameron

LNG Project, USA, for a period of 20 years. Cameron LNG Project started commercial operations in Aug 2019. Till May 2020, IOCL has received three LNG cargoes from the project. An MoU has been signed between the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, and the US Department of Energy for enhanced cooperation in the Strategic Petroleum Reserves Programme on July 17, 2020.

CNG and piped gas to replace LPG

In November 2020, Adani Gas Ltd (AGL), signed a Definitive Agreement for the acquisition of three Geographical Areas (GA) namely Ludhiana, Jalandhar, and Kutch (East). With the addition of these three GAs, AGL shall now have a presence in 22 GAs as a standalone entity and additional 19 GAs as JV partner with IOCL — aggregating its tally to 41 GAs (74 districts), ensuring AGL's continued leadership in CGD Business in India.

French oil and gas company, Total SA, has partnered with Adani Group to supply and market natural gas in India. Adani Total Gas Limited (ATGL), a joint venture between Adani Group and Total Energies, is the largest private Compressed Gas Distributor (CGD) Company in India. ATGL has half a million consumers and business partners who together form the ATGL community.

Down to Earth reported that according to an ICICI Securities analysis of the gas market, prices in the gas market are expected to rise by USD 4.1/mBtu to USD 7.35/mBtu in FY23. This will imply that the main players supplying compressed natural gas (CNG) and piped natural gas (PNG) will need to raise CNG prices by 50-56 per cent between April and October 2022 to maintain their high margins.

The recent hike in gas price has provided these private players the much-needed comfort space to compete with LPG. To make CNG prices competitive for the private and joint venture piped gas distributors, LPG price has to be increased. The Government of India is killing LPG marketed by PSUs. To make it effective, LPG prices have been systematically increased so that consumers find piped gas more attractive than LPG. In May 2014, the price of a domestic cylinder was Rs 414 which has been raised to over Rs 1,000 in May 2022. The market for PNG and CNG is thus created to replace LPG.

Conclusion

India has failed to develop a comprehensive gas policy of its own. The Indo-American Strategic Partnership is a major game-changer not only in the field of petroleum and natural gas but also influences India's foreign policy. India's decision to withdraw from the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) immediately after Modi's return from the USA, in September 2019 and recent objections by the USA on India's import of Russian oil are cases in point.

Views expressed are personal

The share of natural gas in the country's primary energy mix has declined from 8.2 per cent in 2009 to 6.7 per cent in 2020



India's natural gas consumption is projected to rise to as much as 550 million standard cubic meters per day by the end of the decade from about 174 mmscmd presently

Rooting through the history

As a comprehensive answer to the book's title — *Who is a Parsi?* — Prochy N Mehta discusses in fine detail the origins of the community, their assimilation among Hindus in India and then their religious rediscovery through a reformist movement which was essentially orthodox in practice. Excerpts:



History. This was later printed in the Journal of the Iranian Association in January 1914. In this paper, he writes, 'I have said that very few of the statements are properly authenticated and some of them are absolutely nameless. They exhibit the most bewildering

in his time.' He adds, 'various meagre and unsatisfactory traditions exist concerning the tide of emigration, the manner in which it was effected, and the total number of those who left the shores of Gulf.'

date is 716 AD and not 775 or 785 AD, beside this there is no landing at Div. The reason for this difference is the accounts maybe, as suggested by Wilford, that the history of at least 2 bands of refugees has been mixed up. Such discrepancies, coupled with other circumstances, have led some scholars to challenge every detail of the Kisseh-a-Sanjan.

Hodiwala also says: Nothing indeed, can be a greater error than to suppose that Bahman was a great poet, a serious historian or a man of multifarious and accurate scholarship. At the same time, he was not an ordinary man. He belonged to a family possessing remarkable literary aptitudes and it would be folly to suppose that all his statements are unworthy of credit. But it must be also recognized that he is occasionally out of his depth.

Did they come by sea? Hodiwala believes: 'It is very likely that in accordance with their tradition, they came (by land) hugging the coast — thus avoiding the dangers of the sea and the risk of breaking the rule about not defiling the sea with human impurities. The purification ritual to be observed after travelling by boat (over water) as recorded in the Rivayats were filed in court in the Saklat vs Bella lawsuit.

(Excerpted with permission from Prochy N Mehta's Who is a Parsi? published by Niyogi Books)

It is a pity that there is no historical record of the Parsis' arrival in India, no list of names and no count of landed persons

diversity amongst themselves, and, if we are to believe them, the same event (the arrival of the Parsis at Sanjan) occurred in 772, 895, and 961 Vikram Samvat ie. 716, 839 and 905 AD.'

Dosabhai Framji Karaka in his book *The Parsees - Their History, Manners, Customs and Religion* (1858) makes the same point about *Kisseh-a-Sanjan*. 'Whatever information (about our history) is now in our possession, and is to any extant reliable, is gleaned from a work entitled *Kisseh-a-Sanjan*, which was compiled in the year 1599, by one Bahman a Zoroastrian resident of Nowsaree, from the traditions extant

Ervad Maneckji R Unwala has got a manuscript about 150 years old, which gives a slightly different account from that of the Kisseh-a-Sanjan. The

Parsis' arrival in India, no list of names, no count of how many men, women, or children or how many ship or ships came, and exactly when or where they landed. Travelling by sea would have been sacrilegious for the Parsis, so it is possible that they came by land.

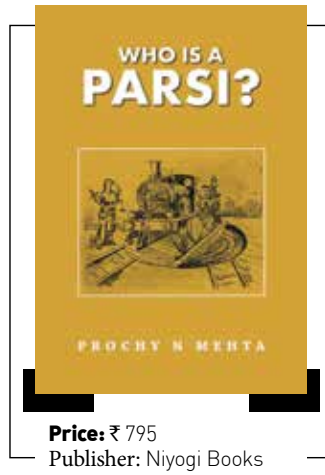
Historian Shapurji Hodiwala in his 1920 book *Parsis of Ancient India* mentions the writer, Baman Kaekobad Hamjiar Sanjana. He writes that very little is known of him except that Baman put the finishing touch on his verses on the day of 'Khordad' in the month of 'Farwandin' in the year 969 AY (about AD 1600), and that he was 'considerably advanced in age' at that time.

An English translation of *Kisseh-a-Sanjan* was made in 1844 at the suggestion of Dr John Wilson by E.B. Eastwick and published in the first volume of the journal of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Kisseh-a-Sanjan talks about five conditions set by the King before allowing the Parsis to enter his land. The conditions have often been misquoted. Hodiwala enumerates them as follows:

- 1) That they should give him some information about their religion
- 2) That they must give up the language of Iran and speak the local language of India
- 3) That their women should put on clothes like Hindu women
- 4) That they must lay aside their weapons and swords
- 5) That good works such as marriages should be performed in the evening.

On 25 October 1913, Hodiwala read a paper before the Society for the promotion of Zoroastrian Research, titled *The Traditional Dates of Parsi*



Which is the one virtue that is best for mankind? Truthful speech is best, because in truthful speech there is good repute in the world and good life and salvation in Paradise.
—Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestan-i-Dēnig

Kisseh-a-Sanjan, a poem written in 1599, is the only record of the history of the Parsis from the time they reportedly migrated to India to escape persecution. Written by Baman Kaekobad in 1599, the poem in its title refers to Sanjan in Gujarat, a place of immense historical and religious importance for the Parsis. It was here that the first Atash Behram was consecrated.

However, the fact remains that *Kisseh-a-Sanjan* is a literary work, and it makes no claims of historicity. At best, it is historical fiction. It is a pity that there is no historical record of the

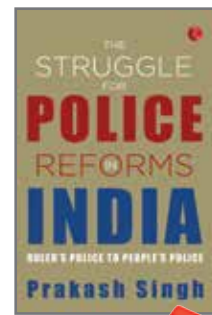


FRESH OFF THE

SHELF



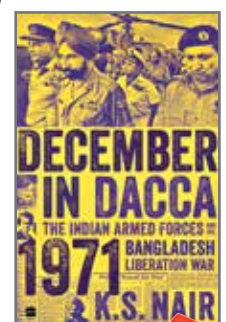
THE STRUGGLE FOR POLICE REFORMS IN INDIA



Giving a historical background to the origin of Indian Police, the book traces its evolution during British rule and subsequently since Independence.

Author: Prakash Singh
Publisher: Rupa Publications

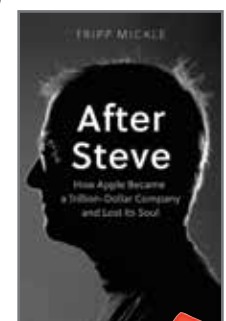
December in Dacca



December in Dacca retells the story of the 1971 war while setting the context and offering some thoughts on why these stories are not better known.

Author: KS Nair
Publisher: HarperCollins India

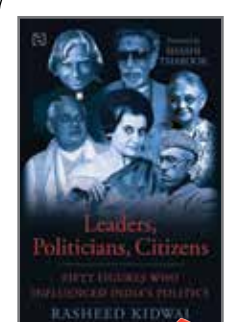
After Steve



After Steve is a result of the author's conversation with more than 200 current and former Apple executives, as well as figures key to this period of Apple's history.

Author: Tripp Mickle
Publisher: HarperCollins

Leaders Politicians Citizens



Bringing into focus the human facet of governments, the book presents a history of Indian democracy and provides insights into the evolution of its political culture.

Author: Rasheed Kidwai
Publisher: Hachette India



MINDOLOGY

By Dr Era Dutta

Dr Dutta is a Consultant NeuroPsychiatrist & Life Wellness coach (MD Psychiatry, DNB, MBBS) and expertises in depression, anxiety, OCD and stress

"What the mind has forgotten. The body remembers long after."
— Liliias Folan

Sonali (name changed) came in to discuss how she had been feeling down lately for no apparent reason. She cited that last year's same time had been traumatic and stressful for her. Losing her mother to COVID-19 at that time and her own professional life going for a toss in the same month led to a brief spell of grief and anxiety but she managed to cope up with therapy and a brief course of medications.

This year, everything seemed to be going great. Her family life was happy, she had secured a senior management position at work, and she had even accepted the loss of her loved one. She questioned, then why are the memories of last year haunting her suddenly?

What is an anniversary reaction?
An anniversary reaction is the renewed feeling of grief or anxiety on or around the date of a traumatic event. This can occur not only at one-year mark of the incidence but each year as well. This reaction is considered a normal and common response.

It is that time of the year when the memories of an event may come flooding to you, leaving you disturbed, irritable and maybe just feeling strange for no apparent reason. Then, on closer introspection of the calendar, you realise that this is the same time of the year when you had experienced a traumatic loss or a major stressor.

Turning full circle

In anniversary reaction, emotional outpourings related to major life incidents — not necessarily traumatic — repeat themselves periodically on an annual basis; if processed adequately, these could lead to mental healing



What are some situations where one can experience it?

The death of a loved one; a car accident; a break-up; a traumatic birth; a miscarriage; a betrayal; a

natural disaster like an earthquake, a major occurrence like a terrorist attack; receiving a diagnosis of cancer or another serious health diagnosis; sexual trauma; a divorce

date; birthday of a deceased loved one; the start of the pandemic.

Why do people experience it?

An anniversary reaction can occur because the date of the original trauma (or some other trigger) activates a traumatic memory.

An anniversary reaction could be a roadway to your emotional healing. Listen to your body and your emotions

What does it look like?

Each person processes loss, stress and trauma events differently. Presentation of an anniversary reaction may differ from person to person, ranging from being mildly upset for a day or two to more extreme psychiatric or medical symptoms.

Some people may experience flashes of major events, memo-

ries triggered by subtle reminders or just out of the blue while doing some work. It can also present as:

- ❖ Grief and sadness
- ❖ Memories and vivid dreams
- ❖ Anxiety and irritability
- ❖ Frustration, anger and guilt
- ❖ Avoidance
- ❖ Remembrance

Does anniversary reaction always have to be related to trauma?

Not always. It can be a remembrance of someone you had a great relationship with, even just the birthday of a beloved.

What is Covid-19 anniversary reaction?

The start or the peak of the pandemic led to dread for everyone. So many people were confined to their homes, many struggled mentally, lost their jobs and even their loved ones. The time around the peak death toll worldwide was another time when the world mourned at the same time and everyone fended for their safety.

Last year this time

- ❖ Your loved one may have been sick, hospitalised or succumbed to COVID-19
- ❖ You may have been sick yourself
- ❖ You may have faced a panic situation in order to fend for your own health or a loved one's health
- ❖ Had trouble arranging resources for COVID-19 health issues.

All of these can trigger an anniversary response.

The good aspect of the anniversary reaction

An anniversary reaction could be a roadway to your emotional healing. Listen to your body and your emotions. Process them adequately.

What to do?

❖ **Acknowledge:** Understand that this is a reaction that can affect anyone

❖ **Be prepared ahead of time:** Try to explore ways to stay meaningfully engaged and be surrounded by people who can support you. If you wish to celebrate a deceased, go ahead and do it in your own unique way

❖ **Allow:** Allow yourself to experience all emotions. Instead of suppressing, express them.

❖ **Speak to a specialist:** Learn techniques like EMDR, and CBT to overcome the trauma response

❖ **Be gentle with yourself**

❖ **Validate:** Validate how far you have come from the original stressor and appreciate yourself for it.

Send your questions to help@dreradutta.com

Letters to the A peek into the lives of spies



Sir — Stories about spies have always excited people. But the reality of espionage can be far more cruel, especially for those who come in the line of fire. A recent book, *Deep Deception*, by five women in the United Kingdom, who were targeted by undercover police officers for their links to activist groups, has laid bare the violation of ethics that is normalized in covert operations. The women were manipulated into serious, long-term relationships with these officers with the aim of spying on their activities. It is ludicrous how government agencies can justify such an abuse of power by citing national security as an excuse. Sir — The Union law minister, Kiren Rijiju, has said that neither the executive nor the judiciary should cross the lakshmanrekha while responding to the Supreme Court's decision to effectively put the sedition law on hold ("Rijiju: None should cross Lakshman rekha", May 12). Rijiju must clarify why he thinks that the apex court's move could be considered judicial overreach. Had the Centre taken a swift decision on the validity of the sedition law — it has decided to "re-examine and reconsider" the colonial-era legislation — the Supreme Court would not have needed to pass the interim order.

Sir — Bharatiya Janata Party leaders may like to say that the different arms of the government should not interfere in one another's work, but the executive itself is guilty of overstepping its mandate. The government has repeatedly used the sedition law against its critics without adequate reason. There is no place for such curtailment of the freedom of speech in a democracy. Sir — The editorial, "New front" (May 11), has correctly pointed out the discriminatory attitude of the Bharatiya Janata Party towards Islamic monuments. Many leading historians of the country have expressed dismay and concerns at the constant attacks on Mughal monuments. A few years back, a BJP member of the legislative assembly from Uttar Pradesh had called the Taj Mahal, which is one of the seven wonders of the world, a blot on Indian culture. No sensible person would think of opening the chambers inside the Taj Mahal to examine if there are Hindu idols and scriptures hidden within. Not just the Taj Mahal, but other Mughal monuments, too, should be left untouched. History must not be distorted. Sir — The Hindutva brigade has repeatedly attacked Islamic structures. The Gyanvapi mosque complex is being surveyed to locate the alleged ruins of a temple and a petition has been filed to open the chambers of the Taj Mahal to see if any Hindu artefacts are concealed within. These attempts are becoming increasingly aggressive. With the Opposition in disarray, India might soon become a Hindu rashtra. Sir — With the passing of the santoor maestro, Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, the nation has lost one of its most illustrious musicians. It was his passion and determination that elevated the status of the santoor, not only in Indian classical music but also on the global stage. Sharma, along with Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, had composed the musical scores for Hindi films, such as *Silsila*, *Chandni* and *Darr*. The government must consider posthumously conferring the Bharat Ratna on Sharma for his contributions to music. Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai.

Our Constitution had envisaged a federal form of government where the Centre and the states would work in partnership and respect each other's rights. These rights and responsibilities were clearly stated and demarcated between the Centre and the states. Law and order was assigned to the states. They were to be responsible for keeping order on the streets, preventing crime and investigating and prosecuting those responsible for crimes committed within their borders. The CBI, which was first established as an anti-corruption wing of the Delhi Police, was metamorphosed into an agency to investigate serious crimes if any of the states requested for expert help. Over the years, it has been transformed into an instrument of political vendetta, though the courts still assign sensitive cases involving political figures to the CBI. All of us are aware that the Supreme Court called the CBI a "caged parrot"! That was a decade ago. Today, the parrot is not merely caged, its wings have been clipped. It hops around behind its keeper waiting to be fed!

The police forces were and are still led by IPS officers, recruited through the All India Civil Services competitive exams. Only those who stand first among their own compatriots from their parent state are assigned to their own state. The other vacancies (half the requirement) are filled by candidates from other parts of India. They are selected by the Union Department of Personnel. This mixing of state and non-state was to ensure that the federal principle prevailed. Since the IPS officers were trained together, they were sufficiently acquainted with each other to amicably decide inter-state cases in a civil and legal manner. This arrangement worked without rancour till very recently. If a Sushant Singh Rajput had committed suicide in Mumbai and his distraught father in Bihar had accused the actor's girlfriend of murder for cornering his wealth, the Bihar police would transfer his father's complaint to the Mumbai police for inquiry into the allegations. Instead, in a distinct departure from normal police practice, an IPS officer from Bihar flew to Mumbai with his team of juniors to inquire into the complaint, knowing full well that Bihar's police had no legal jurisdiction to delve into this case from another state. A sensation was created, more for the Bihar audience and to create a possible flush of sympathy for the BJP which planned and plotted the entire spectacle! It also helped the Bihar police to approach the superior courts which were empowered to order the transfer of the case registered in Bihar to the CBI. And, as planned, the CBI asked for the Mumbai's case to be clubbed with the Bihar one and that, too, happened. But even the CBI's crack investigators could not turn the suicide into a murder! Sushant had locked himself in his bedroom before hanging himself from the ceiling. It took more than three hours for a locksmith to

Turf war between police forces

Frequent disagreements may lead to redefining of Centre-state relations



break open the lock of the door before his corpse could be lowered and shifted to the morgue for a post-mortem examination. Coming closer to the day when a Punjab police contingent from Mohali police station was waylaid by the Haryana police, it is to be noted that Punjab was now ruled by the AAP party of Kejriwal. The AAP was in power in Delhi for two terms but had no control over the police as Delhi was a Union Territory. The Delhi police reported to the Lt Governor and through him to the Union Home Ministry. The Punjab police seem to have barged into the home of Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga, a BJP activist who had stormed the gates of Kejriwal's official home in Delhi some months earlier and used disparaging language for the AAP leader. Kejriwal took offence but could do nothing till he won Punjab and now had the Punjab police to do his bidding. And he decided to copy the BJP's subtle misuse of power to teach his detractors a lesson! And so we got to see a comedy turned into a tragedy! The Delhi Police recorded a case of kidnapping (!) against the Punjab policemen and wired its counterpart in Haryana, a BJP-ruled state, to detain the Punjabis. This the Haryanis did at a crossing at Kurukshetra. The Punjab team was released after a couple of hours after the statements of the men were recorded and senior IPS officers from Punjab arrived to rescue them. If this is going to be the new normal, Centre-state relations will have to be redefined to include new rules on inter-state police disagreements. The Mizoram police had taken position, against the Assam police on a territorial dispute about a year ago. And the Assam police became bolder when its team flew

down to Gujarat and picked up a Gujarati Dalit leader who had made snide comments against Narendra Modi in Gujarat. The sessions court had to come down heavily on the Assam police before Mewani was finally released. The case of Disha Ravi, a young Bengaluru resident working for environmental causes deserves a separate chapter. But there, too, processes were not followed. More than processes, the regular civility and understanding between two state police forces were abandoned in the interest of the likely political gains that were anticipated. We are headed for confusion and confusion will spell ultimate doom for all parties. The respect and bonhomie that sister police forces must nurture for each other will blow out in smoke. All that was inculcated in us at our training institutions at Mussoorie and Mt Abu (now Hyderabad) that India is One and we, too, are One will be irrelevant! This was the natural lesson we learnt from procedures that respected the authority of different states ruled by different political parties.

The BJP wants One India, a United India, also, but wants only one party to rule all the states along with the 'double engine' at the Centre. One party rule has been very successful in neighbouring China, but in a boisterous democracy like India's, regional parties dominate in several states. A Congress-mukt Bharat desired by the BJP is almost complete but AAP is making strides and the Trinamool in Bengal is not to be easily dislodged nor is the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. The BJP will have to adjust to this reality. My guess is that the BJP will try even harder now

Body of crime: on HC's split verdict in a case to outlaw marital rape

Over the years, more than 100 countries have outlawed forced sex in marriage but it continues to enjoy legal sanction in India

The Delhi High Court delivered a split verdict in a case seeking to outlaw marital rape after the two judges expressed opposing views. Over the years, more than 100 countries have outlawed marital rape. Yet, it continues to enjoy legal sanction in India. The exception is rooted in the belief that consent for sex is "implied" in marriage and that a wife cannot retract it later. Sexual violence corrodes the very core of the principles of equality and bodily autonomy. The Delhi High Court's ambiguity assumes significance in the light of the fact that the recent National Family Health Survey-5 revealed that one in five women feel that they cannot refuse sex to their husbands and 34 per cent of men find it unacceptable if their partners turn down sexual advances because they are tired. This is not all. One-third of all Indian women, the survey found, have experienced physical or sexual violence. Worse, 77 per cent of them have never sought help or told anyone about it. The reasons for this silence are not far to seek: violence and its endorsement are embedded structurally. Over 30 per cent of women justified their partners beating them. This staggering number of women rationalizing intimate-



partner violence indicates the deep roots of patriarchy. A handful of women do choose to speak up, only to suffer institutional apathy; only 9 per cent of them found help in the police, usually the first port of call in such cases. The experience of violence is not uniform. Such transgressions are more common among women in rural areas (32 per cent) than their urban counterparts (24 per

cent). Studies by the International Center for Research on Women show that when rural women go to the sarpanch, they are counselled to be accommodating for the sake of the family. Misogyny and misplaced notions of honour thus remain serious impediments to women's rights and emancipation. According to the NFHS-5, a woman's experience of violence also declines sharply with increased schooling and wealth — both for the female victim as well as the male perpetrator. The role of education and economic autonomy in eradicating patriarchy cannot be overstated. Worryingly, the pandemic has led scores of women, burdened with domestic and professional duties, to leave the workforce, not to mention the fact that more women than men were retrenched owing to cost imperatives, according to consecutive Quarterly Employment Surveys. Moreover, subtler forms of violence — emotional and mental abuse — remain invisible. But laws alone can achieve little — the ones against domestic violence are proof of this. What needs to change is the toxic mindset that perceives the female body as a site of possession and is eager to punish women's 'intransigences' in such brutal forms as marital rape.

History in blood

A tale of two martyrdoms in Kerala

1948: Biryani Constable was called so because he needed to wolf down three to four plates daily to do justice to his girth that struck fear in suspects in interrogation cells. In the summer of 1948, Biryani Constable was said to have slammed the butt of a rifle into the head of Mandodi Kannan, a communist leader in Onchiyam in Vadakara in north Kerala. Rivulets of blood ran down Kannan's face as he fell but he dipped a finger in the puddle, lifted himself up and scrawled a sickle and hammer on the grimy wall. Kannan succumbed to his injuries a few days later.

2012: The motorbike rider was heading south and had reached Vallikkadu when an Innova going north swerved right, switched lanes and rammed into the two-wheeler. The rider was thrown off the bike, and a group armed with swords leapt out of the MUV. The first blow was struck with such monstrous might that the blade sliced through the face and smashed the skull. Death must have been instantaneous. Yet, the other sword-wielders went to work with unspeakable barbarity. By the time they finished, the body of T.P. Chandrasekharan bore 51 cuts, it would be revealed later. Chandrasekharan was a communist who had fallen out with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) after a perception gained ground that the party was drifting away from communism. Mandodi Kannan was among the 10 communists and peasants killed by Malabar Special Police, aided by a militia linked to the Congress, in 1948 in what came to be known as the Onchiyam massacre, a defining event in Indian communist history. April 30 in Onchiyam in Kozhikode district is to Indian communism what May 1 in Chicago is to the international labour movement. The Communist Party's Calcutta thesis (which adopted the insurrection line that was eventually abandoned) had been passed a few days earlier and word had reached the then Congress government that some of the representatives who attended the session in Bengal would be convening in Onchiyam to brief the other communists. An operation was planned to capture the leaders, and a posse of the brutal MSP was sent to Onchiyam before dawn on April 30, 1948. Onchiyam was



already in tumult because poor farmers and labourers, oppressed and exploited for generations, had begun to organise themselves, infuriating the rich landlords and ruthless hoarders. But no big fish was in sight for the MSP to catch. So, the police party did what some of their successors do even now: barged into hutments and thrashed everyone. The MSP also picked up a father and son, handcuffed them and proceeded back. Onchiyam was just waking up. Soon, word spread over home-made megaphones: Choyi and Kanaran are being taken away. Carrying flaming torches and chanting, a crowd followed the police, swelling all the while and taking a life of its own. At some point, the police posse lost its nerve and opened fire. Eight people were killed. Kannan and another person surrendered a few days later to stop the wave of police brutality on the poor households. It was then that the unbending Kannan was tortured and killed. I had heard about the martyrdom when I grew up in Kerala but I had neither tried to understand the significance nor been to the spot where the martyrs were gunned down. Largely unaware of the seminal contributions of Mandodi Kannan, I had sleep-walked through the customary pursuits of education cocooned in the Macaulay matrix,

admission in an "apolitical" college "unsullied" by strikes and eventual departure from Kerala in search of a "steady job".

A fortnight ago, I went to Onchiyam without any clear purpose. If possible, I wanted to meet K.K. Rema, the widow of Chandrasekharan. If not, I would have met a friend and returned. Rema is an MLA now, having survived a state-wide pro-CPI(M) wave in the assembly elections last year to pull off an improbable victory from Vadakara, a Left stronghold. Rema did have the support of the Opposition Congress-led front but that does not mean that the erstwhile leader of the Students' Federation of India is a blind follower of the Congress's policies. I called a friend in Onchiyam who said Rema would definitely be at home that evening and he agreed to seek an appointment for me. Only when I reached Onchiyam after a two-hour drive from Kozhikode city did I realise why my friend was certain about Rema's whereabouts. It also gave a measure of the depth of my shameful ignorance. That day — a Saturday — was April 30 — the 74th anniversary of the Onchiyam martyrdom. No communist from Onchiyam can stay away from there on April 30. And I was stupid enough to ask if Rema would be in Onchiyam.

Winding my way through picturesque Onchiyam, it was hard to miss the red flags and the crescendo of revolutionary songs. Another telltale sign was unmistakable: the CPI(M) was organising its own commemoration, so was the Revolutionary Marxist Party of India, born from the merger of the party Chandrasekharan founded with other parties with similar views. Just as I was not familiar with the Onchiyam martyrdom, I had not known much about Chandrasekharan when he was alive. But his initials — "TP" — are a household name in Kerala now — the unintended consequence of the brutality that the CPI(M) leadership has been trying to disown. TP was killed not just because he broke away from the CPI(M), which is not unheard of. But TP did something that the Party could

watch only in disbelief: a large chunk of the cadres in Onchiyam and its surroundings went with him and his party won the local elections. I spent around 20 minutes in Rema's house, marked by an engaging conversation with her father, Comrade K.K. Madhavan, who shared with me anecdotes about the heyday of the peasant movement in Bengal. Soon, it was time for Rema to leave for the commemoration meeting. She assumed that my friend and I would go to the venue and, while leaving, said she would see me there. Although it was not in our origin plan, we went there and positioned ourselves at crossroads, waiting for the RMPI march to go past us. The rally was impressive — both in turnout and in enthusiasm (an unforgettable highlight was a remarkable marching band made up of women, whose proud train made my day later in the evening by asking me if he can take a picture with me). Back home, some of my friends would ask me whose event was more impressive — the CPI(M)'s or the RMPI's? I cannot say because I did not go to the event organised by the Left Front. Bragging right or brownie points are not what I took away from the evening in Onchiyam. As I stood at the crossroads, marvelled at the zeal of the participants and I wondered what made them remember and honour the martyrs who fell 74 years ago. Later that night, V.K. Suresh, journalist, martial arts specialist and author of an upcoming book on the martyrdom — with the economic but evocative title Onchiyam — would tell me how social reform initiative in the latter half of the 19th century had made the soil of Vadakara fertile for egalitarian movements. One such reformer was Vagbhatanandan with whose endorsement the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society, India's oldest worker cooperative, was established in Kozhikode in 1925. Another influencer was Sri Narayana Guru, the great reformer who battled the caste-ridden shibboleths of Kerala and fought for social equality. If the social reformers prepared the ground, the foundations for a politically aware society were laid by the upheaval in Europe in the early years of the 20th century and by education nurtured by Christian missionaries in the 19th century.



Former diplomat Talmiz Ahmad's book is a significant contribution to our understanding of West Asia, with which India has had contact through history **BOOKS page 14**



Though pandemic has been cited as the reason behind holding back Army recruitment since 2020, the issues of rightsizing and 'tour of duty' need to be resolved first **INDEPTH page 15**



Odisha, host of next year's hockey World Cup, is creating top-class infrastructure in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela. It is focusing on enhancing facilities at the district level too **SPORT page 17**



It's a packed house in the Valley after many years, and not without reason. Pan-India tourism promotion, marketing and effective Covid management have all played a part

ROHIT BHAN & SAMAN LATEEF

Nearly 2.8 lakh people visited Kashmir last month, the highest for April in three decades. (L-R) Tourists throng Dal Lake, Gulmarg and Nishat Bagh in Srinagar. PHOTOS: PTI, REUTERS

LONG queues of tourists at the Srinagar airport, overcrowded eateries, families waiting for their turn at the *shikara* boarding points of Dal Lake, couples posing in traditional attire at Nishat Bagh, bustling markets, fully occupied hotels — Kashmir is back in the tourism big league, with a bang. Last month, the Valley welcomed nearly 2.8 lakh tourists, the highest for April in three decades, say officials, who are anticipating the rush to continue through the year. The first week of May alone saw an inflow of 33,000 tourists.

Even last year, when the entire country was in the grip of tight Covid restrictions, Kashmir continued to receive tourists, mainly youth, who either had got the vaccine jabs or were open to the mandatory quarantine before moving to their destinations — for trekking and other adventure tourism trips. "The fillip in adventure tourism sent a positive word across India and we followed it up with an aggressive promotional campaign," says Deputy Director of Tourism Ahsanul Haq.

Official data reveals that 6.6 lakh tourists visited Kashmir last year, bringing the hotel industry back to life after it remained shut in the wake of abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, followed by the pandemic. The tourist footfall for 2020 was a mere 41,000.

All top hotels in Kashmir are booked till June and Gondola, Asia's largest and highest cable car in ski-resort Gulmarg, up to May 18.

THE HARDELL

Officials attribute the tourism boom to effective Covid management, aggressive campaigning across India, and support from the country's tour and travel agencies.

In pre-Covid days, Kerala led Kashmir by a mile as the premier tourist destination in India. The pandemic devastated tourism in the coastal state, and it didn't recover until late December 2021, providing a window to the J&K administration to attract tourists to the Valley.

In September last year, when several states started lifting the Covid restrictions, the Jammu and Kashmir tourism officials carried out aggressive promotion in all small and big cities.

Several groups visited Kolkata, Mumbai and other top cities for promotional events, roping in tour and travel associations, senior officials and the media.

Assurance was given of Covid protection, packages were incentivised, and the most attractive of all offers was opening up of restricted or closed tourist destinations.

Leading Bollywood production houses and filmmakers were tapped to revive their connection with Jammu and Kashmir. In September, the authorities also launched a film policy to provide a single-window mechanism for shooting movies, listing various incentives for producers. A generous provision was a special grant of half the cost of production for any film based on J&K or ₹5 crore, whichever is less.

Similarly, an exhaustive provision of subsidies for TV shows, web series, original shows on the OTT platform, and documentary films to be shot in J&K was spelled out in the policy. Films based on patriotic, child and women development themes, too, came within the ambit of subsidies of up to ₹50 lakh.

"It was a well thought out plan to reach out to tourism players across India before the country opens up post-Covid. We went to almost all the major cities to seek the support of stakeholders," says Haq. Some tourists say they barely heard bad news about Covid management in Kashmir and for others, the abrogation of Article 370 induced confidence.

The authorities also used social media to a great extent to lure tourists. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah shared social media posts about Kashmir's tourist destinations, which added strength to the promotional campaign.

Visiting Kashmir after 40 years, MV Nair, a retired bureaucrat from Kerala, says earlier he had the impression that it was a risky place and hostile. "That fear has gone. I found Kashmir to be a safe tourist destination and I pray it moves towards per-



Tourists at the world's highest igloo restaurant in Gulmarg.

manent peace," he adds. During his week-long stay, he recalls meeting a local family who offered him lunch. "They invited us home and we had an amazing *wazwan* there. Can you see this happening anywhere else in India?" Nair asks. A lot has changed, he says, "but infrastructure needs to be improved".

Nitin Ahuja, 50, a healthcare worker from Connecticut in USA, had come to visit his mother in New Delhi last month, but the heatwave forced him to plan a solo trek to Pahalgam in south Kashmir. "I had heard about violence, bomb attacks, but things have changed a lot on the ground."

NEW DESTINATIONS

Taking into account the tourist rush and interest, 75 new destinations have been opened to diversify the choice for tourists. The claim is backed by figures as thousands of tourists are rushing to Bungus, Lolab and Gurez in north Kashmir and Dodipathri in central Kashmir's Budgam district.

Even young girls in groups can be seen camping in Bungus and Gurez, reflecting the improving security situation in the region.

Smita Pujari, 42, from Mumbai has come to Kashmir for the first time after her friends visited in winter. "They gave excellent feedback and we booked our tickets online." Her group has been to Gurez and Bungus.

"We fell in love with the places. Gurez and Bungus have breathtaking beauty and a serene environment. It's an out-of-the-world feeling," she says.

The uptick in economic activity has been a god-send for many, but the local tour operators are upset as there are no hotel rooms available till June, resulting in a price hike of around 200 per cent. "The online travel sites have blocked all the rooms in top hotels. Our agents in different cities are seeking rooms and we are not able to help," says tour operator Sajad Ahmad.

"We are all suffering due to the unethical overpricing at hotels, non-availability of rooms, and the nexus between local hoteliers and online travel companies. The government has to regulate the tariffs or this will seriously damage us in future," says a spokesperson of the United Tourism Forum, Farooq Kathu. Non-local travel agencies and online companies have grabbed 90 per cent of the inventories, he claims, leading to the blocking of hotel rooms till June 20.

AMARNATH YATRA NEXT

With Kashmir shrugging the tag of an insecure tourist destination, the next challenge is the safe conduct of Amarnath yatra. More than eight lakh pilgrims are expected for the annual pilgrimage to the holy shrine in south Kashmir Himalayas, starting from June 30.

A top Army official says the authorities have their fingers crossed as a single incident can derail all the hard work that has gone into making Kashmir a safe tourist destination.

As former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, reacting to the killing of a Kashmiri Pandit employee in Budgam, said, "Tourism is not normalcy, it's a barometer of economic activity. Normalcy is the absence of fear."

On August 15 last year, the authorities hoisted a 100-foot-tall Tricolour atop Hari Parbat's 19th-century fort built during the Dur-rani Empire, with CRPF personnel securing it. As it draws the attention of thousands of tourists, the fort reflects Kashmir's centuries-old tradition of religious tolerance as it is surrounded by a temple, a mosque and a gurdwara.

"I like the National Flag flying high the most. It's a sign of integration, a testimony that peace and normalcy have returned to Kashmir," says Mahesh Chauhan, 49, a tourist from Mumbai. Mesmerised by the beauty of the Valley, he wants to make it a point to send his relatives to the region. *Inshallah!*

Hello, Kashmir



The 100-foot-tall Tricolour atop the Hari Parbat fort, overlooking Srinagar.



The Tulip Garden in bloom last month in Srinagar. PHOTOS: AMIN WAR

WHY HIMACHAL PRADESH LOSES OUT

Himachal Pradesh, which gained during times of trouble in Kashmir, has been bearing the brunt of the tourism boom in the Valley. According to hoteliers, Kashmir is better placed in terms of infrastructure and connectivity. Bigger planes can land at the Srinagar airport, the airfares are also moderate.

Many travel agents have stopped bringing tourists to Himachal as the entry and other taxes are high. Recently, tour operators of Gujarat had decided to boycott Shimla due to high state taxes.

Navigating the West Asian quagmire

VIVEK KATJU

SCHOLAR and former diplomat Talmiz Ahmad is one of India's leading authorities on West Asia, especially the Arab world. His monumental work, 'West Asia at War', is a significant and timely contribution to our understanding of the developments over the past two centuries in a region with which India has had contact through history; it is also crucial to this country's contemporary interests. Ahmad's lucid writing makes the book very important, both for academics and policy-makers as well as the general reader. It will give them insights into the impulses that continue to shape West Asia, particularly the Arab countries.

Beginning with Napoleon's attack on Egypt in 1798, Ahmad traces the impact of a resurgent and increasingly powerful Europe on West Asia. He seeks to place this "narrative within the framework of resistance" and explores it through five phases covering the colonial period, the consequences of the establishment of Israel as an independent state, the effect

of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and other events of that fateful year, America's Afghan and Iraq wars and the Arab Spring. He shows a masterly grasp of the flow of events and their intellectual, social, economic and political underpinnings concerning the Arab world and even Iran, but falters somewhat in respect of Afghanistan, which has always moved to a different rhythm.

European expansion from the end of the 18th century, built on the strength of its scientific and technological advances, dwelt a shattering blow to the self-esteem of the larger Islamic world. It brought forth a wide range of intellectual and theological responses as Islamic intellectuals, including the Arabs, sought answers to meet fundamental challenges. No Arab abandoned the faith but sought answers within it, stretching from a return to its most rigid doctrines to an accommodation found within its precepts for comprehensive socio-economic reform and good governance. Ahmad does well to probe this intellectual ferment, for its impact is felt in the Arab world even today as it did through the colonial age,

including when the European powers physically gave shape to it after World War I to suit their own interests.

Ahmad examines at length the impact on the Palestinian people and the adjoining Arab states of the Zionist project, which culminated in the establishment of an independent and sovereign Israel.



WEST ASIA AT WAR: REPRESSION, RESISTANCE AND GREAT POWER GAMES
by Talmiz Ahmad.
HarperCollins.
Pages 544. ₹799

He brilliantly focuses on the decades when the current of Arab nationalism sought to cover the myriad contradictions within the nationalist fold, but ultimately failed to do so. He also studies the conservative reaction led by the Saudis to combat these forces. And this drama then was being played within the overarching Cold War competition and the pol-

itics of hydrocarbons which, beginning in the 1930s, became one of the determinants of events.

