## The Sunday Guardian

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**SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY:** TIME TO BUILD **A REGULATORY** FRAMEWORK TO **PROTECT GOOD** 



**FOCUS ON IMPLICATIONS OF INDIA'S LUNAR AMBITIONS** 



**13-16 FESTIVAL OF IDEAS CELEBRATES** BOOKS, **AUTHORS AND CONVERSATIONS** 



#### TOP OF SATURDAY

#### PM TO DISTRIBUTE **OVER 51,000** APPOINTMENT **LETTERS ON** 28 AUGUST

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will distribute more than 51,000 appointment letters to the newly inducted recruits on 28 August, an official state ment said on Saturday. Border Security Force said that Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri will distribute appointment letters or August 28 in Punjab. Taking to X, BSF Punjab Frontier said, "Empowerment through jobs. The 8th tranche of appointment letters distribution is set for 28/08/2023 at 45 Rozgar Mela, including BSF Punjab, Jalandhar, in the presence of Hardeep Singh Puri, GO PM of India Narendra Modi will address the event online.

#### **ISRO SHARES VIDEO SHOWING PRAGYAN ROVER ROAMING AROUND** SHIV SHAKTI **POINT**

NEW DELHI: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Saturday released a video showing the Pragyan rover roan ing around Shiv Shakti point. the touchdown site of lander Vikram, on the lunar surface. Taking to social media platform X formerly called Twitter, ISRO said Pragyan rover roams around Shiy Shakti Point in pursuit of lunar secrets at the South Pole!" This comes hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the touchdown spot of the Vikram lander on the lunar surface would from now onwards be known as the "Shiv

#### 'EU HAS MADE **PROGRESS ON FTA** TALKS WITH INDIA

NEW DELHI: The discussions on the Free Trade Agreement between India and the European Union (EU) have made "progress but a lot of work is still ahead of us", said EU Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis on Saturday, adding that the ties between the two sides have a "lot of untapped potential". At a press conference held in India Dombrovskis acknowledged that while progress has been made in the FTA discussions, there are still substantial challenges to address

**SCIENCE** 





#### **SHUNNING BLOCS**

# AHEAD OF G20 SUMMIT, MODI STEERS BRICS TOWARDS NEUTRALITY

Despite efforts by some of its members to convert the group into an instrument of bloc politics, BRICS has remained neutral. Despite similar efforts directed at causing disharmony within the 2023 G2O, the proceedings have gone on smoothly.

MADHAV NALAPAT NEW DELHI

he XV meeting of the BRICS Big Five (one of them attending virtually) that took place during the week in Johannesburg drew international attention on a scale not seen before. The reason was the perception in international

STELLAR SUCCESS

media that the association would change from its present neutrality to a stance that opposes the Atlanticist powers, specifically the United States. This did not happen. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has thereby ensured that the autonomy of India where foreign (and domestic) policy is concerned remains intact. Despite the fault line created within 2.0 needed to be avoided, the UNSC and the G2O (to name just two international bodies) by the intensification since February 2022 of the conflict in Ukraine, India has remained on the best of terms with both the Russian Federation as well as the United States. Within BRICS, India was clear that the bloc politics of Cold War

and that the platform should continue to remain neutral. As a corollary, it was made clear that any new member should be carefully and unanimously chosen, so that bloc politics did not creep into the selections. All six of the new members are on good terms with India, and among them only Iran,

partly as a consequence of the scrapping of the nuclear deal under President Trump and partly because of its clerical regime, can be considered hostile to the Atlanticist powers. Efforts made by some in the group aimed at bringing in additional members, at least two of which were closely aligned to Cold War 2.0 bloc politics, was

put aside in deference to the view of the Indian side that BRICS needed to remain a neutral platform even after it was expanded by six new members to BRICS Plus. Both Brazil and South Africa, the other two members of the Global South within the current BRICS framework, were on board with the Indian stand that the platform

ought not to become an instrument of bloc politics and recrimination.

#### **PUTIN ACTS AS A FRIEND**

India's success at maintaining a balance within BRICS between the two competing blocs in the new Cold War has been unwelcome

#### Chandrayaan-3 puts India into a higher geopolitical orbit

T. BRAJESH

success in soft-landing the Chandrayaan-3 on the moon's potentially waterrich southern polar region literally brought scores of congratulatory messages to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) scientists, from the United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, Asian nations, the Gulf and the 32-million-plus Indian diaspora. As the development happened coincidentally during the BRICS Summit where PM Modi was present, it increased its international resonance all the more. There is no gainsaying the fact that the successful lunar mission has boosted India's status on the global stage, particularly in all the elite groupings such

India's stellar and historic

as BRICS, G2O, Quad, SCO, etc. PM Modi's statement at Johannesburg soon after Chandrayaan-3's successful landing impressed the global leaders. "The success of Chandrayaan-3 is not only limited to one country, but it is the success of mankind". An official here said: "The words of PM Modi reaffirm his stature as a statesman who gave a wider perspective to the achievement."

Diplomatic officials, who are preparing the strategy for the forthcoming G2O summit to be held in New Delhi next month, told *The* Sunday Guardian that "Chandrayaan-3's success will give India more power in its mission for getting a permanent UNSC seat, Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership, etc." "We will be working much harder to capitalise on India's growing geopoliti-



Ready to take off

A view of the 'Bharat Mandapam', at Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi on Saturday. The G2O Summit will be held at this venue in September. ANI

#### 'DEBT TRAP'

#### FREEBIES GALORE IN RAJASTHAN AS GEHLOT EYES RE-ELECTION

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's bid to win a record back-to-back Assembly election by offering freebies has not only sparked a debate over electoral promises adding up to bad economics, but also started creating a headache-of-sorts for him like in the case of free smartphones for 1.35 crore women wherein some beneficiaries allegedly are complaining about the poor quality of the handsets.

Even the free power scheme for the poor faced criticism, initially, amid allegations that the surcharge on bills was undoing the

ity offer. Apart from 100 free units of power, the state government has now waived off fixed charges, fuel surcharge and other levies for customers who consume up to 200 units of power in a month. Consumers using up to 200 units will also not be charged for the first 100 units of power.

Other schemes announced by Ashok Gehlot for the poor include LPG cylinder for Rs 500 for those in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category; free scooters for 30,000 meritorious girl students at a total cost of Rs 390 crore; free emergency care under right to health; family health insurance of Rs 25 lakh-up

from Rs 10 lakh earlier, along with an accident insurance cover of Rs 10 lakh; and a minimum monthly pension of Rs 1,000 under a social security scheme.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has warned the Congress government in Rajasthan not to offer freebies blindly as such steps will increase the desert state's debt drastically. PM Modi was speaking at the launch of two Metro lines in Pune earlier this month. "Emptying a state's treasury for selfish reasons impacts the people the most...it impacts the future of the youth," he said, referring to what he often calls the "revdi culture".

now 'Shiv Shakti Point' PM Modi declares that 23 August will be celebrated as

R. JAYAPRAKASH

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT** 

Conforming to the naming tradition, Chandrayaan-3's landing point on the moon will be named "Shiv Shakti Point," a convergence of welfare and strength, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Saturday.

'National Space Day'.

PM Modi flew down to Bengaluru on Saturday morning from Greece's capital Athens to interact with ISRO scientists on the successful lunar mission and announced the decision to name the spot where the lander "Vikram" touched

down as "Shiv Shakti Point". Terming the success of Chandrayaan-3 mission as an "extraordinary moment" in the history of India's space programme, PM Modi, who turned emotional, said the place where the Chandrayaan-2 lander crash-landed on the moon's surface in 2019 would be known as "Tiranga Point".

Chandrayaan-3 landing spot

"There is a scientific tradition of naming the location of touchdown. India has decided to name the lunar region where our Chandrayaan-3 landed. The place Vikram lander descended will be known as Shiv Shakti Point.

"In Shiv, there is resolution for the welfare of humanity and Shakti gives us strength to fulfil those resolutions. This Shiv Shakti Point of the moon also gives a sense of connection with the Himalayas to Kanyakumari," the PM added.

He said the new generation should come forward to prove scientifically the astronomical formulae in Indian scriptures and to study them anew. "It is also important for our heritage and for science. In a way, this is a double responsibility for the students of schools, col-

#### **IDEATING**

#### THOUGHT LEADERS DISCUSS A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES IN **FESTIVAL OF IDEAS**

**RAHUL CHHABRA** 

The Festival of Ideas, a two-day event held in New Delhi on 24-25 August, brought together leading thinkers and experts from a wide range of fields to discuss some of the most pressing issues facing the nation and the world today.

The two-day thought-provoking discussions, organised by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, covered a wide range of topics, including politics, defence, economy, science, films, books, influencers,

India's soft power, faith and Hinduism. In the political sphere, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the Opposition's alliance to challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi dominated the debate. While Rahul Gandhi, the relevance of his family and his leadership style figured prominently. Author, Dr Aishwarya Pandit Sharma cautioned the Congress against drifting around buzzwords like "evolution of Rahul Gandhi" as the issue was of interest only to his party. She also highlighted Rahul's failure to understand the situation on the ground, which has changed dras**BEAUTIFICATION** 

## MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS GET READY FOR G20 SUMMIT IN SEPTEMBER

Efforts have been intensified to keep Delhi clean and green before the summit.

TIKAM SHARMA

In view of the summit, the The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has identified 44 roads to further strengthen cleanliness and beautification in the wake of the upcoming G2O summit. According to the MCD, they have intensified the preparation to keep the vicinity MCD. clean and green before the G20 summit, which has 15

days to go. The G2O summit is slated to take place on 9-10 September at the recently inaugurated state-of-the-art International Exhibition and Convention Centre Bharat Mandapam (IECC) at Pragati Maidan in Delhi. It will be the first-ever G20 summit to be held in India as well as in South Asia.

MCD has identified 44 roads and will maintain the cleanliness and beautification of these roads. Earlier, a total of 26 roads were identified for special cleaning arrangements; now, 18 more roads have been added to this sequence. So, in all, 44 roads have been identified by the Officials of the MCD told

The Sunday Guardian that all these roads will be maintained by nodal officers appointed by the MCD. The nodal officers, along with their teams and multi-purpose vehicles, will do the cleaning work, control the dust, and take care of the

Officials further said that the team shall look after the proper cleaning of gully



A beautification work at Bharat Mandapam convention centre of Pragati Maidan to welcome delegates ahead of G20 Summit in New Delhi

gratings, bell mouths, C channels, etc. They will also perform ploughing and removal of unwanted growth from wild ants, bushes, etc. daily. MCD is also running a special drive on missing kerb stones, manholes, gully grating, and/or repair of footpaths, central verges, etc., which will be done with

existing resources or with follow-up action with their counterpart in PWD.

The added roads are: Sector 22 Road, Dwarka; Vasant Kunj Road; Mehrauli-Gurugram Road (upto Aya Nagar Border); Shankar Road; Nelson Mandela Marg; Vasant Kunj Mall Road; Bisham Pitamah Marg; Abdul Ghaffar Khan Marg; Velodrome Road; Satyagraha Road; Mahatma Gandhi Marg from Arihant Marg to NH-48; and many more.

The Delhi police has hired disaster management vehicles. Ahead of the G2O Summit, six disaster management vehicles will be pressed into service along the routes to be taken by the foreign delegates and nearby

These vehicles will be manned by individuals trained in disaster management. "Two to three men will be present in each vehicle. The vehicle will be deployed on the routes and near the venues. An inspector-rank officer will coordinate with the personnel in charge of these vehicles," an official said.

The official added that the main purpose of these vehicles will be to tackle emergencies in the shortest period of time. "If a tree falls on the route where delegates are to pass, the area traffic inspector will ensure that the disaster management vehicles reach there in time and remove the tree quickly to provide seamless traffic movement for the delegates."

#### **DMRC** beautifying metro stations:

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has also beautified the Airport Express Line corridor and metro stations. The DMRC has identified 20 stations from which foreign guests are likely to travel. Special arrangements have been made at these stations. Cutouts of

the G2O summit have been placed near these stations so that people can also be made aware of the relevance of the G20 conference. Stations around Pragati Maidan have been decorated with G20 conference-themed logos. These stations include Indraprastha, Mandi House, Laxmi Nagar, Nirman Vihar, Preet Vihar, Akshardham, Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat, Supreme Court Metro Station, etc. Apart from this, boards of the G2O conference have been installed near the entry gate and ticket counters of all other

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) will issue uniforms and duty passes ahead of the G2O summit. NDMC field workers will do G2O-themed uniforms and carry colour-coded duty passes ahead of summitrelated meetings, expected to be held between 3 and 10 September.

Around 3,000 sanitation workers, gardeners, and Group D field workers will be seen in orange T-shirts with green collars paired with grey trousers, said a senior NDMC official. The uniforms will have the G2O logo on the front and the NDMC logo on the back.

NDMC vice chairman Satish Upadhyay said the new uniforms are expected to be given out by the end of this week. The civic body overseeing Lutyens' Delhi has also initiated the process for making duty passes for its workers who will be deployed on duty during this

**'QUALITY CONCERN'** 

#### NMC pauses order to doctors to prescribe generic medicines only

National Medical Commission had recently asked doctors to prescribe generic drugs instead of branded drugs or face penalties.

**ANJALI SINGH** 

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has put on hold, with immediate effect, its recent regulation mandating doctors to prescribe only generic drugs or face punishment.

The NMC had recently asked doctors to prescribe generic drugs instead of branded drugs or face penalties. These regulations had made the Indian Medical Association (IMA) raise concerns.

A government doctor said: "Big companies pay in cash and kind, give gifts, and sponsor programmes for the doctors in exchange for them prescribing their

drugs. There is always an MR (medical representative) standing outside the office for meetings with doctors. Most of the time, those prescribed medicines were only available in the pharmacies in and around that doctor's clinic. The cost of these medicines is higher than the same ones produced by reputed pharmaceutical companies.'

Medical representatives from these big firms also plan their family holidays, parties, and conferences, he added.

there are hundreds of brands that will have the same salt, but who will judge which one is genuine?

So, there is a high chance the pharmacy will provide the patient with the medication that will profit them more. Doctors maintain that 99% of doctors don't get any benefits for prescribing any medicine apart from getting a pen and notepad.

Former IMA president Dr Rajan Sharma said: "We agree to any regulation that is for patients' benefit, but may I ask who gives permission for all the so-called branded companies to make drugs and market them under their own brand name? It is the Government of India, so the IMA or the doctors have no role to play in it. Blame is being put on the doctors, which is condemnable and not palatable because we are never involved in the pricing of the drugs, their permissions, or stopping them from being included in the essential drugs list, and the prices are regulated by the government."

Responding to a question of how he sees the current regulation that has now been put on hold, he said: "I don't see any logic in such a move; how are they going to meet the requirements?"

As per the NMC's new regulation, now put on hold, doctors can face licence suspension if they do not prescribe generic drugs. Currently, there are a few generic medicines available on the market, and most of

them are branded generics. A generic drug is a medication created to be the same as an already marketed brand-name drug in dosage form, safety, strength,

route of administration,

quality, performance characteristics, and intended use. A drug sold by a drug company under a specific name or trademark is protected by a patent. Brandname drugs may be available by prescription or over

the counter. The difference between brand-name and generic drugs is in the circumstances of producing the drugs. While brand name drug refers to the name given by the producing company, generic drug refers to a drug produced after the active ingredient of the brand name drug. Generic drugs will, however, be sold under different brand names but will contain the same active ingredients as the brand-name drug. But with regards to the effectiveness of the drugs, generic drugs have the same quality active ingredient as brand-name drugs.

According to the NMC's new regulation that has been put on hold, incorprescription guidelines restricts Registered Medical Practitioners (RMP) from getting involved in any third-party educational activity like continuing professional development, seminars, workshops, symposia, and conferences that involves direct or indirect sponsorships from pharmaceutical companies or the allied health sector.

The NMC has said: «India's out-of-pocket spending on medications accounts for a major proportion of public spending on health care. Further, generic medicines are 30% to 80% cheaper than branded drugs. Hence, prescribing generic mediporating the telemedicine cines may overtly bring down healthcare costs and improve access to quality care.»

> The RMPs should advocate for hospitals and local

pharmacies to stock and prescribe generic drugs that are available on the market and accessible to the patient, stated the order.

Leena Singh, a 42-year-old diabetic patient, said: «I am aware of the MR (medical representative) concept that doctors are getting some sort of favouritism like gifts, junkets, etc. from pharma companies, and that is the reason why they promote particular medicines from particular companies, but I'm also sceptical about the fact that, as a patient, how will I decide which brand drug will suit me and who will be accountable if a particular medication show any

side effects?»

'A GLOBAL ISSUE'

#### 'Microplastics in rainwater can lead to different types of cancer'

**ANJALI SINGH** 

In an alarming finding, the Indian Institute of Technology, Patna (IIT Patna), has discovered the presence of microplastics in municipal rainwater samples, raising the spectre of harmful elements increasingly becoming a big challenge for health policymakers across the globe.