With the Iranian revolution, Islamic sectarianism came to the fore with renewed vigour, manifesting, inter alia, in Saudi-Iranian rivalry. This continues to affect every aspect of West Asian politics and Ahmad's seeming optimism that it may abate is misplaced. Where Ahmad excels is in his exposition on the different strands of political Islam and its manifestations. This should be compulsory reading for our policy-makers at different levels, for there is a great need to gain a differentiated understanding of a phenomenon which is of vital concern to Indian interests.

The US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have played havoc with the Afghans and the Arabs and Ahmad repeatedly and justifiably returns to the theme. At the same time, it would have been desirable to examine the failure of Islam to find sufficient resilience for unified, sustained, independent and non-violent agencies to throw off the interference of foreign actors, howsoever powerful they may be.

This is particularly because Islam, in one form or another, comprehensively determines the national lives of all Arab states. Ahmad may see optimism in the continuing Palestinian resistance, but does their cause now really resonate in the Arab and wider Islamic world?

Ahmad's chapter on India-West Asia ties is a fine survey of the changing contours of the relationship. It also factors in Indian-Israeli and Indo-Iranian ties. However, what would have made the analysis more valuable is examining the shadow of Pakistan and its place in the Arab and Islamic calculations on India-West Asia ties. And, this reviewer, for one, cannot go along with Ahmad's view that India with "like-minded countries" should "lead the process" for regional peace. India should avoid the West Asian quagmire and develop bilateral ties, especially where it has major interests. In this context, its moves on Quad 2, as Ahmad notes, are perhaps ill-advised.

And finally, this reviewer may be allowed, as an old diplomatic colleague, to say: "Thank you, Talmiz, for a wonderful book which will stand the test of time."

Pandemic footprints

AKSHAYA KUMAR

THE sheer scale and strangeness of the Covid-19 pandemic triggered off a poetry pandemic. For poets, bunkered as they were in their apartments, writing turned out to be an act of both catharsis and outreach. Most of them, however, relapsed into apocalyptic biblical narratives, or just dug out metaphors of the Holocaust or Partition to measure the magnitude of the medical nightmare; some just turned inward to sing sweet sad songs of quarantined existence.

Satya Mohanty treads along a different and difficult axis. He chooses to

migrants in hostile topographies, Mohanty relies more on his graphic skills than allegorical correlates, which lend a rare sense of intimacy and immediacy to the poetic expression. In lines like these —

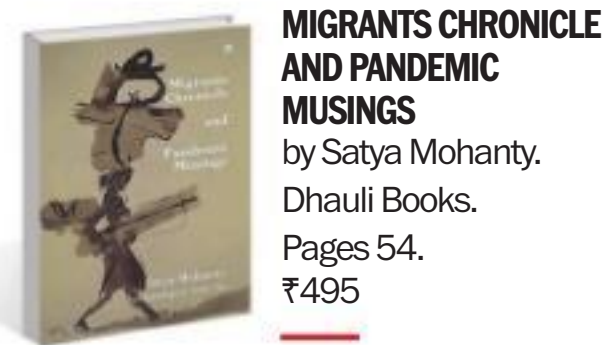
*She cried; her children cowered.
Onlookers stared on without
trying to stop,
Their hunger and weals on feet
Rolled into a charade of
discipline.*

*She got up and gathered her
children,
Wiping tears with the diaphanous
fringe.*

*Broken, she started walking back
Through the cartography
of cruelty.*

— different registers of reportage, history-writing, portrait-painting, and poetry merge in one artistic continuum that transports the reader to the ground zero of the pandemic with persuasive pull. The "incomplete voyage", the "shredded promises", the "torn map", "sprawling shadows", "quivering lips", and a host of such saturnine images cumulatively augment the sense of dread that the pandemic instilled among us. While each poem runs its own tense narrative course, at times the poet hits upon punch-lines such as these — "Our delusions are not deluxe at all", "The Constitution was on vacation", "Our flight remains in arc, we don't look for stars". These lines keep reverberating as grim epigrams of a long diseased present, its plaintive pathos.

But what really accentuates the mood, and lends necessary semiotic thickness to the collection, is the inclusion of a series of pencil drawings of Jatin Das. The art in free hand and the calibrated verbal idiom impart textuality to the musings, and thus salvage the collection from being a requiem in monotone. Right from the cover sketch of a frail woman marching unflinchingly, barefoot with a load of baggage on her head, to a masked woman staring with blank eyes — the bare outlines in blank ink provide a compelling cultural horizon to the experience of the pandemic. The *jugalbandi* of the poet and the painter ensures a resounding post-pandemic life to the collection.



MIGRANTS CHRONICLE AND PANDEMIC MUSINGS
by Satya Mohanty.
Dhauli Books.
Pages 54.
₹495

chronicle the pandemic as an event of immediate lived history that can neither be dovetailed into archetypal parables of disaster, nor be reduced into an occasion of rehearsing the idiom of existential angst.

Divided into two sections, 'Migrants Chronicle' and 'Pandemic Musings', the collection of poems takes us to the very specificities of sight and site of the pandemic with a sustained focus on the travails of the migrants, which the poet empathetically addresses as "guests conflated into loveless bondage". Right in the opening poem, without any aesthetic gloss, Mohanty demands from his readers a heartfelt response to his poetic subjects. The "fleeing hordes" of the "untamed" migrants collectively stand for the resilience of urban India's "castaways", who wear "betrayal like a sash of honour". Migrants embody tales within tales — from side-stepping the police batons as a matter of routine to their long march with "soles sloughing off/ like snake skin" towards their "hallucinating" homes during lockdown. The collection is a poetic archive of these tales, told with care, sensitivity and essential human touch.

While tracing journeys of the

Unmuting Indian voice from WWI

MAJ GEN RAJ MEHTA (RETI)

EBULLIENT and peppy, the English translation of Indian soldier Nariman Karkaria's Gujarati war memoir 'Rangbhoomi pe Rakhad' is unputdownable. Translated by eminent historian/translator Murali Ranganathan, 'The First World War: Adventures of Nariman Karkaria' comes in a colourful jacket design. The book brings readers face-to-face with a rare genre of military writing — the unravelling of an Indian soldier's



THE FIRST WORLD WAR: ADVENTURES OF NARIMAN KARKARIA
by Nariman Karkaria.
Translated by Murali Ranganathan.
HarperCollins.
Pages 260.
₹599

mind and voice from the Great War. Amitav Ghosh describes in inimitable style the unusual circumstances which led him to access this delightful read. It is a stunning potpourri of a Parsi rookie soldier's experiences in the Great War, his riveting travelogue and incisive social satire, all packaged in a gung-ho, insightful translation. Amitav confesses being overtaken by the little he's read of the book.

A phenomenal storyteller, the fractious, unruly, stormy petrel priest's son decamps from mofussil Navsari in Gujarat one rainy night in August 1910, running away from priesthood to seek his fortune, like Dick Whittington. The delightfully, rascally, wanderlust-afflicted scallywag boards a China-bound ship with the little money he can rustle up. He finally ends up, five years later and at age 20, in wartime London — via China, Japan, Siberia and some Nordic countries — including a brief home-sickness driven interregnum at the toddy-infested Navsari after two relentless years of 'wander-itis'.

He returns to China, still driven by childhood memories of Zoroastrian *Burjormama/Shahma* heroic tales, to

become a "British Tommy"; managing "after a million struggles" to become No. 3213 Private Nariman Karkaria, 'D' Company, 24th Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own). He was the only Indian in the all-European unit, recruited for being pale-skinned with matching European manners and tastes, and buoyed by the fact that a Parsi had much earlier preceded him in recruitment. He cannot help wonder after using spanking-clean British train toilets when his "dear proud Hindustan" would catch up. Nariman natively describes his initiation into the khaki uniform and army routine before his unit is sent to the western front after truncated training. His initiation into cold-mud enshrined trench warfare opposite the Germans in "the killing fields of France" is gripping and real as much as it is a brutal expose on the truly appalling conditions that exist there. The highlights, past choking, fatal chlorine/phosgene and irritating chilli tear gas attacks, poor food when made available and general neglect of the soldiery in morale and injury management, are duly noted by him.

The poorly thought-through and executed Somme battle, a frontal attack by British-French forces between July-October 1916, becomes a metaphor for futile, indiscriminate slaughter. Surprisingly, our narrator doesn't make his remarks personal. He retains detachment even when he suffers a gruesome splinter injury, ironically on the day of relief by 4th Suffolk Regiment. He dismisses the injury as "adding injury to insult", happy that he'll be "back to Blighty"; quaffing a desperately welcome "cuppa" and enjoying tender ministrations of nurses.

Posted to another battalion post-recovery, Nariman experiences battles in the Egyptian deserts, then the holy city of Jerusalem, rendering insightful battle and travelogue descriptions. The Balkan front follows with a brilliant tour of the ancient Constantinople/Istanbul post truce.

Overall, the book enthralled, fascinates and is marvellously presented. It makes a deep study of this seldom-visited genre of Indian military writing a necessity.

Growing up Jesuit

PRAKASH LOUIS

THE boy's a joker; he can't be serious; he is just clowning.' 'A Clown for God, A Clown for Others: Recollections of an Indian Jesuit', an autobiography by Rudolf Heredia, begins with these words and ends with these, "Clowns help us see that all the world's a stage, we all have our entrances and exits; and in between we play many parts, which add up to the complex story of our lives. Clowns bring with them much-needed healing laughter and relativising humour to the ups and downs of the journey."

Rudi Heredia, in his indomitable style, has presented to the reader the life and growth, joys and sorrows, ups and downs, being and becoming a clown, a clown for God and for others in his autobiography. His personal narrative highlights the life and vicissitudes of a Catholic boy who was born and brought up in Bombay and how he goes on to become a Jesuit and all that is intrinsic to this.

In this book, he reflects on joining the Jesuit religious order and his various engagements as a priest and a social scientist. It brings the best and the worst of his own self and also the ups and downs of life as it unfolds for every human being. The basic points that Rudi wants to highlight are how life unfolds itself both in what is expected and unexpected, what is certain and uncertain, what is planned and unplanned and, above all, what is joyful and painful. Many of these, he looks at in hindsight and makes sense out of them.

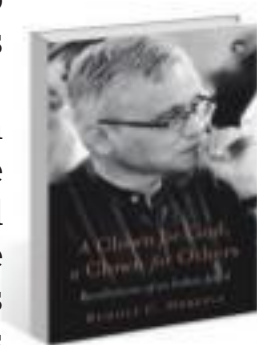
The book also comes out with many examples of the commitment to the marginalised in terms of 'Option for the Poor', as the Jesuits termed it. It also highlights the rootedness of a Jesuit in the Indian soil, ethos and religion. Having been educated in some of the best institutions of Mumbai and the rigorous Jesuit training have given to Rudi the ability to play with words and language and communicate his views succinctly and in a catchy way. Take, for example, this: "Tragedy and pause puncture our hurried, harried and hustled living!"

The book is recommended for light reading, for, being a Jesuit, Rudi has the freedom to critique the Jesuits as well as highlight some of the great qualities that they live by. One such aspect is that Jesuit institutions try to combine the intellectually excellent and socially relevant. The book also talks of the commitment and detachment that is expected of all Jesuits. At times, it appears that Rudi projects others as being on the wrong side and he being right. Leaving that out, Rudi, in this moving, engaging and insightful memoir, invites the readers to look into one's own life and make sense of it.

At a time when religions are being used to divide the citizens of the country, the author's recognition of all religions as contributive of human wellbeing is praiseworthy. He goes on to invite the reader to ponder over this fact that whenever something is given up for collective wellbeing, it is praiseworthy and the reward is great.

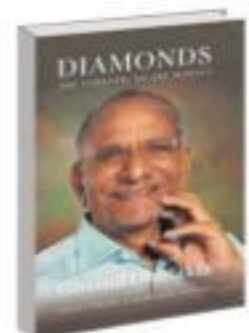
He says, "...wherever such good is renounced for the greater good, the common good, it is never lost but comes back a hundredfold." Be it the Sufis, the *sant-kavis* or Mother Teresa, all not only spoke of this, but lived this out.

A CLOWN FOR GOD, A CLOWN FOR OTHERS: RECOLLECTIONS OF AN INDIAN JESUIT
by Rudolf C Heredia.
Speaking Tiger.
Pages 192.
₹450



BACKFLAP

BORN into a poor agricultural family in a Gujarat village, Govind Dholakia went on to set up India's leading diamond crafting company. How could a school dropout receive an honorary doctorate? How did a diamond polisher, who earned ₹103 when he started out, become a billionaire employing 5,000 people? With endorsements from big names, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the book tells Dholakia's story of struggles, the role of family system in his growth, his many philosophies, his insights into how the world works, his successes and the public service initiatives he took along the course of his life, transparency being the hallmark of his dealings.



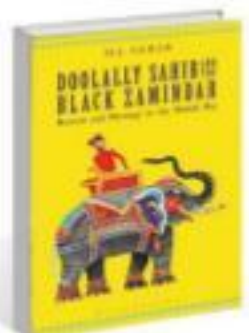
DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER, SO ARE MORALS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GOVIND DHOLAKIA
by Arun Tiwari & Kamlesh Yagnik.
Penguin Random House.
Pages 338.
₹699

TEN minutes, 1,650 rounds. The massacre of innocent Indians at Jallianwala Bagh was a watershed moment in India's freedom struggle, marking the beginning of the end of the British empire and laying the democratic and secular foundation on which our freedom was achieved. In this book, published by Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh, scholars look at the various facets of the incident — its genesis, understanding British reaction to the political unrest in India, its place in literature, the lessons to learn and martial law, among others. It brings together a host of scholars from universities spread far and wide, including KL Tuteja, Nonica Datta and Chaman Lal.



JALLIANWALA BAGH: REMEMBRANCE AND RESONANCE
Edited by Sukhdev Singh Sirsa & Sarabjit Singh.
Saptrishi Publication.
Pages 415.
₹695

WRAPPED in the garb of a novel, MJ Akbar's 'Doolally Sahib and the Black Zamindar' lays bare the history of racial relations between Indians and their foreign invaders. Based on the memoirs and journals of traders, travellers, bureaucrats and military officers — the bibliography itself running into 22 pages — the book unveils the prejudice arising from a deeply engrained conviction of white superiority. Akbar's sharp prose is peppered with verses by Indian greats, making it an intense read. Author of several books, including 'India: The Siege Within' and 'Nehru: The Making of India', Akbar has also written 'Blood Brothers', a novel.



DOOLALLY SAHIB AND THE BLACK ZAMINDAR: RACISM AND REVENGE IN THE BRITISH RAJ
by MJ Akbar.
Bloomsbury.
Pages 400.
₹899

What's holding back Army recruitment

Though pandemic has been cited as reason, key issues of rightsizing and 'tour of duty' need to be resolved first

AJAY BANERJEE

IN March this year, the Ministry of Defence, while replying to a question in Parliament, said there has been no fresh recruitment of jawans in the Indian Army since March 2020. "The recruitment process is suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a written answer in the Rajya Sabha.

Data shows the recruitment of sailors and airmen in the Navy and Indian Air Force (IAF), respectively, is taking place, but the post-March 2020 numbers are yet to match the pre-Covid days.

So, what is holding back Army recruitment when schools, colleges, offices, trains and flights are back to normal functioning post the pandemic?

The Army faces two issues before recruitment can commence. First, the force is 'rightsizing' to be more in tune with modern technology and be less manpower-intensive. After the closure of military farms and merger of base repair workshops, the authorised force levels needed re-calibration, and the assessment is still being done on the final numbers.

Second is the much-debated 'tour of duty' that will be the new method of recruitment. This has led to a furious debate within the forces. The contours of the scheme are being finalised at the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) by an in-house committee steered by a uni-

REGION'S PRESENCE IN ARMY (Data as of March 2021)

The northern states form 21.5 per cent of the Army.

- Punjab has 89,088 soldiers, that is 7.7 per cent of the Army.
- Haryana has 65,987 soldiers, that is 5.7 per cent of the Army.
- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have 47,457 soldiers, that is 4.1 per cent of Army.
- Himachal Pradesh has 46,960 soldiers, that is 4 per cent of the Army.

formed two-star officer.

'Tour of duty' system

'Tour of duty' will apply to only recruitment of jawans, sailors and airmen in the Army, Navy and IAF. Only 50 per cent of recruits will be retained in the force on a permanent basis and the rest will be demobilised in phases before they turn 25 years of age. The tenures would be three years and five years of service. Meaning, no pension. At present, a jawan has to serve for 17 years to qualify for pension.

The age-old recruiting system based on regiments may also go away. For now, a Sikh regiment or Jat regiment would draw troops from these communities, respectively. In future, regiments could comprise inductees from all over India and from all classes. The finer points of this system are also a work in progress by the DMA. This is facing a major mindset block as Army regiments and their battle training are structured on 'Paltan ki izzat' (pride of the battalion), with boys being recruited from the same gene pool

and from within specific geographical locations. In the older regiments, the system has been working for more than 150 years and, in some cases, even 200 years.

Most serving and retired officers believe the 'All India, all class' intake in regiments needs to be done in a very gradual manner.

Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma (retd), former Adjutant General of the Army, says, "The 'tour of duty' needs a viable tenure, this three-year one is too short. Also, have better second career options for those who are to be de-mobilised. For instance, at Metro rail systems, or else the trained manpower would be wasted."

Rightsizing plan

Militarily, 'rightsizing' looks to have small, agile forces capable of waging war in the tech-aided era and the Army's present restructuring proposal is based on an in-house study. The sanctioned strength was about 12.5 lakh jawans before rightsizing, which has been whittled down to around 11.8 lakh; the num-

CANDIDATES ENROLLED FOR RECRUITMENT

Year	Army	Navy	Air Force
2018-19	53,431	5,885	6,862
2019-20	80,572	6,068	7,222
2020-21	Recruitment suspended	2,722	8,423
2021-22	Recruitment suspended	5,547	4,609
Total	1,34,003	20,272	27,116

fixed model," argues Lt Gen Sharma.

Fait accompli

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the Combined Commanders' conference in December 2015, had asked for rightsizing, saying, "At a time when major powers are reducing their forces and relying more on technology, we are still constantly seeking to expand the size of our forces. Modernisation and expansion of forces at the same time is a difficult and unnecessary goal."

On two separate occasions, Modi said more or less the same thing.

On ground, little has happened by way of re-structuring the forces or even jointness, or even the way recruitment was done. The 'tour of duty' is now a fait accompli as the pension bill rises.

Think tank PRS Legislative Research, in its analysis on the budget for this fiscal, says, "Expenditure on defence pension has grown at an annual average rate of 10.7 per cent between 2012-13 and 2022-23. This is higher than the average annual growth of the defence budget at 8.6 per cent."

The share of pension in the defence budget increased from 19 per cent in 2012-13 to 26 per cent in 2019-20. It has dropped to 23 per cent for the fiscal ending March 31, 2022. The allocation for pension in the present year is ₹1,19,696 crore.

Till the government strikes a balance between the right numbers and new recruitment rules, fresh inductions are likely to be held back.



There has been no fresh recruitment of jawans in the Indian Army since March 2020. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

VARIETY

As Lawrence School turns 175...

COL HP SINGH

SEND him to Samawar and make a man of him." This line from Rudyard Kipling's book 'Kim' was enough to motivate my father to admit me to The Lawrence School, Sanawar. Ensclosed in Kasauli hills, Sanawar would become home for those impressionable six years of my life. My alma mater celebrates its dodransbicentennial (175th) anniversary this year, with an inspiring journey in its long march in time.

Founded by Sir Henry Lawrence in 1847 as Lawrence Military Asylum, a charitable institution for the orphaned wards of British soldiers, it is one of the oldest co-educational schools in the world. In 1920, it metamorphosed into Lawrence Royal Military School and thence to its current status of public school post-Independence. Till 1947, the school was open only to English children. When the British left, there was a talk of turning the campus either into a cantonment or to house Panjab University, relocated from Lahore. Fortunately, it was decided to retain the hilltop as it was and the school was smoothly 'Indianised'.

The school has a rich legacy of inheritance. It's the first outside England to receive royal patronage and has been presented with King's colours twice, in 1853 and 1922. The school motto 'Never Give In', believed to be the last words uttered by its founder before he succumbed to his injuries sustained during the 1857 uprising, has become synonymous with the school spirit.

The school song is based on this motto with its characteristic tune. The 'Red over White' school flag, signifying death before surrender, is hoisted daily by the 'Prefect on Duty'. The memorial honouring those killed in various wars is saluted by students as they 'March in unison' for the morning assembly. Bugle calls regulate various events of the daily curriculum.

With an emphasis on multi-dimensional personality development, Sanawar has produced renowned figures in various walks of life.

It has the distinction of sending contingents straight from its campus to the battlefield in both the world wars; 78 never returned home. The tradition continued after Independence even though the school was no longer a military one.



The Lawrence School, Sanawar, was set up for British orphans.

The tally of gallantry awards won includes a Param Vir Chakra, two Maha Vir Chakras, three Vir Chakras and a sizeable number of Sena medals and mention-in-dispatches. The courage displayed in 1971 by 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal in the Battle of Basantar is legendary, for which he was posthumously awarded the nation's highest gallantry award. While Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat headed the Indian Navy, the school has produced dozens of three-star rank officers.

The adventurous spirit fostered by the school is reflected by the likes of Brig TPS Chowdhury, who led India's first round-the-world sailing expedition, and Ajeet Bajaj, the first Indian to ski to North Pole and South Pole. Seven boys, while in school, scaled Mt Everest in 2013, which was the world's youngest team to climb the mountain. The girls, not to be left behind, scaled Mt Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak, soon thereafter.

The school has produced some outstanding sportspersons. Marathoner Ranjit Bhatia, a recipient of Order of the British Empire, participated in the 1960 Rome Olympics while Shiva Keshavan became the first Indian to compete in Winter Olympics. Trap shooter Manavjit Sandhu was awarded the Khel Ratna for winning four silver medals in Asian Games. The best performance, however, has been in equestrian events. There were times when the entire polo team of NDA and IMA was represented by old Sanawarians. Imtiaz Anees won a bronze while Rupri Brar won a gold in Asian Games. The latter was awarded the Arjuna Award, along with other polo legends: 'Billy' Sodhi, 'Pickles' Sodhi, Kuldeep Singh Garcha and VP Singh, all schoolmates.

Public figures like Omar Abdullah (Headboy of my batch), Sukhbir Badal, Maneka Gandhi,

Dushyant Chautala and Rao Inderjit Singh have played a significant role in state and national politics. Navin Chawla served as the Chief Election Commissioner and RS Gujral as the Finance Secretary. The school theatre has produced Bollywood stars like Parikshit Sahni, Sanjay Dutt, Pooja Bedi, Rahul Roy, Bikramjit Kanwarpal, Varun Sharma and Apoorva Lakhia (film director).

The corporate world has an impressive number of old Sanawarians: the Wadias (Ness and Jeh) of Bombay Dyeing and GoAir; the Munjals of Hero, Punit Goenka (Zee Entertainment), Bharat Puri (Pidilite industries) and Jyotsna Suri of Lalit Hotel chain, to name a few.

Reverend Parker set the foundation as the first Headmaster, while EG Carter, the last British Headmaster, oversaw the smooth transformation of a military school into independent India's premier residential school. Major R Som Dutt, the first Indian Headmaster, built upon what he had inherited, giving it the direction in its second phase of existence.

Shomie Das headed the school before handing it over to Harish Dhillon, the first alumnus to take over the reins. The baton would later pass on to two other Sanawarians: Praveen Vasisht and Himmat Dhillon, the incumbent Headmaster.

I fondly remember my teachers for moulding us and providing the impetus necessary for all-round development.

The adrenalin rush fighting the occasional summer forest fires, skiing down the tuck-shop slope in winter snow, the annual hikes and camps, the walking-out passes to Kasauli for 'Bun-Sums' (samosa stuffed in a bun) — I passed out over three decades ago, but the school never left me.

Former Prime Minister IK Gujral's words, "Sanawar is not just a school, it is an institution", inscribed at the school gate are perhaps an apt recognition The Lawrence School deserves.

"She will also go to Sanawar" was the first reaction on seeing my newborn daughter. Later, my son, too, followed her. Why are you so obsessed with your school, I have been asked many times. I have a standard reply: "If you are a Sanawarian, you will understand, and if you are not, I cannot explain."

CAPTION CONTEST 1357

REUTERS



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the above photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 10 words, and reach Spectrum, The Tribune, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be

accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an e-paper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the e-paper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number in your address.

You have a camera or a phone camera? Click and send us a picture for the caption contest. The selected picture will be used for Caption Contest. Mail the high resolution picture (.jpg format) at captionpics@tribunemail.com

Selected entries for Caption Contest 1356

- May 8 issue (see photo)
- **In bull control** — Deeksha, Jalandhar
- **Back to pavillion** — Mohinder Singh Nanda, Patiala
- **Tail-end drive** — Narinder Sharma, Panchkula
- **Field marshal** — Aditya Kalia, Saharanpur
- **Animal Planet** — KL Noatay, Nurbur



Kalu Ram and his cycle



BRIGIS GAKHAL (RETD)

1947 had innumerable harrowing tales. This is a heartwarming one about a boy who got separated from his migrating family, but found a new one — ours. Uncle Kalu Ram prospered, but never forgot his humble beginnings, and those who helped him along the way

THE partition of the country saw much bloodshed and many harrowing tales have been narrated by those who had to leave their lands and settle elsewhere. There were, however, some heartwarming stories of compassion. This is one such tale.

The sun was setting one October evening. After getting off a *tonga* at Basti Danishmand in Jalandhar, my grandfather, Sardar Jawahar Singh, started walking briskly towards his house in Gakhal village. As Sardar Sahib (whom we addressed as Bapuji) was walking along the sandy path, he heard soft footsteps behind him. He looked back and found a boy, barely seven to eight years old, clad in a dirty *kurta salwar* following him. The child froze. No words were exchanged. Bapuji resumed his walk. The boy followed him. When Bapuji reached home, the child was right behind him. By then, the lamps in the house had been lit. Taking pity on the boy, my granny, the lady of the house, whom we addressed as Maaji, ushered the boy in. He was given a meal, which he devoured quickly, and a mat to sleep on in the *deori* (common hall of the house). No words were exchanged till next morning. The boy apparently had separated from his group while his caravan was migrating from Pakistan. He knew little else. The boy had a lean frame and a vacant gaze. He spoke after much coaxing. His Jhangi dialect indicated that he belonged to Sindh. He didn't remember his name. Despite being fair and rosy, he came to be called Kalu Ram.

Jalandhar had nine hamlets or

bastis, including Danishmand, Bawa Khel, Sheikhan, Mithu and Guzan, largely inhabited by the Muslim population. During Partition, the Muslim population migrated westward, leaving their homes vacant. These were later occupied by many refugees from the other side of the border. Bapuji visited many refugee camps in different *bastis* in search of



Kalu Ram's family, but had no luck. The boy was finally adopted by the family. Fed on regular rich farm milk and a nutritious diet, Kalu soon blossomed into a strapping young man. He ran errands for Maaji and helped Bapuji with odd jobs. Bapuji gave him a 'phatti' (wooden notebook), ink pot and 'kalam' (wood-sharpened pen) and tried to teach him Urdu and arithmetic, but Kalu was not interested in studying.

He must have been around 12 years old when he requested Bapuji to help him set up a cycle repair workshop under the village banyan tree. Once his enterprise was set up, Kalu Ram's hard work and keen business acumen started getting him many customers. He shifted his enterprise to Basti Adda in Jalandhar city when he felt he would get more clients if his set-up was closer to a transport hub. The place was well connected on all sides and rickshaws would bring passengers from the narrow lanes of the Jalandhar city interi-

ors to Basti Adda, from where the horse-drawn *tongas* would take on. Kalu Ram would leave early and return late. This went on for a few months. It was quite taxing but the effort was showing its results and his enterprise started doing well. With some financial help from Maaji and Bapuji, Kalu Ram started living in a rented room near Basti Adda.

Every alternate week, however, he would cycle back to the village. He would spend a day with my family and return to the Adda that evening carrying a bagful of farm produce on his cycle, which had been loaded with much affection by Maaji. This would sustain him till the next visit. His hard work and entrepreneurial skills helped Kalu Ram establish his business very well. A few years later, as he sat beside my mother, he said, "Chhaje, main hum iss kabil ho gaya ki apna parivar shuru kar sakaan (I am now capable enough to start my family)." My mother said he should get married. "Eh kamm taan tusan he karouna (This task is in your hands)," retorted Kalu Ram. We sought the help of a Hindu village *pandit* to find a match for him. Kalu Ram got married and became father of three sons. While one son joined the Military Engineering Services, with some assistance from my father, another one became a teacher and the third son took up his father's trade, which had started flourishing.

From cycle repair to cycle sales to a welding plant and manufacturing school furniture, things started looking up for Kalu Ram's family, but even as he prospered, he never forgot his humble beginnings. On our visits to the village during my

father's annual leave, Kalu Ram would come to meet us at Basti Adda. He would serve us lemon soda at his shop and load us on to a *tonga*. If there was any heavy luggage, he would hold it back and have it delivered the next day. He would visit us the following Sunday, spending the entire day regaling us in Jhangi accent.

For us, Kalu Ram was family. When my father, Col Gurmohan Singh, retired in 1972, we set up a farm closer to Basti Danishmand. Every Sunday morning, Kalu Ram came cycling in his spotless white *kurta salwar* and a matching white-starched *kulla turban* with a long trail, his rosy cheeks flushed by the cycling effort. He would draw a *peedi* (stool) by my mother's side and give her his family's update. After lunch, he would take a round of the farm and collect fresh produce. Though my mother never asked him for anything, on his own he would make a piece of furniture that would help my mother in her kitchen management. That piece of furniture came strapped on the carrier of his cycle.

Some years later, his wife passed away. My parents went to attend the last rites and console Kalu Ram. As he aged, Uncle Kalu Ram's visits became fewer. Though his family had a car, he would always visit us on his cycle. We would say to him, "Uncle, car tey aaya karo (Uncle, you should come in a car)." To this, his humble reply was that this family gave him the beginning which was a cycle, how could he come riding in a car. About a decade back, Kalu Ram passed away. The unique bond that Kalu Ram and the Gakhal family developed was all thanks to the Partition.

— The writer is based in Panchkula

Out of control

TOUCHSTONES
IRA PANDE

FORGET climate change. What we should be really concerned about is the wave of madness that seems to have engulfed the world. The senseless war forced upon Ukraine by a despot, who is bent upon becoming the next Peter the Great of Russia, has shaken the very foundations of Europe. No one is able to prevail upon Putin to roll back his troops and stop flattening city after historic city in a once-beautiful country. Terrified refugees, holed up in dark, dank bomb shelters, await their fate as many neighbouring countries (many of them merely the size of a large Indian city) throw up their hands declaring they can't accommodate more people. In any case, the long-term consequences of this immigration will forever shatter the complacent prosperity and social bonhomie Europe has thus far preened about.

England is nervously waiting for their PM to step down in the face of serious charges of political misdeemeanor. Their Queen, an eternal symbol of continuity and British rectitude, is becoming frailer, and, for the first time in more than 60 years, she excused herself from the pomp and pageantry of the opening of the parliament this year. Prince Charles, her elderly heir, looked acutely embarrassed and ill at ease when he sat upon the designated royal chair to read out her message to the people. Heaven knows what the future of the House of Windsor will be like, with one prince accused of sexual profligacy and another who has chosen to migrate to America with his new wife and family.

America? The less said about them the better. Biden is increasingly coming across as a doddering old man, unable to handle the fast-paced events that he has to deal with: the Middle East, Ukraine, the rise of the redneck Americans of the Bible belt, inflation and rising oil prices, the prospect of an election that may be more keenly fought by the Republicans now that they sense a vulnerable President. In any case, Biden will always be compared to Obama, the last Democrat President, and guess who wins each time on the polls?

Come closer home: Sri Lanka and Pakistan, our immediate neighbours, are in a place that even we did not wish them to be. Who knows what the consequences of another civil war in Sri Lanka, or even Pakistan, may mean for us? Myanmar with a junta that has incarcerated Aung San Suu Kyi is in a similar place. Further afield, in

the Philippines, the infamous Marcos family is being joyously greeted by the very people who threw them out, lock, stock and barrel, just a few years ago. As for China, under Putin's twin, no one knows or even dares to speculate what it may decide to do next.

Our own country is a case study in itself. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, it seems as if the lunatic fringe is now in full rampage mode. And what is the state of our ruling party and the Opposition? In these circumstances, who can we wish to take control? The rule of law, of civil decency and accord, of respect and restraint in political and social behaviour, is now a distant memory. One can only pray that we do not descend the slippery slope to a long spell of fragmentation along linguistic and religious lines. Our own politicians, armed with the weapons of social media and fake news, with a compliant and domesticated press, have no interest in the real problems of this country. All they want is to win elections and since one party has perfected this art, every other wannabe leader follows that path. Stepping among the people, speaking to them about their hopes and fears, listening patiently and in humility — lessons Mahatma Gandhi taught us a century ago, have been forgotten and put aside. Power flows from money and information, so who cares for anything or anyone else?

Mark my words, we are in for a long, punishing summer. Punjab is teetering on the verge of a serious economic crisis and added to that is now the emergence of a ghost state that one thought had been finally put to rest. The state threw out the known parties convinced they had reached the end of their political lines, and placed their trust in a new party that promised them all they wanted to hear. A few months down, they seem unsure that they can fulfil even one of the many promises they had made, even as fresh problems arise every month. It breaks my heart to see a proud and prosperous state reduced to such a pass. The new actors should be given a chance for sure but I find it difficult to believe that they have it in them to bring the state out of the mess it has become. Mind you, their intentions may be good, it is just the lack of experience and a new way of governance that give me the feeling that Punjab Police and the bureaucracy cannot be controlled and made to work. Years of easy living and no accountability have extracted a very heavy price. Like the depleting water table, the machinery of the government appears unable to sustain the needs of the land.

I hope I am proved wrong and sincerely wish the state well. After all, it was *sadda* Punjab, too, once upon a time!

The 'Fauji Bhaiyon Ke Liye' lifeline

MILITARY MATTERS
BRIG SANDEEP THAPAR (RETD)

The role of the humble transistor cannot be overstated. For the troops at the most isolated of places, it was not only a source of entertainment, but ensured a connect with home and civilisation

THIS will definitely come as a surprise to most millennials, who cannot visualise anything beyond their mobiles or tablets, but the most prized possession that we *faujis* could have in the 1980s was a humble transistor. A small, amazing instrument that operated even in the remotest areas and brought news, entertainment and much more, daily. It kept the soldier, deployed at the most isolated of places, connected to home and civilisation, helping maintain sanity.

Whether an officer or a jawan, you had only arrived when you bought a transistor. By today's standards, it wasn't costly at ₹200 or so, but as a ratio of one's take-home salary then, it was almost half. The most common brand then was Murphy, later others came in. One walked with pride carrying the newly acquired possession prominently. Immediately, some cloth camouflage pattern was bought and a cover was stitched. One's Army number was unobtrusively but permanently etched to obviate loss or exchange. Needless to say, most owners were extremely possessive about their transistors; nobody but the owner could handle

it. And only those programmes which appealed to him were played, at the time and volume of his choice, irrespective of whether others in the barrack liked it or not!

New friendships were formed, some old ones turned into rivalries based on liking of radio programmes. Among the Sikh boys, mainly it was *Gurbani* recital early morning, followed by Punjabi songs the entire day. Some old-timers liked to listen to news occasionally. But a programme that caught everyone's attention was 'Fauji Bhaiyon Ke Liye' on All India Radio, where troops wrote letters asking for songs and messages to be read out to friends and family. The programme was heard in pindrop silence. Every request being read seemed like one's own — 'coming on leave' was heard with a smile, 'Baisakhi/Diwali greetings' with a nod and 'blessings to sister on her wedding' with perhaps a tear rolling down the cheek! 'Forces Request' on Fridays was another such programme which mostly officers subscribed to. At posts where letters came in the weekly link, where there was no electricity or newspapers, where

dusk meant it was time to sleep, the transistor was a great stress-buster. One knew all the programmes and stations by heart and what played at what hour. My love for Lata, Rafi and Kishore songs can be traced back to those days.

The transistor did not only have an entertainment role, it also helped a youngster like me control an agitated company. It was 1984, and we were deployed in Manipur at a post along the road. Operation Bluestar had created tremendous turbulence among my Sikh boys. The apprehension that someone may get highly worked up and attempt to go back home unannounced was prime on my mind. I ensured the troops were kept together and spent maximum time with them. Regular news updates on AIR were played out to calm edgy nerves. But, for some, AIR news was not considered accurate; they wanted to hear BBC Hindi only. Somehow, the BBC narrative was not along the same lines as the AIR version. It took leadership and diplomatic skills for a 24-year-old to manage censorship and tide over that fortnight without any untoward incident.

The penchant for BBC was wide-

spread in the Army. Most senior officers liked to listen to the 6.30 am news. In 1986, as a young Captain, I was detailed as a Liaison Officer to a GOC on a three-day visit. I was made to believe by the HQ that the success of the visit largely depended on my ability to ensure that everything went smoothly. On Day One, as I wished the GOC good night, he said, "I have to go for a walk early morning. Can you please record the 0630 BBC news for me, I will listen to it on my return at 7." I immediately arranged a tape recorder, a transistor and practised some recordings. In the morning, I was ready with my equipment but was delayed by a minute or two and missed the opening. I frantically searched for the station and the moment I heard news in English, I pressed the record button. The recording went on for some seven minutes before the newsreader said, "This is Voice of America." The next BBC bulletin was at 7.30 am, I was doomed. As the GOC arrived, I walked in and before he could question me, I sheepishly blurted out my mistake. Fortunately for me, he took it sportingly, saving my nascent career!

Milestone reached, show must go on for Tagore Theatre



RANI BALBIR KAUR

The Chandigarh-based theatre has a dynamic legacy of world-class performances from India and abroad. If its golden jubilee is a time to celebrate the brilliant delineations, it is also a moment to introspect

Don't expect the theatre to satisfy the habits of its audience but to change them.
— Bertolt Brecht

A CITY is known not for its tall buildings or commercial towers, but by its cultural institutions, art galleries and museums. A city is known by the narratives that buzz at its art cafeterias, in the hubs where artists, writers, intellectuals and journalists often meet. Tagore Theatre, which celebrates its golden jubilee on May 30, is a sacred space for performing arts and artists from not just Chandigarh, but beyond as well.

It has a dynamic legacy of world-class performances from India and abroad. So, it is time to celebrate the brilliant delineations, but also to introspect.

Tagore Theatre was conceived in 1961 (and registered as a society in 1972) on the occasion of Rabindranath Tagore's birth centenary, when the Ministry of Cultural Affairs had decided to build auditoriums in his name all over India. Yet, it stands as a soulless structure of concrete and bricks today. I would say it is merely an auditorium named after Tagore. It does not resonate with his great philosophy: 'Arts are the overflow of our deeper nature and spiritual signifi-

cance.' A portrait is all there is to allude to the origins.