According to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), microplastics may serve as vectors for harmful organisms, including enteric viruses and protozoa, and can cause several health hazards.

Microplastics are plastic pieces that have been cut off from larger plastic pieces and are in the micron size range. They get into the environment over years after degradation from larger plastics. Microplastics (MPs) are a global issue because they are released all over the world (Yu et al., 2018; Alimba and Faggio, 2019). In 2018, global plastics output increased to over 359 million tonnes (Mt), up from 348 Mt in 2017 (PlasticsEurope, 2019).

Dr Rahul Manchanda, Hon. Senior Consultant (Endo-

scopic Gynaecology), PSRI Hospital, said: "This rainwater may eventually find its way to either drinking water or bathing water. And in both these situations, in the drinking water, it can get into the digestive system, and in the bathing water, it can get into the skin and cause diseases like dermatitis. So inflammation of the skin and long-term use can also lead to different types of skin cancer."

India currently generates 9.4 million tonnes of plastic garbage a year, according to estimates. Due to poor recycling rates and inadequate waste management infrastructure, a large amount of this debris winds up in landfills, rivers, and seas, where it slowly decomposes into microplastics. A study, "Plastic waste inputs from the land into the ocean, published in the journal Science in 2015, showed that India ranked 12th among the countries with improper management of waste plastics and was projected to be ranked fifth by 2025. According to a study, «Microplastic pollution and associated health hazards: Impact

of Covid-19 pandemic,» the

ultimate fate of microplastic is accumulation inside the human body, posing the risk of different health conditions like cancer, diabetes, and allergic reactions. Dr Yudhyavir Singh, Assistant Professor at AIIMS, New Delhi, said: «We are living in a plastic world. Everything is made of plastic. Whatever we are using is made of plastic. So, either it will come through the water or whatever you use. Plastic is part of your life.» He added: «Some studies show that these plastics can also cause genetic changes affecting cells; imagine the level of harm they can cause to the body.»

Asked if microplastics have entered mother's milk and the human heart. Singh said. "Studies show if a child at his her early stages of life gets exposed to microplastics, then it could lead to neurodevelopmental abnormalities and cognitive issues like lack of concentration and learning disabilities or autism."

"Today, we consume plastic every day because the food material comes in plastic, and whatever food you are offering from the rest to the end

is also plastic. It is packed in plastic," he said.

Dr Manchanda said: "Now, when we are so exposed, these fine particles will be absorbed through the food, the water, or the air in your body and can cause multiple unwanted changes in the body. If we look into how it can affect the body, then in the longer term, it can damage the respiratory system, get into the blood systems, and the digestive systems, and cause accumulation in all these systems, including different organs, and hence have harmful effects."

Microplastics can also contain toxic substances that may disrupt normal biological processes. These microplastics are considered to have adverse effects on hormonal balance, immune function, and cellular processes, which can then raise concerns about cancer development. Even finding them in the placenta has been recently seen, and these can then affect newborns in the critical stage of development in their organs and systems because they are essentially vulnerable to these microplastics, he added.

**IN HARYANA** 

#### SEC 144 IN NUH, SHOBHA YATRA PERMISSION DENIED

CORRESPONDENT PANCHKULA

The Manohar Lal Khattarled Haryana government said on Saturday that no permission has been granted to hold the Braj Mandal Shobha Yatra in Nuh, adding that Section 144 has been imposed in the district. Addressing the media, Nuh Deputy Commissioner Dhirendra Khadgata said, "We have denied permission for the yatra (Braj Mandal Shobha Yatra). Still, some have said they will conduct the yatra. We have imposed Section 144." Haryana Police

said on Saturday that internet services have been suspended in Nuh district until August 28. "As a preventive measure, internet services have been suspended in Nuh from 12 noon on August 26 up to 11:59 pm on August 28," an official statement said. Earlier, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad said that they would bring out a Braj Mandal Jal Abhishek Yatra on August 28 in Nuh.

Haryana government authorities have, however, denied permission for the yatra, citing apprehensions of disturbance of law and order expressed by local police as well as intelligence agencies.

Earlier today, Haryana Director General of Police (DGP) Shatrujeet Kapur presided over a meeting with senior police officers of bordering states through video conferencing here and called for a coordinated effort to effectively deal with the situation. In the meeting, which was attended by the senior police officers of the states of Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Kapur said

that the Nuh administration has denied permission to the organisers of the Yatra in the wake of the meeting of the G2O Sherpa group scheduled to be held in Nuh from September 3 to 7 and to maintain law and order in the aftermath of violence that took place on July 31, 2023. "Even though permission has been denied to hold the Jal Abhishek Yatra, there are indications that certain organisations have invited people from Haryana and other neighbouring states to reach Nuh on August 28, the DGP said.

AT DELHI AIRPORT

#### **AMPLE PARKING SPACE FOR PLANES DURING G20 SUMMIT**

CORRESPONDENT PANCHKUI A

Assuring a smooth and efficient travel experience for all, the Delhi airport operator DIAL said on Saturday that the Indira Gandhi International Airport is fully equipped with ample parking space for aircraft during the G2O Summit. Delhi International Airport Limited also said that it has received requests from airlines for the cancellation of 80 departing and as many arriving domestic flights during three days from September 8 in connection with the global summit, which is going to be held under India's presidency.

Earlier, the Civil Aviation Ministry was in discussions with stakeholders to relocate grounded aircraft from Delhi Airport to nearby airports. "We take immense pride in India's role as the host of the G20 Summit 2023. Current news on cancellations of flights has no linkage to the parking of aircraft. We have already provided the required parking. Decisions on cancellations of flights have been taken by airlines, possibly in light of traffic restrictions due to the G2O summit," a DIAL spokesperson said.

He said that Delhi Airport is fully equipped with ample parking space for aircraft. "So far, we have received requests for cancellation of approximately 80 departing and 80 arriving domestic

is a mere 6 percent of the normal domestic operations at Delhi Airport. The restrictions will not have any impact on international flights," he said. "While we recognise that approximately 80 arrivals and 80 departures may be affected due to these cancellations, we are committed to working closely with airlines to minimise any inconvenience caused to passengers," the spokesperson added.

flights over 3 days, which

**'EARLY MOVER'** 

## BJP MAY RELEASE 70 NAMES FOR LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

Party won't wait for Election Commission's election date announcement.

RAHUL CHHABRA

ational BJP strate-gists are preparing to announce the party's first list of 70-plus Lok Sabha candidates much before the official release of dates by the Election Commission, sources said. Most of these seats will be those on which the party stood second or third in the 2019 elections.

The party adopted a similar early mover strategy in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh by announcing 39 and 21 candidates, respectively, for Assembly polls in the two states later this year. The objective behind the early release of candidates' names is to give its nominees extra time to campaign on challenging seats. Early announcement

of names not only helps the BJP surprise rivals, but also mounts pressure on the latter to hasten their announcement of candidates.

For the 2024 parliamentary elections, the BJP has identified 140-plus challenging seats where the performance of the party needs improvement, sources said.

Apart from these 140 seats, the BJP has identified 40 high-profile seats where Opposition heavyweights are likely to be fielded. On these seats, the saffron party plans to field candidates who are popular and fit the social-engineering and oth-

Meanwhile, at a time when the year-end Assembly elections in five states are in national focus, the political discourse in the national capital has started getting dominated by issues

The objective behind the early release of candidates' names is to give its nominees extra time to campaign on challenging seats. Early announcement of names not only helps the BJP surprise rivals, but also mounts pressure on the latter to hasten their announcement of candidates.

related to the Lok Sabha elections.

While the BJP, which holds all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, has taken a lead over its rivals by announcing names of party leaders in charge for each seat, the AAP and the Congress, both partners in the national-level Opposition bloc, have started having sharp exchanges over seatsharing. While the Delhi Congress says it wants to prepare for contesting all seven seats, the AAP says in such a scenario there is no need for a national alliance.

Sources said that for their united fight against the BJP on the seven seats, both the AAP and the Congress want to adopt a seat-sharing formula so that there is just one strong opposition candidate to challenge the saffron party in each Lok Sabha seat.

However, BJP leader Manoj Tiwari questioned the tie-up between the AAP

and the Congress and asked, "What sort of an alliance is this? They don't want to talk about each other's corruption." When AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal goes to Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh, the Congress feels uncomfortable. Kejriwal calls the ruling Congress in Chhattisgarh inefficient, but at the national level both the parties want to fight elections jointly, he said.

During his political meetings in Raipur, Kejriwal flaunted the AAP model that he claimed had resulted in free, uninterrupted power supply to Delhiites and Punjab residents. He claimed that free power was not available even in advanced countries like US, Japan or France. "Only I have the formula to ensure free power to the poor," he said. He also shared "Kejriwal guarantees" with the voters of Chhattisgarh, vowing that he would prefer dying than reneging on his promises, including free 300 units of power, improved education and health services and free pilgrimage for the elderly.

Leader of Opposition in

Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bhiduri was quick to call him out on his alleged "lies" on the power situation before the AAP came to power. "Kejriwal is lying openly by claiming that there were 7-8 hours of power cuts in Delhi before he became the CM. The privatisation of the power utility in the city had changed the electric supply situation much before he had entered politics and there were no long power cuts as he claimed in Chhattisgarh," he said.



#### THE MAVERICK REMEMBERS

Mani Shankar Aiyar's book is making news, some for the right reasons and some for reasons that are uniquely Mani. The book, "Memoirs of A Maverick: The First 50 Years" is the first of three volumes. Now usually one's memoirs fill one volume, but remember this is Mani Shankar Aiyar we are talking about, and to quote him, he needs 500 words just to clear his throat. So, three volumes for a memoir should not be too surprising. However his comments at a very high profile book launch in the capital (with Sonia Gandhi in the audience) have caused some controversy, for while commenting on former PM P.V. Narasimha Rao's 'communal tendencies" he observed that Rao was the first BJP PM. But speaking at the Festival of Ideas in the national capital, Mani also commented that he could pin point the exact moment in time when he realised that his political career was over. That was when he told Sonia Gandhi that he planned to write his memoirs, and she told him "Go ahead". That was when I knew that she had no plans for me (in active politics). Well, some would say the alternate employment was more rewarding as the publishing world is richer by three volumes.

#### RAHUL IN AMETHI?

Is Rahul Gandhi going to contest from Amethi or did the local Congress chief make a comment that was above his paygrade, so to speak? Congress spokespersons are yet to confirm this on record, but off record, they outline the dilemma at hand. Going by ground reports the Congress feels that it is in a strong position to wrest back Amethi from Smriti Irani, especially with a tie-up with the Samajwadi Party on the horizon. But at the same time Rahul is equally keen to contest from Wayanad and has developed a special equation with the constituency and the state. If he wins both then which one will he give up, asked a Congress leader? So why enter into this quandary, he added. As for the other claim that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may contest from Varanasi, there are not many takers for this as this is the Prime Minister's seat and there is no way he will lose, no matter who contests against him. So there is nothing to gain, apart from some headline play. Hence, Congress leaders state in a battle where every seat counts it makes sense to pit Priyanka in a seat where she has a winning chance. Then, will it be Priyanka from Amethi? As for Rae Bareli, the former Congress president still ...... enjoys a tremendous amount of goodwill and will probably retain the seat if she contests again. But one thing is clear, the Gandhis are very keen to ensure that at least one—if not two of them—are Lok Sabha MPs from Uttar Pradesh, the state that traditionally sends Prime Ministers to Delhi. In fact there is even a buzz that Mallikarjun Kharge may even contest from the cow belt, but so far it's only a buzz. Then again, isn't that how waters are tested?

#### **ROAD TO DELHI VIA LUCKNOW**

While attending the Festival of Ideas conclave in the capital, Akhilesh Yadav, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh got a rousing welcome from the audience, leading the moderator to guip that perhaps Akhilesh should consider the Chief Ministership of Delhi. Quick to retort, Akhilesh said that currently his only aim was to be Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and then added with a smile, "besides, aren't all roads to Delhi via Uttar Pradesh?'

#### TOP OF SATURDAY

**WILL START AT 11 AM** 

#### PM TO ADDRESS 104TH EPISODE OF MANN KI BAAT ON SUNDAY

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the 104th episode of his monthly radio programme. Mann Ki Baat, on Sunday. The broadcasting of the programme will start at 11 am. Taking to social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, the Prime Minister said, "Tune in at 11 AM tomorrow. Always a delight to highlight inspiring life journeys from across India." The 103rd edition of 'Mann Ki Baat' was aired on July 30, when PM Modi mentioned 'Meri Maati Mera Desh' campaign for the first time. Mann ki Baat has impacted all sections of society, who have been inspired to contribute towards fulfilling the great goals he has set for the nation. Mann ki Baat started on 3 October 2014, and reached its 100th episode on 30 April 2023. ANI

**THIRD ADMISSION ROUND** 

#### **OVER 65,900 OF 71,000 UG SEATS** FILLED; SPOT ROUNDS TO FILL REMAINING IN DELHI UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI: Over 65,900 of total 71,000 undergraduate seats have been filled in the Delhi University as the third round of admission concluded on Saturday, varsity officials said. The university may announce spot admission rounds to fill the remaining seats, a varsity official said. "The overall admission at the end of the third round of seats allocation are 65937. We may announce spot rounds to fill the remaining seats," a university official said. There are 71,000 seats across the DU colleges. The seats for UG programmes are being allotted under the Common Seat Allocation System-UG-2023. In June, DU started the admission process for 78 UG programmes for the academic year 2023-24. ANI

#### **'BEING RELEVANT'**

## Jayant Chaudhary plans greater RLD presence in western Uttar Pradesh

'Party working to increase its electoral worth so that the party chief can negotiate as many seats as possible'.

**BADAR BASHIR** NEW DELHI

Rashtra Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary is seen to be in pursuit of making his party more relevant in western UP. Sources suggested that the party has started working on the ground and increase its electoral worth so that the party chief can negotiate as many seats as would be possible to get.

Sources in the RLD said that the party is focusing on around 25 seats in the western UP and also asserted that work taken up in these constituencies doesn't mean that the party will contest on all, but the groundwork will also help its partners who would probably contest on many of such seats. However, the party wants to consolidate the Jat voters which would eventually help the party strengthen on electoral grounds. An



File photo of Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary addressing the RLD National Annual Convention, at the Constitution Club, in New Delhi on 14 February 2023. ANI

analyst said, "If the party wants to grow, it needs to have a say over its core vote bank and such a move is seen to lay the foundation for its growth in future political ventures. Moreover, if these voters start coming towards RLD, the party would have a greater say while seeking more seats in any alliance.'

RLD general secretary Trilok Tyagi told The Sunday Guardian, "We are pre-

paring on seats but there is no hard and fast rule that we will contest on all the seats we are preparing on. First, we have contested 10 seats with Mulayam Singh Yaday and have also contested around 15 seats with the Congress. First there was Akhilesh Yadav and RLD together and now there is Congress in the alliance as well. So, there is no question about we being

adamant on the number

will also help its partners who would probably contest on many of such seats. of seats. We will all sit to-percent vote share to 3.18

Sources in the RLD said that the party is

and also asserted that work taken up in

focusing on around 25 seats in western UP

these constituencies doesn't mean that the

party will contest on all, but the groundwork

alliance." Since RLD's first general election in 1998, the party's vote share has remained less than 1%. Its vote share had dropped from 0.44 in 2009 to 0.13 in 2014. However, after the 2019 general elections, the party is seen to be having upward trajectory in vote gathering as it polled 0.24 in 2019. Moreover, in 2022 Assembly elections, the party for the first

time was able to cross three

gether and decide on that. owing to farm law protests We are with Akhilesh and it had supported vigorously. Congress Party in INDIA Before that, in its 27-year electoral history, the highest the party had polled was in 2002 at 2.65%. In addition to that, in 2004, the party had contested highest number of seats winning 3 out of 10. In 2009, it won the most number of seats in its electoral history, winning 5 out of the 7 it had contested.

The party's core vote bank has been the Jat population. The Lok Sabha constituencies where there is most lat population are Muzaffarsuggest that Jayant Chaudhary has recently spoken to his inner circle, conveying that the Congress will have a considerable role in seat distribution formulae in UP. The party insider said, "As it is a national alliance, they are going to be a part of. So, the role of national party will be more sought as they are the mainstay of the INDIA alliance." A political analyst based in UP said, "The party is going to be a part of bigger alliance this time and it wants to relaunch itself with a bigger standing in Lok sabha. Thereby, it feels that this could be the right time for them to come up as bigger party as the bigger al-

liance will also warrant big-

ger chunk of voters coming

nagar, Kiarana, Bijnor, Na-

geena for Chandrashekhar

Vavan, Mathura, Baghpat,

Amroha, Fatehpur Sekri,

Meerut, hathras, buland-

shahr, aligarh. Party insiders

#### **ELECTORAL PROCESS**

## Assembly elections not in sight, J&K prepares for local body elections

Terms of municipalities will end on 15 November and for panchayats on 9 January 2024 in Jammu and Kashmir.