Tagore Theatre was inaugurated by actor and filmmaker Prithviraj Kapoor, who became the first chairman of the Tagore Theatre Society. I remember one of my earliest performances there as a teenager studying in Government College for Girls. It was a high-profile function to celebrate World Peace Day. With PN Haksar among the dignitaries present, I appeared on stage dressed as Mother India and sang, "Zarra, zarra keh raha hai shanti... atma insaan ki ab jung nahin maangti", to a rousing applause.

Among my own productions and solo performances staged at Tagore is my tribute to Pt Jawaharlal Nehru: 'Ae vatan waalon tumhare pyar ko, main kabhi dil se bhula sakta nahin, yeh mohabbat is qadar annol hai, jis ki keemat main chuka sakta nahin.' The occasion was the inauguration of the Nehru Foundation and in attendance were Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, son Rajiv and his wife Sonia. I still remember some of my productions and performances: 'Three Penny Opera' (1975), 'Shubh Karman Te Kabhoon Na Taroun' (2000), 'Pagla Ghoru' (1980), 'Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Hasin Sitam' (2005) and 'Agni Aur Barkha' (2019).



Tagore Theatre celebrates its golden jubilee on May 30. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

I remember how Sadhu Ram, the curtain puller, would always keep toffees for young artists who received thunderous applause from the audience, as his token of appreciation. I must have received several toffees, for me no less than an award or honour. Sadhu Ramji is no more and his son has stepped into his shoes.

I must also mention Jaspal Singh, the light designer/operator, and Ranjit Singh, the set creator/executor — two pillars who executed the simplest and the most complex of productions. Varied productions, from every nook and corner of India and the world over that came to perform were well taken care of, round the clock, by

these two with help from the other staff.

Tagore Theatre was designed by Aditya Prakash, principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture and a close associate of Le Corbusier. His prowess in theatre architecture was profound, his love for the arts leading him to become an actor famous for his play 'Zindagi Retire Nahin Hoti'. Aditya Prakash was heartbroken over the demolition of his pride creation and sat on a dharna. MS Sathyu and I, along with others from the fraternity, joined him. Sathyu wrote to the Governor and the Adviser, but the administration paid no heed.

My friend Namita Singh is a brilliant architect, but I suppose she had to expand it out of proportion as per the instructions of the UT Administration. The green rooms are too large and lack a certain isolation from the main stage; they don't give privacy to the artists. There are no single rooms for the lead players.

My own efforts to establish a Tagore Theatre drama repertory were spread over two years. My proposal to set up a cafeteria as at Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi and Jehangir Art Gallery and Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai, along with a bookshop, a script bank and a costume shop, too elicited no response.

Yet, there are tremendous possibilities that can enliven Tagore Theatre and the spaces within the campus. The rehearsal rooms and the small studio theatre behind the main auditorium were conceived by a committee comprising theatre experts, of which I have been an active part.

From an illustrious beginning, however, Tagore Theatre today is a building that rents out the auditorium for various programmes, including private functions, star nights and political meets, etc. Financial viability of the place seems to have taken over the promotion of arts.

Its sanctity must be upheld and it should be restricted for the deliberation and advancement of arts, crafts and literature. It should be put under the care of a committee of stalwarts from the field of performing arts, with a youthful director from the field. Under the stewardship of Chakresh Kumar, the present director, I am sure the theatre would be rejuvenated.

I am reminded of how during World War II, while Moscow was being bombed by Hitler's forces, Moscow Art Theatre, the world renowned institution, was performing, with the motto that the show must go on, holding the torch of hope and sanity.

— The writer is a Chandigarh-based veteran theatreperson

BANKS NEED A NEW PLAYBOOK

Having substantially cleaned the balance sheets, a new ecosystem must be created to facilitate higher credit growth while keeping gross NPAs at a low level of around 2%

B Sambamurthy

Real GDP hit a decadal high of 8.2% during 2016-17. Since then, it has been on a downward slide and declined to about 4% during 2019-20. Covid-19 inflicted significant damage to economic growth and growth hurtled to a negative 6.5% in FY2021.

Keeping the impact of Covid-19 aside, the deceleration of economic growth has been placed nearly at the doorsteps of low bank credit growth during the last few years. The government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have been exhorting banks to step up lending to boost economic growth and legitimately so.

Decelerating Credit Growth & Economic Growth

Bank credit growth hit a decadal high of 14% during 2012-13 and has been slowing down since then, reaching a low of 5.5% in 2020-21 triggering alarm bells in government corridors. There is both coincidence and correlation between credit growth and economic growth.

The government and the RBI have unleashed a series of measures, (still continuing) to prop up credit growth and thus economic growth. These measures include massive dollops of liquidity, liberal refinance lines, credit guarantee (up to 20%) for MSMEs and recapitalisation of PSU banks. Bank credit grew by about 8% during 2021-22.

A brief review of bank credit growth during 2021-22 reveals hits and misses.



Growth in percentage (2018-2022)



Source: RBI Documents
Note: FY 2022 - Sectorial Figures as on Feb

Personal Loans: Rs 35 lakh crore



The personal loans segment emerges as a big winner, continuing its faster growth over the last decade. With an outstanding level of around Rs 35 lakh crore, it leaves behind credit to large industry (around Rs 25 lakh crore) by miles. It takes away over 43% of incremental credit growth and together with NBFC, it sucks away 58%. This no doubt fulfils aspirations of larger sections of people to own automobile, house, TV, fridge and other consumer durables.

This has also pushed up consumption-led growth. But it is a moot point whether household debt-fuelled consumption is sustainable in the long run; whether personal loans are a substitute for employment.

Whether personal loans are a substitute for employment and avenues for earning living wages is debatable. Risk-adjusted returns are higher for lenders as compared with other sectors. It looks a win-win-win for personal loan borrowers, consumption-led economy and lenders. But this enthusiasm needs to be discounted if you go by the experience of other countries.

It is a moot point whether household debt-fuelled consumption is sustainable in the long run; whether personal loans are a substitute for employment

Piloting and fuelling the real growth engines



CHARTING PATH

WE NEED A PLANNED ANNUAL CREDIT GROWTH RATE OF AT LEAST 15% IN THE NEXT 4-5 YEARS CONSISTENTLY. THAT WOULD TRANSLATE TO ABOUT BANK CREDIT EXPANSION OF RS 25-30 LAKH CRORE PER YEAR. LAST YEAR, THE GROWTH WAS ONLY ABOUT RS 10 LAKH CRORE AND THE PREVIOUS 2/3 YEARS, MUCH LOWER

So far as the PSU banks are concerned, only a few bigger banks may be designated to participate in big-ticket infra/corporate loans. Only sound banks may be allowed to grow faster

Sectoral flow of credit needs to be aligned with larger goals of sustainable economic development. Sectoral flow is as important as overall credit expansion for quality and sustainability of the GDP

Fintech and Big Tech are transforming personal finance. Collaborations have put the lenders of this segment on the accelerator. But it is important for the lenders to carry their own map and compass to sustain the growth

Bank credit is necessary but not sufficient condition to boost economic growth and progress. Lenders have to take necessary action and the government and regulators/entrepreneurs must create sufficient conditions for lending to infrastructure

A new playbook to resolve loan stress arising out of business cycles as distinct from mismanagement/frauds is needed. This would minimise the damage to lenders and help infuse confidence

It is important to monitor the increase in money supply, especially in reserve money and massive liquidity of nearly Rs 8 lakh crore sloshing around in the system and ensure it flows to the real sector rather than between banks & RBI. It needs to be monitored so that it does not create asset price bubbles

Climate change, poverty and rising inequalities have been posing serious challenges worldwide. Financial systems have an important role in converting these challenges into opportunities and ushering in better societies. Transition to a low carbon economy needs a major shift and new orientation and risk management frameworks by lenders

Large Industry: Stagnant at Rs 25 lakh crore

Credit flow to large industry has been lacklustre over the last few years and this trend continued this year as well. According to the recent Economic Survey, industry's share in gross value added growth fell from 9.6% in 2016 to a negative of 1.2% during 2021. Similarly, manufacturing growth plummeted from 13.1% to minus 2.4%.

Large private sector lenders having suffered huge losses in the earlier decade have pivoted to the retail sector. Massive write-offs of previous years have tapered off during this year. Some of the well-rated corporates have been accessing debt markets directly and banks invest in some of these issues. Some of the corporates have also



deleveraged taking advantage of booming capital markets. Even reckoning these factors, there is not much eagerness to lend to this sector.

This sector faces both demand and supply problems and many call this the Scissors problem. Firstly, the demand for funds for fresh investments is subdued due to

the availability of installed capacity. Capacity utilisation hovers around 70%. Secondly, the fact that some of the well-rated corporates can borrow at repo or subpar repo rates (4%) indicates weak demand for new investment loans. This also reflects intense competition among banks for big-ticket loans and

Since big-ticket loans accounted for 70% NPAs, it is only natural that risk appetite is diminished, which in turn constrains supply

even to lend at a negative net interest margin (NIM).

Given the fact that big-ticket loans accounted for as high as 70% NPAs and some of the banks incurred NPAs as high as over 15-20%, it is only natural that risk appetite is diminished, which in turn constrains supply.

There is no gainsaying the importance of bank credit flow to large industry, particularly for new investments. The recently announced production linked incentive (PLI) scheme may perk up demand for new investment credit.

MSME — Manufacturing and Services: Rs 17.1 lakh crore

This segment has also grown by 13.5% on the back of nearly 20% growth in the previous year. This comes further on the back of Mudra loans a couple of years ago. The government's ECLGS (Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme) guaranteeing 20% of the loan has given a fillip to the credit growth. This has given a lifeline to micro and small enterprises, which account for over 80% of the credit. This segment is highly vulnerable to vagaries of economic cycles and technology disruptions and has little buffers. These measures notwithstanding, mortality remains high. Very few graduate to medium sector and still fewer from medium to large industry. As guarantee is limited to 20%, one would assume that lenders have not compromised due diligence.

Agriculture

The agriculture sector credit grew 9.6%. There is a need and opportunity for massive investments in logistics to ensure better incomes for farmers, particularly for small/marginal farmers. Lenders need to focus on faster adoption of agri-tech to improve productivity and efficiency, and reduce risks across the value chain.

Infrastructure: Rs 11.90 lakh crore

Lenders to this sector were badly bruised over the last decade. Loss given default in some of the cases is very high at over 90%. But this sector is vital for achieving higher economic growth as it has the highest growth multiplier of all the sectors. Bank lending has resumed and recorded a growth rate of 11.2%. The problems are largely not lack of credit flow but other administrative and policy bottlenecks.

The Central government recently launched Gati Shakti Mission to reduce delays, cost and time overruns. It has already identified 130 critical projects with significant gaps. The newly launched Development Finance Institution may do the heavy lifting. Small and medium category lenders may like to know why even the big lenders headed by scholars could not identify and mitigate risks of lending to this sector and they pivoted to the retail/personal sector effectively. Developments in this sector have huge implications for achieving the \$5-trillion economy.

(The author is a former PSU Bank Chairman)

not be underestimated in a bank-dominated economy like ours. Bank credit is both a consequence and a cause of economic growth. Fiscal and monetary policies keep them going in a virtuous cycle.

The altitude and trajectory of growth depend much on the efficiency of the pilots flying these engines. If they fly low and slow, much of the fuel (bank credit) gets wasted and even turns toxic (NPA)

An IMF working paper (11/278) by Deniz Igan and others argues that credit booms are followed by credit crises with a lag and at times

threaten financial stability. The research covers 90 credit booms in over 90 countries, including India. What is a credit boom? Where to strike a balance? Macro-level credit boom is a call for regulators and micro-level boom is a call for boards and shareholders? The RBI in its latest report puts this optimal credit growth at 13%.

Having substantially cleaned the balance sheets of banks, it is vital a new ecosystem is created to facilitate higher credit growth and at the same keep gross NPAs at a low level of say 2%. Regulators, government, entrepreneurs, market infrastructure players have their tasks cut out.

Is the new playbook ready?

QUOTE-UNQUOTE



I ALWAYS LIKED READING BUT I HAD STARTED WORKING AT AN EARLY AGE, RIGHT AFTER GRADUATING FROM SCHOOL. I USED TO FEEL REALLY OUT OF PLACE IN GROUPS BECAUSE PEOPLE WOULD TALK ABOUT LITERATURE AND OTHER SUBJECTS. I THEN STARTED SELF-EDUCATING MYSELF.

KANGANA RANAUT
ACTRESS



THE NEWLY CREATED DISINFORMATION BOARD SHOULD REVIEW THIS TWEET, OR MAYBE THEY NEED TO FORM A NEW NON SEQUITUR BOARD INSTEAD. RAISING CORP TAXES IS FINE TO DISCUSS. TAMING INFLATION IS CRITICAL TO DISCUSS. MUSHING THEM TOGETHER IS JUST MISDIRECTION.

JEFF BEZOS
AMAZON FOUNDER



WORKFORCE BEING CRUSHED BETWEEN INFLATION AND JOBLESSNESS

MODI GOVT'S WRONG POLICIES MAY FURTHER AGGRAVATE THE SITUATION

DR. GYAN PATHAK

Workforce in India is being crushed between inflation and joblessness chiefly on account of wrong policy stance of the Narendra Modi government and the pandemic may be just an additional excuse. Retail inflation (CPI) in April soared to a 8-year high, ie the entire period of Modi Raj, and touched 7.79 per cent as against 8.3 per cent in May 2014, which he had strongly criticized during his election campaign. In place of the promise of providing one crore job every year, his government actually delivered unprecedented level of joblessness in decades, further exacerbated by the pandemic.

High taxes on petrol and diesel, high administered prices, and high GST rates have all along fuelling the rise of inflation, apart from the rising food prices, the downturn in labour market started with the policy experiment of demonetization in November 2016, could never be stopped. Job situation has never been worse. Both unemployment and labour force participation suffered historical decline during Modi Raj. The pandemic and other domestic and external factors did have it impact and the government seemed to be stupefied. Rethinking on its old wrong priorities was required but the centre continued with them, and in several cases vigorously followed them.

The worsening market condition with price rise and inflation and labour market deterioration with large number of job loss, declining opportunity of jobs, and rising unemployment has become the characteristic features of the entire Modi rule. No money in hand and little opportunity of getting jobs have made the life of our workforce miserable.

The month of April 2022 though witnessed substantially increased activities in the labour market, the additional jobs that became available were inadequate compared to the demand. A large number of the frustrated people who have left the labour market and had stopped even searching for jobs resumed their search, though the search has become costly, the unemployment rate has increased compared to 7.88 per cent in April compared to 7.57 per cent in March, according to the latest CMIE assessment.

The labour force increased by 8.8 million from 428.4 million in March to 437.2 million in April. It was a substantial increase in the recent months, especially after a fall of 12 million in the preceding three months. This increase was far below the loss which should be taken into consideration.

Employment expanded by only 7 million in April, which was less by 1.8 million increase in the labour force. The increase in employment had also come after three consecutive months of decline in employment, according to CMIE data, which also reveals that employment had fallen by 10 million from 406 million in December 2021 to 396 million in March 2022. In April,

it reached to 403 million, only to recover a part of the fall.

Thus the number of unemployed persons rose to 34.2 million, which includes the 1.8 million increase (increase in labour force minus expansion in employment) in the count of the unemployed in April 2022.

April 2022 also saw a 2.3 million increase in the count of those who stated that they were unemployed and were willing to work if work was made available to them but were not actively looking for employment. The count of these rose to 19.5 million in April 2022.

The agriculture sector shed 5.2 million jobs in April. Part of this decline in labour force was due to winding of rabi harvesting season, shrivelling of the wheat crop, and the consequent decline in wheat production. Wheat production is expected to have fallen by between 10 and 20 per cent this year because of intense heat wave. It is a very serious concern, and the Centre has already banned exports of wheat to avoid food insecurity of the country. Since the recent rise in CPI inflation was chiefly due to rise in prices of food articles, the wheat production fall indicates that its prices will increase in near future which may push up the prices of rice also due to shift in demand. The further rise in inflation can thus not be ruled out.

Increase in employment in April was chiefly in industry and services. Industry added 5.5 million jobs while services added another 6.7 million. Within industry, 3 million jobs were added in manufacturing and nearly 4 million in construction. However, mining and utilities reported sharp decline in employment which coincided with the coal shortage and the consequent power sector crisis, which again impacting overall performance of the business, industry and agriculture. Within manufacturing, it was heavy industries such as metals, chemicals and cement that added jobs. Within services sector, the increases were in the retail trade, hotels and restaurants industries.

A matter of more serious concern is that the increase in employment in industry and services was of low quality jobs. The CMIE says that it indicated the fact that the increase in employment was largely among daily wage labours and small traders. This type of occupation saw an increase of 7.9 million jobs. Entrepreneurs increase by 4 million and farmers fell by 5.1 million. There was almost no change in salaried jobs which were close to 79 million during March and April 2020, much below 87 million before the pandemic in 2019-20. Big increase of 12 million was reported in non-farm jobs, two-thirds of which were daily wage labours and small traders.

In this scenario, Modi government needs to urgently redress the twin evil of inflation and joblessness by reviewing its entire set of policies that have been fuelling both. Alibi is a bad defence, and bad politics. Good governance with better policies may help reverse the trend.

BLESSING IN DISGUISE

EU BAN WILL SEE MORE RUSSIAN OIL FLOWING EASTWARDS



K RAVEENDRAN

The seismic shift in the global crude oil market has begun to take effect. This is expected to manifest in tightened crude markets as well as unprecedented shifts in trade flows, most notably of Russian oil from Europe to Asia. Russia is expected to redirect as much volume as possible to alternative markets and India, along with China, would be key players in this shift.

Rystad Energy has revealed that India has increased the import of Russian oil by 8 lakh barrels per day between February and April this year, prompted by the growing Urals discount offered by Moscow. The agency estimates that in the event of further discounts offered by Russia, the volume could go up perhaps to a total of 1 million bpd to 2 million bpd.

Over the past two months buyers from all geographies have demonstrated that political correctness can be offset by steep and heavily discounted oil from Russia, leading to assumptions that some countries and refineries will cheat and continue to source Urals, especially if the discount widens further as the barrels are officially deemed untouchable by EU law.

There are, however, significant infrastructure limitations for this shift, with only two pipelines, including a transit link via Kazakhstan, offering a

spare capacity of only 300,000 bpd. Of course, there is a serious challenge as more cargoes would be moved by the sea, which means higher insurance costs, risk of sanctions and in some cases seizures.

The agency believes that repercussions of the Russian oil embargo currently being mullied over by the EU would lead to wide-ranging consequences, pushing oil prices higher in the short to medium term. As the sanctions are negotiated, crude prices will stay elevated as war-related uncertainty persists and summer demand kicks in over the

certain exemptions made for the land-locked countries of Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic. The deal on the table apparently involves a six-month phase-out period for crude imports, and eight months for petroleum products, including the crucial supply of around 1 million bpd of Russian diesel/gasoil to the EU market.

If enacted into law, Rystad believes that most EU members would likely abide by the ban, but reduce their crude purchases at slightly differing speeds, while the near 300,000 bpd of Druzhba crude imports

directly swapped, with potential shipping and insurance sanctions as part of the EU embargo plan further affecting movement, Russian upstream operations will take a severe hit, possibly close to the scale of the April 2020 Covid-19 induced shut-ins.

Russia has said its breakeven price for selling Urals is around \$45 per barrel, so the government will likely opt for steep discounts to ensure a flow of budget revenues before enacting costly well shut-ins.

The seasonally high consumption months of June, July, and August will increase demand materially as the travel season pushes up demand for road and jet fuel, and as the amount of oil burned in the Middle East over the summer period for cooling purposes increases. Projections of global refinery runs see an increase by at least 4 million bpd between now and the peak July intake.

The expected seasonal increase, as well as the strength in momentum for an EU embargo, has led analysts to maintain an expectation that oil prices will remain supported towards the third quarter of this year. The market had not fully priced in the EU oil embargo news, which adds to the tightness in the crude market for non-Russian grades such as Brent and WTI. But much will depend on the extent of the unprecedented shift in global crude trade flows this may cause in the months ahead.

RYSTAD ENERGY HAS REVEALED THAT INDIA HAS INCREASED THE IMPORT OF RUSSIAN OIL BY 8 LAKH BARRELS PER DAY BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND APRIL THIS YEAR, PROMPTED BY THE GROWING URALS DISCOUNT OFFERED BY MOSCOW. THE AGENCY ESTIMATES THAT IN THE EVENT OF FURTHER DISCOUNTS OFFERED BY RUSSIA, THE VOLUME COULD GO UP PERHAPS TO A TOTAL OF 1 MILLION BPD TO 2 MILLION BPD.

coming weeks. The EU is getting very close to enacting its proposed ban on Russian oil imports, including sanctions on shipping and insurance. Since unanimity is required within the EU and given the current stance of Hungary in particular, a compromise version of a proposal by the President of the European Commission made on 4 May is currently being re-negotiated in Brussels. But what seems to emerge from all these deliberations is that the EU will act and impose an oil embargo, with

into the three land-locked countries would continue as it is at least for the initial six to eight months of the phase-out period.

According to analysts, the EU potentially displacing between 2 million bpd and 3.4 million bpd should be a bullish signal for short-term pricing for the replacement barrel market, such as Brent and WTI. They also expect discounts on Urals to further widen to attract more buying from India and China. Given that not all barrels can be

POLITICAL DELICACIES

Rahil Nora Chopra

CONGRESS'S CHINTAN SHIVIR IN UDAIPUR, 400 PARTY LEADERS TO ATTEND

Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting shall be held at AICC headquarters on 9th May in Delhi. The meeting comes ahead of the 'Chintan Shivir' to chalk out the party's future strategy. While Congress president Sonia Gandhi meeting with senior party leaders on Tuesday to scrutinize the preparations for the three-day Chintan Shivir (brainstorming session) that is scheduled to be held between May 13 and 15 at Udaipur in Rajasthan. Congress leaders K.C. Venugopal, Ambika Soni, Randeep Surjewala and Mukul Wasnik were among those who attended the meeting. In preparations for the Chintan Shivir, CM Ashok Gehlot, K C Venugopal, Ajay Maken and PCC chief Govind Dotasara reached Udaipur on Wednesday. Venues for the meetings of the Chintan Shivir and the stay of the leaders were finalised on Wednesday. CWC member Raghuvver Meena is handling this responsibility in Udaipur. About 400 prominent leaders of Congress including Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi will attend the Chintan Shivir.

CONGRESS BRACES FOR 'ONE MAN, ONE POST' OVERHAUL SOON

The Chintan Shivir of Congress is scheduled to be held between May 13 and 15 at Udaipur in Rajasthan. In this context, the party is gearing up to implement the 'one man, one post' rule at both the AICC and state levels. Currently, Congress leaders like Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Randeep Singh Surjewala and Mukul Wasnik hold more than one charge. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury holds the post of Floor Leader in the Lok Sabha and is also the West Bengal party president, while Randeep Singh Surjewala is the party's Karnataka General Secretary as well as heads the party's communication department. Mukul Wasnik is Madhya Pradesh party general secretary and also secretary of the party's Central Election Committee (CEC). In a recent update, veteran Congress leader and former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath resigned from the post of LoP in the state Assembly. Congress President Sonia Gandhi accepted his resignation and appointed Govind Singh in his place. Kamal Nath was holding the posts of the leader of the opposition and state Congress President. Now he is only the chief of the state unit of the party. Moreover, speculation is rife that the new AICC communication department head will be appointed soon, and the names making the rounds in the Congress are of Manish Tewari, Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Salman Khurshid.

PROFILE: NEW ARMY CHIEF GENERAL MANOJ PANDE IS A PERSON OF DIVERSE QUALITIES

A LOW KEY OFFICER, HE IS THE FIRST TRAINED ENGG TO REACH THE TOP

HARIHAR SWARUP

Around eight years ago, when he was Brigadier, Manoj Pande was posted in the headquarters of Eastern Command as the Brigadier General Staff (Operations), one of the most important positions there. His immediate boss was the late General Bipin Rawat who was Major General Staff. Rawat's boss at that time was General Dalbir Singh Suhag, as the Eastern Army Commander.

All three would go on to become Army Chief. While Suhag took over as the 26th Army Chief in July 2014, Rawat became the 27th Army Chief in December 2016 and the country's first Chief of Defense Staff in January 2020. General Pande took over this month as the 29th Army Chief.

The 28th Chief of the Army, General M M Naravane, was also posted in Eastern Command Assam

Rifles that time. There was one thing though that put General Pande, 60, apart from rest. He is the country's first Army Chief to have risen to the top from Corps of Engineers.

Those aware of their military history tell you how the legendary US Army Chief of early 1930 and Second World War, Douglas MacArthur, once finished top of his class at Corps of Engineers. General Pande similarly stood first in the Young Officers' Course of Corps of Engineers, and now has broken a glass ceiling in the Indian Army to rise to top. The Army so far has Chiefs only from infantry, Armoured Corps or the Artillery.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Sanjay Kulkarni, who served as boss to both Gen. Rawat and Pande as Chief of Staff of Eastern Army Command, says he saw Pande at "close circles quarters" as a Brigadier, and remembers him as one of the brightest officers at the command.



As Brigadier General Staff, one of Pande's most important tasks was to brief the command's leadership about all operational aspects every morning. Kulkarni recalls: "His retentive memory was good. He wouldn't just point a finger on the map without knowing where it was... Most of us would be groping... He is extremely conscientious, very hard working, and puts things across in a very rational way. No emotional outbursts. Takes it very

easily, and comes to a very logical conclusion".

There was another thing about Gen. Pande that struck Kulkarni. "He wasn't a chap who would lie to cover up an incident. He would be honest that this is what has happened, this is where we are, and that is how it is. It was up to us seniors to go about it."

From seniors to juniors to batchmates, others too vouch for Pande's attention to detail and his keenness

to know things, while also talking about his sincerity and humility and soft spoken, mild nature. In that, many say, he is closer to his immediate predecessor Naravane, than say the late Rawat who was flamboyant and often found himself in a rough patch over his remarks.

General Pande's batchmate from the National Defense Academy, Maj Gen (ret'd) Ajay Seth says: "He is a quiet person, doesn't talk much. But he talks sense when he speaks. He is not a showman."

Seth says they really got to know each other well a few years after the NDA, and recalls the time the two of them prepared for their first promotion exams in the late 1980s. "Our centre was Yol in Himachal Pradesh... My commanding officer had not granted me leave, but I had managed some time and made notes. I asked him about his preparations. He said 'I have not prepared at all, Ajay. You have to help me.'"

Will Hardik Patel's Congress stint end soon?

The Hardik Patel-Congress marriage seems to be heading for a divorce after just three years. Patel, who joined the Congress in March 2019 and is currently the state Working President, has, since the last one month, started sending signals that he is reviewing his position, stand, and association with the party.

Congress sources said even before he made his dissent public through interviews, Patel had started acting against the party interests, and claimed that he had blocked the state organisation's plan to have four to five Working Presidents.

The party's state President Jagdish Thakor and his team wanted to give importance to four to five castes that have good dominance in the state and can help the party in creating a new social engineering. Towards this end, it wanted to have Working Presidents from the Patidar, Koli, Rajput, Brahmin/Baniya, and the Muslim community.

However, sources said Patel opposed the plan demanding that there should be only one Working President - that should be him and no one else, otherwise it has no meaning.

Posed this question by IANS through a text message, Patel preferred not to comment.

According to sources, Patel had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in April during the latter's visit to Ahmedabad, when his entry into the BJP was worked out.

Sources however said that his entry into the state's ruling party is not going to be a cake walk as one stalwart BJP leader is opposed to him since the leader's political career was jeopardised by the Patel-led Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti agitation.

Recently, Patel had been constantly alleging that few state Congress leaders are sidelining him in the party, he is not given work to do, otherwise he is ready to give 100 per cent to the party. He had appealed to the central leadership to intervene, but, at the same time, he also praised the BJP, removes the Congress symbol from his Twitter and other social media accounts. He has also started calling himself "hardcore Hindutvavadi".

However, Thakor maintained that Patel was never sidelined and always given due importance in the party, adding that whenever the Patidar leader publicly dissented, he or Gujarat in-charge Raghu Sharma has tried to reach him out and discuss the issues and tried to resolve them.

Congress leaders attended the condolence meeting on his father's first death anniversary condolence meeting, though some of us were not invited, Thakor said. He did accept that the party's second phase reorganisation is delayed, but did not agree that it is because of Patel.

Asked what if Patel quits the party, Thakor, avoiding directly answering the question, said that the Congress is not dependent on one or few leaders or few MLAs, and even if few MLAs or leaders quit the party, it will have little impact on the party prospect in the coming elections. The party is prepared for all consequences, he added.

Political analyst Dilip Gohil said that Patel has been planning to quit Congress for the long-term benefit, as he does not see his future in the party. "He wants to become a victim so that he gets sympathy from the community and voters, that is why he is making allegations against state leaders, so they suspend him from the party, which is not likely to happen," he added.

Gohil said his reading of Patel's activities and statements over the last one month is that he is acting as per scripted plan given to him, but said his quitting Congress will have little impact, as shown by the 2017 Assembly elections results.

"No doubt, the Congress vote share and seats both increased, but at the same time, the BJP vote share increased by one and half per cent, which means the OBCs voted for it."

Gohil is of view that for Congress gains in 2017 elections, the entire credit can't be given to Patel, whose influence is fading, as results of the recent by-polls, civic and panchayat polls showed.

He also said that it seemed that Patel had great hopes of Rahul Gandhi's intervention, but by the way, he gave the cold shoulder to Patel during his visit to Dahod, it was clear indication that the Congress is ready for his exit.

The world will run only with artificial intelligence



By Narvijay Yadav

It is estimated that by 2023, 50 percent of all business workloads are expected to run in the 'cloud', and Covid pandemic accelerated the cloud adoption. As of now, over 60 percent of all corporate data is stored in the cloud. McKinsey estimates that AI techniques have the potential to create between \$3.5T and \$5.8T in value annually across nine business functions in 19 industries. AI is making its way into every field, so how could a smartphone remain untouched by it? Smartphones have become so important in our lives that most of the time we all spend scrolling this or that on the screen. And a smartphone is such a thing about which it is said that "it knows everything about you". Not



only that, your phone knows you more than you. The same applies to computers as well. Both the devices are based on the Internet and AI has arrived to manage the Internet. Google is at the forefront in using AI. As per the accounting firm PwC, the AI industry will be worth over Rs 117 lakh crore by the year 2030. AI has already entered people's lives through digital assistants and face recognition technology etc.

AI has been used in industries to automate industrial procedures, avoid human errors, and discover unexplored places. All the industries, especially healthcare, banking, manufacturing, agriculture, and pharma, will depend heavily on AI, security and data analytics. In the coming times AI will handle the routine tasks of work and everyday life, while humans will engage their brain in creative tasks. That is, machines and gadgets will do routine work and humans will do creative work. World renowned Artificial intelligence expert Stuart Russell says that if machines become super intelligent then the very existence of humans will be in danger. Intelligence is power. Power means control, and that will be the end of the story of humans on Earth. Through artificial intelligence technology, you can track people, recognize their faces. Its abuse has already started, for example, your computer knows all about you, and your mobile phone listens to all your conversations. It is the responsibility of man now to stop these machines from making terrible mistakes, or else everything will perish. It's a warning.

In general terms, artificial intelligence refers to computation tools that resemble human intelligence to perform certain tasks in exactly the same manner. This technology is currently progressing at a very fast pace. Indeed computer databases have evolved into the core infrastructure that drives software. It is anticipated that most of the new features that will be included in the software in the coming years will be powered by AI. Then there is Big Data by which YouTube receives over 400 hours of video content every single minute. Computers have been trained in such a way that it can identify a person's personality better than his friends. To do this, it is seen what type of posts a person likes on social media. Artificial Intelligence and Big Data have a special relationship. Machine learning has contributed a lot to the development of AI. This technique trains AI using large data sets. AI chatbots can be trained on data sets that include understanding human interactions.

(Author is a senior journalist & columnist. The views expressed are personal opinion of the author. He can be reached at Twitter @NarvijayYadav)

Decoding General Pande's stated 'whole-of-nation approach'



By Bimal Prasad Mohapatra

The basic issue remains the resolution of the border. What we see is that China's intent has been to keep the border issue alive. What we need as a country is a 'whole-of-nation approach' and in the military domain, this is to prevent and counter any attempt to alter the status quo at the LAC, Army Chief General Manoj Pande, who took over the charge on April 30, 2022, said to a group of selected journalists on May 9, 2022.

On the day of the above interview got wide coverage in Indian Media, this author searched for any headline of news report and opinion piece with verbatim the 'whole-of-nation approach' using Google search engine, but in vain. Instead what he found is identical headlines "China wants to keep boundary issue alive: Gen Pande" on top of all newspapers reports in the inside pages. And the 'whole-of-nation approach' General Pande lamented is there buried in their third or fourth para in the most of the news reports. As this author feels, the 'whole-of-nation approach' is the most important part of the interview along with Chinese intent that General emphasized in so far as on-going border standoff is concerned, and has been neglected by media for the reasons best known to them, he ventured to discuss the issue here in due details.

While reading the news reports in various newspapers and digital media over the issue, a question comes to mind: Why has General made the 'whole-of-nation approach' part of his statement while discussing border dispute with China? What does the verbatim mean over the issue? Is it a grievance of India's Armed Forces and they strongly felt 'wanting'

when they prepare strategy to protect nation's sovereign territory? Yes, General Pande has not specified the reason of making the 'whole-of-nation approach' as part of his statement (or no body among the journalists asked), maybe it is his due regard to service rule, and Indian armed forces are the most disciplined forces which never found engaged in public debate over the issues that matter to them as a matter of principle. However, the indication is loud and clear which callous kumbhakarnas among us (in media, civil society, politics, opposition, strategic analysts, etc.) refuse to acknowledge for vested interest at the cost of national interest.

Here, I bring to my readers' notice what former PM Indira Gandhi had said when she was asked by opposition about India's preparedness just before 1971 Indo-Pak war in Parliament. She told to the Lok Sabha, "In a serious moment like this, the less we as a government say, I think the better it is", and in the Rajya Sabha, she told, "A wrong step, a wrong word, can have an effect entirely different from the one which all intend." And the entire opposition so also media, civil society, etc. had kept quiet leaving the matter to be dealt with by the duly elected government and the armed forces under later's command. Is it what General Pande means as something related to the 'whole-of-nation approach'?



when they prepare strategy to protect nation's sovereign territory?

Though exactly what General means this author does not know, yet while he tries to decode General's statement Indira Gandhi's 1971 statements in both houses of Parliament and the then opposition parties' concurrence to her statements instantly comes to his mind along with the manner and style of dealing of opposition parties, media, civil society, etc. have been now over ongoing border standoff with China.

Let us further decode General's statement quoted in the first paragraph here. He said, "China's intent has been to keep the border issue alive." Latter, he went ahead saying, "What we need as a country is a 'whole-of-nation approach' and in the military domain, this is to prevent and counter any attempt to alter the status quo at the LAC." Do the above two statements mean that General is convinced that China has been taking advantage of lack of the 'whole-of-nation approach' over the ongoing border standoff in India? Means China has strong conviction that Indian polity and strategic thinkers are divided over country's actual border with China?

Now, let us discuss what have been happening in India that possibly contributes to convince China to take strategic advantage by 'keeping border issue alive' and Indian general feels aggrieve while dealing with enemies in at time

bloody border standoffs?

During 77 days long Doklam standoff between Armed Indian Forces and People's Liberation Army near India-China-Bhutan strategic tri-junction border area in 2017 over construction of road building, which was ended with announcement of both on August 28 that they had withdrawn all their troops from the face-off site, on July 11, 2017 Hindustan Times reported, "After morning of denials, Congress accepts Rahul Gandhi met Chinese envoy."

Questioning the Congress Party's initial denial, senior CPI leader D. Raja said that the Congress should make its stand clear on the matter. "Why did they deny the reports first only to confirm later," Raja asked, adding that this happens in our political life. "Parties keep meeting envoys..... There is nothing to hide or be secretive about." The Chinese Embassy's office official site, which first reported that Rahul met Zhaohui to "exchange views on the current bilateral relations", and then, hours later, deleted the post. Both sides never made it clear why they seemed to be denying that the meeting took place.

Here, it is to be noted that Congress Party and Rahul Gandhi are not non-entities in Indian politics. Congress Party is the longest ruling party in India ruling over 55 years out of 75 years of self-rule and in GE2014 and GE2019 got over 19+% votes, the second largest party next to present ruling BJP. And Rahul Gandhi is the scion of Congress Party first family, which has given three PMs and one de facto PM (2004-14), and he was the party President and main party election campaign icon. Therefore, it is needless to mention that his activities have been closely monitored not only by his political rivals and non-political executives and Armed Forces in India, but also by nation's external adversaries. Being a practicing democracy, India's ruling leadership keeps on changing election after election, at time based on ideologies. But, the main motto of Armed Forces remains same. In view of this, one should not

forget that any dubious activities of important political functionaries create confusion in thought process of military strategists and generals/commanders having direct negative repercussions on national security apparatus.

Doubts have been generated and negative propaganda have been made over Indian Armed Forces' most daring 2016 Surgical Strike and 2019 Balakot Air Strike by political outfits with electoral objectives despite the clarifications given by Military Commanders who commanded the operations. Even media and civil society are not far behind in these demoralizing activities which might have prompted General Pande to use the 'whole-of-nation approach' while discussing the ongoing standoff PLA has with Indian Armed Forces in Western sectors. Here too, the strategies of armed forces questioned by none other than the former military commanders, diplomats and strategic writers working in Think Tanks and writing columns in media, and even their political authority has been mocked by former minister who was part of Cabinet Committee for Security (CCS). They should not forget that India faces literally two fronts war like situation. While one adversary has one party rules and is world's second most powerful nation in so far as her armed forces and economy are concerned; the other one is, though a democracy, its military is not accountable to political executive. So, they virtually have no problem over 'whole-of-nation approach' when they venture against India for anything.

Here, we should not forget that 1971 war India won against formidable adversary Pakistan, which had direct supports of world super power the US and latter's powerful allies such as UK and China, due to the 'whole-of-nation approach' burying political and ideological differences.

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Big initiative to save the pond and stepwell



By Satyavan Saurabh

In summer there is a massive water crisis across India; Given this problem, under the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence, the Haryana Government has started work vigorously to develop the Johad ponds of the state as Amrit Sarovar to save the ponds and johars which are losing their existence in their villages. This Amrit Sarovar will prove to be a boon for water conservation as well as for the farmers. Provision will also be made for irrigation with the water of these Amrit Sarovar. Under this scheme, 1650 ponds of Haryana state will be developed as Amrit Sarovar by August 15, 2023. In the initial phase of this program, Chief Minister Manohar Lal launched the scheme of 111 Amrit Sarovar in the state through the online system.