NOOR-UL-QAMRAIN SRINAGAR

Even after many political voices asking for conduct of Assembly elections in J&K, the UT administration here is preparing for elections to municipalities and panchayats on schedule, giving no indication that Assembly election would be held soon.

The terms of municipalities are going to end on 15 November 2023 and for the panchayats on 09 January 2024 in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

Recently, the Chief Electoral Officer of Jammu and Kashmir issued notification for the revision of electoral rolls for all J&K municipalities and final electoral rolls would be published in the last week of this month. The

Chief Electoral Officer has said that they are prepared to hold panchayat elections also on time in Jammu and

All the regional parties, especially National Conference and PDP, have been pressing for early Assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir and have been claiming that people are choked by lack of voice for their governance.

The Centre had given some indications in the past that Assembly elections will also be held, but as of now, it seems far-fetched that Assembly elections would be conducted in the near

The National Conference has been preparing the ground for the elections and is very keen to participate



Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party (JKPDP) chief Mehbooba Mufti addresses a press conference in Srinagar on

in the municipal and panchayat elections as the party feels that they would be conducted on time. Recently, former chief minister and vice president of National Conference Omar Abdullah said that there is complete disconnect between the common people and

the present bureaucracy in Jammu and Kashmir. He claimed that non-local officers have been posted at all the key places and they have problems with communication as they do not know the local language of the people. He said that there are a lot of pent-up feelings among the

common people in Jammu and Kashmir and whenever there would be Assembly elections, there would be record breaking participation of the people to elect their representatives.

Most local political parties, including a J&K Apni party and the Ghulam Nabi Azad-led Democratic Azad Party, have been pressing for early elections, but most of them are now going to the areas to have their candidates elected for coming municipal and panchayat elections.

The J&K administration is preparing to hold elections on time for all the 4,290 panchayats and they will also hold municipal elections for two municipal corporations of Jammu and Srinagar, 57 municipal committees and 19 municipal councils.

It is in place to mention that municipal elections were held in Jammu and Kashmir in September 2018 and the term of these elections is going to end on 15 November this year. The elections for District Development Councils (DDCs) in Jammu and Kashmir are going to be held in 2026 as these elections were held in all the 20 districts of J&K in December 2022.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the electoral process for all the three tiers of the panchayat raj system has been put in place and the government is very keen to hold these local elections on time so that people have their own representatives at the ground level.

'TRAP OF SCAMSTERS'

## CBI SENDS AUDIO CLIP FOR TEST IN HIMACHAL CONSTABLE RECRUITMENT EXAM LEAK

Over 75,000 aspirants for constables' post in Himachal Pradesh Police had appeared in the exam last year.

RAHUL CHHABRA

n the Himachal Pradesh constable examination paper leak case, the CBI is sending for forensic

paper leak case, the CBI is sending for forensic tests an audio clip in which some aspirants are allegedly heard discussing that an agent is demanding Rs 8 lakh to Rs 10 lakh each from candidates to ensure that they clear the written test held on 27 March last year. Before the case was shifted to the CBI, the state police

had arrested an engineer and an income tax officer, in addition to 169 people in connection with the paper leak

A 17-page purported transcript of the conversation between students mentions that the gang of paper leakers had set a target of tapping 25 job aspirants and keep their original Class 10 and Class 12 documents as security till the execution of the entire deal, sources said. Investigators are trying to verify if the alleged tel-

ephonic conversation is genuine and whether it was indeed held three days before the examination. Employees of the printing press where the question paper of the recruitment examination was printed are also under the scanner for allegedly working in league with the kingpin of the scam.

After registering an FIR on 17 August in the case of alleged irregularities in the examination, the CBI investigators are also planning to record the statement of the

whistle-blower in the case, Gaurav Kumar, 26. a resident of Arki in Solan district, who had cleared the examination whose results were declared on 5 April 2022.

Gaurav had written a letter to Himachal police to inquire if there was a genuine conspiracy to leak the examination paper or if the audio tape had deliberately been circulated to get the examination declared null and void. Over 180 mobile phones, half a dozen lap-

tops and hard discs that were recovered by the Himachal police after Gaurav Kumar's complaint are also likely to be sent to the CFSL for tests, CBI sources said.

At the initial stage, investigations into the paper leak scam had pointed toward the network of this job scam being spread across 10 states. Three gangs based in UP, Haryana and Bihar allegedly coordinated their efforts to sell the answer key to the question paper. Some of the job aspirants

who allegedly fell into the trap of the scamsters belong to Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, UP, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttarakhand.

In some cases, the bribe was allegedly transferred by the job seekers electronically and state police are likely to hand over evidence related to these transactions to the CBI. Over 75,000 aspirants for constables' post in Himachal Pradesh Police had appeared in the recruitment examination last year. Out of these, 25,000 had

cleared the examination. However, when the alleged paper leak assumed political colour, the state government cancelled the examination.

The employees of the printing press where the question paper was printed allegedly established links with private coaching institutes and other examination leak agents who arranged the phone numbers of the job aspirants and contacted them individually, offering them answer key to the ex-

amination.

The CBI unit in Chandigarh has now registered an FIR under penal sections dealing with public mischief (505 IPC) and common intention (34 IPC), against unknown persons. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, who assumed office in December 2022, had supported a growing public demand to transfer the case, which unfolded during the tenure of the previous state government, to the CBI.

#### STRUCTURAL MEASURES

#### Swiss tech to help check damage to roads due to landslides

Officials are studying the Swiss early warning system for landslides which is one of the most advanced in the world.

RAHUL CHHABRA

Looking to help landslide-hit states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the Central government is planning to scale up road-protection structural measures such as improved retaining walls and drainage based on a system globally popularised by Switzerland. This will be in addition to a new draft policy to be proposed for the creation of physical barriers to minimise damage to road infrastructure due to landslides in hilly areas.

As part of using the best technologies to minimise damage to road infrastructure, road transport and highways, ministry officials are studying the Swiss early warning system for landslides which is one of the most advanced in the world. "Warnings are issued on the basis of data captured by sensors that closely monitor ground movements and weather conditions," said an official.

Special five-metre-long glass fibre bolts made in Switzerland are also likely to be used to bind together weak rocks that disintegrate easily to cause landslides. "Each Swiss bolt costs around Rs 5,000," said an official, adding that these fasteners are extensively used in the West in traffic engineering. At a time when road transport minister Nitin Gadkari has rushed teams to rain-hit hill states to assess the damage to roads due to incessant rains over the last week, officials said concrete roads may be popularised in heavy-rain areas to withstand nature's fury. Help for rebuilding damaged roads is also likely to states

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and education of area

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and this will be in addition to Rs 400 crore released for Himachal earlier this month from the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund for rebuilding roads damaged in landslides.

While following the Swiss model, the Centre, along with state governments, is also going to focus more on non-structural measures to prevent landslides such as land-use planning and education of area residents to reduce the risks and protect lives and property. An official said apart from mitigation steps, the

Swiss government invests heavily in research and development into landslide prevention and mitigation. This research helps to improve the understanding of landslide processes, and to develop new and more effective prevention measures. This investment in R&D has helped make the Swiss system for tackling landslides one of the most effective in the world.

The Swiss invest heavily in detailed understanding of the geology, geomorphology, and hydrology of their country. This information is used to identify areas that are prone to landslides, and to assess the likelihood and consequences of a landslide event, said a top MoRTH official.

Early in the week, Uttarakhand's Rishikesh recorded 42 cm rain in 24 hours, the highest in the country in August so far. It was followed by Kangra in Himachal Pradesh which received 27 cm rain in one day. The India Meteorological Department had issued a "red alert" in both the hilly states over last weekend

According to Himachal Chief Minister Sukvinder Singh Sukhu, over 55 deaths have been reported due to heavy rain since last Sunday. Hamirpur, Shimla, Solan and Mandi have faced most of the brunt of recent cloudbursts. According to officials, there are about 17,120 landslide-prone sites in the state, of which 675 are near critical infrastructure and habitations.

#### PROBE IS ON

## CBI hunts for fugitive Indian who 'duped' UAE travel firm of Rs 3.3 crore

Vinod from Kerala issued flight tickets and packages, but allegedly did not post the money collected from clients to company's accounts.

RAHUL CHHABRA

NEW DELHI

The CBI has launched a hunt for an Indian fugitive who allegedly duped an Abu Dhabi-based travel company, in which he was employed as a travel consultant, of dirham 148,2697 (Rs 3.3 crore).

Vinod Vasudevan, 40, a Kerala resident, while working in Omeir Travel Agency issued flight tickets and holiday packages as part of his job but did not post the money collected from clients to the company accounting section. He had been working in the company since 2008. He had left UAE for Bahrain on October 7, 2018 and was later tried in absentia in a court in Abu Dhabi and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, according to CBI.

Earlier, a request for local prosecution was received from the UAE by the Ministry of External Affairs. The MEA, in turn, forwarded the matter to the CBI to trace the fugitive and take forward the proceedings against him for the offence of breach of trust.

In another case, a fugitive Indian, originally from Kolkata, has also come on CBI's radar for his alleged involvement in embezzlement of dirham 320,000 (Rs 72 lakh) at a company in UAE. Sanjoy Kumar Datta, 53, a resident of Thakurpukur in Kolkata, conspired while working as an accountant in United Eastern

Medical Service in UAE.

He allegedly misappropriated the company funds by mis-invoicing the company between 2015 and 2017. He was working in the company since 2008.

As per the UAE prosecutors, Dutta was responsible for all electricity, water, communication and parking bills of the company and its affiliates.

The company said it found during an internal audit that there was a big difference between the invoices it received and the amounts delivered to him by the company to settle the payments, amounting to AED 320,000.

The company said when Datta was confronted by company seniors, he admitted the wrongdoing and promised to return this amount. Datta also gave a signed letter to the company confirming his alleged wrongdoing and promised to return the amount.

The company alleged that since Datta was incharge of settling the invoices of the company, he was taking more than the invoiced amounts and keeping the difference for himself.

An Abu Dhabi Court for First Instance (Misdemeanor Chamber) had in 2019 issued its judgment in absentia by imprisoning Datta, against the charges assigned to him, for one year followed by deportation. Datta's date of last departure, as per the records of UAE authorities, is November 5, 2017 through Dubai

#### 'IN SEARCH OF WORK'

## Mizoram deaths put migrant labour issue under the scanner

Trinamool Congress has alleged that dead bodies of the workers arrived in pathetic condition from Mizoram.

SUPROTIM MUKHERJEE KOLKATA

Sitting on the verandah of her one-storey house in Malda district's Sattari area, 32-year-old Smriti Sarkar is at a loss for words. A few days ago, she had a family. Now, she is mourning the death of her husband, son, father and brother—all killed after an under-construction railway bridge collapsed in Sairang, near Aizawl in Mizoram on Wednesday.

Abdul Sattar is mourning the death of his 20-year-old son. "My son Sariful Sheikh was working there. The only earning member of my family is no more," he said.

All five, like many others from the district, had gone to Mizoram a month ago to work as labourers in the railway project. Now, 26 of them are dead.

Thirteen victims were from

Chouduar village in Malda, and, of these six from one family. A pall of gloom has descended on the village. On Thursday, leaders of Trinamool Congress, including Ministers, and Samirul Islam, a newly elected Rajya Sabha MP who has just been named as the first chairman of the West Bengal Migrant Workers Welfare Development Board, visited Chouduar village. The state government will extend an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each, West Bengal's Minister of State for Irrigation Sabina Yasmin informed the bereaved families.

On Friday, West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose visited Malda by train. He



Search and rescue operation underway after the underconstruction railway bridge collapsed in the Sairang area about 20 km from Aizawl, Mizoram, on Thursday. ANI

handed over cheques of Rs. 9.5 lakh sent by the Ministry of Railways along with a cash grant of Rs. 50,000 to each family of the deceased workers in Malda in the presence of Railway officials.

The Governor then visited Chauduar village under the Pukhuria police station to meet the families of the deceased on Friday afternoon. Before departing for Chauduar, the Governor read out a condolence message. "I am completely shocked by the death of so many workers. It is not the time for criticism in any form. Everyone should support the families of the deceased workers," stated the Governor.

As leaders across political parties made a beeline for Malda, a political slugfest erupted over the deaths. The Trinamool Congress alleged that the dead bodies of the migrant workers arrived in a pathetic condition from Mizoram on Friday.

Samirul Islam alleged: "The bodies of these poor people were not sent properly. They

were dripping blood all over. This is a sign of disrespect to the dead bodies. I will raise this issue in the Rajya Sabha."

The bodies of 18 migrant labourers reached Malda in ambulances at around 7 pm on Friday and were taken straight to the Malda Medical College and Hospital. The District Administration received the bodies at the Malda Medical College and dispatched them in hearses to the families. "The Governor was in Malda when the dead bodies arrived. However, he did not come to the Medical College to show his respects but he could visit the families to hand over cheques and cash," alleged Krishnendu Narayan Chowdhury, Chairman, English Bazar Municipality.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urged all the migrant workers to return to the State and start their own enterprises with subsidised loans from Bhabishyat' credit card. Banerjee also slammed the Railways for frequent accidents and loss of lives. The Chief Minister demanded that the Central government give one job to a family member of each labourer who died in the Mizoram tragedy.

The Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, said the incident exposes the lack of job opportunities in West Bengal which is forcing lakhs of migrant labourers from the State to travel outside in search of jobs.

"Some of these jobs pose grave danger to their lives. These opportunities are offered to them by middlemen as they provide labour at cheap rates. But the risk always lurks as many of them do not possess the skills required for such jobs. But they are left with no choice as the West Bengal Government has failed to create employment opportunities in the state," Adhikari said.

Reacting to Adhikari's comments, State Minister for Industries, Commerce & Enterprises, Shashi Panja, termed them as totally untrue. "When lakhs of migrant workers were returning home on foot during the Covid pandemic in 2020, the Union Government did not have any statistics on migrant workers. West Bengal is the only state which is deprived of Central funds under the MGNREGA scheme.

"The Leader of the Opposition should know that many workers are associated with the 100-day job scheme under MGNREGA. The Union Government has actually forced them to become migrant workers, since no Central funds under the MGNREGA scheme have been provided to

the West Bengal Government since 2021," Panja claimed.

Samirul Islam told *The Sunday Guardian*: "Even though Uttar Pradesh and Bihar send a far larger number of workers outside their States, West Bengal, which is at number three, is the first state to actually constitute a Migrant Workers Welfare Development Board."

The first step is to have foolproof data about the number of workers who go outside the State, he said, adding that the state government was working to prepare a list of migrant workers and the labour contractors who take them. This would be done at the "Duare Sarkar"camps to be held from September 1.

The Board would also set up a portal to register the workers living in other States. The state government would also station a Nodal Officer in New Delhi shortly to coordinate with other States on all matters concerning the migrant labour population. A foolproof database will help us reach out to anybody who is in distress and also cut down cases of women trafficking, he said.

The state government wants poor citizens to take advantage of the 64 social security programmes and not leave the state for work, he added. Islam informed that the state government wanted people to stop going to other states to work. "Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wants people to stay in the state and set up small businesses using a Rs 5 lakh loan which will be guaranteed by the government."

#### TOP OF SATURDAY

International Airport.

IN J&K

## TERRORISTS AFFILIATED TO LET HELD IN KUPWARA

KUPWARA: Jammu and

Kashmir Police along with

the Indian Army have arrest-

ed three terrorist associates of the banned Lashkar-

e-Tayyaba (LeT) in two separate operations in the Kupwara district. Hand grenades were also recovered, officials said on Saturday. In a significant joint operation, the Jammu and Kashmir Police along with 28 Rashtriya Rifles apprehended two terrorist associates affiliated with the Laskar-e-Taiba in Kupwara. The operation led to the recovery of five hand grenades of Pakistan and China origin from the suspects. Acting on credible information received, the Jammu and Kashmir Police and Army 28 RR launched an operation to intercept two terrorist associates who had procured a consignment from an unidentified individual in Kupwara, officials said. The individuals were traced to be moving towards village Shatmuqam, with instructions received from Laskar-e-Taiba commander Ghulam Rasool alias Rafia Rasool originally a resident of Chandigam Lolab and now based in PoK. The apprehended individuals were identified as Zubair Ahmad Shah Peerzada and Peerzada Mubashir Yousf, both residents of Lolab, Kupwara. The security forces successfully nabbed the suspects as they attempted

to flee, officials added. ANI

**AHEAD OF POLLS** 

## GEHLOT STRENGTHENING HIS GRIP ON CONGRESS IN RAJASTHAN

'His plan is to reach out to new candidates popular on the ground and assure them that they will get tickets'.

BADAR BASHIR

s Assembly elections are drawing close, Ashok Gehlot is seen to be strengthening his hold on the rank and file of his cadre. Sources suggest that he is keen on picking up candidates who have the potential to win Assembly seats and offer them tickets which would help him break the jinx of Rajasthan being a swing state.