Their best efforts in the form of ponds and step-wells for the conservation of water and the gift of ancestors have been engulfed in the memories of the past. The biggest reason behind this has been the apathy of the government. Due to this these dry ponds and step-wells are not used by the people for water. Rather, they are doing it in the form of playing cards by sitting under the shady trees on their banks of them. The indifference of the villagers towards the ponds that have been deserted for decades has also gone home. The decreasing days of rain have also proved to be a curse for the ponds and step-wells. This is the reason that today the ponds and johads in villages across the country are dry due to lack of water. Due to this, neither the footsteps of animals are heard till these johads and ponds nor man is seen following their path.

Given all this, the Central Government launched the AMRUT scheme on April 24, 2022, on Panchayati Raj Day. This scheme will be run till 15th August 2023. Under this scheme, 1650 ponds in the state will be developed as Amrit Sarovar and 75-75 ponds in each district will be made Amrit Sarovar. This scheme will beautify the villages and will help in conserving water.



Today the condition of the village ponds is very pathetic and the water of the ponds is overflowing and flowing on the roads and the ponds are not able to conserve even the rainwater. Keeping all these aspects in mind, the Amrit Sarovar Yojana has been started. Irrigation work will also be done through this scheme and rainwater will also be conserved.

Water scarcity in India has come not from insufficient supply but from the way we manage the water we have. Agriculture uses 78 percent of India's water, and uses it very inefficiently. About two-thirds of the water used for irrigation comes from groundwater. Heavy power subsidies for farmers to pump groundwater and the fact that groundwater is largely unregulated have led to a steady explosion in the use of groundwater through tubewells for irrigation over the past several decades. Extensive digging of borewells to meet the demand deficit leads to increased but unaccounted use of groundwater.

Urban India's inefficiency in water use stems from a general condition of inadequate, outdated, and dilapidated distribution networks, inefficient operations, inadequate metering, incomplete billing and collection, and poor governance. Another source of inefficiency comes from not treating wastewater and using recycled water for special uses such as gardening and flushing toilets. Low pricing of urban water also contributes to wasteful use. If something costs less, users will use more of it.

A political settlement between the Center and the states are needed to jointly address India's

water-saving challenges. There have also not been many attempts to dissuade farmers from growing water-intensive crops such as paddy, sugarcane, and banana when it is widely known that agriculture consumes 80% of freshwater. In the desert areas of Rajasthan, the importance of water is like that of God. The villagers here make every effort to save every drop of this precious resource.

Ponds are the easiest way to conserve water in rural areas of the Nagaur district of Rajasthan. The remarkable fact about these ponds is that many of these ponds are centuries old and have been preserved only through the efforts of the villagers. No river flows through the Nagaur district and groundwater is also not potable. In such circumstances, villagers have found effective ways to conserve and use rainwater. To save rainwater, tanks for personal use and ponds for community use have been created in the houses. Even today these ponds are the primary source of water for the villagers of Nagaur.

Every decision regarding ponds is taken collectively by the villagers. Every village has implemented certain rules for the conservation of ponds. Those who litter the pond are not tolerated, emphasis is laid on keeping the catchment area free from encroachment. It is strictly forbidden to enter the pond wearing shoes. Apart from this, bathing, washing clothes, and bathing cattle are also prohibited in the pond. There is no restriction on taking water from the pond for home, but water from the pond cannot be taken for sale.

Barring a few villages across the country, most are where ponds are not maintained properly and they dry up quickly, forcing residents to look for other sources. Now the Amrit Sarovar Yojana of the Haryana Government has given new hope to the entire country in preserving the empty and drying ponds and the villagers of Haryana are proud of it. Their active participation in protecting their water sources is a great example for other water-scarce regions.

(Author is a research scholar, poet, independent journalist and columnist. The views expressed are personal opinion of the author. He can be reached at goonjichaupal@gmail.com)

DOWN IN JUNGLELAND



Ranjit Lal

Ranjit Lal is an author, environmentalist and bird watcher

How Seeds Get Away

Sometimes leaving home is a breeze. For others it's a roulette

MOST (SENSIBLE) parents can't wait for the day when their loutish teenagers finally pack up and leave home because they "want to be independent" and live their own lives. Nor can most animal parents. Once the pup or kitty can fend for itself — it is turfed out of its parent's territory. But how do plant parents get rid of their often hundreds if not thousands of young who like them are stuck in one place forever? They must, because some plant parents will not allow their progeny to mature if they stick around close to them. So how do these seeds get away?

Well, like us they travel by air, by water and overland! They may parasail, flutter like drones, drift on the oceans for months together or hitch a lift with passing animals. A little while back, the silken seed pods of the silk cotton tree were wafting down everywhere: it's worthwhile taking a close look at their beautiful and delicate design and construction. A whiff of breeze and it's bye-bye mama, we're off! And we've all experienced (or should have) the pleasure of blowing on a dandelion puffball and watched the tiny silk parachutes take off into the wild blue yonder; something filmmakers and photographers have used when they have a smitten, dreamy heroine around!

Some seed pods of lianas growing in tropical forests are attached to tissue-thin membranous wings that are so aerodynamically perfect that they can float vast distances even in still air — and whose design our aerodynamic engineers are still trying to figure out. The seed pods of the sycamore are attached to helicopter-like vanes which spin when the seed falls free, taking it far away from its parent.

As for the seafarers, there is, of course, the coconut. Very helpfully, the parent — the tree — will lean towards the ocean or river as far as it can and then drop its bomb-shell baby with the hope that the tide or current will catch it and bear it away. Heavy though it is, it floats and can do so without disintegrating for over three months by which time it is cast away on some distant shore where it can start a life of its own.



WIKI MEDIA COMMONS

ROMANCING THE BREEZE

The seed pods of the silk cotton tree are a dreamer's delight

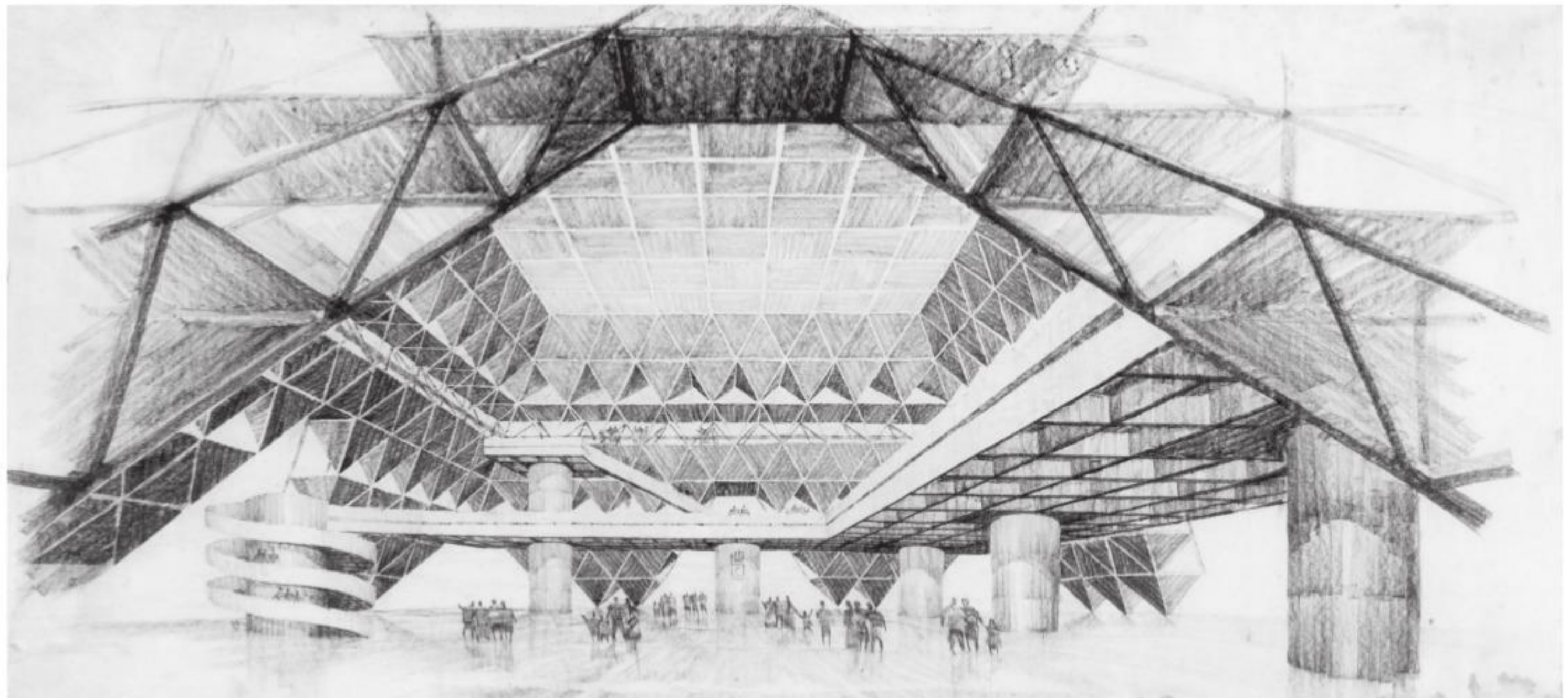
Then, of course, there are the hippie gypsies: those seed pods armed with hooks and burrs, or ones that are plain sticky which cling on to your clothes or fur if you're an animal, travel with you, until you pull or scratch or shake them off.

Some alas, show no desire to leave the comfort of their parents' home — and literally have to be kicked out. Apparently, the Himalayan balsam is one such; the seeds stay put inside the pod, where like in a pressure cooker the pressure builds up — due to evaporation — then boom! The fruit of the dynamite tree (*Hura crepitans*), explode like a stick of dynamite flinging its seeds 100 m away. There are several species in Africa, which actually need fire to prompt the seeds to leave home and germinate.

Perhaps, the least prepossessing way of leaving home, which thousands of plants use — is literally by being eaten. With devious cunning, the parent plant will cover its beloved seeds with a sweet (often red, orange or yellow), juicy pulpy flesh fruit which ripens in the sun, enticing monkeys, elephants, birds of all sorts, and reptiles to take a bite. Usually, the seed is just spat out — or makes the revolting journey through the steamy intestines of the predator and is evacuated from its nether end! What a way to make an entrance and start a new life! In fact, the seeds of some African acacias must go through this rite of passage — through the enormous gut of elephants in order to survive. The journey through this rumbling churning charnel of a tunnel kills beetle grubs which would otherwise kill the seeds themselves. And be warned, in many cases, such as in apples, while the fruit might be sweet and delicious, the seeds themselves are bitter and may be poisonous. Some seeds, like that of a mango I planted in the garden are lucky: they grow and are looked after and cosseted over every day.

Of course, in many cases — like in pine trees — the cones fall beneath their parents towering mass. Here they must wait, until the parent tree dies and falls, and then there is a desperate race among the seedlings to shoot up and fill up the sky space that has just opened up, so they can get life-giving sunlight. In temperate countries, animals, like squirrels, will snatch up acorns and stash them away for the winter. They have formidable memories and will eventually retrieve (and eat) most of them, but some will get away, and begin to grow next summer.

So yes, for some, leaving home is a breeze, for others Russian roulette, and yet others a trip up shit creek!



MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE, CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU/COURTESY MOMA

Concrete as Competence

Curator Martino Stierli on the MoMA exhibition that recalibrates the Western perspective of architecture in South Asia and why the Hall of Nations was important

Shiny Varghese

THE MUSEUM of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, exhibition, "The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947-1985", that continues till July, comprises over 200 works from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and includes sketches, drawings, photographs, films and architectural models. In this interview, Martino Stierli, The Philip Johnson chief curator of architecture and design at MoMA, speaks on architecture shaping the process of decolonisation and how concrete as a material straddled the global and the local. Excerpts:

What prompted the team to look at South Asian architecture after independence?

Modern architecture in South Asia is characterised by a wealth of extraordinary aesthetic and architectural quality that is little known, both to MoMA's audiences and the architectural community outside of the region. We felt that investigating this unique body of work would allow us to recalibrate the ways in which the history of modern architecture has been told, mainly from a Western and Eurocentric point of view.

What are the lenses of your reference?

We are particularly interested in the theme of self-determination and how the first generation of post-independence architects in the

region collectively articulated a powerful vision of a postcolonial society. This aspiration was expressed in new cities and spaces of political representation and in the construction of formally and typologically innovative buildings. The exhibition showcases how architects from the region responded to the social and material conditions, and how they related their work to craft traditions and labour conditions unique to the subcontinent. The exhibition is transnational in nature and organised thematically. These address the construction of new cities, housing, industry and infrastructure, spaces of political representations, as well as educational and civic institutions.

What features do you see in the design of the buildings that suggest the idea of decolonisation?

Concrete took on a particularly significant role in embodying the cultural aspirations and realities that architecture in South Asia found itself in after independence. It was a material that was readily available and comparatively inexpensive; it could be employed on a large scale even by an unskilled labour force. We see this in the works of architects and engineers such as Raj Rewal, Mahendra Raj, Charles Correa and Kuldip Singh. Concrete as a material was in wide use all around the globe. By ostentatiously displaying the imperfections of the mould, the surface of these buildings were a self-reflexive commentary on the economic and social conditions in which they were constructed.

What unites many of these buildings in



MADAN MAHATTA/COURTESY MOMA

MATERIAL MATTERS

(Top) Perspective drawing of the Hall of Nations, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, India, by Raj Rewal and Mahendra Raj; Escorts Factory, Faridabad by Joseph Allen Stein; Martino Stierli

the exhibition is a direct expression of the constructive and tectonic potential of concrete, whether it is in daring cantilevers or in geometric spaceframes. The widespread use of concrete allowed architects to both speak in an international architectural idiom and to firmly ground their work in the specific local conditions. In so doing, they changed the very idea of modernism as something from elsewhere and asserted it for their idea of a self-determined architecture specific to them.

That said, concrete was certainly not the only material that was in wide use in modern architecture in South Asia. Traditional brick, too, continued to have wide currency and was employed in new and imaginative ways. I am thinking, for instance, of the work of India's Laurie Baker, of Muzharul Islam in Bangladesh and Yasmeen Lari in Pakistan.

Did the curatorial team visit some of the buildings? What were your experiences?

Members of the curatorial team were able to visit almost every building represented in the exhibition. I remember the absolute thrill of entering the, now sadly demolished, Hall of Nations by Raj Rewal and Mahendra Raj in New Delhi's Pragati Maidan, the sublime interior of Balkrishna Doshi's Premabhai Hall in Ahmedabad, and the peaceful interior courtyard of one of Anwar Said's mosques in

Islamabad, to name just a few.

There were a great number of outstanding archival finds during the multi-year research project that preceded this exhibition. One thing that deserves mentioning is the work of the late Achyut Kanvinde, a Delhi-based architect, who produced an incredible oeuvre. The quality of Kanvinde's drawings and also the significance of many of the projects, among them industrial complexes and university campuses, will be a real eye-opener for many visitors.

With the shift towards a capitalist world view in South Asian countries, does it seem like the architect has truly left the masses but for a moneyed few?

Architecture has the capacity and the duty to give communicable and memorable form to society's collective aspirations. In an ideal world, architecture is more than individualist expression. Modern architecture was a key agent in the advancement of social and societal progress in the decades immediately following independence, and it came to embody these ideals and aspirations in a powerful way. The neoliberal turn has, in many instances, marginalised architecture's civic dimensions and has shifted it to the realm of individual enjoyment and consumption.

It's a powerful statement to have New Delhi's Hall of Nations on the cover of the publication that celebrates the exhibition.

One of the key objectives of our exhibition is to raise awareness for the precarious state in which modern architecture finds itself in this part of the world as well as in many others. We hope to raise awareness for the need to preserve this legacy and the bold societal vision it embodies. The destruction of the Hall of Nations in 2017 is a particularly glaring example where a building of the highest architectural merits and historical and political significance was lost to short-sighted economic interests. It probably didn't help either that the Hall of Nations stood for an idea of India that is no longer in fashion, a situation unfortunately encountered in other regions as well.

The Connecting Line

How the Constitution is the bridge between the President and Parliament

Chakshu Roy

THE PRESIDENT and Parliament are joined together by a line in our Constitution. Article 79 states, "There shall be a Parliament for the Union which shall consist of the President and two Houses to be known, respectively, as the Council of States and the House of the People." Beyond the words of our founding document,

there is a personal connection between the two institutions. Most of our presidents have played a role in our national legislature.

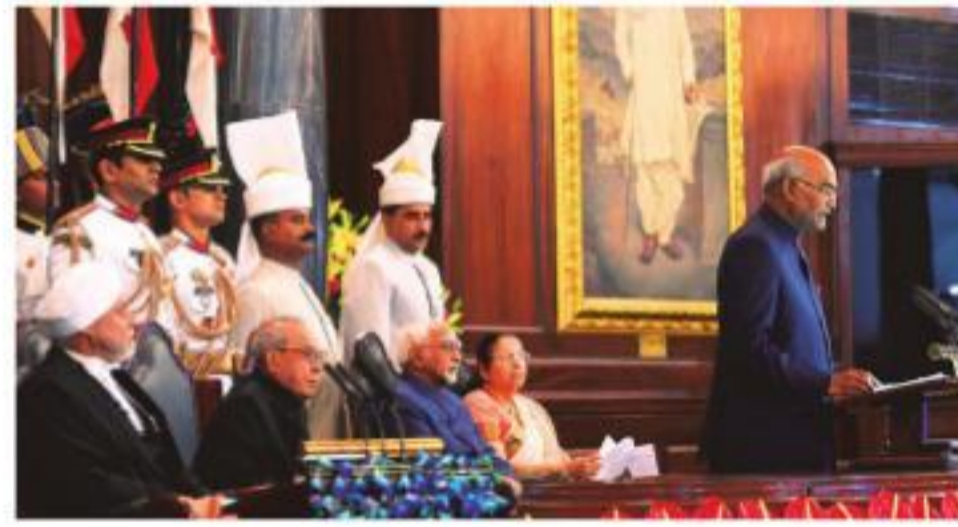
President Rajendra Prasad chaired the Constituent Assembly that created our Constitution. Six of his successors (S Radhakrishnan, Zakir Husain, VV Giri, R Venkataraman, Shankar Dayal Sharma and KR Narayanan) had steered the proceedings of Rajya Sabha as its chairman. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy had been twice elected the speaker of Lok Sabha. And the Rajya Sabha was where Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Zail Singh, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, Pranab Mukherjee and current President Ram Nath Kovind started their association with the national legislature.

In 1912, during the planning for the new Capital, the idea was to house the legislature in one part of the Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan). In pre-Independence India, legislatures existed under the shadow of the country's colonial government. They

were toothless and had limited Indian representation. The governor-general was the head of the government and had the power to overrule the legislative council. And since the legislatures were hardly independent, the Government House in Kolkata (the present Raj Bhavan), where the viceroy lived and worked, was also the venue for the meetings of the imperial legislative council.

In 1913, Edwin Lutyens, the architect of Government House in Delhi, had asked Lord Hardinge (under whose term Delhi became the capital) to consider the idea of a separate building for the legislative council. Hardinge replied, "No... I, as Governor-General, with my council (of six) govern India, so it must be in my house!" As a result, when Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens signed on to be the architects for Delhi, their brief only included the design of the Government House and two principal blocks of government of India Secretariats and attached buildings (North and South Block). As part of the Government House, they were to design a Legislative Council Chamber and, accompanying it, a library and writing room, a public gallery and committee rooms.

The plan to house the legislature inside the Government House would never materialise. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1918 would result in the creation of a larger bicameral legislature in the country. And to



PHOTOS: RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN ARCHIVE

FIGURE OF SPEECH

The swearing-in ceremony of President Ram Nath Kovind in the Central Hall of Parliament on July 25, 2017; (above) S Radhakrishnan taking the oath as President, in the Central Hall of Parliament on May 13, 1962

house it, the circular Council House (present Parliament Building) would be constructed. After Independence, our Constitution would redefine the relationship between the President and Parliament. It would join them together to make the legislature and also provide for them to come together.

Every year, the parliamentary calendar begins with the President's Address. It is a solemn occasion when the entire Parliament assemble under a constitutional mandate. The event is associated with ceremony and protocol. The Lok Sabha Secretariat prepares extensively for this event. In the past, it used to get 150 yards of red baize cloth from the President's House for the ceremonial procession. An officer of Lok Sabha would remind the aide-de-camp (ADC) to the president to bring the water and tumbler from Rashtrapati Bhavan for the president's use.

The president arrives at Parliament House escorted by the Presidential Guards. The presiding officers of the two Houses, the prime minister, the minister for parliamentary affairs, and the secretaries-general of the two Houses, receive the president. They escort the president to the Central Hall, where he delivers his address.

The president is usually not disturbed while delivering the speech. The first time that tradition was broken was in 1963, when President Radhakrishnan was interrupted by a few MPs in the Rajya Sabha. He took it in his stride and continued with his speech. But Lok Sabha took note of the incident. The House conveyed its regrets to the president and reprimanded the offending MPs. Over the years, political parties have resolved to treat the President's Address as sacrosanct.

The President's Address is the viewpoint of the government. It leads to debate in Parliament about the government's accomplishment and its goals.

In our parliamentary system, the president also shoulders the responsibility for inviting the leader of a political party or alliance to be the prime minister. And a bill passed by Parliament becomes law when the president signs it. President Kalam once sent a bill back to Parliament for reconsideration that was aimed at shielding MPs and MLAs holding an office of profit from disqualification. President Zail Singh postponed his assent to the Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986, that would have violated the privacy of personal correspondence, and prevented it from becoming law.

And finally, Parliament House is also the starting point for the journey of most of our presidents into office. It is in its Central Hall that the Chief Justice of India administers to them the oath to "protect and defend the Constitution and the law", before they become the first citizen of the country.

Chakshu Roy heads the legislative and civic engagement initiatives at PRS Legislative Research

How different are the sex lives of women and men in India?

How often do Indians have sex? Do spouses think of sex as a duty? And do money and education impact how much sex you have? An analysis of NFHS-5 data throws up some interesting answers

Chandrima Banerjee

It was in anthropology class that a teacher told us about how young boys from indigenous communities are taught all about sex by girls who live together with them in youth dormitories. (She, of course, talked about other customs as well but this one stuck in my head). My naive sensibilities found it astonishing, and liberating, that there could be such honesty and openness around sexuality in Indian communities. And that women seemed to be leading it. Because I had, until then, only associated it with privilege.

I only learnt later how much more complicated both assumptions were. But the takeaway that remained unchanged was this — we know awfully little about how the sex lives of Indians, and even less about how it's different for women and men.

LET'S TALK ABOUT TEENS

By the time a girl is 15, she is more likely to have had sex than a boy. When the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5 asked women between the ages of 25 and 49 about the age at which they had sex for the first time, 10.3% said they did so by the time they were 15. When men were asked the same, only 0.8% said so. (NFHS does not categorise data for non-binary gender identities yet.)

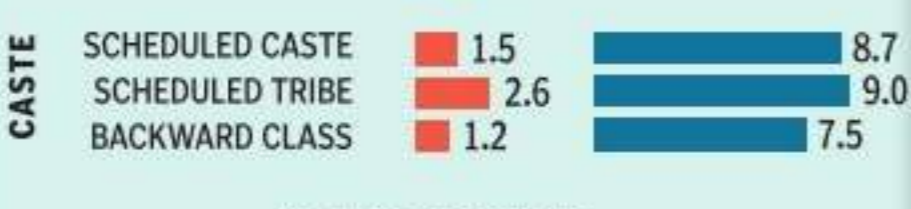
The age of consent in India is 18. But 6% of women younger than that now said they had had sex as compared to 4.3% of boys. Why are women sexually active so much earlier? The reason seems to have little to do with sexual autonomy and more with power dynamics. Because the age at which women first have sex changes with education (17.5 with no schooling and a much higher 22.8 for those with 12 or more years in school) and wealth (17.8 for the poorest and 21.2 for the richest). For men, that remains within the 22 to 25 range across backgrounds. By the time women reach 22, 3% say they have been raped. (Of the 6% overall.)

WOMEN DON'T ADMIT TO CHEATING

The age at first marriage and age at first sexual intercourse overlap entirely for both women and men. So, are Indians not having sex before marriage? (The term "premarital

Overall, 7.4% men & 1.5% women had sex before marriage

Share of people (%) who were not married and said they have had sex

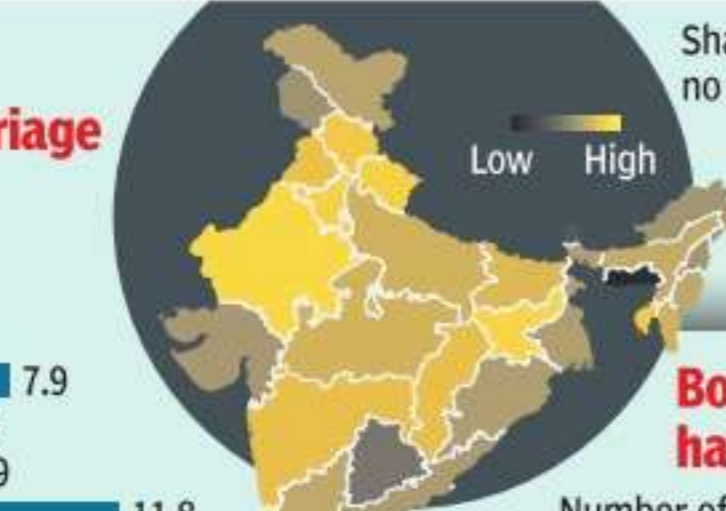


The educated & wealthy are more likely to have multiple partners

sex" is used in the survey but it ends up assigning normative value to sex only within marriage.) They are, but with a striking pattern.

The share of men who said they had sex before marriage is inversely proportional to the share of women who said so within each group or community. So, while about 12% Sikh men said they had sex before marriage — the highest among religious communities — only 0.5% Sikh women said so — the lowest. The same happens when wealth is considered — the richest men and the poorest women are the most likely to have sex before marriage.

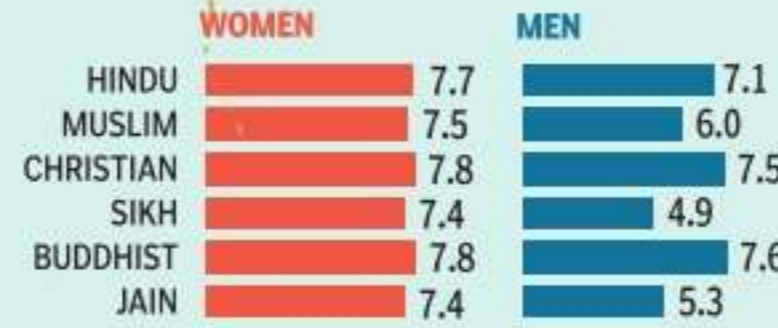
For married people, though, sex with someone who is not their part-



ner follows the same pattern for both women and men — privilege allows it more. Overall, though, women admit to it far, far less. But attitudes have been gradually changing. A 1971 book on sex and marriage in India, 'Vivaah, Sex aur Prem (Marriage, Sex and Love)', said that most women interviewed for it said that sex before marriage, outside marriage and purely for pleasure is a right that women and men both have.

Both women and men have sex every 7 days

Number of days since they had last had sex



% of people who had sex in the past year with a person they're not married to or lived with



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and predictive modelling have been harnessed to predict customer behaviour and needs.

Q-commerce is changing customer habits with its "stickiness", says Murali Balan, co-founder of Tenovia, an e-commerce analytics company. "Once customers get used to deliveries in half an hour, next day delivery just seems slow. Like how discounts and choice led to the wider adoption of e-commerce in India, Q-commerce is a disruption which is here to stay because it's providing customer delight."

Future Brands CEO Santosh Desai agrees that Q-commerce has recalibrated customer expectation. "Technology fundamentally moves towards reducing the gap between

Diapers to dal, how Indian shoppers fell for 10-minute grocery deliveries

Quick commerce was mocked as a sign of the 'lazy economy' but it has piqued the appetite of both consumers and investors. Now, the question is whether startups can make the model profitable

Himanshi Dhawan@timesgroup.com

● Bengaluru-based Ashwin S, who lives alone, no longer visits the supermarket for vegetables. "When my cook comes in the morning, I tell her what I want to eat, and she tells me what ingredients she needs. I order them online and then I am back at work. The vegetables are delivered fresh. I don't feel the need to store anything," he says.

● Last week Delhi-based Sakshi Tyagi had unexpected guests and while serving cold coffee she found one of them was lactose intolerant. Tyagi ordered oat milk on an instant delivery app and quickly whipped up a lactose free cold coffee.



When grocery delivery startups rolled out quick commerce — ranging from 10 to 30 minutes — they were met with a wave of scepticism and memes. While the memes were funny enough to elicit laughs, the ones having the last laugh might be customers who have found that it can come in quite handy when one needs a last-minute tonic water or that one-missing ingredient for a dish.

Noida-based psychologist Harshita Kaushal says it is the perfect solution to her forgetfulness. "Just the other day I ordered flour at midnight because I realised only then I had run out. This would not have been possible earlier, but now I can't imagine life without it," she adds.

Despite some hiccups such as a

growing shortage of delivery workers and the heat wave which is impacting timeliness in some locations, Q-commerce is only growing. A report by consulting firm Red Seer estimated that quick commerce would be a \$5 billion market by 2025 from \$0.3 billion currently.

Investors seem to be betting on it. Zepto, one of the first to introduce 10-minute deliveries, was started last year by two 19-year-old Stanford dropouts. The nine-month-old company raised \$200 million last week at a valuation of \$900 million, and CEO Aadit Palicha is planning to use the fund raise to expand

to 24 cities from the current 11. It's not the only one investing heavily. By 2021-end, Blinkit (earlier Grofers) reached 300 dark stores country-wide, opening a new dark store every four hours. According to a blog by CEO Albinder Dhindsa, the app processed over a million orders a week across 12 Indian cities last year. Karthik Gurumurthy, SVP, Swiggy Instamart, says that since its launch in August 2020 it has expanded to 28 cities selling over 5,000 products. In December 2021, Swiggy announced an investment of \$700 million in Instamart, with a focus on offering convenience and a greater selection

Most ordered items...

- Milk | Potatoes | Bread | Ice-cream
- Chips | Diapers | Eggs | Sanitary pads

Sources: Swiggy & Zepto

of products. Other players in the segment include Tata's BigBasket. It was the lockdown that changed shopping habits, with many waking up to the convenience of app-based deliveries. And then the promise of instant gratification came along and turbo-charged the market. While many dismissed it as the rise of the lazy economy, a look at the items that are most ordered (yes, of course, there is ice cream and chips for those couch potatoes who need late-night munchies) shows that customers include parents who have run out of diapers, women who need sanitary napkins and working professionals who probably don't have time to run down to the store for staples. It's not just time, one has to negotiate the traffic, the potholes, the parking and then lug bags back.

But what makes quick commerce possible? Despite everyone predicting a rise in road accidents as the 10-minute delivery workers dash around, that's not exactly how the model works. Quick commerce companies have algorithms that tell them what the most ordered items are, and they stock up accordingly. They focus on a smaller basket of 2,000-3,000 products stored in warehouses or dark stores near residential complexes that service an area of less than 2-3 kms.

Zepto CEO Aadit Palicha says that within 60-90 seconds of a customer placing an order, the product is packaged, giving a waiting delivery person 8-12 minutes of time to deliver it. The delivery area is within 1.5-1.8 km area. AI and tech like automated verification of products ordered, supply chain management

and predictive modelling have been harnessed to predict customer behaviour and needs.

Q-commerce is changing customer habits with its "stickiness", says Murali Balan, co-founder of Tenovia, an e-commerce analytics company. "Once customers get used to deliveries in half an hour, next day delivery just seems slow. Like how discounts and choice led to the wider adoption of e-commerce in India, Q-commerce is a disruption which is here to stay because it's providing customer delight."

Future Brands CEO Santosh Desai agrees that Q-commerce has recalibrated customer expectation. "Technology fundamentally moves towards reducing the gap between

fort of able-bodied people. That's the truth, no matter how bitter it might seem. You will see them according to the position you occupy in the social ladder. If you are a government official, you will treat the disabled person as a beneficiary. If you know disabled people only from social media, you will treat them as inspirational role models. If you happen to be a parent of a disabled child or know someone close who has a disabled child, you will feel bad for the parents. After everything they have done, they certainly don't deserve more barriers. And yes, we are using the word disabled and not differently abled or specially abled. What's special about getting your dignity taken away?

There was some sunshine in the Ranchi incident, with fellow passengers becoming advocates and this advocacy spreading to social media. There is empathy left in the world, perhaps. But was there really any empathy for the disabled person or just the parents? That is an important question. The trauma, the shouting, the loss of dignity that this young disabled person must have gone through is unimaginable. Expressing yourself to your parents, only to be judged by the whole world because of it. That's a position no one wants to be in. But many of us lack the imagination to even understand that.

If our imagination wasn't limited, we, as a society would have treated persons with disabilities as equal members. Treated everyone with respect and respected their rights. Made our cities more accessible. Made sure that everyone received education, could afford healthcare and buy mobility aids. We don't. The disabled person only props up in our societal imagination as an inspiration

Have wheels but can't fly: The cost of living in a disabling world

Abhishek Anicca

Not normal. Not allowed to board a plane. Not allowed to sit in a restaurant. Not allowed access to public places. Not allowed to apply for certain teaching positions. Not allowed to be treated like an adult. Not allowed to express sexual desires. Allowed to dream?

There is no fixed criteria for what is 'normal'. Often, what shapes the idea of normal is what is considered a deviation from the norm, which, in turn, is a reflection of how a society has evolved, what it values. Last week, a child was not allowed to board a plane at the Ranchi Airport because according to an airline official he wasn't behaving normally. Could it be a mere coincidence that he was a wheelchair user? Are all the children and teenagers throwing tantrums at the airport barred from boarding a plane? I guess we all know the answer.

We still ask the questions, though. What if their tantrums cause discomfort to the people in the plane? What if their wheelchair causes discomfort to the people sitting in a restaurant? What if their bodies or expressions cause discomfort to the other children in a classroom? Exclusion is a price disabled people pay for the imagined discom-

or a tragedy. They are treated as equals only in speech and seldom in spirit. It only gets worse depending on caste, gender and class locations.

It's not about one incident. Many disabled people have to show a 'fit to fly' certificate to board a plane, fight for their wheelchairs broken in transit, and even crawl through the narrow aisles of a plane. It has happened before and even after court cases and media struggles this continues to happen. Away from the eyes of the onlookers,



the disabled person is out on their own. They can't spend half their life getting the law implemented. Writing to disability commissioners. Waiting for a reply. Campaigning. Petitioning. Doing social media activism for every incident that happens. And these incidents of discrimination happen far too often. How do you expect a person to keep going to the courts for getting a job or getting admission despite having the qualifications? Or run from pillar to post to get recognised as a person with a disability when they live their life? It's exhausting.

We have made some progress in the last few decades. But new laws or new words



It's not about one incident at an airport. Many disabled people have to show a 'fit to fly' certificate to board a plane, fight for their wheelchairs broken in transit, and even crawl through the narrow aisles of a plane. Loss of dignity is part of the routine for a disabled person

won't be really effective unless the perception of what is normal changes. The diversity of different bodies, different ways of thinking, different ways of existing must become the core idea on which a truly democratic society is built. In a country where inclusive democracy is still a work in progress, a more inclusive culture remains a distant dream. But one is hopeful.

Hope is the pivot on which many disabled lives are built. The hope that one day disabled people will get sufficient disability pension to live a comfortable life. The hope that healthcare systems will be affordable and accessible. The hope of a job or a seat in an educational institution. That they can get on trains, buses and planes without getting harassed. Most of them are stuck not because of lack of ambition but lack of societal imagination. They have always been ready to fly. But having wings is perhaps not considered 'normal' in our society, is it?

Abhishek Anicca is a writer, poet and performer. He identifies as a person with disability and chronic illness

When teens invent new words

The New York Times asked students to get creative and make up their own vocab. Here are the top picks

heartdown (noun)

A period when, after being hurt or betrayed, your heart is recovering and you are reluctant to let others get close to you. More and more people go into heartdown after parting with a loved one

—Milana, Russia

mondize (verb)

To take away fun after a brief spell of freedom, or give a task after a break, the way Monday ends the freedom of the weekend.

The teacher mondized his students by giving homework through online platforms just after the first week of summer break

—Muhtasim Sadat, Bangladesh

mnemonty (noun)

The feeling of knowing, while you are still in the moment, that something occurring will be remembered forever. As I was standing on the dock, looking out at the lake for the last time, a feeling of mnemonty washed over me like a soothing breeze

—Jennifer Desantis, New York

oblivionaire (noun)

A billionaire who chooses to be blind to the disparity and inequality that his or her wealth is creating. Gen Z's furor over the so-called oblivionaires ignoring global crises is blowing up on social media, in a campaign being noticed by many global and political figures

—Rohana Khattak, Islamabad, Pakistan

trendaissance (noun)

The rebirth, or renaissance, of a cultural trend or meme after a period of unpopularity or dormancy. The grunge aesthetic is enjoying a trendaissance on social media right now

—Lindsey, North Carolina

FOCUS INVASION OF UKRAINE

HEROES OF APOCALYPSE



The war has already been strangely 'normalised,' accepted as a process that will continue indefinitely. Fear of a sudden, dramatic escalation will haunt our daily lives

We should not underestimate the effectiveness of this propaganda. In Serbia, the latest opinion polls show that, for the first time, a majority of voters now oppose accession to the European Union. If Europe wants to win the new ideological war, it will have to alter its model of liberal-capitalist globalisation.

The world is dealing with multiple, simultaneous crises that evoke the four horsemen of the apocalypse: plague, war, hunger and death. These riders cannot simply be dismissed as figures of evil. As Trevor Hancock, the first leader of the Green Party of Canada, has noted, they are "remarkably close to what we might call the four horsemen of ecology, which regulate population size in nature." In ecological terms, the "four riders" play a positive role by preventing overpopulation. But when it comes to humans, this regulatory function hasn't worked: "The human population has more than tripled in the past 70 years, from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 7.8 billion today. So what happened... Why are we not controlled? Is there a fifth horseman that will cause our populations to crash at some point, as lemmings do?"

Until recently, Hancock observes, humanity was able to hold the four riders in check with medicine, science, and technology. But now the "massive and rapid global ecological changes we have triggered" are moving beyond our control. "So, although of course an asteroid strike or super-volcano eruption could wipe us out, the greatest threat to the human population, the 'fifth horseman' if you like, is us." Whether we will be destroyed or saved is up to us. Yet while global awareness of these threats is growing, it has not translated into meaningful action, so the four riders are galloping faster and faster. After the plague of COVID and the return of large-scale war, hunger crises are now looming.

We should, of course, resist the temptation to glorify war as an authentic experience to lift us out of our complacent consumerist hedonism. The alternative is not simply to muddle through. Rather, it is to mobilise in ways that will benefit us long after the war is over. Given the dangers we face, military passion is a cowardly escape from reality. But so, too, is comfortable, non-heroic complacency.

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School.

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Toward the end of April 2022, barely two months after Russia invaded Ukraine, the world became aware of a deep change in what the war means for the future. Gone is the dream of a quick resolution. The war has already been strangely "normalised," accepted as a process that will continue indefinitely. Fear of a sudden, dramatic escalation will haunt our daily lives. Authorities in Sweden and elsewhere are apparently advising the public to stock up on provisions to endure wartime conditions.

This shift in outlook is reflected on both sides of the conflict. In Russia, talk of a global conflict is growing louder. As the head of RT, Margarita Simonyan, put it: "Either we lose in Ukraine, or a third world war begins. Personally, I think the scenario of a third world war is more realistic."

Such paranoia is supported by crazed conspiracy theories about a united liberal-totalitarian Nazi Jewish plot to destroy Russia. Upon being asked how Russia can claim to be "denazifying" Ukraine when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is himself Jewish, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov replied: "I could be wrong, but Hitler also had Jewish blood. [That Zelensky is Jewish] means absolutely nothing. Wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews."

On the other side, especially in Germany, a new version of pacifism is taking shape. If we look past all the lofty rhetoric and focus on what Germany is actually doing, the message is clear: "Given our economic interests and the danger of being pulled into a military conflict, we must not support Ukraine too much, even if that means allowing it to be swallowed by Russia." Germany fears crossing a line beyond which Russia will become truly angry. But only Vladimir Putin decides where that line lies on any given day. Playing on Western pacifists' fear is a major part of his strategy.

Obviously, everyone wants to prevent the outbreak of a new world war. But there are times when appearing too cautious will only encourage an aggressor. Bullies by nature always count on their victims not to fight back. To prevent a wider war - to establish any kind of deterrence - we, too, must draw clear lines.

So far, the West has done the opposite. When Putin was still only preparing to launch his "special operation" in Ukraine, US President Joe Biden said his administration would have to wait and see if the

Kremlin would pursue a "minor incursion" or a full occupation. The implication, of course, was that a "minor" act of aggression would be tolerable. The recent shift in outlook reveals a deep, dark truth about the Western position. While we previously expressed fears that Ukraine would be quickly crushed, our real fear was exactly the opposite: that the invasion would lead to a war with no end in sight. It would have been much more convenient if Ukraine had fallen immediately, allowing us to express outrage, mourn the loss, and then return to business as usual. What should have been good news - a smaller country unexpectedly and heroically resisting a large power's brutal aggression - has become a source of shame, a problem we don't quite know what to do with.

Europe's pacifist left warns against any re-embrace of the heroic-military spirit that consumed earlier generations. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas even suggests that Ukraine is guilty of moral blackmail vis-à-vis Europe. There is something deeply melancholic in his position. As Habermas well knows, post-war Europe was able to renounce militarism only because it was safely beneath the US nuclear umbrella. But the return of war to the continent suggests that this period may be over and that unconditional pacifism would require deeper and deeper moral compromises. Unfortunately, "heroic" acts will be needed again, and not only to resist and deter aggression, but also to cope with problems such as ecological catastrophes and hunger.

The Western media are full of reporting on the billions of dollars that have been sent to Ukraine; yet Russia is still receiving tens of billions of dollars for the gas it

delivers to Europe. What Europe refuses to consider is that it could exert an extraordinarily powerful form of non-military pressure on Russia while also doing much for the planet. Moreover, to renounce Russian gas would allow for a different kind of globalisation - a sorely needed alternative to both the Western liberal-capitalist variety and the Russian-Chinese authoritarian brand.

Russia does not only want to dismantle Europe. It is also presenting itself as an ally of the developing world against Western neocolonialism. Russian propaganda ably exploits many developing and middle-income countries' bitter memories of Western abuses. Was the bombing of Iraq not worse than the bombing of Kyiv? Was Mosul not flattened as ruthlessly as Mariupol? Of course, while the Kremlin presents Russia as an agent of decolonisation, it lavishes military support on local dictators in Syria, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere.

The activities of the Kremlin's mercenary organisation, the Wagner Group, which is deployed on behalf of authoritarian regimes around the world, offer a glimpse of what Russian-style globalisation would look like. As Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Putin crony behind the group, recently said to a Western journalist: "You are a dying Western civilization that considers Russians, Malians, Central Africans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and many other peoples and countries to be Third World scum. You are a pathetic endangered bunch of perverts, and there are many of us, billions of us. And victory will be ours!" When Ukraine proudly declares that it defends Europe, Russia responds that it will defend all of Europe's past and present victims.



Slavoj Žižek

EUROPE'S PACIFIST LEFT WARNS AGAINST ANY RE-EMBRACE OF THE HEROIC-MILITARY SPIRIT THAT CONSUMED EARLIER GENERATIONS



Never grumble. All sorts of forces enter you when you grumble and they pull you down.

THE MOTHER

Outdated Laws

The Supreme Court has put a stay on the sedition law, and the Union government has also said the prime minister wants colonial era legislation to be phased out. This is a good moment. The law said: "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India, shall be punished with imprisonment for life."

The website Article-14.com has done great work in compiling the misuse of the law by the government and is responsible for the issue being in the public domain. Experts have cautioned that firstly, sedition cases can still be filed by the government and second that there are many other laws that are problematic and can be misused. Both of these are true. However, we must rejoice and take heart in the general direction. Once it dawns on the judiciary that some laws are out of place in a 21st century democracy, then problematic laws will fall. Nations reform themselves internally when they realise such truths.

India has many laws that need to be examined in light of individual liberties guaranteed to us in the Constitution. And sedition is not the only type of colonial law that we face. The Rowlatt Act that Gandhi opposed and led to the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh did away with fundamental principles of the rule of law. It could detain people without charge or trial and it did away with jury trials, in favour of in-camera trials by judges. This is called administrative detention, meaning the jailing of someone without a crime having been committed, merely on the suspicion that they will commit a crime in future.

But we have several such laws in India today. In 2015, over 3,200 people were held in "administrative detention" in India. Gujarat has the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act of 1984. It allows for detention without charge or trial for a year. Uttar Pradesh has the National Security Act allowing detention without charge or trial for a year to "prevent a person from acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India" or "from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State, or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order, or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community."

This law has been used to jail Muslims accused of cattle smuggling and slaughter in Madhya Pradesh. Tamil Nadu has the Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug-offenders, Forest offenders, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Sand-offenders, Sexual Offenders, Slum-grabbers and Video Pirates Act, 1982. It allows the state to jail without trial or charge "any bootlegger or drug offender or forest offender or goonda or immoral traffic offender or sand offender or slum-grabber or video pirate... to prevent him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order."

Karnataka has the Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Acid Attackers, Bootleggers, Depredator of Environment, Digital Offenders, Drug Offenders, Gamblers, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Land Grabbers, Money Launderers, Sexual Predators and Video or Audio pirates Act, 1985.

It allows for detention without charge or trial of "up to 12 months of "any acid attacker or bootlegger or depredator of environment or digital offender or drug offender or gambler or goonda or immoral traffic offender or land-grabber or money launderer or sexual predator or video or audio pirate... to prevent him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order."

Assam has the Preventive Detention Act, 1980. It can jail individual for two years, without charge or trial.

Bihar has the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act, 1984. It allows for "detention without charge or trial for up to two years to prevent a person from i) smuggling goods, or (ii) abetting the smuggling of goods, or (iii) engaging in transporting or concealing or keeping smuggled goods, or (iv) dealing in, smuggled goods otherwise than by engaging in transporting or concealing or keeping smuggled goods, or (v) harbouring persons engaged in smuggling goods or in abetting the smuggling of goods."

Jammu & Kashmir has three laws, one allowing detention without charge or trial for six months, another for a year and third for two years. West Bengal has the Prevention of Violent Activities Act of 1970. Journalists in Chhattisgarh are regularly jailed under the NSA and kept in prison for a year for their reporting.

As we can see from the dates, none of these are so-called colonial laws. These are laws we have gifted ourselves. Every state uses them liberally and there is no resistance from the judiciary. These days we have classified sections of the Indian people as the enemy through the use of the phrase anti-national.

We do not have Jallianwala Bagh-type gatherings today and if we did, against such laws, we would be called anti-national. But that does not change the fact that these laws are as out of time and place today as the Rowlatt Act was a century ago. Once that realisation dawns on us as a nation, and especially in the higher judiciary, we can expect that there will be reform of the sort that we have just seen with sedition. And that is something to be hopeful about for our future.



Aakar Patel

India has many laws that need to be examined in light of individual liberties guaranteed to us in the Constitution

SPECTRUM WORKPLACE

A closer look at the 'monkey business'



Shivaji Mohinta

FAIRNESS, APPRECIATION, INCLUSIVENESS AND RECOGNITION STILL REMAIN THE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS IN BUILDING TRUST

Post pandemic, India Inc. is witnessing the "Great Resignation Drama" unfolding. The attrition rate projected in 2022 is 19 per cent which is a 57 per cent increase over last year (as per data for 100 plus firms across 18 sectors). In some of the IT firms it is over 30 per cent. The study reveals that India ranks the highest (amongst Asia Pacific markets) in terms of professionals intending to move out from their current jobs, in the next six months. All these movements are not merely for the sake of money. The key non-monetary reasons are unhappiness with indifferent treatment, mistrust, inequity, unfairness and non-inclusion.

Way back in 2003 there was an experiment done with Capuchin monkeys by two behavioural scientists -- Sarah Brosnan and Frans de

Waal. Capuchin monkeys are the most intelligent New World monkeys and their exhibited social behaviours are quite close to humans in several aspects. They can be trained to perform several tasks like handling tools, cracking nuts and opening drink bottles!

These monkeys were kept in separate enclosures in the lab and were given some tokens, resembling coins. They were taught to handover a token in lieu of a slice of cucumber. The attendant would give a piece of cucumber and the monkey would hand over a token. This went on perfectly fine till one was given a grape while the other a cucumber. The other monkey who saw that she was given a cucumber instead of a grape slowed down but still did the given task. When this was repeated a few times, the aggrieved monkey dis-

played her anger by thumping her chest and tried to pull down the iron grills of the cage. Not only she stopped completely but threw back the cucumber on the attendant! In fact, she rejected the unequal pay for the same efforts in an animated manner. Then, the researchers put curtains in between the cages and continued to give grapes to one, cucumber to another. Now both the monkeys performed their tasks with the same speed, in isolation, although the neighbour was getting a better reward (One undistinguished lesson - if you are not fair don't try to be transparent!).

These behaviours and reactions are perfectly similar to humans when faced with inequity, injustice and status demotion. Even in today's fast paced digital world some core values are deep rooted

in our genes and like our primal ancestors we consider them as non-negotiable. Fairness, appreciation, inclusiveness and recognition (FAIR) still remain the foundational pillars in building trust in workplace, which in turn works in favour of the organisation. Without these, the other motivators might only address the symptoms but not the root causes. When the fundamental principles of reciprocity are violated it not only hurts the simians but humans too. In most of the times our primal brain decides the behaviour which triggers action.

So, is there anything to learn from this monkey business? Surely, please take a closer look.

The writer is a corporate professional, business advisor and a startup mentor.

WISDOM CORNER

Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it. KAHLIL GIBRAN

You can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality. AYN RAND

No matter how far you travel, you can never get away from yourself. HARUKI MURAKAMI

WORDSWORTH

Supernaculum

In 1592, the London writer Thomas Nashe published Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell, a brash and witty survey of London types, written as though from a penniless scribbler who tries in desperation to seek patronage from Lucifer. In passing he mentions a drinking game that had newly "come out of France." When a man had finished a drink, he had to turn his cup upside down and put its lip on his thumb nail. If there was more liquid left in the cup than would form a pearl on the nail, he would have to drink again as a penance. This seems to have gone down a treat in the taverns of Southwark. Nashe called the game, drinking super nagulum, which pretty soon turned into supernaculum. It's a bilingual pun of a type that delighted the wits in that circle of pamphleteers and playwrights that included Nashe and Shakespeare. The first bit is the Latin prefix super-, above. The remainder comes from German Nagel, a nail. The word and the game mirror a German one that was usually referred to in the phrase auf den Nagel trinken, to drink on the nail, to finish off liquor to the last drop. Drinkers became rather casual about the custom and just inverted their cups or mugs to prove that they'd drunk to the last drop. Supernaculum could mean this, or the last remaining drop of a drink, or a cry to indicate that one had done it.

Habit of losing

Sir, Successive electoral humiliations have pushed the Grand Old Party of India to a corner. Shockingly, though the party leaders scurried for cover after early losses, losing seems to have become a habit for the Congress - a dangerous reality. The biggest bane of the party is undoubtedly its leaders - big and small. Introspection was thrown out, and top leaders appeared to be just going through the motions. Recent flop show in Punjab revealed how listless the party leaders had become. The top two - Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi - have miserably failed to revive the party and enthuse workers at the grassroots. In the Chintan Shivir at Udaipur, Sonia has spoken for change in working style. She has used words like "extraordinary" and "unprecedented" to get out of a rut. Though she pretended to be aggressive, her address was lacklustre. There was nothing new in it. Past "Shivirs" of the Congress have yielded precious little. Leaders and cadres are all ears when their boss speaks; everything is forgotten once they are out. Another loss, and the cycle repeats. Change in working style, asking questions, new "committees" are all hogwash until the biggest demand of a section of the party is met: new leadership. Family rule has disillusioned a lot of party workers and the party supporters as well. If democratic voices in the party have to be heard, then an "outsider" has to be made the Congress president. Rahul has displayed a chronic aversion to ambition and responsibility. Without these two traits, a leader cannot go half the way in politics. What the Congress direly needs is a 24-hour-leader at the top. Staying united is a good thing but unity without electoral victories means nothing. Time is running out for the Congress as more and more regional parties are making their presence felt in national politics.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Shining shuttlers

Sir, The Indian men's badminton team deserves accolades for scripting history and reaching their maiden Thomas Cup Final. The Indian team, which had never gone beyond the semi-finals after 1979, came back from behind to down 2016 champions, Denmark. With the tie locked 2-2, HS Prannoy produced a remarkable rally in the decisive match to take India home. The Indian outfit had earlier humbled five-time champions Malaysia in the semis. A victory in the finals would be the perfect icing on the cake.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

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USE OF RELIGION AS A KEY FACTOR IN DEVELOPMENT

Faith-based development is fine, but guard against conversion of one's faith

W CHANDRAKANTH

Can religion be the key to development in the world? Can development be planned through religion? Do development studies encompass religion to evolve ways and means of modernising a society? The debate in the West still continues on the efficacy of religion as a key contributor in the development of a region.

Gilles Carbonnier is the vice-president of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Professor of Development Economics at Geneva's Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. Carbonnier is an academic, development economist and passionate humanitarian. He has traced the early theories of development (in the West) to enlightenment and modernisation traditions. But, development studies have widely neglected religion, he feels.

In one of his works on religion and development, he says "given that the origins of development assistance trace back to missionary ventures and religiously inspired initiatives during the colonial era, this is something of a surprise. Today, faith-based organisations remain highly prominent actors in the aid industry. (...) The lack of attention to religion and faith in development research and policy thus stands in stark contrast to the paramount role played by religion in the daily lives of individuals and communities, particularly in the most active field of international development cooperation, the developing world."

For those who believe in the role of religion in development, it was wrong to separate the functions of the State and the Church. However, even if the West agreed to separate the Church from the governance, it always used religion to "develop" the backward or uncivilised world everywhere. The name given to this mode of development which always had strings attached to it was aiding faith-based organisations (?).

Thus, we have a Christian organisation, World Vision International, for instance, with the largest budget among humanitarian and development aid non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with total expenditures on international programmes, international relief and rehabilitation programmes, community education and advocacy, administration and fundraising reaching \$2.72 billion in 2011 itself. Similarly, the London-based NGO Islamic Relief has grown tremendously "influencing" a large part of the world with its aid activity. It has millions of pounds at its disposal for the "work."

The Indian government is, however, trying to keep a tab on the activities of such organisations now after coming across reports of "misuse" of funds. Several complaints have been received that the organisations have been funding the needy, no doubt, but with an ulterior motive of converting the locals here into their faith. There could be criticism against the Indian government for getting suspicious of the activities of the NGOs, but not only these NGOs are receiving overseas funds but they are not being transparent in showing the records. World over, anyway, there is no doubt as to how the money is being spent and to what end. Faith-related funding is seeking to increase the "size of the faith" everywhere through its "good work."

Giles also refers to the World Bank which engaged with religion and faith-based organisations under President James Wolfensohn in the 1990s. However, all these arguments, in the West, took a blow following 9/11. Governments started studying religious fundamentalism and their own practice of funding through religion.

A few bilateral development agencies, such as the UK Religions and Research Programme Consortium, the Dutch Religion and Development Knowledge Centre, and the Swiss reflection on the Role and Significance of Religion and



Secular governments and faith-based organisations can't be compatible with religious extremism taking over the emotions of people. Developmental studies need to incorporate these two into their gamut more and more for a better worldview and safety, too. A serious investigation is needed world over into the faith-based funding of developmental activity. If India resorts to it or at least keeps a check on it, there should be no complaint against the same. Many governments have started it already

Spirituality in Development, began to support research into the religion-development nexus.

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All this may sound interesting to the Western thinkers and philosophers. But India is not new to this thinking. A proper and unbiased study of Indian history tells us that Indians are not strangers to the religion-development theory. The Indian past tells us that Hindu temples served as nuclei of important social, economic, artistic and intellectual functions in ancient and medieval India. Burton Stein, a his-

torian amongst anthropologists, states that South Indian temples managed regional development functions, such as irrigation projects, land reclamation, post-disaster relief and recovery too.

The place of temples in Indian society is indeed pre-eminent. It played an important role in uniting people through the various ritual activities. All the social activities of villages in medieval south India centered around temples. Temples were the repositories of our tradition, centres of education, charitable institutions, hospitals, centres of preservation of the fine arts and historical records, governing body of local self-government, place of entertainment, meeting place and place of Justice.

Schools and hospitals were often located in the temple precincts, and it also served often as the town hall, where people assembled to consider local affairs or to hear the expression of sacred literature. Only there was no attempt to convert anyone into the local's faith in India in the past. The society had always been tolerant and al-

lowed all faiths to nestle in India and flourish throughout. The aberrations are from elsewhere.

Development was possible in India in the past because a temple was not just a matter of faith or 'Astha.' It was a centre for local administration in whose matters faith had a limited or nil role. A temple was an expression of faith but not the whole faith itself. This is the essence of Hindu life. Rather it was!

One should not forget that religious adherence is on the rise, as is clearly seen in recent research on religious demographics. It plays both negative and positive roles in relation to inclusive growth some might argue. On the one hand, religion-related hostilities, prejudices and biases can lock people out and inhibit inclusive growth.

Beyond poverty alleviation, research also shows that when freedom of religion or belief (including interfaith and intercultural understanding) accompanies the rise of faith, the peaceful conditions necessary for inclusive growth are often strengthened. This has been acknowledged by the World Economic Forum, too.

The faith factor in inclusive growth (or development) is a complex topic which is only just beginning to be analysed. An economy that excludes skills! There should be no doubt about this cardinal principle.

A society that neglects development or the one which focuses only on faith loses out. People at the margins know how to fish, but they don't have access to the pond. They aren't able to engage and participate in the economic systems, markets, relationships, networks of support and collaboration and cooperation, tools, and models many of us take for granted. Hence, focus must be more on an inclusive system. India could become an economy of \$5 trillion or even \$50 trillion if it includes its population at the margins too. Is it prepared to do so? Or is it only interested in my faith vs your faith challenge?



The challenges that business travel faces

Business travel's big buzzword now is 'bleisure.' It's exactly what it sounds like – a blend of business and leisure. A typical bleisure trip might be a three-day work trip with a few days of play tacked on to the front or back end. Or a one-week vacation might be extended to two weeks, with the traveler bringing along the technology needed to work from the road on the second week

VINCENT FERNANDES

International travel will continue to improve, bringing better connectivity with many of the United States' key trading partners. By the end of 2022, US corporate travel may near its new normal, the level it will sustain for the next several years. Assuming significantly reduced quarantine on arrival for Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas, and several months of a stable health situation, US corporate travel could reach 80% of 2019 levels.

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Global business travel is clawing its way back to normal after being decimated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid shift to videoconferencing and virtual events, according to data from the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). Hit hard by the pandemic, global business travel activity plummeted 53.8 per cent in 2020, generating just \$661 billion in revenue – down from \$1.43 trillion in 2019. That figure rose to \$754 billion last year, is expected to top \$1 trillion in 2022, and return to pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

Over the remainder of 2022, corporate travel should grow significantly from its now-small base. Team meetings that have been postponed multiple times will finally take place. More conferences will shift back from online to in-person, and those that already have will likely see attendance improve. Even international trips should grow significantly, although some regions will recover faster than others.

As health concerns

subside, companies will want to continue to bank some of the financial savings and environmentally friendly practices realized from two years of very limited travel. Corporate travel's return has begun, but the conferencing technology that replaced nearly all of it beginning in early 2020 will likely continue to replace some of it for the foreseeable future.

In 2023, Deloitte projects continued but decelerating improvement in corporate travel spends. Apart from the many unknowns surrounding international travel, by 2023 companies should begin to settle into their post-pandemic travel norms. Leaders know in-person interaction can be a key component of innovation and growth and will be glad to see more employees get face time with clients and one another. But the pandemic has demonstrated the effectiveness of technology to replace a significant amount of travel, saving companies money and mitigating the harm business trips do to the environment.

The top driver for a return to international travel aligns with the biggest driver of domestic trips – 43 per cent of respondents rank sales visits among their top two reasons for sending travellers overseas in 2022. Leadership meetings (32 per cent) and client project work (31 per cent) follow in importance. Conferences, which should see resurgence domestically in 2022, face another tough year attracting international delegates. Only 15 per cent ranked industry events in their top two reasons for international travel.

As travel climbs back up from its pandemic lows, it will soon begin to push against companies' sustainability priorities and cost imperatives. Leaders will look to lock in gains in these areas as much as possible, even as they loosen the reins in the name of growth and innovation. Rising travel prices is one of the few travel-detering factors that saw an increase in significance from 2021 to 2022. To keep costs under control, nearly three in four companies say they will limit the number of trips taken.

Gufic Biosciences has developed Isavuconazonium Sulfate API and finished formulation Isavuconazole and manufactures Isavuconazole for the treatment of patients who are 18 years of age and older for the treatment of Invasive Aspergillosis and Invasive Mucormycosis. It is now augmenting its global focus across major markets

CHITRA SAIKUMAR

Gufic is engaged in the research and development and manufacturing of innovative herbal products along with a wide range of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs). Rated as one of the fastest-growing

A boon therapy for fungal infections

100 companies in India, it is also one of the largest manufacturers of Lyophilized injections therapy areas such as antibiotic, antifungal, cardiac, infertility, antiviral and proton-pump inhibitor (PPI).

Gufic has added another feather to its cap as it has received permission from Central Licensing Approving Authority, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for manufacture, sale and distribution of Isavuconazonium Sulfate API and finished formulation Isavuconazole for Injection 200 mg/vial. Isavuconazole for Injection 200 mg/vial is indicated for the treatment of patients who are 18 years of age and older for the treatment of Invasive Aspergillosis and Invasive Mucormycosis.

Its COO Nagesh Y said, "The incidence of invasive fungal infections has been increasing over the past few decades and represents a significant problem in immune compromised



individuals and a large proportion of critically ill patients. Also, during the second wave of Covid-19, there has been a significant increase in number of cases of Mucormycosis in covid-19 patients across India during treatment in hospitals and after discharge. This is where Isavuconazole has come as a boon for these patients."

Isavuconazole has activity against

Aspergillus, Mucorales and other rare mould infections, enabling physicians to treat the patients without a confirmed diagnosis.

The second wave of Covid-19 in early 2021 has caused devastating chaos in India. Mucormycosis or Black Fungus an invasive fungal infection in Covid-19 patients posed a big challenge towards the medical fraternity and a high death rate was

reported in this scenario. There was an urgent need of an effective anti-fungal drug to fight this life-threatening condition. Isavuconazole, a first-line of therapy came as a saviour for these patients," said Dr Adarsh Shetty, GM - Medical Affairs.

The overall invasive fungal infections incidence rate varies from 3% to 20%. The ongoing covid-19 pandemic has also brought the focus back on super infections caused by secondary invasive fungal infections. Invasive aspergillosis and mucormycosis are also associated with lengthy hospital stays, and impose substantial healthcare costs, driven by prolonged treatment and management of treatment-related adverse events. "This increases mortality rates and contributes to the economic burden of invasive aspergillosis and mucormycosis. There are only a limited number of approved therapies for the treatment of invasive aspergillosis and mucormycosis," concluded Adarsh.

Markets racing to meet millennials' food habits

SYDELLE FERNANDES

Millennials are changing their eating habits, and the market is rapidly evolving to keep up with all 75 million of them. Whether it be what foods they prefer or how they shop, the marketplace is drastically changing to meet new demands.

In fact, 55 per cent of millennials say that convenience is one of the most important factors when deciding what foods to buy. To accommodate this demand, grocery delivery has been growing in popularity, which in turn reduces the amount of impulse buying that happens in stores.

Millennials lean toward healthier food options that omit large amounts of fat, cholesterol, sugar, and carbs. Instead they target organic, fresh, and frozen foods found in the outer ring of the grocery store, which is bad news for an industry that is already plagued by low margins.

snacks, only 3 per cent of them mentioned fruits, vegetables or nuts.

Well-being in definition is far more comprehensive than health or wellness, as it considers a broader universe of personal factors and speaks to the goals of a well-rounded life.

Fueled by the informed ideology and mass influence of younger generations like Gen Z, who are hyper-aware of social and environmental issues, the expansive future of consumer health and wellness is proactive, highly personal, mindful, and motivated towards well-being.

Millennials tend to dine out and order food at the convenience of their homes more frequently than any other generation. It is said that 86 per cent of diners order delivery at least once a month and 87 per cent of Millennials are most satisfied with getting food delivered to their homes. Therefore, if you're looking to increase off-premise revenue – here's your ideal target market.

The millennial audience is three times the size of Generation X and surpasses the generation of Baby Boomers. A study states that the millennial generation has



This generation is amongst the largest living adult age group today and are economic leaders with the purchasing power over \$1.4 trillion in 2020. They grew up in the era of convenience – self-driving cars, limitless entertainment, food at their doorstep in 30 minutes or less. So, it's safe to state that this generation expects convenience at every stage of the buying process. Restaurants therefore should pay due focus to evolving with these current trends

become the major focus for restaurants with 87 million people, aged between 18-34, or those who are born between the early 80s and the year 2002.

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living adult age group today and are economic leaders with the purchasing power over \$1.4 trillion in 2020. They grew up in the era of convenience – self-driving cars, limitless entertainment, food at their

doorstep in 30 minutes or less. So, it's safe to state that this generation expects convenience at every stage of the buying process. Restaurants therefore should give due focus towards evolving with these current trends in order to sustain themselves in the market and to stand out among their competitors.

Millennials are digital natives; Millennials and Gen Z have spent nearly their whole lives surrounded by the world of social media and digital devices. Their curiosity is immense and they are increasingly interested in trying out emerging trends. Over 53 per cent of millennials desire to seek out details and look for unusual things online rather than talk to store staff when they are about to make an order. Everyday there are millions of people constantly searching for food online and consuming knowledge on new trends. In fact, 86 per cent of millennials who come across food-related content online will visit that restaurant in the near future.

Millennials' values authenticity; so promote an up-to-date and honest digital menu online so customers can phone in their orders and leave you a glowing review at the

end of a highly-convenient buying journey.

Creating a unique dining experience for consumers either on-premise or digitally from the time they start navigating through your menu to finishing their plates, will heighten positive emotions and build lasting relationships. Ultimately increasing restaurant sales and building the online reputation of your restaurant.

Today, people are more inclined to trying out food items that are enriched with a backstory they can resonate with. So considering adding intriguing menu descriptions, that highlights a nostalgic backstory of your restaurant, this is likely to help increase conversion rates by 55 per cent.

India is the world's fastest growing health foods market and forecasted to become a \$30 billion sector by 2026, a new report by investment banking services firm Avendus Capital said.

The number of health-conscious consumers in India would increase from 108 million in calendar year 2020 to 176 million in 2026, the report noted, adding that as a percentage of total packaged foods and beverages stood at 11 per cent in India compared to 31 per cent in the US.

When Krishna Didn't Miss the Wood for Indra's Precious Parijata Tree

When forestlands are under threat from the bulldozer mindset, we should remember that even the gods thought it important to fight and move heaven and earth for a tree

WAYS OF SEEING



PARUL PANDYA DHAR

The scorching heat of an Indian summer finds its antidote in the shade of green trees laden with scarlet gulmohur, golden amaltas, and the fragrant whiteness of madhukamini, mogra and champa. For those not holidaying in hill-stations or chilling in 24x7 air-conditioned comfort, this rings true with greater urgency. For the privileged too, an Indian summer spells succulent mangoes, from alphonso to sundaris and langdas. But

even as temperatures rise, our 'bulldozer mindset' is ready to graze trees to the ground with little discretion and increasing apathy. The denuding of tribal forestland for coal-mining in Hasdeo, Chhattisgarh, and the legal consent to clear 11,000 trees for the Dehradun-Delhi expressway are more recent symptoms of a larger malady.

In art and myth, the motif of the tree pervades world cultures. Its visual expressions range from the 'tree of life' to tree spirits and the association of trees with abundance, nurture, healing, and women. Even Hindu gods thought it important to steal, fight for, and move heaven and earth for a tree. The tale of the theft of the parijata tree (parijata-harana) by Krishna from Indra's paradise, and its trans-



PARIJATA-HARANA, BHAGAVATA-PURANA, C. 16TH C. LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

plantation in his queen Satyabhama's earthly garden in Dwarka, offers a fasci-

inating perspective.

This story first appears in the early centuries of the 1st millennium CE as part of the Hariwamsa supplement to the Mahabharata, and in the Bhagavata- and Vishnu-puranas. In its earliest version, the contestation between Krishna and Indra is only implicit. But in later additions to the Hariwamsa, Vishnu-purana and some later texts, Krishna defeats Indra in an open battle to appease Satyabhama's jealous quest for the parijata tree.

Painted versions of this story also reveal in this sub-plot of a divine contest. A 16th century Mughal miniature of the Razmnama, inscribed with a Persian translation of this Hindu myth patronised by Akbar, offers the most graphic portrayal of this divine battle for a tree. It is now housed in the Victoria and Al-

Vishnu-Krishna is uprooting the parijata tree from Indra's garden, an act witnessed by Indra and Sachi

bert Museum in London.

But the painter of a 16th century Bhagavata-purana miniature chose to focus on the earlier, non-confrontational textual version of parijata-harana (photo). Painted in the central and western Indian traditions, perhaps from the region of Mewar in Rajasthan, a background of solid red and black divides the composition vertically in three parts, with the garden of paradise in the central register. To the left is a two-armed Krishna with companion in his earthly abode in Dwarka, and to the right are Indra with his consort Sachi in their heavenly mansion, their hands joined in supplication.

The blue-skinned Krishna reappears twice in the central space, this time as the four-armed Vishnu-Krishna of the celestial realm. Below, we notice him uprooting the parijata tree from Indra's

garden, an act witnessed in resigned acceptance by Indra and Sachi. Above, Krishna-Vishnu sits on his lotus seat carrying his beloved Satyabhama on his lap, then being flown over the skies by Vishnu's vehicle Garuda the eagle. Intriguingly, we see two trees! Perhaps, in an innovative departure, the artist has conflated two sub-plots: the abduction of the tree to Earth, and its return to heaven after Satyabhama had performed the parijata tree-ritual, telling us of the many values attached to this tree.

Looking at recent media images of Hasdeo tribal women clinging to trees to save their forests, I was reminded not just of the Chipko movement, but also of the deep associations of nature and nurture signified by trees over centuries. May better judgement prevail before we use the axe on them.

DATA CRUNCHER



ATANU BISWAS

Can a Name Change For Congress Usher Its Renaissance?

The jury - and Juliet - is out there, but political relabelling is an option

While trying to give the party some hot tips, Prashant Kishor probably didn't prescribe a name change for the Congress. Well, Shakespeare's Juliet may think names to be unimportant, but French politicians would disagree. For them, there's lots in a name. After his uncomfortable re-election in the presidential bid, Emmanuel Macron has rebranded his party, La République en Marche! - The Republic on the Move - or simply En Marche!, as 'Renaissance' ahead of the June French legislative election. He certainly thinks the name change will help him politically amid the changing socio-political dynamics of France.

It's not the first time that Macron has rebranded his party. In 2016, he created En Marche! - using his own initials, EM! - as a vehicle for his presidential bid in 2017. It was then renamed La République en Marche!, that too before the 2017 parliamentary elections, where Macron won a majority.

As it happens, name-changing is quite common in French politics. Gaullist party Les Républicains has changed its name six times since its foundation in 1946. Macron's main political rival, Marine Le Pen, also changed her far-right party's name to Rassemblement National (National Rally) from Front National (National Front) in 2018, although it's unclear how much of her recent success in French politics can be attributed to that.

Researchers certainly paid attention. A 2015 study, 'The Dynamics of Party Relabelling: Why Do Parties Change Names?', on 537 parties in 429 different elections held in 31 European democracies during 1945-2015, pointed out that across European democracies, roughly a third of all parties have relabelled themselves at least once since 1945. A similar proportion of elections include at least one party running under a new name.

While party relabelling is not quite common in countries such as India and the US, South Korea is another country where renaming parties does not have a bad name. The Democratic Party of Korea, for example, has been relabelled so frequently that the average age of each label is about three years.



ONLY IF IT WAS THAT EASY

So why do parties undertake such an aggressive step like relabelling? Understandably, these are usually caused by some form of shock or series of electoral setbacks. Parties carry out such a cosmetic change in pursuit of revitalising their deteriorating images, reconnecting with their voter-consumers, and eventually regaining support from the electorate - sometimes shedding a possible 'disgraceful' past, while also signalling to electorates that something about the party has changed thereby meriting a name change.

So, can a party really get more votes by relabelling itself than it could have won without changing its name, with other things being equal? That's not very clear though. Of course, there are parties like Italy's green party, Verdi, or Czech Republic's US-DEU (Freedom Union-Democratic Union), that drew near 0% vote shares in 2001 and 2002, respectively, despite changing party names.

The effect of relabelling is, according to available research, not negatively conditioned by electoral viability but positively conditioned by electoral pressure - even for large and catch-all parties. And how well parties fared in their last contest negatively affect party relabelling for vote share. However, an election outcome, we know, is a complex effect of numerous socio-political factors. So, it's difficult to assess the 'true' effect of relabelling.

And in India? A few months ago, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) was reportedly mulling the idea of a possible change in party name, with an eye on achieving a pan-India appeal ahead of 2024 polls. The Jan Sangh certainly transformed successfully into today's Bharatiya Janata Party but it's doubtful whether it was because of the change in labelling.

For some parties, a name change may be the first step to starting anew. As a 1987 Journal of Business Research paper, 'New Brand Names and Inferential Beliefs: Some Insights on Naming New Products' (bit.ly/3syPS5s), illustrated, 'Polar Bear' is more reminiscent than 'Pharaoh' as an ice-cream brand name. Whether all calls for En Marche! can eventually lead to Renaissance, the proof of that pudding will be in the French legislative election voting in June.

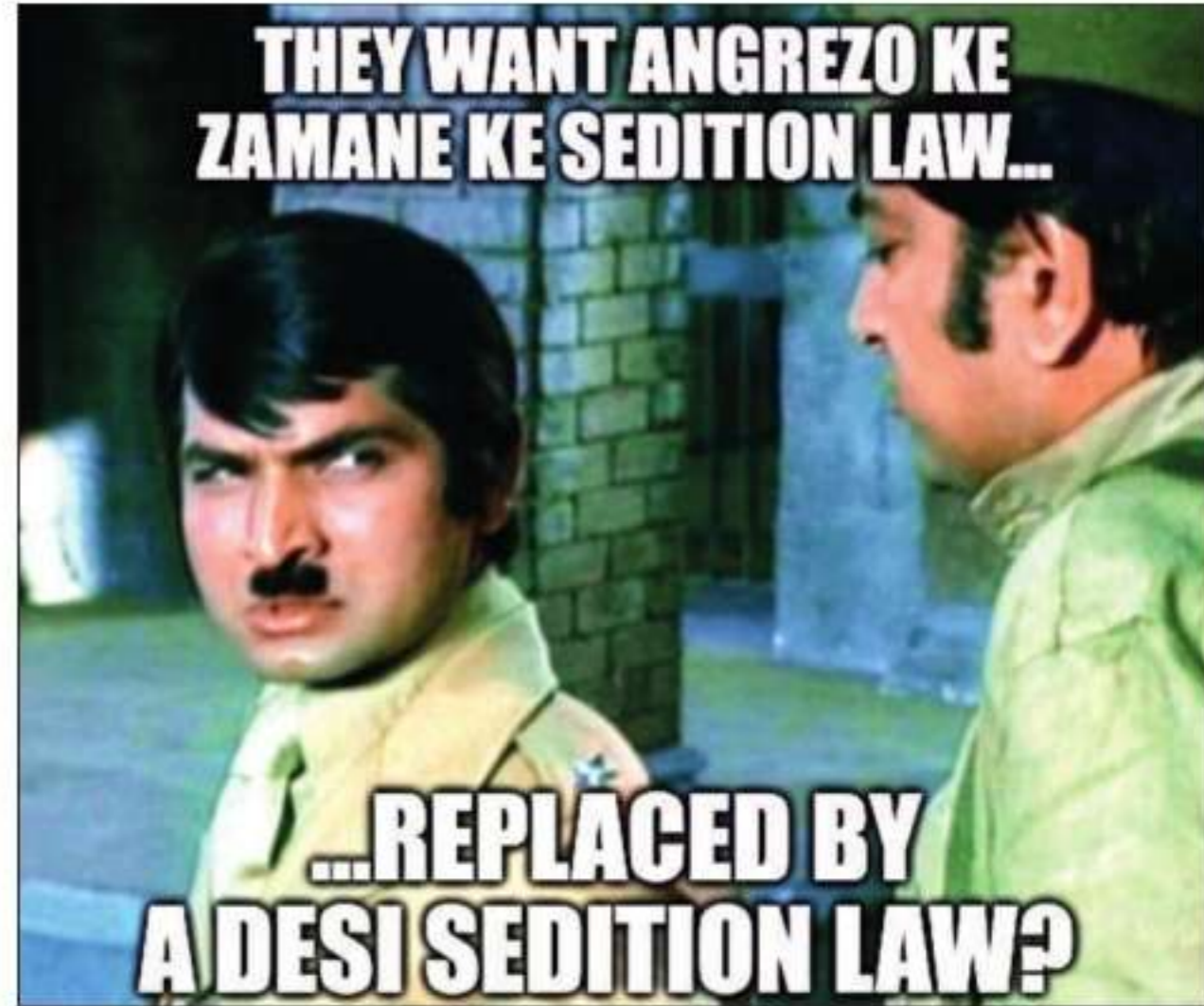
The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

NO OFFENCE



Morparia

MEME'S THE WORD



E=MC²: Coal, Power Cuts & Schrödinger's Cat

When the Indian Institute of Tautology conducts a study to find out what causes surges of inverse energy, let's not sweat it

JUGULAR VEIN



JUG SURAIYA

Summertime and the livin' is sweaty
The bijli's blinkin'
And the heat wave is high.
Your discom's got a glitch
But your power bills are shocking,
So hush, aam aadmi, why don't you cry?