A political analyst working with Congress said, "His plan is to reach out to the new candidates who are popular on the ground and give them assurance that they will get tickets. He will reach out to those who have high possibility of winning. Even if they are from the Sachin Pilot camp, they will enter Gehlot's faction

just because they will have assurance of getting tickets. Moreover, Pilot is genuinely doing nothing against Gehlot. He is silent. Now what is important is who will get enough tickets-Pilot or Gehlot."

The ticket distribution is seen to be an important step in Rajasthan Congress if the party wants to retain the state. Surveys accessed by The Sunday Guardian suggest that there are more than 40 seats which are vulnerable and if the candidates are not replaced, the party will have a challenging task of retaining such seats.

The Assembly seats where the people are unsatisfied with their legislators are Bhinmal, Merta, Pali, Bali, Sumerpur, Phalodi, Jhunjhunu, Chaksu, Bagru, Dhod, Ihotwara, Amer, Kishanpole, Jhadol, Dungar-



**Ashok Gehlot** 

pur. Apart from these there are Garhi, Kapasan, Ahore, Ajmer North, Ajmer South, Aspur, Badi Saddi, Chittorgarh. Dungargarh, Ghatol, Jaitaran, Kumbhalgarh, Ladpura, Lunkaransar, Manoharthana, Mavli are also included in this.

Udaipur city, Ratangarh, Sagwara, Sangaria, Tijara, Behror, Thanagaji, Bassi,

The ticket distribution is seen to be an important step in Rajasthan Congress if the party wants to retain the state. Surveys suggest that there are more than 40 seats which are vulnerable and if the candidates are not replaced, the party will have a challenging task of retaining such seats.

dela, Sirohi and Gangapur

Party insiders presume that around 80 tickets could be cut down out of those 200 candidates who were given tickets last time, which includes around 10 ministers (out of 19 ministers) and also around 40 sitting MLAs.

Moreover, it is also being seen by political observers that there is not much focus from Gehlot on the Guj-

Dudu, Shahpura, Khan- jar community. A political observer in Rajasthan said, "That is because they will support Pilot eventually. Plus, there are less chances that Congress will be able to win as many as they won last time, as the Gujjar community (which is around 8% in Rajasthan) itself seems to be drifting away from the Congress because they have always wanted Pilot to take the charge of Rajasthan. That possibility

for now seems a far cry. So,

the idea is to appease other sections of society."

Asked if there will be resistance from Pilot in anyway, a political analyst based in Rajasthan said, "It is true that there is not much movement from Pilot, but even if there is, what will happen? The show is all run by Gehlot here. And now if Pilot meets the Gandhis and seeks support from them, what will they do? They will convince him to be patient because the high command has been unable to do anything against Gehlot. Gehlot has also struck down any involvement from the high command that has threatened his existence. All the top Congressmen who have been given responsibility of Rajasthan have leaned towards Gehlot. Or rather, he has convinced them enough to be on his side."

**RAJASTHAN POLLS** 

#### **CONGRESS' VICTORY CHANCES HINGE ON HIGH COMMAND'S FIRMNESS**

AJIT MAINDOLA

Congress is pulling out all the stops to change Rajasthan's history of voting out the incumbent government. Neither there is any anti-incumbency against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, who is Congress' face in the state, nor are there any charges against his government. Growing popularity of the Gehlot government is a cause of concern for the BJP.

CM Gehlot has been in campaign mode over the last six months, while the saffron party is still in the process of finalising its strategy. The only challenge for Gehlot is ticket allocation. In fact, there are 50 seats in Rajasthan where BJP is normally invincible. With the strong central leadership, BJP's ticket distribution is likely to be a smooth affair.

On the contrary, there is a tight competition in Congress for tickets. Congress claims that it will give tickets to only strong candidates, but this is not the practice in the party. The party witnesses massive fights among ticket-seekers from various factions. Rajasthan PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra and CM Gehlot put up a show of unity during the election campaign over the past few weeks. In view of this, Dotasra is unlikely to pressurise Gehlot to give tickets to his loyalists. CWC members such as Sachin Pilot, Jitendra Singh and Harish Chaudhary will definitely put pressure on Gehlot seeking tickets for their supporters. Jintendra Singh is supposed to be more powerful than Sachin and Harish. Jitendra Singh is close to the Gandhi family and CM Gehlot. The party always preferred Singh's supporters from Alwar seats. Jintendra Singh is himself planning to contest the polls this time. However, there won't be any tussle on his candidature.

The number of ticket-seekers from Sachin's camp is huge. Last time, the party faced a tough time striking a balance between Gehlot and Pilot camps during ticket allocation. If the high command had projected Gehlot as CM candidate in 2018, the scene would have been different in Rajasthan. The party would have secured a comfortable majority then.

Congress president Mallikarjuna Kharge is making all possible efforts to avoid any dispute in Rajasthan. He has therefore sent observers to make ticket distribution a smooth affair in Rajasthan. But sending so many leaders for analysis of just one seat may add to problems. Harish Chaudhary is another powerful leader in the state Congress. Gehlot brought him to politics. Chaudhary consolidated his network in Delhi due to close proximity with Rahul Gandhi. He speaks against his government from time to time to assert himself. He seems to be interested in central politics as he has preferred to remain in CWC as in-charge. He is unlikely to contest polls. However, he will intervene in ticket allocation processes. Zubair Khan has confined himself within his own assembly seat, even though he has been active at the national level for a long time. CWC member Mohan Prakash normally stays away from all these exercises. Tribal leader Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya is close to Gehlot. He has got a berth in CWC because of being close to the CM. He is interested in getting a ticket for himself only. Dheeraj Gurjar can also recommend his supporters using his position in the team of Priyanka at one point of time. Another influential name is that of Assembly speaker C.P. Joshi. The names recommended by Joshi will be considered positively, given his record of conducting the House in a smooth manner. In other words, there is good coordination among Gehlot, Jitendra Singh and CP Joshi. If only these three leaders finalise tickets, the party will be able to announce candidates quite early. Gehlot wants to release the list of key names as early as possible. Another challenge is how to drop sitting MLAs. Surveys suggest there is tremendous public anger against more than half a dozen sitting Congress MLAs and ministers. If the party does not drop them, the way ahead will be difficult.

#### **POLL CAMPAIGN**

## BJP aims to woo voters with 'Parivaratan Yatras' in Rajasthan

The saffron party has decided to send seniors to flag off the yatras at different places.

AJIT MAINDOLA

The election campaign heat is gradually picking up in Rajasthan. While Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot is giving a boost to Congress' campaign on the basis of welfare schemes, the BJP is in the battle field completely banking on the central leadership.

The BIP is kick-starting "Parivartan Yatras" from four Hindu religious places in poll-bound on 2 September. These yatras will cover all 200 assembly constituencies. After the conclusion of these yatras, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to address a rally in Jaipur

Dehat on 25 September. Earlier, it was decided that these vatras will be led by former CM Vasundhara Raje, State BJP president C.P. Joshi, Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and former state BJP chief Satish Poonia. But now state election management committee chairman Narayan Panchariya has announced that these leaders will only participate in the yatras. These yatras are being organised on the lines of ones carried out by Poonia from Mewar, Wagad, Shekhawati, Marwar, Eastern Rajasthan, etc when he was state BJP chief. He also visited 195 Assembly seats four to five times.

He travelled around four lakh kilometres in the state. But Poonia was removed from the post of BJP chief all of a sudden. BJP strategists believe that removal of Poonia as party chief was a mistake. In fact, Poonia belongs to the influential lat community. Moreover, he played a pivotal role in creating a favourable atmosphere for the BIP in Rajasthan by dint of hard work over four years. Poonia's removal sent a wrong message to the Jat community. Now realising the mistake, the leadership is again relying on Poonia's capabilities. Meanwhile, Raje camp believes she would be given the charge of the cam-

paign committee which is yet to be announced. Supporters are confident that Raje would be projected as CM face. The debate in the BJP is on two lines. One, BIP feels that it can win polls on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma. Secondly, it also believes that if Raje is not projected as CM face, the going will be tough for the BJP in the upcoming elections. The party cannot ignore the fact that CM Gehlot has consolidated Congress' position with the help of his schemes. Confident of repeating its government after polls in November, the Congress is already in a position to give BJP a tough fight. With this

in view, the BJP is launching vatras from famous religious places of Hindu community. This is also being linked to BIP's move to push 'polarisation politics' ahead of polls.