- Summertime, Jhanish Jhoplin

Come the hot weather and that's the national refrain, year after year. To tackle the recurring problem that crops up annually at this season, the IIT - the Indian Institute of Tautology - was tasked with conducting a study to ascertain the factors behind this puzzling occurrence. After comprehensive in-depth, as well as in-width and in-height, field research, the IIT submitted its report that highlighted some significant findings.

One of these was that the incidence of inverse energy - the new, politically correct term for power cuts and electrical outages - seems to coincide with the hot weather and appears to increase in duration and intensity as

the temperatures rise during heat waves, which by common consensus were attributed to man-made climate change, which might or might not be caused by cross-border 'western disturbances' instigated by Pakistan's ISI, a matter which the report submitted was best left under advisement to the ministry of eternal affairs.

While the report noted the correspondence between heat waves - Islamabad-engineered or not - and inverse energy, it did not arrive at a unanimous verdict as to whether there was a causal link between the two, or whether it was a result of Jungian synchronicity that explores and explicates paranormal phenomena such as the Bermuda Triangle and the druidical significance of Stonehenge.

The issue being set aside, nem. con., for deliberations by a specially ap-

pointed sub-committee, the report went on to focus on the mysterious link between the availability - or, rather, unavailability - of coal and the occurrence of inverse energy. The report observed that trying to establish a relationship of inverse energy with coal - or the absence of coal - was like establishing the connection between the chicken and the egg: which came first, the murgi or the andaa?

It was an ontological question concerning the nature of Being, the Kantian Ding an Sich - the Thing-in-Itself - the ultimate reality. Did absence of coal create what used to be called power cuts? Or did what used to be called power cuts create an absence of coal?

Or did the two take place simultaneously, thus substantiating Bell's theorem of quantum mechanics, which posits a 'non-local' universe in which there are interactions between events

too far apart in space and too close together in time for them to be connected even by signals moving at the speed of light?

In an Annexure (marked Appendix B, Footnote 3c), the report drew a parallel between this hypothesis and the Einsteinian E=MC² equation in which E stands for electricity and MC² stands for minus coal squared.

To resolve this impasse, the report suggested that it might be best to deem both the presence, or absence, of coal and the manifestation of what used to be called power cuts, to be suspended in a limbo analogous to that occupied by Schrödinger's Cat, which could be considered neither dead nor alive till an observation regarding its state of being, or non-being, determined the outcome, thereby corroborating Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty.

At this point of the proceedings, the report noted that an unscheduled inverse energy, plunged everything into pitch blackness and stifling heat, putting an abrupt end to all further business, which was adjourned suo motu till further notice, or till the bijli came on again, whichever was later.

Come on, let's sweat again,
Like we did last summer
Yeah, let's sweat again,
As we did last year!
Do you remember when all the fans stopped turnin'
Yeah, let's sweat again, sweatin' time is here!

- Let's Sweat Again, Chubby Chadda

Did absence of coal create inverse energy, that is power cuts? Or did inverse energy create the absence of coal?



WHO TURNED THE PINK OFF?

FILE PHOTO

ROLL UP FOR THE TAJ MYSTERY TOUR

Rajneesh Singh is not out to tarnish the Taj Mahal, but to mysteriorise it and rescue the monument of love from fallen footfall and cliché

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

The Taj Mahal is the new Stonehenge, Bermuda Triangle, Loch Ness - places where the whole point and purpose is for them to remain a mystery. The day people are absolutely convinced (which doesn't have to be on account of any proof) that the 3000-2000 BC era stone monument on Salisbury Plain in Britain was not built by visiting aliens or alien knowhow, be assured that the number of tourists there will drop drastically.

The same goes with the freshwater lake in the Scottish Highlands. Once people believe that the monster is a remarkably preserved (Scotch does that to you) bloated century-old hippopotamus carcass with an early prototype of a vacuum cleaner stuck to its face, the magic of visiting never mind Loch Ness, but nearby Inverness will go out of the window.

The Bermuda Triangle, of course, is the perfect self-sustaining mysterious destination - what really happens in the Triangle, stays in the Triangle, making it an under-the-radar hotspot

in the western Atlantic Ocean to spend a dirty weekend. You can't ever prove it's not a mysterious place. Because if you do happen to come back intact, you must have gone on a closed day - like visiting Parliament when there is no session.

Now, the Taj has suffered terribly the last two years because of Covid lockdowns and restrictions. In 2020, the first year of the pandemic itself, footfall to the mausoleum - no, the word has nothing to do with 'Musliman' but is named after the 4th century Greek king of Caria, Mausolos, whose tomb in modern-day Turkey the term originally applied to - fell by 76%.

With Agra authorities announcing fresh Covid curbs last month, some 8,000 visitors recorded on April 11 this year fell to less than 3,500 the next day. The Taj continues to do bad business. This, of course, has hit the local economy badly. Even Hindu shopkeepers and guides have been left 'Bermudaed' in Agra.

In this scenario, enter Rajneesh Singh, BJP youth media-in-charge in Ayodhya. He has reportedly filed 'many RTIs' wanting to know the Truth - it's *in* there. He wants to know what is behind 'the 22 closed doors in the Taj Mahal'. Moving a PIL at the Lucknow High Court last week, which the latter rather impolitely dismissed ('Please enroll yourself in MA, then go for NET, JRF and if any university de-

nies you research on such a topic, then come to us'), Singh wants the Archaeological Survey of India to set up a fact-finding commission and submit a report to 'clear all doubts among the people regarding the presence of Hindu idols in the locked rooms'.

This comes along with BJP MP from Rajasthan Diya Kumari's perfectly reasonable claim that the land on which the Taj stands was bought by Shah Jahan from Jaipur ruler Jai Singh, her ancestor, of course. Incidentally, this is the same Kumari who had earlier claimed that her father was the 309th descendant of Lord Ram. Rajneesh Singh is not a Raghuvanshi, but it's clear he wants to help - not thwart - the future of the Taj Mahal while everyone's het up about its past.

ANDAA MYSTERIOUS CONDITIONS



Is Jat Taj spelt backwards? Did Lady Diana sit alone for her February 1992 Taj Mahal photograph as a cryptographic message confirming that Charles and she would separate in nine months? Did Yanni, the Greek muzakian turn the Taj Mahal into a giant hotel lobby in 1997 when he held his concert there so as to publicise Donald Trump's near-bankrupt casino-hotel in Atlantic City that had opened only seven years before?

Whatever be the mysteries that Rajneesh Singh wants to sprinkle on the Taj Mahal, it's under the spotlights and moonlight again. All that the good people of Agra, whom Singh is genuinely rooting for, want now is for tourists to roll up, roll up for the magical mystery tour.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Bolivia's Get Out of Jail Free Card

IDEA IS TO GIVE HOPE TO INCARCERATED AWAITING TRIAL

You mean there's actually a free pass like in the game of Monopoly?

Well, that may be a slight exaggeration, but Bolivia has introduced a programme called 'Books Behind Bars' by which inmates can reduce jail time.

Wow. How does that work?

The idea is to give some hope to the incarcerated awaiting trial, which can take a rather long time due to the South American country's slow judicial process, and to spread literacy among the inmates of overcrowded prisons.

Are we talking years shaved off?

An officer said it might more likely be days or weeks and it would depend on the prison board but the focus is to encourage inmates, since pre-trial imprisonment can last for years.

Interesting. How's the programme panning out?

It's been launched in 47 prisons that are unable to pay for inmates education, reintegration and social assistance programmes with 865 inmates improving reading and writing skills so far, according to a Reuters report.



Are the inmates happy with this option?

One of them, who has read eight books so far and passed some reading tests, said it's quite difficult for those who don't have any family outside or any income. Some of the prisoners are in fact learning to read and write through this programme. Those who are in jail also have to work to be able to eat and pay the court costs involved in getting released.

The books, then, might be a welcome distraction...

Exactly Another inmate, a woman, told Reuters, "When I read, I am in contact with the whole universe. The walls and bars disappear." Hopefully, there are no bars on the kind of literature allowed - unlike the reservations one of our courts had about PG Wodehouse, that dangerous revolutionary with dangerous ideas.

Text: Indulekha Aravind

DECCAN Chronicle

15 MAY 2022



Shailaja Khanna

Off the beaten track

What makes this festival in Kashi a treat for the soul

Hindu belief has linked the classical music tradition with gods and goddesses — the rudraveena is said to have been created by Lord Shiva himself, another veena was named after Devi Saraswati, the bansuri is associated with Lord Krishna, and the legendary Lord Hanuman apparently was an accomplished rudraveena and pakhawaj player. The Sankat Mochan Hanuman temple in Kashi, said to have been established by Goswami Tulsidas himself in the sixteenth century, maintains the tradition of pleasing Lord Hanuman through music. An annual musical celebration has been held in the temple precincts for decades, commemorating Lord Hanuman's lunar birthday, with musicians from all over the world invited to present their music free of cost to the deity in all-night music sessions. Dance performances have also been permitted; the style of music is eclectic and the offering includes classical and devotional music. Performers as varied as US jazz artiste George Brooks, percussionist Sivamani, ghazal king Ghulam Ali from Pakistan, bhajan maestro Anup Jalota, playback singer Kavita Krishnamurthy, the US-based Ustad Aashish Khan and "Nightingale of the South" Bombay Jayashri have all performed their "haazri" at the temple.

Performing at the temple is not easy — the recitals are interrupted by temple rituals at midnight and the break of dawn. The heat is immense; the temple has no soundproof green rooms and other such amenities that top-class musicians take for granted — one recalls an unnamed, somewhat anxious Ustad a few years ago picking his way between the cows tethered nearly to reach his vehicle! (The cows are now at a discreet distance!)

Keeping to the performance time slots is a challenge. The enthusiastic audience sometimes refuses to let its favourite artistes vacate the stage for the next artiste! One recalls a fulminating Padma Vibhushan Dr Sonal Mansingh performing alone without her co-artists, as they had to leave to catch the train home for forthcoming concerts. Her performance timing had been messed up as Padma Vibhushan Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma decided to play another short piece, which required the retuning of his 100 stringed santoor.

The proximity of the audience, too, can be unnerving. The artistes are literally only a few feet away, and with typical Banarasi insouciance are quite capable of audibly uttering "bhui, jama nahin" to the chagrin of the performer! On the other hand, the loud, rousing appreciative cries of "Har Har Mahadev" with upraised hands far outweighs any clapping or standing. As the late Pt Rajan Mishra once observed, "In India, we clap to chase away crows; it is not a traditional gesture of appreciation."

This year, at the five-night festival, first-time performer Deepika Varadarajan from Chennai said: "The energy of the audience was wonderful. In the South, we are used to performing in temples, and there is no doubt a different type of energy. But here, in Kashi, unlike in the temple concerts in the South, the audience is stationary, immobile and not transitory. They sit only to listen. It's a wonderful experience."

For many artistes, it's a time to just chill and relax in each other's company. Music festivals nowadays are very structured; and staying beyond one's performance time is not encouraged by organisers. No such considerations apply in "Baba's Darbar" — Pt Jasraj used to stay the duration of the entire six-day festival in the temple guesthouse with his entourage of disciples. Artistes pop into the temple to hear each other; staying up all night sometimes. At times, they even fly out of the city to play other concerts, and then return to Varanasi for a concert two days later! In this edition of the festival, young tabla exponent Ishaan Ghosh of Mumbai played as an accompanist, then returned two days later to play a solo with his father Pt Nayan Ghosh!

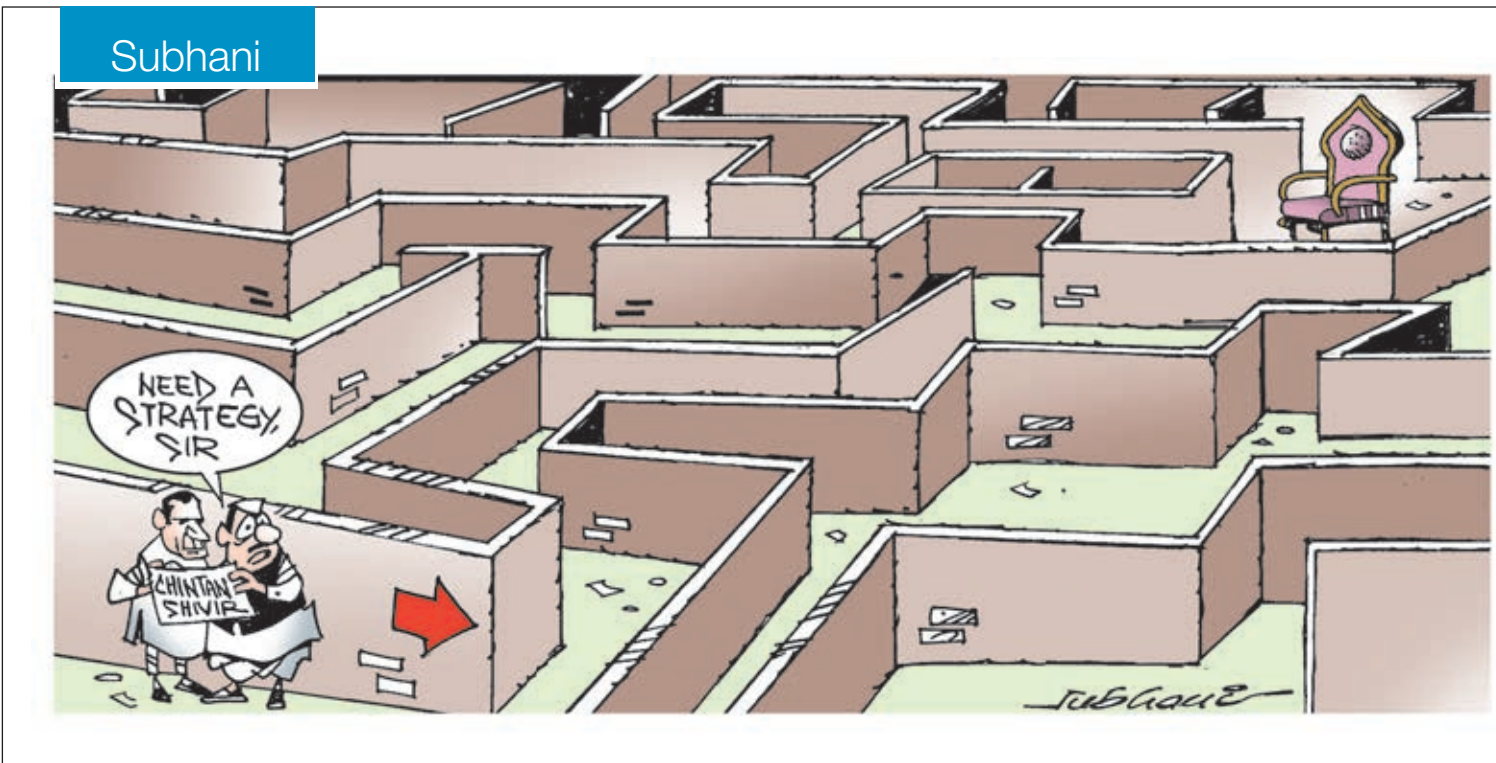
Music "addas" are held at Diamond Hotel all through the day and night; one can also hear sounds of a rigorous sitar "jhalra" being played at 3 am behind a closed hotel door, as the artiste didn't have any other time free for "riyaz". "One can't take the Sankat Mochan audience for granted; many understand music really well," shared sarodist Biswajit Roy Chowdhury who has been a regular since 1978. "Being accompanied by the finest tabla or pakhawaj exponents is another unique feature of this festival. I cherish having played with so many legends at Sankat Mochan," he added. In fact, the tabla performances are so intrinsic to the festival that UK-based tabla maestro Sanju Sahai makes his annual pilgrimage home coincide with the Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh.

Earlier, there were loudspeakers outside the temple precincts too, so the entire area nearly up to Assi Ghat used to resound with music through the night. For many locals, it was a week of a total change of routine — sleeping from around 8 am to 3 pm, then getting ready for the next night's music.

The somewhat chaotic arrangements of earlier years are treasured memories. One recalls a leading sitar player perched on a friend's scooter, precariously balancing his sitar on his lap, and racing from Diamond Hotel at 2 am to reach the temple stage on time, as the vehicle sent to pick him up had been hijacked (perhaps to procure the famous Banarasi "paan" for an outstation maestro).

The combination of music, camaraderie, devotion and a shared perspective produces a magic unmatched anywhere else making the Sankat Mochan festival an unmissable treat for the soul.

Shailaja Khanna is based in Delhi and writes on music



India is not Sri Lanka, but must draw lessons



Pavan K. Varna

Chanakya's View

India is not Sri Lanka; and, Sri Lanka is not India. Our island neighbour is going through an economic meltdown. Its foreign currency reserves have dried up; inflation is skyrocketing; food prices are going through the roof; fuel shortages have led to miles long queues; power cuts have become endemic; and the health system has ground to a halt due to lack of medicines.

India is facing major problems of unemployment and inflation. Foreign currency reserves have dipped. Growth rates are sluggish, the informal sector is hurting, consumption has not picked up, and the rupee is sliding. Yet, India is not in the throes of an economic crisis. Sri Lanka is an island economy. It is over dependent on one source for revenue — tourism — which has taken a huge hit due to the pandemic. India is a continental economy. Its productivity spectrum is far more diversified. And, decades of investment in institutions for the management of the economy, have made it far more resilient in weathering transient global crises.

This being said, there are striking parallels in the social and political developments in both countries. Like India, Sri Lanka is a multi-religious, multilingual and plural country. Like India, Sri Lanka too has a majority community, the Sinhala. The Sinhala are Buddhist. They constitute some 70 per cent of the population. Tamils, mostly Hindus, account for 18 per cent. And Muslims total around nine per cent. Like India, therefore, Sri Lanka has been grappling with how to live in a society where there is harmony and goodwill between the various communities that constitute the nation.

Sri Lanka has done a very bad job on this score. Successive governments have, for short term political dividends, encouraged Sinhala entitlement, rooted in mytho-history, discriminatory policies, politics, hyper-nationalism and communalism. As a result, the country witnessed a deadly civil war with Tamil insurgency in which over 100,000 people were killed. The economy was set back by decades. The war against the Tamils was pursued ruthlessly and ended in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE. The person who claimed credit for this "victory" is the current President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Not surprisingly, Gotabaya Rajapaksa reaped short-term political rewards for aggressively representing the Sinhala cause. He won the 2019 presidential election with a huge majority. His inauguration ceremony was triumphantly conducted at a Buddhist temple. Next year, his party, the Sri Lankan People's Party, swept the parliamentary elections. This led him to believe he was invincible. Riding on the support of the majority Sinhala community, he took decisions on the spur of the moment which were disastrous. He ordered wide-spread tax cuts when the economy was starved of revenue. In a move reminiscent of the disastrous demonetization step in India, he suddenly banned the import of fertilisers, declaring that all farmers should rely only on organic fertilisers. The farm crop was badly hit, as were export sectors like tea and rubber production.

On the socio-political side, he continued to encourage Sinhala dominance. Promises made to the Tamils during the civil war for economic relief, rehabilitation, and better political

representation, remained unimplemented. The Muslims were targeted too. Since 2012, Buddhist monks and their supporters had begun to attack Muslim neighbourhoods, mosques and businesses with impunity. He did not think it fit to stop this. His regime became increasingly autocratic. Civil society was threatened, as were human rights lawyers. Generals in the army, close to him, began to run civilian departments. He did not take kindly to dissent or criticism. The pandemic was his alibi, but he deliberately chose to ignore that tourists to Sri Lanka dwindled also because of the deadly bomb attacks on churches, and the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 267 innocent people.

Linguistic chauvinism also contributed to internal unrest. From its very beginning as an independent nation, the ultra-right among the Sinhala community wanted Sinhalese to be imposed as the sole national language.

Alas, while Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the last elections with a resounding majority playing precisely on such divisive politics, his country is up in flames today. People of all communities, Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhala — the constituency

he considered his vote bank — are up in arms and out on the streets against him and his repressive regime.

Thus, there are, indeed, some important lessons to be learnt from Sri Lanka. The first is that countries that are not at peace with themselves internally can never enduringly achieve economic prosperity. Social harmony is the bedrock on which the edifice of economic development can be built. Deliberately majoritarian policies, in plural societies, appear politically expedient, but ultimately unleash endemic social instability that vitiates stable economic progress.

The second is that hyper-nationalism appears a good way to garner votes in the short term but, ultimately, leads to authoritarianism in the name of "national security", stifling dissent and discourse so essential to a democracy, and destroying due processes of law. This creates serious fault lines in society, and devalues the belief system in established institutions of the Republic.

Thirdly, Sri Lanka teaches us that once the genie is let outside the bottle, it is difficult to bottle it back. The divisiveness and bigotry so unleashed acquires a momentum of its own. It's a fire that spreads, beyond the control of those who encouraged it in the first place.

And lastly, Sri Lanka is a living example of a country where the political hubris generated by ethnocentrism and divisive politics often leads to the real problems of the people being ignored. We have only to see what dominates the media in our country today — azaan, Hanuman Chalisa, burqa, halaal, temple, masjid, Vishnu Stambh, etc., etc. — to understand that nobody seems to be concerned about the burning problem of lack of jobs and skyrocketing prices.

India is not Sri Lanka. But, perhaps, there is much we can learn from Sri Lanka.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics and is the national vice-president of the Trinamul Congress

LETTERS

TOWERING INFERNO

The fire tragedy occurred in a commercial building near the Mundka metro station in outer Delhi, which reportedly consumed 30 innocent lives, is yet another stark reminder of how fire safety norms are flouted by building owners with impunity. Buildings must be planned, designed and constructed to ensure that fire safety measures are in place in strict accordance with National Building Code of India's guidelines which regulate the building construction activities across the country. Even though NBC makes these measures mandatory, majority of multi-storey buildings continue to ignore and violate the safety norms, and often play with human lives. Many buildings lack even basic fire safety systems like fire extinguishers. There is no statutory provision for regular verification of adherence to fire safety norms in multi-story buildings.

R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

MINISTER'S METAPHOR

Minister for Higher Education K. Ponnudiyil's resentment against imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu is understandable. But, his argument that learning Hindi has not helped people get jobs, citing the example of pani poori settlers being Hindi speakers, is far from cogent. The other day, I came across a taxi driver who was speaking good English. Stretching Ponnudiyil's logic, can we conclude that learning English will only make you land up as a taxi driver? I wish the minister had used his educational background effectively while putting forth a metaphor!

P.G. Menon, Chennai

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Why Sibal absent from Udaipur; in Nagaland, Cong is again on song

Senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal has been unusually silent after he set the proverbial cat among the pigeons two months ago by publicly suggesting that the Gandhis should step aside and give somebody else a chance to lead the party. A leading and vocal member of the pro-changers or G-23 Congress leaders who have been demanding an organisational overhaul and a more visible leadership, Mr Sibal has apparently been silenced not by the Gandhi sycophants (which, of course, would be expected) but by other members of the G-23, which includes senior leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Anand Sharma and Prithviraj Chavan. Though these leaders privately agree that it is time for a non-Gandhi to head the Congress, they were not happy that Mr Sibal had spoken to the media about it. They conveyed as much to Mr Sibal and asked him to keep a low profile for some time. It is possibly for the same reason that Mr Sibal decided not to attend the Congress chintan shivir at Udaipur. In fact, most other G-23 leaders are in

Udaipur and are awaiting the outcome of the discussions before they make their next move. Since none of them can afford to leave the Congress, their best bet is to act as a pressure group in the party.

After veteran leader Oscar Fernandes, Nagaland Congress leaders have finally found a kindred spirit in Ajoy Kumar, who is the party's state in-charge. While Mr Fernandes established a rapport with the music-loving leaders from the Northeastern state by playing the mouth organ in the midst of serious discussions, Ajoy Kumar joins in their sing-song by playing the guitar. This has thrilled Nagaland Congress leaders who maintain Ajoy Kumar is a welcome change from his predecessor C.P. Joshi. They said not only does Mr Kumar play the guitar but also sings English songs and, most importantly, is not a vegetarian. According to them, it was difficult to converse with Mr Joshi who was not just a taciturn person by nature but was also not too fluent in English. Communication between them, therefore, was a prob-

lem. Moreover, the few times Mr Joshi did visit Nagaland, he made a beeline for the local Bharatiya Janata Party chief's place to savour Marwari vegetarian food served there. It is to be seen now if Ajoy Kumar and the Nagaland Congress can convert this "musical fest" into an electoral victory.

It is often said that there are no permanent friends or foes in politics. Only permanent interests. Now take the case of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray, also Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's estranged cousin. In 2019 when the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena contested the Lok Sabha elections together, Raj Thackeray led a bitter campaign against the two parties. The Congress and Nationalist Congress Party were thrilled that Raj was doing their work of demolishing their political opponents. However, Raj failed in his mission and the BJP-Shiv Sena cruised to a thumping victory in the state. He was not seen or heard for the last three years till the BJP's Maharashtra unit decided to

utilise his services in its ongoing effort to dethrone the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Consequently, Raj Thackeray has hit the streets and grabbed headlines once again but the tables have turned this time. Besides Shiv Sena, the MNS chief is also taking on the NCP-Congress, the same parties which had once depended on him to vanquish their political enemy.

That Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath is the political boss of the Hindi heartland state can hardly be disputed. But his influence also extends to his home state of Uttarakhand. For instance, it is common knowledge in the hill state that Yogi played a role in the electoral victory of Ritu Khanduri, daughter of former chief minister B.C. Khanduri, in the recent Assembly poll from Kotdwara though even her BJP colleagues didn't think she would make it. It is said that Ritu Khanduri was named Speaker of the Uttarakhand Assembly after Yogi put in a word for her. Little wonder then that the new Speaker made it a point to call on Yogi Adityanath when he came to

visit his mother in Uttarakhand. In fact, she also travelled to Lucknow to thank Yogi for his help.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally leading his party's campaign to woo the Sikh community, it is being speculated that former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh may be rewarded for ditching the Congress and joining hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party in the recent Assembly polls. According to the Delhi political grapevine, Mr Singh may be nominated to the Rajya Sabha as several members in the distinguished persons' category are set to retire soon. In fact, there is talk that the former Congress leader could even be accommodated as a Cabinet minister to showcase a prominent Sikh face in the Modi government. But this is all in the future. For the present, Amarinder Singh has rented a place in South Delhi as he plans to spend a lot more time in Delhi.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

ENCOURAGING

TOTAL FACTOR PRODUCTIVITY TRENDS: HOW CHINA AND INDIA FARE

India will continue to need labour intensive growth due to the imperative for employment for its labour.



VIVEK JOSHI

Total Factor Productivity (TFP) is the increase in total production in an economy, in excess of the increase that would result from increase in factor inputs. This additional increase can result from intangible factors, like Technology, Health, Education, R&D, and other factors not directly attributable to labour, job skills or capital. It is one of the indicators of the efficiency in an economy, in converting inputs into productive output. TFP is best estimated over long periods of time and as percentage change.

The factors driving the TFP are not fully understood yet or quantifiable. It is estimated statistically,

and does not have a theoretical explanation. It does not account for some qualitative changes. The richest person on earth did not have the intangible benefits of immediate connectivity in 1925, but the poor worldwide now have instant connections with friends and family. Some experts have reasoned that the stagnation of Technology from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s has contributed to a reduction in the growth of TFP. For the mathematically inclined, TFP can be represented by the Cobb-Douglas function: $Q = (TFP) \times (Labour)^a \times (Capital)^b$, where Q is the total output, exponent a is the output elasticity of labour and exponent b is the elasticity of capital.

The first chart shows the trends of 5-year compounded average annual growth rate (CAGR) in TFP at constant national prices for five countries. Recent trends for China and India are highlighted. The data is accessed from the St Louis Fed Economic Data FRED (Ref 1). Note that the data is indexed at 2017=1 for each country, and therefore ab-

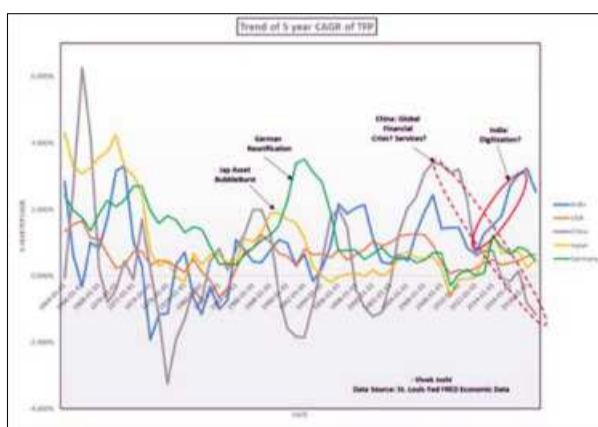


Chart 1

solute values or comparison of values across countries should not be interpreted from this chart. The data does not cover the period of the Covid pandemic, with its significant long-term and short-term disruptions. The arrows in the chart point towards major inflection points in the TFP trends and major macroeconomic event for a country. A similar analysis can be attempted for the TFP at Current Personal Purchasing Parity (PPP).

The two subsequent charts show the change in TFP year-wise for India and China, and not the 5-year CAGR.

ANALYSIS OF TRENDS

TFP FOR INDIA: A noticeable increase in 5-year CAGR of TFP from 2013 is seen for India (blue line). Some of the underlying drivers of this increase could be: a) Thrust on Digitization in several aspects of the economy with resultant efficiencies. b) Baumol's Effect, resulting from increasing emphasis on manufacturing, and therefore a proportionate reduction in role of lower productivity labour based services (and agriculture). However, it may be too early for the emphasis on manufacturing to show results. India

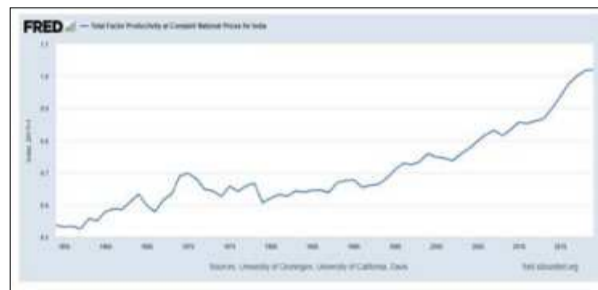


Chart 2

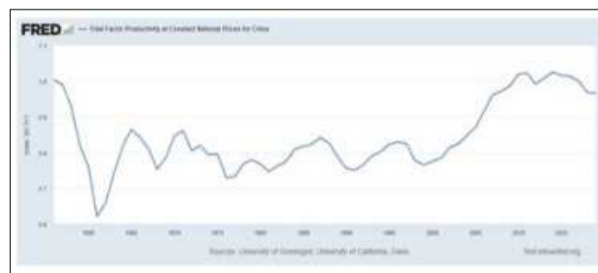


Chart 3

will continue to need labour intensive growth due to the imperative for employment for its labour. Shift of labour from low productivity agriculture was seen before the Covid pandemic, but has reversed during the pandemic, probably temporarily. c) Higher enrolment ratios in colleges and senior levels in schools. This is also one of the reasons for the decrease in Labor Force Participation rates (LFPR). d) Employment elasticity

of growth (Ref 2) has been decreasing for a long time. This can reflect in higher contributions by the other factors in the Cobb-Douglas equation shown above. e) Higher portion of outlays on MNREGA utilized for actual productive work. f) Low base of productivity to start with. g) Healthier and more skilled labour (upskilling programs).

TREND FOR CHINA: TFP plummeted during the disastrous "Great Leap

Forward" and "Cultural Revolution" in the past, recovering as China liberalized. A noticeable downward trend is seen from the global financial crisis in 2009 (grey line). The reasons could be a) Rapid and excessive investments in infrastructure not yet yielding results. b) Sharp increase in debt levels in the economy. c) Shift towards an ageing population. e) Higher starting base as compared to that for India. f) LFPR for China has also decreased. Another common trend for China and India is a sharp fall in female LFPR for both countries in the past 30 years.

BENCHMARK WITH USA: While the trends for India and China, both emerging market economies, show steep ups and downs, the trend for the United States is "steadier and flatter". It has a highly innovative economy among the five countries, and is better positioned. An open economy, innovation, immigration, political stability, strong commercial law enforcement and broad con-

sistencies in policy making appear to support TFP.

The trends are positive and encouraging for India. It is important to emphasise that in terms of absolute productivity of labour and capital, India lags far behind the other countries discussed here. It is important that the trend in increase in TFP be maintained over long periods. The imperative to provide employment to a vast workforce runs counter to the need for higher productivity unless high and rapid growth of the economy is sustained. Managing these will be a challenge for a long time.

Reference 1: University of Groningen and University of California, Davis, Total Factor Productivity at Constant National Prices for United States [RTFPNAUSA632NRUG], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; February 20, 2022

Reference 2: "Employment Trend in India: A Review", Vivek Joshi.

Vivek Joshi is an Advisor with A-Joshi Strategy Consultants Pvt Ltd, and has more than 25 years of international management experience.

STRATEGIC KINSHIP

France and India: New shift in an old relationship

The developing trajectory of Indo-French ties emanates from considerable alignments at a policy level.

MANISH BARMA & SHREYA SINHA
NEW DELHI

As the first batch of the Rafale fighter jets perched down on the tarmac at the Ambala Air Force base, it evoked a sense of national euphoria not seen in recent memory as far as any kind of military acquisition by India is concerned. The euphoria, mostly generated by a persistent and heightened media coverage was not just because of what the Rafale brings to the table in terms of augmenting India's air power, which it does, but essentially because the induction happened in the backdrop of an increasingly volatile geo-strategic environment. To specify, the clashes at Galwan valley in June 2020 where 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives, marked a turning point in the relationship between India and China. This was echoed in the words of the late General Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff, who had stated the fact publicly that it was China and not Pakistan that is India's biggest enemy today. Such a scenario that entails reworking of strategic thinking as well as action-to deal with new challenges, has brought the indispensability of time tested and old partners back to the fore. And one such partner is the Mediterranean country of France.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND MILITARY TIES

The road to strategic ties was taken during the days of the Cold War. Notwithstanding the fact that the Soviet Union was India's prime security and diplomatic partner, France added a different dynamic by striving to balance India's excessive dependence on Soviet Union. Apart from the attractiveness of India as a market for export, France also appreciated and identified with the strategic disposition of India in the larger South Asian region. For instance, France had leaned towards India's side during the India-Pakistan War of 1971. This happened despite the fact that the United States was actively in Pakistan's support during the war. Not limited to the dynamics of that particular conflict, France visibly traded on a relatively independent course on several matters like nuclear technology, space and defence cooperation with India.

A definitive turning point in the ties was witnessed in the late 1990s. With the USSR becoming history, French President Jacques Chirac was determined on behalf of France to fill the vacuum and stated a "strategic partnership" between the two countries. France strongly advocated on the

need to remedy India's exclusion from the global nuclear order. This resonated very strongly with the Indian administration. The integrity of such a stand came to the fore when post the "Pokhran-II" nuclear tests, the Atal Behari Vajpayee-led NDA government at the Centre had to face international criticisms, condemnation and sanctions. But France not only refrained from criticizing the action but instead increased its strategic engagement with India. At a time when India had become a nuclear pariah, such a stand by France resounded solidly across and among the establishment in India and in an emotional plane, lingers on till this day.

21ST CENTURY AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The signing of the strategic partnership agreement in 1998 catapulted Indo-France relations to new heights and a new plane. It set the ball rolling for the culmination and progression of this relationship in the 21st century with its set of challenges and realities. The strategic partnership facilitated high-level meetings between the National Security Advisor to the Indian Prime Minister and the diplomatic advisor to France's President. Talking about the renewed impetus France is putting onto Asia, as is being stated in the French Defence White Paper of 2008-09, Gireesh (2020) comments that France's appreciation of the future scenario of Asia is an extremely important step, and it is quite apparent in its diplomatic ventures in the region, especially in its outreach to India.

POLICY CONVERGENCE, DEFENCE DEALS, INDO-PACIFIC

The developing trajectory of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets French President Emmanuel Macron, in Paris on 5 May. ANI/PIB

Indo-French ties emanates from considerable alignments at a policy level and is not merely the result of some officialese surrounding deliberations around Europe's "strategic autonomy" or India's commitment to diversify its supplies of military equipment. To appraise with an instance, the visit to India by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2018 concurrently also saw the announcement of the "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region".

Such a long-standing alignment of outlook has had a positive bearing, leading to the successful execution of significant defence deals, like the Inter-Governmental agreement for the purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jets in 2016, between the two countries. The strengthening of the strategic relationship has seen a positive spillover effect onto other areas as well. This gets apparent by the fact where fresh after his re-election in April 2022, President Macron meets the first head of state in Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

COOPERATION ON NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS

Non-traditional threats are

(ISA), primary objective of the alliance is to work for the efficient consumption of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

THE INDO-PACIFIC

France's and India's interest in securing the now booming Indo-Pacific region finds the sharpest expression in the Western Indian Ocean. This is seen evidently with the establishment of France's military presence in Abu Dhabi and Djibouti, which gives the security actor critical access to two major chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz (connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea) and the Bab-el-Mandeb (connecting the Gulf of Aden with the Red Sea and the Suez Canal), which comes as a corollary to Chinese assertion and wolf-warrior diplomacy in the region (Rajamohan and Baruah 2018). In addition, French military personnel have been stationed in the Réunion Island continually contributing to training, capacity building, and patrolling for surveillance in the Southwest Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific in such an environment offers the long-missing regional anchor to the strategic partnership between India and France.

MARITIME COOPERATION, JOINT EXERCISES

Cooperation in the maritime domain is increasingly becoming a vital part of the strategic equation between both countries. The political leadership in both nations have expressed specific interest in enhancing the security and safety of the IOR. Both countries also have a history of productive cooperation and interactions between their respective navies. The maiden naval bilateral be-

tween India and France was held in 1983, and eventually it was christened as "Varuna" in 2001. The 19th edition of the "Varuna" bilateral exercises was held in April 2019 in the Arabian Sea. It was an exercise of considerable proportions represented by frontline warships, submarines, aircraft carrier and other combat platforms of both the navies.

CHINA'S AGGRESSION

In recent years in particular, France has not only been apprehensive of the Chinese provocation of European countries pushing them towards adopting a "One-China" policy with no exception, but also of China's assault on Hong Kong's independence as well as China's assertion of a wolf warrior diplomacy across its foreign policy. According to the European Commission's report "EU-China: A Strategic Outlook" (March 2019), the member states of the EU has come to perceive China as a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance" (European Commission 2019). This perception is broadly shaped by not only China's alarming nationalist narrative and its growing support towards the populist parties of Europe, but also Europe's frustration owing to its inability to access Chinese markets.

India has welcomed EU's Indo Pacific strategy and is looking forward to the French presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2022 as an opportunity to give further shape to EU's engagement in the Indo Pacific region, including in security, connectivity, sustainability and economic development. Subsequently, China's powerful presence in the Indo-Pacific region has been increasing since 2008, which

has long been perceived as a threat in the Indian Ocean backyard. China's hegemonic activities have been widely seen as the most important element in reshaping the region's security dynamic. Littoral states have been sceptical including India as well as Australia, which like France and the United States, has to cope with security issues both in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

CONCLUSION

With the steady increase of the strategic consequence of the Indian Ocean and its extended maritime zones, nations across the globe are devising fresh policies to recalibrate and strengthen their scope in the region. Though preceded by a long history of partnerships, recent ventures by many countries in the region are to a large extent in response to China's increasing clout and aggressiveness. Across this global security landscape, France and India have increasingly engaged on the security environment, including current developments and long-term challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the situation in Southeast Asia, West Asia, Afghanistan and Africa while also focusing on the non-traditional aspect of security partnership. With the given initiatives, it remains imperative for the two sides to continue pursuing these objectives through enhanced cooperation at the bilateral as well as multilateral level, deepening engagement in regional institutions and forums along with jointly working with and assisting other countries in the Indo Pacific region.

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FINE WRITING

A rare insight into China's negotiations with India

Retired Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale's book, *The Long Game; How the Chinese Negotiate with India*, identifies the strengths and vulnerabilities in a manner that's useful for anybody negotiating with the Chinese.



MAJ GEN JAGATBIR SINGH (RETD)
NEW DELHI

Vijay Gokhale, who retired as India's Foreign Secretary and had also served as India's Ambassador to China, has had a rare insight into China's negotiations with India on various issues. His path-breaking book, *"The Long Game; How the Chinese Negotiate with India"* throws light on how India has dealt with and continues to deal with its greatest strategic challenge. It is a study of vital negotiations between the two countries, soon after Independence until the current times, by examining six historical and significant events in the India-China relationship. The lessons drawn are extremely valuable with long term relevance and also has international ramifications.

The specific situations where India dealt with China range from recognition of the PRC and negotiations over Tibet and Sikkim. The aftermath of India's nuclear tests and the US-India nuclear deal, and getting Masood Azhar designated as a terrorist by the UN. He has identified the strengths and vulnerabilities in a manner that's useful for anybody negotiating with the Chi-

nese. "The Chinese want to be seen as the beautiful swan gliding on the placid surface of a lake in sylvan surroundings. Below the surface, their feet are churning away and roiling the waters for the other creatures... but this remains unseen."

The author has given a rare insight into how our negotiations and relations with China have evolved over the last seven decades. That India was keen to recognise communist China in the late 1950s and went overboard to please China while China insisted they were not interested in getting recognition unless India met their demands, is something that is not openly written about.

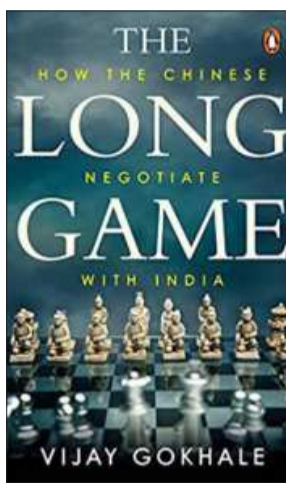
As the author points out, China was never fully colonised and the Chinese state had an unbroken record of dealing with foreign powers. Specifically, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai had experience negotiating with the Japanese, the Soviets and the Americans since the 1930s. India's leaders, by contrast, had dealt only with the British, who were quite different from the Chinese Communists. Sardar Patel had nevertheless warned Prime Minister Nehru, "even though we regard ourselves as friends of China, the Chinese do not regard us as their friends".

India was among the first countries to derecognise the Kuomintang and officially recognise the People's Republic of China. In 1950, Mao Zedong was invited to be the chief guest at India's first ever Republic Day celebration in January 1951. We continued to back the

People's Republic of China (PRC)'s cause across international fora without receiving any quid pro quo from them. As a result, a foreign policy decision of enormous magnitude and its timing which had relevance for India's core security and strategic interests was arrived at without adequate deliberation within the government.

Gokhale states: "how to recognise the new regime in China appears to have been confined to the tight circle of advisors around the Prime Minister and lacked wider political consultations." He concludes by stating, "India's approach to the whole idea of recognition (of the PRC) was a mixture of emotionalism and conjecture. There was no strategy." Ironically, we were in a hurry to recognise China, whereas they were in no hurry to be recognised.

The second chapter titled "Tibet the Price of Friendship" is about Tibet and extensively covers the negotiations which eventually led to the agreement on "Trade and Intercourse" between the Tibetan region of China and India on 29 April 1954. The agreement translated to what came to be known as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel)". Unfortunately, both India and China did not discuss and settle the shared frontier while discussing the question of India's rights and privileges we had inherited from the British. We seem to have taken Chinese silence on border issues as consent, which was a grave error. In fact, in "July 1952, the Indian



REVIEW

Embassy was forbidden from raising the frontier issue", whereas in December 1953, Zhou said "only those issues would be taken up for discussion, 'which are ripe for settlement'".

The chapter titled, "Pokhran: How to Untie a Knot from the Tiger's Neck" talks about India's nuclear tests in 1998 and their aftermath. The event highlighted how China played an important role in exercising its influence so as to counter India with regard to nuclear testing. It also gives brief insights on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), on how China plays the role to sideline India. The nuclear tests no doubt had caught the Chinese completely by surprise, they now concentrated on isolating India and played up US and Western concerns on a possible nuclear conflict over Kashmir.

"Sikkim-Half a Linguistic Pirouette" discusses the position of Sikkim with regard to the Indo-China negotiations as a result of which China formally recognised "Sikkim State of India" on 11 April 2005. The discussions at the highest level over decades and the Chinese wanting to leverage various trade concessions have been well documented. There is no doubt that "compulsions of democracy have led to India compromising on the deal outcome".

The fifth chapter titled "123 Deal, The Big Turnabout" covers the insights on the India-China negotiations on the 123 Nuclear Deal in 2008. When India conducted its nuclear tests, China thought it had succeeded in enticing the US into building an international coalition to isolate India. But India succeeded in getting sanctions lifted, and ultimately signed a nuclear agreement with America as well as got a "clean" waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. China used its "close connections" with Left parties in India to "build domestic opposition" to the Indo-US nuclear deal between 2007 and 2008. "Knowing the influence that the Left parties wielded in the United Progressive Alliance government of Dr Manmohan Singh, China perhaps played on their fears about India's tilt to the Americans. This may have been the first example of China's foray into domestic politics, but they were careful to remain behind the scenes".

"Masood Azhar, The Principle of Consensus" covers China's role in continuously blocking India's bid to recognise Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammed's (JEM's) chief Maulana Masood Azhar as a terrorist in the UNSC 1267 Sanctions List. The author reveals how China used the Russians to stall the listing of Azhar. The Chinese side also claimed that Pakistan had reliably assured them that the "JeM was defunct" and that "Masood Azhar had retired". Finally, Azhar was designated global terrorist at the UNSC on 1 May 2019.

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepared a grand welcome for China's President Xi Jinping in his home state, Gujarat. However, even as the two leaders sat together on a traditional swing at Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront, followed by a more than 200 People's Liberation Army troops intruded into Chumar in Eastern Ladakh.

The book helps make sense of these mixed and contradictory signals as it delves into the Chinese style of diplomacy—a style that has been consistent since Zhou Enlai's time.

The last chapter is a must and for those who want a deeper understanding of India's relations with China. China prepares meticulously for every meeting and uses every trick to bring pressure on India. India should be wary and prepared for such situations as well as its persistent attitude. The use of information and narrative shaping to advance the Chinese interest, the subtle deployment of the PLA during negotiations

and investing in the political parties of foreign countries amongst other techniques adopted by Beijing have been well flagged.

Chinese negotiators have followed a pattern set by Zhou Enlai for many years, though aggression is now seeping into their diplomatic intercourse. Only the lead negotiator speaks; the others simply take notes. They insert a Chinese proverb or two—"how to untie the Tiger's knot" was the one thrown at the India when it sought to normalise ties after the Pokhran nuclear tests. They select a venue that makes it difficult for the opposite side to frequently consult decision-makers back home. The choice of words is important, as a different phrase on the same issue shows a shift in the Chinese position.

It is evident that there is a pattern of a fundamental asymmetry in India-China relations. We do not raise issues such as Tibet, Taiwan, Uyghurs and human rights violations in Hong Kong, whereas China has openly helped Pakistan against us.

From a military point of view he has not dwelt on the negotiations regarding the 1962 conflict to include the release of our prisoners of war as well as has not talked about the so called East-West swap when it was proposed by Chou En Lai to agree to Chinese claims in Aksai Chin in return for recognition of Arunachal Pradesh, which was apparently also raised by Deng Xiaoping in 1980. But maybe the details of these negotiations continue to remain

firmly in the classified domain.

However, after reading the book, it is possible that China would have changed the frame of references with the passage of time and today with the comprehensive power gap between the two countries having considerably widened China is not talking about this any longer. As the author states; "It may become progressively more difficult to extract concessions from China." This is a statement of fact given the very entrenched and rigid attitude of our neighbour.

China's relationship with India has wide-ranging security and economic implications for the country. Understanding how the Chinese conduct diplomacy can help India better prepare for future negotiations.

The author is a China expert, has worked in China, Hong Kong and Taipei for a long time as an Indian Foreign Services officer, and was also present during the Tiananmen Square incident. He is amongst a few in India who know China extremely well.

This is truly an insightful book and a piece of very fine writing which puts into context the current relationship between India and China and is a must-read for anyone interested in India's China policy. It's a rare blend of scholarship and personal experience as a practitioner at the highest level. Unfortunately, there seems to be an end in sight to "the long game".

Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran.

TOTAL CHAOS

China benefits as the US loses its way under President Biden

Joe Biden sends \$55 billion to the most corrupt country in Europe, Ukraine, while Americans can't feed their families.



MITCHELL FEIERSTEIN
NEW YORK

During the past decade, plutocrats, pay-to-play political elites, and their dishonest media partners have deployed fear-based propaganda and psychological operations campaigns to sow seeds of discord that facilitate control and obedience over the population.

The campaign's objective: to deflect attention away from the most significant economic plunder and wealth transfer in history.

The crisis campaigns included: the dot com crisis, housing crisis, great financial crisis, a global pandemic, unlawful lockdowns, vaccine mandates, and medical tyranny.

The campaign results: The highest inflation in history. Policies that accelerated food and energy prices and amplified supply chain disruptions making shortages commonplace across America. The evisceration of middle-class America to ensure their dependency on big government.

"Let's take out Putin; there is no off-ramp"—US Senator

Lindsey Graham's reckless and irresponsible rhetoric this week accomplished two things: 1. He increased Russophobia; and 2. he greatly increased the probability of nuclear World War III where Europe and the UK are destroyed first. Like Graham, Washington DC swamp rats, owned by the military-industrial complex ("MIC"), are the problem. He should resign or be voted out. Who wins? China. In 1961, President Eisenhower warned about the military-industrial-complex.

The US has wasted over \$6 trillion in taxpayer dollars on military adventurism that no one voted for. These actions have made the world less safe.

The US has failed at any successful military deterrence since 1945. The West cannot win a war in Ukraine. Therefore, a corrupt Ukraine is of no strategic significance to the US, UK, or EU.

Why are we risking a nuclear WWII with Russia, with over 6,000 nuclear warheads and hypersonic missiles that the West cannot defend against? All voters are against a nuclear war.

Have sanctions ever worked? No. Russia's currency is higher and its current account has surged to record highs. Unfortunately, Nuland/Milley/Austin's dangerous assumptions have grossly underestimated the resolve of the bloc that has joined Russia: China, Iran, Brazil, UAE, Saudi, and several additional Asian

and African nations. The world is no longer unipolar. Despite Biden's tone-deaf elites' denial, the world has "transitioned" into multipolarity. What sanctions have done: signalled the death of the petro-dollar and end of the US dollar as the world's reserve currency within five years.

The US could have prevented the Ukraine/Russia war by forcing Ukraine to de-escalate immediately and settle with Russia. Simply denying Ukraine NATO membership and provisional weapons guarantees would have saved lives and prevented this war.

The dishonest political soundbite "we are saving democracy" is false on its face; Ukraine was never a democracy. Instead, the likely objective is to forcibly transition democracy into a hybrid socialism, fascism, and Marxism.

General Mark Milley and heavily conflicted Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are running a proxy war between Russia, its partners and the West. Austin and Milley were defeated in the \$2.5 trillion Afghanistan war by farmers in pickup trucks. NATO and the West need to heed Putin's warnings and take his red lines seriously.

Biden and Victoria Nuland's MIC have based their military strategy on "media propaganda and wishful thinking," neither of which are viable combat plans capable of defeating a nuclear-armed Russia with hyper-



A 12 March photo of President Joe Biden holding a phone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. ANI

sonic missiles.

Who benefits from an unwinnable WWII or conflict with Russia? The MIC and China. Who suffers? The people of Ukraine, with their lives, and the USA, UK, and EU taxpayers.

How did we get here? Forty years of failed neoliberal policies and endless wars cost lives and trillions of taxpayer dollars: reckless central bank money printing and the worldwide fiscal profligacy of our pay-to-play politicians have allowed the MIC to prosper. For these reasons, the most significant global financial crisis in history is now unavoidable.

Democratic party leaders, Hillary and Bill Clinton's decades of deceptive practices were influenced by extremist Saul Alinsky. The Clintons excelled at creating diversions. The Clintons' gold medal: Loudly accuse others of precisely what

they were guilty of.

In 2009, a cultural revolution began in the USA. Obama/Biden breathlessly hyped this as "the transformation of America." Unfortunately for America, Obama's transformation directly began an attack on democratic institutions, due process, the rule of law, culture, religion, free speech, liberty, and the nuclear family.

In 2016, Hillary Clinton, the democratic party, FBI, CIA, and DOJ perpetuated the false Russiagate narrative that they dragged out for four years. Their oligarchs' partners in Silicon Valley unlawfully influenced the results of the 2020 election by censoring factual reporting on the Biden family crime syndicate, Hunter Biden's laptop and Ukraine.

In 2020, Nina Jankowicz promoted the misinfor-

mation and false claims regarding Hunter Biden's laptop being "Russian disinformation" and Trump's involvement with Russia. Jankowicz now runs Biden's personal Stasi, a Ministry of Truth that would make Joseph Goebbels and George Orwell blush.

With the unlawful appointment of Jankowicz, Biden has created a "China-style social credit system" to "protect the public from misinformation and disinformation." Jankowicz will now weaponize the Department of Homeland Security and Silicon Valley to conduct a great purge while imposing mass censorship of all political opposition. Biden's authoritarian power grab is the most significant existential threat to liberty, freedom, and democracy in America's history.

Joe Biden promised America "unity." As of May 2022,

what has Biden delivered?

America's greatest division and tribalism in our lifetime. Eye-watering inflation. An economy on the brink of collapse. Broken supply chains that caused widespread food and energy scarcity. Millions of illegal aliens and drug smugglers are invading the USA's open southern borders with impunity. Violent crime and drug related deaths are surging, and America's two-tiered judicial system is dysfunctional. Biden has not provided any solutions.

Biden's Press Secretary Jen Psaki endorsed the unlawful violation of US Federal Law by doxing and intimidation of US Supreme Court Justices by stating, "We certainly continue to encourage protests outside the homes of SCOTUS justices."

Biden's inability to win majority mandates with "free and fair elections at the ballot box to transform America" has unmasked uncomfortable truths: 1. The extremist left turns to mob-rule violence, Antifa, BLM, or by any means necessary including violence, to ensure they get their way, and 2. the democratic process is broken.

Who funded the 2020 murders, arson, looting, and violent riots, causing \$10 billion in damage across America? Why were these crimes not prosecuted?

Since 2021, Biden's divisive rhetoric has divided and polarized over fifty per cent of America. This week,

Joe Biden stated the MAGA organisation is the "most extreme political organisation that's existed in recent American history"

When people are hungry, everything changes very quickly. Biden's record inflation is preventing Americans from providing for their families. No Americans want a nuclear WWII or endless war expenses similar to the \$2.5 trillion wasted on the Afghanistan disaster.

Biden is sending \$55 billion to the most corrupt country in Europe while giving the middle finger to middle America. Biden has done nothing to resolve America's problems. Instead, Biden's open border policy has allowed 2,000,000 illegal aliens and drug dealers to invade America with impunity, accelerating violent crime and 300 drug overdose deaths per day.

While Biden, Schumer, and Pelosi shriek about Ukraine's borders being sacrosanct, they have done nothing to protect America's borders; and voters will remember this in November.

While China and Russia are laughing at America's woke age of rage addiction, many fear America has lost its way. The extreme left has abandoned due process and the rule of law in favour of mob-rule, socialism, and Marxism. This will not end well. Who benefits? China.

Mitchell Feierstein is CEO, Glacier Environmental Fund.

COMMENT & ANALYSIS

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OPINION OF THE WEEK

We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care of what you think.

Swami Vivekananda

PICK OF THE WEEK

Code red

A helicopter drops water as it assists firefighters battle a hillside fire that burned through a neighbourhood and destroyed homes in Laguna Niguel, California, US, on Thursday. REUTERS/MIKE

BLAKE



EDITORIAL FOR OVERALL SECURITY

LEND LEASE FOR INDIA

Several years ago, this writer had suggested that the US extend its Lend Lease system to India. In particular, safeguarding the Indian Ocean from hostile activity called for much stronger naval forces than were available in India. Given budgetary constraints, it would not be possible to acquire the vessels needed for the Indian Navy to fulfill the enormous task of joining friendly navies in keeping the Indian Ocean safe. The Kitty Hawk, a huge aircraft carrier of the US Navy, was being decommissioned, and the suggestion was made that it should instead be transferred to India under a Lend Lease arrangement. Given the *jugad* skills of India, the formidable vessel would serve the Indian Navy for at least ten more years. Given the strategic imperative of India and the US needing to work together to secure the Indian Ocean, a transfer of naval equipment from the US to India would serve the interests of both countries. The idea did not fly for long. In India, the lobby pushing for the purchase of the Admiral Gorshkov from Russia looked askance at it, as did the muscular pro-Pakistan lobby in the Pentagon. A later suggestion was for the US to station an information gathering system in India, preferably in the Andaman Islands, on the lines of those functioning in Australia and Japan. Another was to situate a THAAD unit in India, in place of the planned purchase of S-400 systems from Russia, which by then had by default become uncomfortably close to China where military matters were concerned. Only in 2017, due to the momentum imparted by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe, was the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) retrieved from the freezer and brought back into focus, this time with Australia as an eager rather than as a reluctant participant. Much is made of President Donald Trump taking a combative stance towards the PRC after a period of flirtation with Xi Jinping. The problem with the 45th US President was that he mistook dollar signs for love, and insisted on not just top dollar but over the top dollar for any defence acquisition or even collaboration with the US. Even longtime allies such as South Korea and Japan were asked to pay large sums in excess of the commitments they had made, or face the prospect of a US military withdrawal from their shores. India entered the market for US weaponry in a major way, but got no discount on any purchase, despite these being used in the common defence of the democracies in the Indo-Pacific. As for THAAD, if Trump had his way, it would be an even more financially expensive system than the S-400. The logic of offering to set up such a system in India, as also an intelligence gathering mechanism that could jointly keep track of hostile activities in the Indo-Pacific, never entered into the cash register that was the mind of Donald J. Trump.

After Joe Biden had won the 2020 Presidential election, he had said that the African-American community had his back (having ensured through their votes his election) and that he would have theirs. That promise has been forgotten in President Biden's propensity for spending vast amounts of taxpayer dollars in "defending freedom and democracy worldwide" in Ukraine. It is clear that the additional spending program on social services and on economic betterment of the underprivileged is no longer a priority for the White House. Making such spending a campaign issue so as to shame the DINO's (Democrats in Name Only) in the US Senate into voting for funding designed to rectify societal imbalances is not the priority, writing bigger and bigger cheques to Ukraine is. The economic impact of the manner in which the Russia-Ukraine conflict is being handled by Biden is becoming clearer with every passing month, and is devastating the Democratic Party voter base. Meanwhile, encouraged by Lone Ranger Biden and his faithful Tonto Boris Johnson, even otherwise rational countries such as Germany have joined the movement to cut themselves off from Russian resources. The impact of such a breakaway from a country awash in resources would be disastrous, as is already becoming evident to many in the European countries. With each acceleration of the conflict, Ukraine is losing more land and people, and yet the dance of destruction goes on. It may be too much to expect that the White House may finally understand that the problem is not Russia but China. And that, from the perspective of the overall security interests of the US, it is India much more than any other country that ought to be offered a Lend Lease agreement. History is littered with the debris of lost opportunities, and this is what is becoming obvious in the very countries that need to understand that they are fixating on the wrong country in their zeal at protecting the world from the threat of authoritarianism.

MDN

THE TRIGGER

Ukraine war may create Sri Lankas in Europe

The overconfidence within the higher echelons of NATO in the destruction of Russian capabilities may get tested for accuracy in a relatively short time.

ROOTS OF POWER

M.D. NALAPAT



Every event has a trigger. In Sri Lanka, apart from the fall in revenue from tourism because of the Covid-19 pandemic, President Gotabaya's abrupt decision to ban chemical fertilisers affected crop yields, most significantly in Sri Lanka's other large source of foreign exchange, tea. While not the only cause, the effects of the fertiliser ban dented the popularity of the Rajapaksas among the Sinhala farming community, till then a reliable base of support. Had the Rajapaksas entrusted either the

Prime Ministership to a loyalist outside the family, such as G.L. Pieris, he would have served both as a lightning rod as well as a scapegoat for the policy errors made that caused the present unrest. The 2019 takeover once again by the Rajapaksa clan of the Sri Lankan government made them the sole owners of the present crisis, and the mood of the protestors is such that even after Mahinda Rajapaksa quit as Prime Minister, chants of "Go Gota" against his younger brother have not reduced in frequency. What practical good that would do is unclear, as the crisis facing Sri Lankans will not be mitigated in the slightest by the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Indeed, such a resignation could put at considerable physical risk the entire family, unless they all leave the country, thereby forfeiting any future comeback, which must be among

the reasons why such a move by the Sri Lankan President is off the table. As for outside actors being involved, that is unlikely to be China, for there are several in the Rajapaksa clan who are exceptionally close to Beijing, which has cultivated sections of the Colombo elite from the 1960s onwards. And although Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa is no friend of India, he cannot compete in the "Close to China" sweepstakes with Basil Rajapaksa, whose linkages with the PRC have long been on display. Alternatively, had there been a US hand in the protests that have turned so deadly for the elected government, there would have been a hero and a villain in the narrative. In common with Bollywood movies, US-inspired efforts at regime change usually involve a "good guy versus bad guy" contest. In the current test of guns and blood playing out in Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is clearly the hero where the White House is concerned, and Vladimir Putin is in the familiar role of villain. Earlier, in Venezuela, the role of the idealistic hero was played by Juan Guaido, who (the narrative went) was battling to protect human rights and liberty

that were under attack by President Nicolas Maduro. The Venezuelan leader was hardly the only target of US-led efforts at regime change within oil producers, a list that include Iran, Iraq, Libya, Venezuela and now Russia. The list of oil and gas producers affected by geopolitical tensions caused by US efforts at regime change is growing. The consequence of each such spat is a rise in oil prices and a fall in supply. Good news for countries that are surplus in oil and gas, but bad for everyone else. After the Covid-19 shock has come the Ukraine conflict, and this may cause a severe recession in several economies. This could be the case for many countries in Europe, especially Germany. Chancellor Scholz, who is from the SPD, seems intent on slowing down the German economy through his efforts at delinking supply of gas and oil into Germany from Russia. In the US, while a few sectors such as armaments and petroproducts may gain from the way the Ukraine war is being handled by NATO, the overall economy could as a consequence of the dislocations slip into recession and worse. President Biden seems as oblivious to the economic

consequences of his strategy towards Russia as Chancellor Scholz. Doing away with the supply of resources from Russia will hobble Europe economically to a degree that would reduce its geopolitical footprint even more than what has already taken place owing to the rise of parts of Asia. The leaders of NATO are already being blamed by their public for the steep rise in energy prices and fall in economic growth. This is despite the incessant messaging of imminent success for NATO and its Ukrainian partner. Every day the message is the same: that Putin is about to breathe his last, that Russia is beaten, and that Ukraine will win back all the territory it has lost. The Victory Day parade in Moscow was derided for its perceived downscaling. Retired and serving military officers in NATO have been unanimous since the first days of the war that the Russian army has exhausted its capabilities. That Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu may be saving up more advanced weaponry and stocks for what both he as well as President Putin believe will be an inevitable showdown with NATO seems not to have entered such western prophets of

imminent Russian doom. They are reminiscent of the Minister of Information in Saddam Hussein's government. Al Sahhaf, who during the 2003 war spoke every day about the coming defeat of US forces until he was captured by the "defeated" enemy. President Putin may not wish to reveal in the Victory Day parade some of the more advanced systems that he intends to use not against Ukraine but against NATO. Overconfidence led to disaster in situations in the past where European countries were concerned, and the visible overconfidence within the higher echelons of NATO in the destruction of Russian capabilities may get tested for accuracy in a relatively short time. The cliff edge of direct war between NATO and Russia looks to be close at hand, and the momentum towards it that has been set by the tactics of the Biden-Johnson duo seems unstoppable. Should such a catastrophe occur, several countries in Europe may go the way now being traversed by Sri Lanka. They would not be the only ones. There will be other countries in Asia and Africa that would be collateral damage in this rush in Europe towards disaster.

GROWTH TRAJECTORY

RSS, nearly hundred

On Vijayadashami 2022, the organisation will complete 97 years of its existence.

OPINION

MANMOHAN VAIDYA



The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded in Nagpur in 1925 and on the Vijayadashami of 2022, the organisation will complete 97 years of its existence. As it approaches its centenary, the Sangh's reach and influence is growing manifold, despite opposition and obstacles. Consistent hard work, penance, sacrificial spirit of the Sangh workers, accretion support of the society and blessings of the Almighty have made this possible. This achievement fascinates many, the world over. Lately, people are also curious to learn how RSS would celebrate its centenary.

RSS founder, Dr Hedgewar was very clear in his vision, in that he saw Sangh not as an organisation operating within the society, but as the organisation of the entire society. One of Sangh's luminaries, Shri Dattopant Thenagdi remarked, "conceptually RSS and Hindu society are co-terminus and psychologically they are one."

Therefore, the centenary of RSS cannot be confined to the organisational level. Since Sangh is synonymous with society, and Dr Hedgewar opined that our mission to unify the entire society under Sangh's vision should be fulfilled even before the celebration of the silver jubilee, accomplishing the Sangh's mission before the centenary would be the ideal centenary celebration.

A Sangh song goes like ("कार्यमन्ता जीवन हो और कार्यपूर्ति ही विमर्ति") Karyamagnata Jeevan ho aur Karyapurti hi Vishranti "to live is to be absorbed in work and only its completion is to rest."

The journey of the monu-

mental expansion of Sangh operations has seen four major phases. The period spanning the foundation of RSS up to the nation's independence should be considered the first phase, wherein the focus was on "organisation" since it was necessary to make people believe that Hindu society can be united and speak about Bharat and Hindutva as a unified chorus. While swayamsevaks participated in the ongoing freedom movement and other social reform movements, Sangh as an organisation completely absorbed itself in organising the collective.

The second phase of Sangh's expansion is from Bharat's independence to the year 1990. A thousand-year-long struggle followed by the inspiration of the freedom movement called for a need to envision a social and national blueprint based on our real identity or self ("Swa"). Rooted in the traditions of Bharat, initiatives were propelled by swayamsevaks in several segments like education, student development, politics, labour, tribals and farmers. While the organisation carried on with its core activities, many people's initiatives addressing the needs of the entire spectrum of human lifespan also shaped up alongside. Today, Sangh's shakhas are conducted in over 90% of the development blocks and more than 35 community-driven initiatives are addressing different needs of the society.

The third phase commenced following Dr Hedgewar's birth centenary in the year 1990. The mission to weave the society as one with affection and affinity resulted in the outreach to the deprived, weak and the backward within our society. Sewa Vibhag (social service initiative) was established to work towards their uplift.

In the same spirit every volunteer takes an oath, "I have become a constituent (volunteer) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh for the

all-round progress of the nation." It is irrational to assume that the volunteers alone can bring about all-round progress. Many influential and well-intended people want to contribute toward society's betterment. In 1994, the Sampark Vibhag (societal outreach initiative) was set up for connecting and gathering information about the activities and contributions of such social achievers, making them aware of the Sangh's vision and cooperating in areas of mutual interest.

Take for example the matter of conversion that has been debated since the freedom movement. In 1967, under Congress governments, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha passed a bill to stop Christian conversion. Since then this issue has single-handedly been taken up by the Bharatiya Janata Party only and most of the bills to stop conversion were passed during the BJP reign in various states with an exception of Himachal Pradesh.

In 2006, the Congress government led by Shri Virbhadr Singh passed a bill against conversion there. Just a few years ago, some officials of the Sangh Sampark Vibhag had met with Shri Virbhadr Singh-ji, who narrated the first-hand accounts of the passing of the bill and told them that if he could be instrumental in stopping conversion anywhere in India outside Himachal Pradesh, then he would readily contribute.

Similarly, in 2008-09, when Gau-Gram Rath Yatra was organised, "Sarvodaya" workers participated in this yatra at many locations. In this way, issue-based cooperation with those who might not entirely share the Sangh's worldview has been enabled by the Sampark Vibhag.

RSS has been and still continues to be at the receiving end of spiteful, organised efforts to malign its image through misinformation. To tackle this the Prachar Vibhag (media relations initiative) of RSS was formed in 1994. Its aim is to disseminate what Sangh really stands for and does for society. It emphasises RSS' national outlook using different media and also counters the malicious, false propaganda built around

RSS by providing accurate information.

Additionally, during the third phase, alarmed by certain burning social problems, key social reform projects were instituted. It was through the intervention of "Dharmajagan Vibhag" efforts to stop organised mass Hindu conversion operations and the project of helping those proselytised and desirous of connecting back with their roots were initiated.

Along similar lines, it was felt that village folk could be mobilized to enable village development, independent of state intervention. With a motto to usher in extensive rural development by empowering villagers in a way that they can accrue adequate benefit of the government schemes, "gram vikas" work was started.

Since antiquity our Hindu society has had members that identified with varied caste nomenclatures but



RSS volunteers participate in a march on the occasion of Hindu New Year, in Ghaziabad on 3 April. ANI

those elements that have vested interests in dividing the society have consistently tried to instigate caste-oriented animosity. To create a consortium for all concerned to discuss common challenges and contemplate collective action, a series of meetings have been organised, known as "Samajik Sadbhav" (social harmony) meetings. Similarly, to eradicate untouchability and malpractices associated with it, by commemorating our common heritage, efforts have been made through "Samajik Samarasata" (Social Equality and Brotherhood).

The work of "Gauseva—Gausamvardhan" has flourished with thousands of new gaushalas coming up all over Bharat. Creating mass awareness about the medicinal value of products obtained from cows of

indigenous breeds, conservation and promotion and breed improvement of these cows along with education programs to train farmers in cow dung based natural farming are some of the programs undertaken.

While Western thought sees the individual as the smallest unit of the society, Indian culture believes that it is the family. According to the Bharatiya spiritual worldview, family is the first step of the journey from "Me to We." In the present scenario, urbanization and the fast pace of life have shrunk families and created a lack of opportunities to come together and celebrate our heritage, traditions, relationships, and festivals. Therefore, "Kutumb Prabodhan" (familial awakening through dialogue) was started where family members gather weekly to analyze our civilizational heritage, traditions, culture and the prevailing social scenario from the na-

The founder of the Sangh, Dr Hedgewar in his address during a 1940 RSS training camp said, "Sangh work and values should not be confined to the shakha but must be extended and established in the entire society." Earning the necessary income for our families, nurturing our families and attending shakha regularly would not suffice. To invest one's time in actively working towards social change and social awakening is the definition of a Sangh worker.

Sangh expects that its swayamsevaks, 1. will develop themselves to effectively execute Sangh's mission in the society. 2. Will uphold the holistic Akhil Bharatiya (All-India) perspective, that this entire nation from (Ram) Setu to the Himalayas is one and is my own. 3. Will realise the feeling that all members of the society are equal. 4. Will regularly attend shakha so that the practice of putting the nation above oneself and leading the movement while remaining in the backdrop could be perfected. 5. Will actively channel the character traits built through the shakha in one of the many areas of social transformation.

Simultaneously, swayamsevaks should be more active in society, meet new people so that newer sections of society can come into contact with the Sangh, understand the Sangh and know the national ideals of the RSS. Being an integral part of society, they can also connect and contribute to protect Hindu Dharma, the Hindu culture and the Hindu society and remain devoted to the cause of all-round progress of the nation.

Along with this, the fundamental work of societal organisation and character building will go on. Social awakening is also a perennial task. With a view to bring about systemic changes, swayamsevaks are actively contributing in different areas through various organisations. It is time that each swayamsevak goes out with a renewed vigour for social change and through all these initiatives towards the fulfilment of Sangh work would be the best way to celebrate the centenary.

श्रमन्तुः श्रेष्ठं कुर्यात्: Kimanyaihi Shramaihi Shunyaihi (All other efforts are pointless).

LONG WAY TO GO

Delhi University's legendary teachers

BETWEEN US

PANKAJ VOHRA



is long, and in an attempt to identify some of them, many may get left out, not because of an oversight but on account of the huge numbers. Teachers both in the university as well as in colleges have left their mark and therefore any omissions are totally inadvertent and not meant to deprive anyone of their rightful place.

Prof Frank Thakurdas, of the famous Thakurdas family of Lahore and fondly referred to as "Uncle" by his students and junior colleagues was one of the most admired teachers who taught western philosophy and drama. Associated with the Kirori Mal College and the Political Science department, "Uncle" was a major influence in the lives of so many. Cine star Amitabh Bachchan, actors, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, T.P. Jain, V.M. Badola and Shyam Arora were all his disciples.

His residence on the K.M. Campus was an open house for anyone to walk in and have a drink with him in the evening. He would regale everybody present with innumerable anecdotes from his illustrious career.

Prof Randhir Singh of the Political Science department was considered to be an authority on Marx and was amongst the founders of the Left movement in the Delhi University though later on he fell out with many of his associates. However, there is no denying that his classes in the arts faculty were attended by maximum students, many of whom would come prepared to prove him wrong, something they could not do.

Prof Bhisham Sahni, younger brother of thespian Balraj Sahni and former president of the Punjab University Teachers Association was one of the most respected teachers of the university and Delhi College where he taught English. An author who also wrote in Hindi, he was revered by even the most notorious students who would never ever do anything objectionable in his presence.

Arun Bose was a member of the politbuo of the undivided Communist Party and one of the most illustrious DUTA presidents. His articulation and knowledge would leave all those who came in contact with him spellbound. Both as a teacher activist and as a scholar, he excelled.

Prof Sydney Rebeiro, till recently the dean of the alumnus affairs of Delhi University has had a long association with his alma mater. A committed teacher, he helped the authorities to put together the history of this great institution and also record the contribution of its students and teachers towards society and the country. If the DU authorities in the centenary year wish to confer honoris causa degrees on distinguished alumni, he should be up in the front.

The university had legendary Vice Chancellors from Sir Maurice Gwyer to Dr C.D. Deshmukh, V.K.R.V. Rao, K.N. Raj, Sarup Singh (he was the first DU student to be selected for the post), Moonis Raza and V.R. Mehta. There were many famous principals as well, such as M.N. Beg, Sayed Ahmed Ali, B.M. Bhatia, W.S. Rajpal, G.S. Randhawa, Rajendra Prasad and G.P. Chopra.

Amongst the administrators, Delhi University should always be grateful to K.N. Thusu, the former Registrar and Madan Mohan, the Controller of Examination and later Registrar as well. They and many others, helped in ensuring that the sanctity of the DU ordinances and statutes was never infringed while they held office. Such dedication is not easily found these days.

Two deans, Mohinder Singh and A.S. Kukla, left an indelible impression on the affairs of the university. Kukla, as Dean Students Welfare shaped the careers of many student leaders including Arun Jaitley and Sudhanshu Mittal. His friendly approach helped the university to resolve many contentious issues.

Mohinder Singh, on the other hand, was a nuts and bolts man, who knew the university working like the back of his hand. Without him, vice chancellors felt inadequate. As Dean of Colleges, he regularly briefed the media on the happenings on the campus and helped defuse many crisis-type situations.

The DUTA has always been a pillar of strength. Besides Arun Bose, it has been headed by Kumares Chakravarty, O.P. Kohli, Zahoor Siddiqui, Murali Manohar Prasad Singh, S.S. Rathi, N.K. Kakkar and Shashwati Majumdar amongst others. The DUTA movement also produced Prof V.P. Dutt, Kiran Walia, Yogesh Gondal, U.S. Mathur, Inder Kapahi, Rajendra Pawar, R.M. Kohli, S.S. Goyal and many other illustrious activists.

The DU evolved with the assistance from the departments which had many iconic teachers. Prof Seshadri in the Chemistry department, Prof Maheshwari and Prof Mohan Ram in the Botany department, Prof Nagendra in the Hindi department, Prof Ganguly in the Psychology department and Prof Wahiyuddin and Prof Ansari in the Philosophy department wielded a lot of academic influence.

It should be mentioned that St Stephens College was Delhi University's most famous college and there was a time when the Indian Civil Service had many of those who had graduated from the portals of this esteemed institution. When the college celebrated its centenary many years ago, the then Vice Chancellor had commented that Stephens was an example where part of the whole is perhaps larger than the whole meaning it had more clout than the university itself.

The role of teachers, administrators, karamcharis and students have made the Delhi University what it is and without the combination of all these factors, nothing could have been achieved. Delhi University has a long way to go in its journey. Between us.

IN MEMORIAM

Tribute to a Bengali *bhadralok* businessman, S.K. Roy

KAUSTAV BHATTACHARYYA

There are individuals who appear serendipitously in our lives and then disappear and yet they leave an indelible mark in our memory of a charming experience. S.K. Roy was one such remarkable individual. Chairman of the Peerless group based in Kolkata, he passed away on 8 May 2022 after a spell of prolonged illness. On hearing this very tragic news a pall of sadness descended, leading to reflections on what a splendid *bhadralok* or gentleman S.K. Roy was. I met Sunil Kanti Roy only once and it was during my wedding and was a guest at one of his Peerless hotels located in the steel city of Durgapur. The night before the wedding one of the members of the organising "crew" of family and friends were struggling and stressing about a particu-

lar ritual where the groom is fed some sweet curd and rice during the early hours of dawn. A bespectacled distinguished gentleman dressed in the quintessential Bengali starched dhoti and punjabi was overhearing and then approached us to enquire about all the confusion. On being explained about the complexity of the ta.S.K. he assured that the hotel would organise the curd and rice for that ritual. He turned towards me and said, "You are the *jamai* of Peerless", or in other words, "son-in-law of Peerless", which reassured my wedding crew. This statement which was spoken with sincerity touched my heart deeply at his affection and generous hospitality. This distinguished gentleman was none other than the Chairman of the Peerless group, S.K. Roy who was visiting the Durgapur property.



S.K. Roy

Over the next couple of days in between the wedding rituals we enjoyed his attention and care including that of a traditional Bengali meal being served in earthenware pots. In our interactions we realized that we had a few shared acquaintances from the Kolkata corporate world.

In the subsequent years, I interacted with some of the Peerless group companies like Bengal Peerless, a successful joint-venture between Peerless group and the West Bengal government. I watched

and heard S.K. Roy at events and forums organised by business bodies and Chambers of Commerce. Through my business affairs in Bengal I developed acquaintances with senior managers and directors engaged with the Peerless group and was impressed with the leadership and professional management.

I truly salute his success in managing the affairs of his business group in Bengal as a "Bengali entrepreneur" when that "species" itself is an endangered one. One only reads about the glories of Bengali entrepreneurship in the pages of history. The Peerless group is one of the legacy enterprises of Bengal which still continues to flourish in contemporary times. It's all the more impressive when one considers that S.K. Roy expanded and diversified in the state of Bengal where

most business tycoons have decided to leave for greener pastures.

S.K. Roy or Sunil Kanti Roy was born in the year 1944 to a Bengali business family where his father Radhyashyam Roy had started an insurance enterprise, Peerless Insurance, which later metamorphosed into the Peerless General Finance and Investment Company Limited. S.K. Roy joined the company in 1969, was inducted into the Board of Directors in 1984 and then assumed the mantle of Managing Director in 1996 which he held until his demise this year. In his remarkable career S.K. Roy led the diversification of the financial institution into hotels, hospitals and real-estate. These diversification strategies paid off and today Peerless group boasts of a turnover of Rs2,500 crores with nearly

3,000 people employed.

Apart from his role as an entrepreneur S.K. Roy was a philanthropist and offered patronage to several social initiatives like that of the Peerless Skill Academy through the B.K. Roy Foundation. S.K. Roy held important positions in industry bodies contributing to the industrial policy making of Bengal like that of being the President of Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and board member of WBIDC.

S.K. Roy was awarded the Padma Shri in 2009. A lifelong devotee of Ramakrishna Mission, he was a disciple of Swami Bireswarananda Maharaj.

Here is my humble tribute to S.K. Roy who was the very embodiment of Bengali *bhadralok* entrepreneur as a *jamai* of Peerless group. Om Shanti.

PLAN AHEAD

CAA is first step to managing a post-Hasina Bangladesh

Recent incidents of violence against Hindus in Bangladesh have shown that India needs to prepare for political transition in Bangladesh—a turbulent phase where CAA will provide succour to millions of people belonging to minority religions in the nation.

OPINION

ABHIJIT MAZUMDAR



The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which was passed by India's Parliament in 2019, is primarily aimed at providing Indian citizenship to minorities from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh facing religious persecution.

However, recent incidents of violence against Hindus in Bangladesh have shown that India needs to prepare for political transition in Bangladesh—a turbulent phase where CAA will provide succour to millions of people belonging to minority religions in the nation. For the uninitiated, Hindus comprise 8.5% of the population in Bangladesh, totalling around 1.6 crore; a vast majority being Dalits, Buddhists and Christians are the other minorities in the country.

Two issues that will soon bring to India's borders a torrent of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh need to be underscored. First, conventional wisdom dictates that at age 74, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will

soon have to hand over the reins of power to her successor that will most certainly bring about another phase of miseries for Hindus in the country. Second, in its present form, CAA has 2014 as a cut-off date, which may soon need a rethink given the way the situation is spinning out of control at alarmingly frequent intervals in Bangladesh. Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's perspicacious decision to usher in CAA is one that foresees beyond the boundaries of time. However, it may



A file photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi handing over a representational item to Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina as a symbol of India's gift of 1.2 million Covid vaccine doses, in Dhaka on 27 March 2021. ANI

still be a first step to preparing for a political transition in Bangladesh.

The utility of CAA for minorities in Bangladesh can be viewed using a historical prism going back to 1947. Political upheaval in what was East Pakistan and then Bangladesh has resulted in religious atrocities causing a deluge of Hindu refugees en-

tering India at different points of time, most during military rule in the country. The flight of millions of Hindus has resulted in a drop in Hindu percentage in Bangladesh from 28% in 1947 to a mere 8.5% in 2011.

Coming to more recent times, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, has documented more than 3,600 instances of attacks on Hindus alone in Bangladesh since 2013. The organisation also chronicled another 1,670 attacks on Hindu places of worship and desecration of Hindu idols since 2013. Attacks on Hindu minorities also regularly involve rape of Hindu women in rural Bangladesh, where the police look askance.

While hatred against Hindus among Islamists in Bangladesh is a rallying cry to bring jihadis of different hues

under one umbrella, there is also an economic component to the mayhem. Before 1947 and in the years since, Hindus in Bangladesh have been owners of vast tracts of land that has resulted in envy among the fundamentalists in the country.

Prof Barakat's research at Dhaka University found that 60% of Hindus in Ban-

gladesh became landless because of two laws—Enemy Property Act and Vested Property Act—that aimed at grabbing Hindu-owned land in Bangladesh. His research further found that by 2046 there will not be any Hindu left in Bangladesh. More than 11 million Hindus have fled Bangladesh between 1964 and 2013 due to atrocities unleashed on them by successive regimes, especially military ones in the country. To put things in perspective, the research found that 632 Hindus fled Bangladesh daily since 1964. However, the biggest challenge a landed Hindu family planning to leave Bangladesh faces is to find someone to buy his land because once whispers spread that a Hindu family is leaving the country, no one is willing to buy his property in the hope that soon the Hindu-owned property will be theirs without having to pay a penny.

While CAA has given a glimmer of hope to millions of oppressed minorities in Bangladesh, the Modi government needs to go a few steps further. The cut-off date for CAA has to be current and not 2014. India needs to bring to bear political pressure on the Bangladesh government to buy land at market value from Hindus wanting to leave Bangladesh. India also needs to provide protection to Hindus living in rural Bangladesh using all the means at their disposal. Most importantly, India's security mandarins need to draw up a plan of action to prepare for changes that will come about with political succession in Bangladesh in the near future.

Abhijit Mazumdar is an assistant professor of journalism at Park University in the US.

FAIRYTALES

Tejo Mahal? When fiction pretends to be history

The Taj Mahal did take a very long time to build. But it was never a temple.

AS I PLEASE

K. NATWAR SINGH



It all began 30 years ago. In 1989, a self-appointed "historian", wrote a book, "Taj Mahal: The True Story". According to P.N. Oak, the author, the Taj Mahal was actually a temple of Shivji and a palace named Tejo Mahal. No concrete historical evidence was produced. Nothing sticks like a falsehood. It took a little time to dismiss the Oak fiction, but not before Oak approached the Supreme Court to declare that the Taj Mahal was built by a Hindu King. The Supreme Court rejected his petition.

A few days back, Rajneesh Singh of the Bhartiya Janata Party filed a plea in the Lucknow branch of the Allahabad High Court, asking it to direct the Archaeological Survey to probe the 22 closed rooms in the Taj Mahal to ascertain the existence of idols of Hindu deities there.

The court rejected Rajneesh Singh's plea, giving him a

dressing down and asked him not to make a "mockery" of the PIL system. He was told to do research on the topic.

Justices D.K. Upadhyay and Subhas Vidyarthi, said to Rajneeshji, "Tomorrow you will come to ask us to go to the chambers of honourable judges... Go and research. Do an M.A. Do PhD. Then choose such a topic and if any institute disallows you to research on such a topic, then come to us. Please enrol yourself in M.A. and if any university denies you research on such a topic then come to us."

The petitioner's lawyer asked the court to allow him to withdraw the petition and file a new one. This the judges did not accept. The court "pulled up" Rajneesh Singh for filing the PIL in a "casual" manner... It further said the petitioner should point out which legal or constitutional rule had been infringed.

There is more to this fair-

rytale. A BJP Member of Parliament, Diya Kumari from Jaipur supported Rajneesh Singh. She claims that the land on which the Taj Mahal was built belonged to her forefathers. Apparently, the relevant documents are in the "Pothikhana" in one of the Jaipur palaces. Diya Kumari should ask for these to be made public. This is not a private matter.

The Taj Mahal is among the seven wonders of the world. It is visited by people from all parts of the globe. Every detail about its construction is documented—where did the marble come from, and the craftsmen. Yes, it did take a very long time to build. It was never a temple.

Earlier in this month one wise man announced that the Qutub Minar was not built by Qutubuddin but by a Hindu king. He even took a group of people chanting Hanuman Chalisa on his way to the monument. If I am not mistaken, they were stopped by the police. All this was reported in the newspapers.

Some years ago, the 400th anniversary of the battle of Haldighati was observed with much fanfare. It was not clear to me and all genuine historians whether the defeat of Maharana Pratap was being

observed or the victory of Emperor Akbar.

Maharana Pratap is among the great heroes India has produced. He never bent or bowed before Emperor Akbar. But he did not win the battle of Haldighati. Akbar did. One of the commanders in Akbar's army was none other than Raja Man Singh of Jaipur.

Rana Pratap died in 1597. His son Amar Singh finally surrendered to Jahangir in 1615, who treated him "with great courtesy... And never made to attend the Mughal Court or offer a daughter in marriage" I have quoted this from Ira Mukhoty's superb book on Akbar.

The Congress Chintan Shivar held in Udaipur displayed no signs of austerity. Gastronomically it must have been a treat. Nine chefs were brought from various parts of India. Plenty of food. Little food for thought.

Finland and Sweden have more or less decided to join NATO. Mr Putin was far from amused. He said in that case he would invade Finland.

The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to exercise his veto if Finland and Sweden are to be made members of NATO. Turkey is a member of NATO. This is unlikely to happen. The US will take care of the President of Turkey, who is constantly over reaching himself.

Tomorrow I will be 93.



A file photo of the Taj Mahal. ANI

People Of The Sacred Books

HINDUISM

Ahimsa in Hinduism

By Prarthna Saran

'Ahimsa Paramodharma'. Yes, sure it is. But, what exactly does it imply? A sad misunderstanding of our scriptures has led to a defeatist and cowardly mentality which has for long enslaved the minds and hearts of confused generations of Hindus. Our scriptures list 24 different kinds of himsas (violence). There is violence of speech , violence of intention, violence at the emotional and intellectual levels, violence against women and children, violence against the weak and the aged, violence against those incapable of defending themselves, and violence of snatching money or property etc. Such violence is categorised as aggression ,and is forbidden to a true Hindu . So non- violence is the greatest dharma, but nowhere is it stated that violence should be meekly tolerated! Ahimsa does not mean non- defence against aggression. That would be a dangerous interpretation of our noble philosophy.

The Geeta teachings are a religious call on every Hindu to discard his mind numbing defeatist cowardice, paraded as Ahimsa, and fight bravely against aggression and evil -doers. Krishna jolts and awakens Arjuna to the call of duty at the battlefield by insulting him with the humiliating term "impotent", as Arjuna was refusing to pick up arms, covering his shame with the mantle of Ahimsa! Krishna goads him to fight the righteous war and defend his right to kingdom, dignity and even life! All Hindu gods and goddesses carry weapons. Why?? Ram ,Krishna, Durga, Kali, Ganesh and Shiva, all are armed! Why? They have self- confessed that they have manifested to protect the noble and righteous and destroy the evil-doers. Don't we destroy all those that come to harm or kill us, even mosquitos, bacteria and viruses?

The Mahabharata states, "It is as sinful not to kill the evil-doer as it is to kill the innocent."

This first appeared on 21 June, 2020. The writer could not write this week due to unavoidable circumstances.

ISLAM

Dates on a calendar

By (Late) Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Someone has rightly said, "A day you have lived fully was your day. All other days are simply dates on your calendar." There are two ways of leading your life. One is to pass your time, and the other is to avail of your time. If you live just to pass time, you are wasting your life. But if you spend your days meaningfully, you are living. You are making proper use of this blessing that is life. Every new day that dawns brings with it many opportunities. These opportunities do not loudly announce themselves. Rather, they speak very silently. It is for us to recognize them and to use them in a properly-planned manner. You need to be able to skilfully discern the opportunities that come your way every new day. You need to be able to recognize which opportunities are truly for you and which are not. You should be able to appreciate how the opportunities that are indeed for you can be availed of in a peaceful way. You need to be able to know the best and most realistic way of employing these opportunities, and also the limits within which you must remain while doing so.

Furthermore, you should be aware that in using them you do not transgress into someone else's territory. There is another very important thing you need to remember while setting about using the many opportunities that come your way every day. And that is that you are not alone in this world. Just as you want to go ahead with making your life, there are vast numbers of other people who are impelled with the very same purpose. If you want to succeed in your life, it is very important for you not to come into conflict with others. You need to be able to navigate your life without clashing with them. Just as you have some interests, others, too, have their interests. A successful person avoids clashing with other people's interests and sails ahead to attain the purpose of life.

SIKHISM

One must fight the demons one faces

By Davinder P.S. Sandhu

Sometimes, we are advised to "leave" this materialistic life, and retreat to the jungles, caves, and mountains. It is said that this will help in "finding" the truth, because daily life is full of sham and drudgery. But the Guru Granth Sahib says He can be found right here: *Deep within my heart, the Guru has shown me the home of my being; My mind is imbued with peace and poise, O my fellow travelers.*

A town has two parallel streets. One day, a man comes from one street, and passes by the other street. His eyes are flowing with tears, and the residents of the second street presume that a death has occurred in the first, thus the tears. However, they do not ask for the real reason. Word soon spreads of the assumed death, and now the conversation turns to what could be the reason. Rumours spread of the cause of death, and many people say it could be the plague. People stop going between the two streets now, and the residents decide to leave the "stricken" city. The residents of each of the two streets leave in separate directions.

The town soon becomes a ruin. Now, there are two towns on either sides of the ruin, and they talk of their "great escape" from the plague. If only they had interacted with each other, they would have learned that the man had been crying from having peeled a large number of onions! Guru Granth Sahib tells us not to run away. It encourages us to explore ourselves, and guides us to face our demons — anger, lust, and jealousy. As we understand them, and the weaknesses that they cause, we will find the tool of His Word to defeat and master them. There is no need to retreat to caves, forests, and mountains, it is all right here: *The villains have been mastered, and goodness prevails, I am now Your Own Mansion and Temple, O Lord.*

This first appeared on 15 March, 2015. The writer is not writing due to unavoidable circumstances.

CHRISTIANITY

Whom are you seeking?

By Rev. Dr. Richard Howell

Jesus asked the disciples of John, who started following him when John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah whom they awaited, "What are you seeking?" To seek is to desire, and we desire what we love. When Jesus rose from the dead and saw the weeping Mary, who thought Jesus' body had been stolen. He asked her, "Whom are you seeking?" Mary was resilient in her pursuit to see Jesus.

What gave Mary real joy was the reality that Jesus was alive and that He had defeated death. The promises He made about giving eternal life were true.

What has captured your imagination? The advertisement industry makes billions of rupees by advertising products. They advertise to create a desire for the new, for our desires apart of God can never be satiated. To seek fulfilment outside the will and ways of God, as clearly stated in the scripture, will never satisfy; in fact, it will leave you thirsting all the more. Addictions often start with small doses taken for fun, which slowly ensnare us as the body begins to demand more.

Satan, the father of lies who comes to steal, kill and destroy, came to Jesus in the wilderness when He fasted for forty days and was physically weak. Satan told Jesus to turn stones into bread as He was God's Son and could easily satisfy the hunger He experienced. Jesus refused to listen to Satan's truth and fulfil desires outside the will of God.

Like Mary, let's be resilient and learn to practice the presence of God. Spend time reading God's Word, for it purges our ignorance as the Holy Spirit enlightens our hearts and mind. Develop a habit of reading God's Word both in silence and aloud. As the Word teaches, "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Whom are you seeking, Jesus or sinful desires?

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ALIGNMENT PROBLEM

Quad cannot ignore fallout of Russia-Ukraine conflict

It is only India's foreign policy establishment that is so convinced that it has the absolute brilliance to make the world understand India's position with precision. Those with less brilliance simply see India as more aligned to one side. And that has a terrible record of impacting on FDI as it did ever since Independence.

OPINION

SUNIL CHACKO



Of the Quad members, US, Japan, India and Australia, it is only India that is not officially aligned with Ukraine. India's "principled neutral, independent, impartial, non-aligned or its modern reincarnation—strategic autonomy" or any number of euphemisms cannot easily explain India's position in the conflict that can potentially spiral into World War III. India insists that the Quad nations should restrict to Indo-Pacific matters, and not venture into Russia-Ukraine, but the rest of the Quad disagrees and is spending time, attention and funding for Ukraine and refugees from the conflict, presumably as a signal that they and much of the world stand united against potential aggression in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere.

An expected military victory of the more powerful armed force in the conflict may not end the war, but rather convert it into a festering wound in the heart of Europe that does not heal anytime soon, unless there is an unconditional surrender or the decapitation of leadership of one of the sides that could change the current inability-to-compromise scenario. Further, with some 6,000 nuclear bombs available with the Russian Federation (including 2,000 smaller and more precise tactical nuclear weapons—one of which is being threatened to be dropped somewhere in Europe), this is no ordinary conflict like those abandoned after so-called struggles to impose democracy via the barrel of the gun in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Cambodia etc., that have sapped so much of the West's moral supremacy encapsulated in UN rhetoric.

THE 'MELANIN TEST'

While many ascribe diverse motives and attempt to understand the reasons for India's repeated abstentions at the UN, the Indian statements and actions look eerily like India's response to the USSR's crushing of the Hungarian revolution in 1956—although of course that conflict was less bloody and destructive, with approximately 2,500 Hungarians dead and 20,000 wounded. Many fled as refugees, including Andy

Grove who escaped from communist Hungary as a 20-year-old, completed his education in the US and became the third employee of Intel Corporation and later its CEO, and he is credited with transforming it into the largest semiconductor company in the world. Further, India was comfortable immediately condemning UK and France when they attacked Egypt in the Suez crisis that occurred simultaneously in late October and early November 1956, thus providing a fitting contrast. Some have seen these actions meeting the so-called "melanin test" wherein India immediately sides with the party with large melanin concentration in the skin (that gives the darker skin coloration) and against the melanin-deficient (Caucasians). When it is two sets of melanin-deficient parties going at each other, India demonstrates action-paralysis and confusion—as it did in the Hungary crisis in 1956 and as alleged by the Indian government's detractors today in the Russia-Ukraine war.

In the beginning of the conflict, India was very focused on getting out about 20,000 Indian students, who were left stranded in Ukraine by the sudden Russian invasion. Indeed, given all the chaos, the students themselves made their way to the multiple borders in a bid to escape the horrors of the fighting. Once they were across the Ukraine border, in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland, the Indian government provided Air Force and commercial flights to the students to return to India, but to what is now a very uncertain future given that many university buildings in Ukraine have been destroyed, and faculty and management have fled as refugees.

DE-DOLLARIZATION RISK

In business schools where the most insightful professors teach finance as if it were mathematical poetry, the term "risk-free" asset is emphasised in every class. It was believed, for instance, that US treasuries or bonds designated in US dollars issued by the US Treasury or Finance Ministry and held by investors around the world, ranging from oligarchs to sovereign wealth and pension funds, are "risk-free". The recent round of sanctions against oligarchs and people allegedly "close to Putin" no matter which passport they carried or whether in fact they had any leverage over President Putin, has left the finance community shell-shocked. Because, for the first time they understood that no asset in the world is

actually "risk-free". Unilateral US sanctions have bitten around the world. For instance, an oligarch's \$100 million yacht, registered in the Cook Islands was impounded at Mallorca island in the Mediterranean by Spanish law enforcement authorities at the request of the US with the backing of a US magistrate judge's order. The Cook Islands is a self-governing island country comprised of 15 small islands in the South Pacific Ocean in free association with New Zealand wherein New Zealand is responsible for the Cook Islands' defence and foreign affairs, and it is a little-known tax haven and the yacht was not even registered in the oligarch's name but allegedly does indeed belong to the oligarch.

Such has been the effectiveness of the US Treasury and US Department of Justice as they seek to drain President Putin of his support milieu. But has this all been a pyrrhic victory as those oligarchs in fact appear to have little actual influence over Putin, and the conversion of hitherto "risk-free" assets like US Treasuries into politically risky ones, will mean that the wealthiest irrespective of nationality and even others too will seek to diversify their wealth holdings into multiple categories of assets and currencies. Millionaires with nothing to do with any conflict have been opining that "what if some future administration gets upset with them" and so they must diversify. This appears to have become the first genuine risk to the US dollar since the heydays of the US in the early 20th century, especially after its decisive role in World Wars I and II, and the Marshall Plan to redevelop a devastated Europe and a similar one for Japan. It comes as technologies like cryptocurrencies and alternative currencies and many commodities like gold are becoming viable options for safeguarding wealth away from diverse political risks.

Decades ago, Dr Saburo Okita, a prominent economist and Foreign Minister of Japan, who was also a great friend, tried hard to make purchases of oil in Japanese yen to enable the yen to become a world currency. He was unsuccessful then because of larger geopolitical factors beyond his control. Today, however, Saudi Arabia is selling oil to the PRC in yuan/renminbi, breaking the historical jinx. Further, that would never have happened if the de-dollarization move was not underway.

India has great expertise in digital payment systems, with 74 billion digital financial rupee transactions being recorded during the past fiscal year. But India has no digital currency and cryptocurrencies are currently not traded in India and an ambiguous version of illegality is ascribed to cryptocurrencies, making India behind the times in ascertaining value through mining and utilising cryptocurrencies. This is another area that ought to be developed with



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attends the virtual Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in Tokyo on 4 March 2022. ANI

India immediately sides with the party with large melanin concentration in the skin (that gives the darker skin coloration) and against the melanin-deficient (Caucasians). When it is two sets of melanin-deficient parties going at each other, India demonstrates action-paralysis and confusion—as it did in the Hungary crisis in 1956 and as alleged by the Indian government's detractors today in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Quad expertise since investment capital, digital or otherwise, is the urgent need.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are being pressed by multiple leaders of European countries to intervene and resolve the Russia-Ukraine imbroglio, especially those in Western and Northern Europe that have existential reasons to press India. Sweden (9.7 million) Norway (5.1 million) Denmark (5.6 million) Finland (5.3 million) are less populated than most major Indian cities and would expect to be overrun by a rampaging Russia (144 million) should the conflict spill over beyond its current dimensions. While India remains smug in its belief that its "nuanced, principled and balanced" approach is well understood, a harsh reality exists as in Cold War 1.0 that perceives India as being on the side of Russia while mouthing generalities in support of Ukraine. Meanwhile, sycophants have been attempting to portray that there are several Nobel Peace Prizes available for the team that successfully negotiates an end to the conflict and ensures lasting peace.

A cautionary tale in history is worth recounting for India and PM Modi on playing negotiator. Before the name of Nelson Mandela became known worldwide, the reputation of Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's Prime

Minister, and later President, was acknowledged as the greatest champion of Pan-Africanism and decolonization. Ghana was the first Black African nation to achieve independence in 1957 and that was followed by 31 other African nations in rapid succession within a decade and Nkrumah was the foremost proponent of that effort, with his stirring, passionate rhetoric and arguments joined at the hip with the mass movement of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, and ideological assimilation of black nationalist Marcus Garvey and other leading lights of US African-Americans. Nkrumah also joined with Prime Minister Nehru and Presidents Nasser and Tito to build the Non-Aligned Movement. Thus, he was a towering figure, politically, in the "Third World", while commanding at best a nascent economy seeking to industrialize that was heavily dependent on cocoa, then as the world's No. 1 producer. His critics also saw him as authoritarian and increasingly under the grip of party apparatchiks and his Soviet advisors. While he himself proclaimed to be non-aligned, the world saw him (like it saw Nehru) as being aligned to the communist network of USSR, China and North Vietnam. Ironically, even tractors donated by the Soviet Union (that were apparently older than second-hand) broke down in Ghanaian fields, further

compounding the mess in agriculture and efforts on food self-sufficiency. Thus, when he set out on his quixotic mission to broker peace between the US (and its allies) and North Vietnam that was backed by China and Russia, it was seen as an affront to US President Lyndon Johnson, who was then in no mood to negotiate peace. Indeed, servile flatterers like Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his band of "best and brightest" hacks continued to convince President Johnson that the "kill ratios" and other fake statistics were indicating the certainty of victory over the peasant population. From declassified documents, it even appears that Nkrumah might have been lured into that politically suicidal mission to facilitate a coup in Ghana, while he was away, by senior military officers backed by US intelligence officials. On 24 February 1966, while Nkrumah was in the PRC, en route to North Vietnam, he was overthrown in a coup that ended his government and the young democracy in Ghana. Nkrumah spent the remaining 6 years of his life in the West African nation of Guinea as an exile writing books and railing against "neo-colonialism". While no military coup can possibly happen in democratic India, the cautionary part that resembles this facet of history is that if two belligerents (Russia and Ukraine) are each convinced of com-

The inability of Japan and India to agree to a special arrangement for India to allow the Japan Air Self-Defense Force to fly its planes to land in India, pick up humanitarian goods from UN High Commissioner for Refugees warehouses in India (likely filled with humanitarian goods procured in India itself) and then transport those goods to Ukraine is another evidence that India is wary of misunderstanding by Russia that it is getting too cozy with the pro-Ukraine camp via the Quad.

plete victory, there is really nothing that a negotiator or negotiating team can accomplish, no matter what well-wishers might want.

JAPAN AND INDIA, WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE QUAD

The inability of Japan and India to agree to a special arrangement for India to allow the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) to fly its planes to land in India, pick up humanitarian goods from UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warehouses in India (likely filled with humanitarian goods procured in India itself) and then transport those goods to Ukraine is another evidence that India is wary of misunderstanding by Russia that it is getting too cozy with the pro-Ukraine camp via the Quad. Correspondingly, India has not succeeded in becoming the prime destination for Japanese industry moving abroad (and transferring production from Japan and other countries) despite considerable rhetorical support for India-Japan. Soon after the Great Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011, when India even sent its NDRF to help in Onagawa, industry has been moving production abroad to such a great extent as to hollow out certain parts of the Japanese industrial bases, one reason for the approximately 30% sharp decline in the yen relative to the US dollar. Environmental regulations and protectionist measures in some countries have also compelled Japanese companies to manufacture locally in those countries. However, India has not benefited to the extent it could have in terms of Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI)—revealing the weakness of a government-government approach that does not involve more innovative think tanks and the private sector adequately.

Similar problems were apparent at the end of Cold War 1.0 when leading lights of foreign investment from actual investor nations openly stated that India was with the Soviets when the USSR existed and could not simply turn around and expect FDI stating that it was now genuinely non-aligned. It is only India's foreign policy establishment that is so convinced that it has the absolute brilliance to make the world understand India's position with precision. Those with less brilliance simply see India as more aligned to one side. And that has a terrible record of impacting on FDI as it did ever since Independence. Nothing much has changed, except that today, the teeming millions of youngsters in India, with more than 50% of its 1.4 billion population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35, many belonging to an "aspirational class", are desperately in need of investment capital, more than ever before. Failure to see that reality will have enormous consequences for India's elite.

INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

The Quad will be at the centre of the developing Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, that is the way of creating more unity within the countries keen for a free and open Indo-Pacific beyond military means. Trade and investment are at the core of the Framework, and most countries need to rapidly upgrade their economies following the catastrophic mismanagement of Covid that was very different from mainstream and other media portrayals. Severely impacting the elderly and those with significant lung and other pre-existing morbidities, Covid did not have any great mortality impact on the younger and healthier part of populations. Yet the one size fits all approach championed by one country and one multilateral brought economic destruction to much of the world through unprecedented lockdowns that had never hitherto been implemented nationwide for any other epidemic or pandemic. To successfully come out of that prolonged stagnation that is now wrecking entire societies will pose a tremendous challenge. The experience of Sri Lanka in recent weeks might portend a similar situation in more Asian countries. The collective wisdom and actions of leading economies will be essential to rectify the man-made catastrophes. Hence, the new Framework will concentrate on 1) fair and resilient trade, 2) supply chain resilience including medicines and vaccines, 3) infrastructure, clean energy, decarbonization, and 4) digital.

The Quad as democracies adhering to four key principles—rather than a gathering of four countries—looks to become the lasting legacy especially as countries like South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and other democracies in the Indo-Pacific seek to join a Quad Plus grouping. The rising concerns about the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict cannot be ignored by the Quad—even though it is a security dialogue focused not on Europe but rather the Indo-Pacific and is not a military alliance. Nevertheless, if the Quad cannot maintain the security of the Indo-Pacific through strategic and economic means and its transformation to permanently "free and open", it all will have little meaning, and will signal the end of the post-World War II era and its associated institutions and frameworks. Therefore, much is at stake in the run-up to the Quad Leaders' Summit meeting in Tokyo on May 24, 2022 and its follow-up.

Dr Sunil Chacko holds degrees in medicine (Kerala), public health (Harvard) and an MBA (Columbia). He was Assistant Director of Harvard University's Intl. Commission on Health Research, served in the Executive Office of the World Bank Group, and has been a faculty member in the US, Canada, Japan and India.

IN COURT

This is luxury litigation: SC on Kerala challenging clerk's rank

ANALYSIS

PRANSHI AGARWAL

The Supreme Court in the case *The State of Kerala and Ors. v. Subeer N.S. and Anr* observed assailing the Kerala High Court's order of affirming the seniority of an upper division clerk for filling a Special Leave Petition pulled up the State of Kerala.

The Government lost sight of these aspects while issuing Annexure-A13

order ratifying Annexure-A10 decision of the Director of Public Instruction on Annexure-A5 complaint was undertaken by the Director of Public Instruction, who has no authority to take a decision invoking Rule 27B of Part II KS & SSR based on the review of the Seniority the Director of Public Instruction and the Government while issuing the impugned

orders, none of these aspects were considered to Annexure-A3 final seniority list also by any of the aggrieved persons except a bogus complaint submitted as Annexure A5, that too almost 3 years after the finalization of the seniority list and there was no objection and further there was no objections to the rank and seniority assigned to the applicant in the provisional seniority list, the said seniority is finalized after publishing a provisional seniority list and inviting objections if any to the same as early as on 8th March 2009, the bench observed while affirming the view by KAT.

The said mistake was brought to the notice of the authorities, necessary cor-

rective action was taken and the applicant's seniority was reassigned based on his eligibility on the part of the controlling officer it is only by a mistake that he was granted promotion and was assigned the rank in the seniority list, the counsel said to further persuade the bench.

The Bench of Justice Chandrachud remarked that if the counsel feels there is an error you must rectify the error correctly and there was no fraud on his part and all this must be due on a reasonable dispatch.

The bench comprising of Justice DY Chandrachud further observed and noted when the matter was called upon hearing before the bench that the State

is here challenging it the bench further remarked by saying that why don't you do something better? Build schools, roads or infrastructure as one upper division clerk has got seniority.

Respondent's seniority was revised to the date on which he rejoined duty after the leave and the respondent was on leave without allowance at the time of his promotion as U.D Clerk, the counsel appearing for the State contended before the Court.

The Bench comprising of Justice DY Chandrachud and the justice Surya Kant orally remarked while dismissing the SLP against the order dated 01.17.2022, We are not a court of law but a court of justice as well.

IN COURT

Gyanvapi mosque survey issue listed before bench of Justice Chandrachud

PRANSHI AGARWAL

The Supreme Court in the case *Committee of Management Anju man Intezamia Masjid Varanasi Versus Rakhi Singh & O* observed before a bench presided over by Justice DY Chandrachud of listing of the petition filed against the survey ordered by a Varanasi court in Gyanvapi Mosque.

The Court ordered the Commission to submit a report by 05.17.2022 before the court to accompany Court commissioner Ajay Mishra for the survey and further the Court has appointed 2 more lawyers as commissioners.

The petitions have been moved by five Hindu women asking for year-long access to pray at a Hindu shrine behind the western wall of the Gyanvapi Mosque complex in Varanasi and once a year the site is currently opened for prayers, an order passed by the Varanasi Court in an inspection of the premises.

The videography inside the mosque was being opposed by the Mosque Committee so the survey could not take place. Thereafter a report was to be submitted by 05.10.2022, earlier the local court directed the authority.

on behalf of the Anju man Intezamia Masjid Committee demanding the removal of Advocate Commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra, a petition was being filed and the Court ordered that the survey of the



premises shall continue, After 3 days of arguments.

Till the survey is not completed, it shall continue further the Court directed and the court has also ordered for surveying the entire mosque complex.

The Committee of Management, Anjuman Intezamia Masjid, has filed the present special leave petition against order of the Varanasi Court ordering a survey on a plea by few Hindu devotees.

a bench led by CJI Ramana, the direction has been issued after the issue was mentioned and urgent listing of the case was sought.

The bench has further observed and directed that the Court deem it appropriate to direct the Registry to list the matter before the Bench presided over by Hon'ble Dr. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, upon being mentioned by, learned Senior counsel Mr. Huzefa Ahmadi, appearing on behalf of the petitioner.

Senior Advocate Huzefa Ahmadi had sought status

quo of the local court's order before the Chief Justice of India, while Mentioning the matter.

The Court has ordered Commissioner to conduct a survey as this is covered by Places of Worship Act Survey has been directed in relation to Varanasi property, submitted by the Senior Advocate, Ahmadi.

The direction has been issued by a bench headed by Chief Justice of India NV Ramana in a special leave petition challenging a Varanasi Court's order directing the survey work to continue in the Gyanvapi mosque-Kashivishvanath temple premises.

The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India, NV Ramana observed and issued the direction petition challenging a Varanasi Court's order directing the survey work to continue in the Gyanvapi mosque-Kashivishvanath temple premises in a special Leave petition and was heard by the court on urgent listing.



ELECTRICITY ACT

AN ASSOCIATION OF CORPORATE BODIES CAN ESTABLISH A CAPTIVE POWER PLANT PRIMARILY FOR THEIR OWN USE: SUPREME COURT

PRANSHI AGARWAL

The Supreme Court in the case *Chhattisgarh State Power Distribution Company Ltd. vs Chhattisgarh State Electricity Regulatory Commission* observed that a captive power plant primarily for their own use can be established by an association of corporate bodies.

The requirement would be that the consumption of SBPIL and SBMPL together should not be less than 51% of the power generated. Admittedly, the joint consumption by SBPIL and SBMPL is more than 51% and under the provisions of the said Act, the use of electricity by it would be for captive use only even an association of corporate bodies can establish a power plant. Since SBMPL holds 27.6% of the ownership, the requirement of not less than 26% of shares is fulfilled by SBMPL as SBMPL holds 27.6% equity shares in SBPIL.

The fourth proviso to subsection (2) of Section 42 of the said Act would also reveal that surcharge would not be leviable in case open access is provided to a person who has established a captive generating plant for carrying the electricity to the destination of his own



use and under Section 9 of the said Act, could be an individual or a body corporate or association or body of individuals, whether incorporated or not, it is clear that the person will get benefit even an association of corporate bodies can establish a captive power plant it has been seen. The definition of "person" is wide enough to include any company or body corporate or association or body of individuals, whether incorporated or not, or artificial juridical person it should be primarily for the use of the members of such cooperative society or association is the requirement, the Bench observed while referring to the provisions of the Electricity Act.

The BPIL, the respondent contended and supported the impugned judgment that no permission is required from the Commission for supply of electricity for its own use. Thereafter the appellant Company contended that unless SBPIL consumes 51% of the aggregate electricity generated by it, it will not be entitled to get the benefit under Section 9 of the said Act, in an appeal filed before the Apex Court.

An appeal was dismissed by the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity filed by the Company further The Commission held that SBPIL was entitled to supply electricity to its sister concern SBMPL and the same would qualify to be

treating as own consumption and within the ambit of Section 9 read with Section 2(8) of the Electricity Act, 2003 and Rule 3 of the Electricity Rules, 2005 SBPIL submitted a petition for providing open access and wheeling of power through the transmission system of the Chhattisgarh State Power Distribution Company Ltd (Company) for captive use by SBMPL to the Chhattisgarh State Electricity Regulatory Commission, the commission. A Captive Generation Plant is established by SBPIL, and is a sister concern of SBPIL Shri Bajrang Power and I spat Ltd and Shri Bajrang Metalics and Power Ltd, SBMPL.

SECTION 376DB IPC

SC to examine validity of minimum punishment of life imprisonment till death for gang rape of minor girl

PRANSHI AGARWAL

The Supreme Court in the case *Nikhil Shivaji Golait v Union of India & Anr* observed the minimum mandatory sentence of life imprisonment till natural life section 376DB of Indian Penal Code, 1860. The Court further issued the notice in a writ petition challenging the constitutionality of the same.

Even of 40 years or 50 years of imprisonment or more than that and thus the said sentence is totally disproportionate to the nature of offence which was alleged against the convict as the life sentence for natural life could be a very long sentence, stated by Advocate Gaurav Agrawal, who filed the petition.

The petition further stated that there is chance of reformation of the convict and commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment and in most cases, it provided minimum term of imprisonment of 20 years/ 25 years/ 30 years and even the Hon'ble Court has accepted the fact, the large number of judgments have shown that even in cases of rape and



murder of minor girl, of sentencing jurisprudence of this country reforming is one of the important aspects.

Under Section 376DB of the IPC, 1860 the prescription of such life sentence for the offence is unconstitutional as the reason for being it is unconstitutional is that it completely takes away the chance of reformation of the individual, stated by the petitioner in the plea.

Section 376DB amended in the year 2018 prescribes

that if a person is convicted of gang rape of a minor girl, then the court has no option, but to impose the aforesaid sentence or the higher sentence of death sentence of a girl who is less than 12 years of age.

The Bench comprising of Justice DY Chandrachud and the Justice Surya Kant by observed and noted that On the sentence which the leg has been prescribed, Mr. Gaurav Agrawal has placed on record Writ Petition under Article 32 of the constitution of India which

challenges the imposition for imprisonment of the remainder of the natural life on the constitutional challenge on the sentence which has been imposed, the bench ordered of issuing a notice. The Court further stated that there is no merit in the challenge to the conviction as the petitioner has been convicted of offence and has been sentenced to suffer the remainder of his natural life which is punishable u/s 376 DB, IPC with regards to the findings.