Therefore, the saffron party has decided to send seniors to flag off the yatras at different places. BJP president J.P. Nadda will flag off the yatra on 2 September from Trinetra Ganesh Mandir. Sawai Madhopur. After this, Union Home Minister Amit Shah will flag off a yatra from Venudham at Dungarpur on 3 September. This yatra will conclude in Kota covering 52 seats. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will commence the third yatra from

Ramdevra, Jaisalmer on 4 September. This yatra will end in Jodhpur covering 51 seats. The fourth yatra is scheduled to begin from Gogamedi, Hanumangarh and will be flagged off by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari. This vatra will conclude in Alwar. During these yatras, BJP leaders will showcase the Central government's achievements. These yatras will cover the entire state. BJP will try to give a boost to its campaign and woo voters of the state. The party will also conduct surveys to ascertain the mood of the voters. Following this, BJP will be announcing its campaign

'A VISION DOCUMENT'

#### Political motives behind resistance to NEP implementation

Particularly surprising is the opposition to the National Education Policy by the Congress and its state governments.



In the realm of political power play, it's commonplace for the Opposition to criticize any decisions or economic policies of the central government. However, it is highly inappropriate for certain state governments to flatly reject the proclaimed National Education Policy, especially after thorough and extensive deliberation, and justify their opposition solely on party lines and political gains. Such a stance disregards the comprehensive contemplation needed for shaping the future of India's emerging generation. The constitution's architects had designed provisions to grant a certain extent of authority to state governments over subcare, and the legal framework. However, over the course of 75 years since independence, the benefits of policies and budgets formulated by the central governments have not reached the states as intended. Particularly surprising is the opposition to the education policy by the Congress party and its state governments. It is astonishing whether the purportedly knowledgeable leaders of the Congress Party, who are following Rahul Gandhi's cues, lack the awareness that the Kothari Commission prepared the first National Education Policy within three years, and the Congress-led central government implemented it in July 1968. However, due to the lack of a solid implementation plan and sufficient financial management, it couldn't be effectively enforced. Then, under Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government, the National Education Policy was formulated in 1986, which remained in effect until now. However, its

shortcomings were highlight-

jects like education, health-

ed by the Ramamurthy Committee and the Prof. Yashpal Committee. Therefore, for the development of India's future, the new National Education Policy 2020 was formulated under the chairmanship of Kasturirangan. Almost 34 years later, in 2020, significant and crucial changes were made to the old policies. As a result, the BJP-led states initiated efforts in the past two years to implement the new policy.

In the recent state Assembly elections, the newly formed Karnataka government has decided to cancel the National Education Policy (NEP) and prepare a new state education policy. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that after completing necessary preparations, the NEP will have to be cancelled, which couldn't be done this year within the stipulated time.

The central Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and **Education Minister Dhar**mendra Pradhan vehemently opposed this initiative by Karnataka. In their statements, they described it as detrimental to the future of Karnataka's students. Endorsing the central government's new education policy, they said that the Congress lacks information about the benefits of the NEP. Karnataka was the first state to implement NEP 2020, but by the end of 2023, Karnataka has decided to part ways with it. Alongside this, there are discussions about cancelling the 4-year undergraduate program under NEP and implementing a 3-year program instead.

In a similar manner, there is opposition to the new National Education Policy 2020 in Tamil Nadu. The provision of three languages in the Education Policy 2020 is cited as the main reason for the opposition. The Tamil Nadu government wants to adhere to a two-language policy (Tamil and English) in the state. Bihar's Education Minister, Professor Chandra Shekhar, also expressed his dissent against the education policy, but he argued that there is currently an infrastructure deficiency

and various issues in the state, so the new education policy cannot be implemented.

The central government approved the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in the year 2020. During this time, the Ministry of Human Resource Development was renamed as the Ministry of Education. This policy aimed to establish a common regulatory body for all higher education institutions and to abolish the M.Phil. Additionally, a plan was formulated to establish a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to promote digital learning. An interesting develop-

ment is that the West Bengal government, led by Mamata Banerjee, the chief leader of the new alliance of opposition parties including the Congress, has decided to implement the four-year undergraduate program under the NEP 2020 in universities starting from the upcoming academic session in March. There are 20 government universities in West Bengal that offer general degrees.

Within these 20 universities, there are 49 government and 433 government-aided degree colleges. Additionally, there are 11 private universities that offer degree programs.

The leaders of opposition parties do not pay attention to the fact that no party has formulated an education policy. After considering the opinions of nearly two and a half million people and extensive discussions with educators, the Modi government announced the education policy. The new policy gives utmost importance to mother tongues and Indian languages as the foundation for education and making education relevant from a livelihood perspective. Instead of solely relying on scores, the focus has shifted towards holistic development to shape the future of the new generation. Through knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian languages, the future generation can be connected to the true meanings of caste, religion, and regional identity, and uplifted beyond them for the progress

of the entire human society. Learning English and other global languages, and sharing their benefits with the nation and the world, wouldn't cause any objections. Connecting with one's mother tongue and Indian languages since childhood can strengthen the sense of national unity and self-reliance.

In the new education policy, it is also important to establish various mechanisms to prevent the commercialization of school and higher education. Transparent arrangements will be developed to determine the maximum fees of different institutions, ensuring that private institutions cannot act arbitrarily. For school education, a new and comprehensive national curriculum, the NCFSE and NCFET, will be prepared in consultation with all stakeholders, including state governments, ministries, central government, relevant departments, and other specialized bodies, based on the principles of the National Education Policy, the needs of the forefront curriculum, gional languages. Within 5 to 10 years, a review and updating of this curriculum will also be conducted. Considering national and international requirements and challenges today, traditional knowledge and artificial intelligence, design thinking, holistic health, organic living, environmental education, global citizenship education, and digital education are essential dimensions through which students must be introduced. It is essential to shift the focus in India from caste-based, communal, or worn-out ideological slogans to the real issues of the present and future of the people. Nonetheless, under the "Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India" scheme, allocating a budget of around Rs 18,000 crore to develop 14,597 government schools into model government schools is a welcome step. This initiative could set a new direction in the next five years. The writer is editorial director

and made available in all re-

of ITV Network-India News and Dainik Aaj Samaj.

**COMMON CAUSE** 

## BRICS LEADS WORLD'S GROWTH ECONOMIES

After expansion, BRICS becomes a powerful group of growth economies of the world.



**PRANJAL SHARMA** 

fter an hour's flight north from Johan-⊾nesburg, I landed at the small airport of Hoedspruit town. Built within a private game reserve, the airport allows access to the great savanna region of South Africa. I took a twohour drive away on excellent roads, cutting through vast stretches of protected grasslands to visit the ZZ2 Farming Company. Run by the Van Zyl family for generations, the farm now is among the largest producer of tomatoes in the world. ZZ2 also produces avocados and a range of fruits, including cherries and dates.

Already an exporter, ZZ2 is now poised to expand its business across the world as South Africa enhances its position in the BRICS grouping. The farming company uses cutting edge technologies to enhance its output and yield. ZZ2 uses smart plant sensors to monitor the growth of its crops. "The plant sensors ensure that we don't over or under irrigate the plants. Each row gets the

right amount of water to ensure optimum yield," Tommie Van Zyl, CEO of ZZ2, told me as we stood among long rows of lush green tomato plants. Marketing head Clive Garrett said that tariff agreements between South Africa and BRICS countries will further enhance agricultural trade within the group. "For instance, mangos from India could be imported to South Africa while our avocados could be sent to India at much lower prices," Garrett explained to me.

My recent visit to South Africa for the BRICS Summit allowed me a good view of the economic abilities of the country. Agricultural products are among the many strengths of the South African economy which is now keen to globalize further while investing in its own economic infrastructure.

The BRICS Summit hosted by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the sparkling Sandton town of Johannesburg capital region marked a significant turning point in global politics. The expansion of BRICS to include Argentina, UAE, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia carries deep implications for a world grappling with poly-crises. These countries will join the grouping from January

The expanded BRICS will include the world's fastest growing economies amounting to about 30% of global GDP worth over \$30 trillion. Moreover, these econo-





mies are also among the top producers of oil in the world. New and distinct lines are emerging in the global economy. While global institutions categorise the world into developed and developing economies, I would describe them in a more contemporary manner. The developed countries of the Global North should be described as legacy economies. The developing countries of



**ZZ2 Farming Company** 

The developed countries of the Global North should be described as legacy economies. The developing countries of the Global South should be termed as growth economies. A quick glance at the GDP growth ranking shows that the fastest growing economies are no longer in the Americas or Europe.

the Global South should be termed as growth economies. A quick glance at the GDP growth ranking shows that the fastest growing economies are no longer in the Americas or Europe. The legacy economies are larger in size but appear to have peaked in their growth curve. The growth economies may be relatively small but rising fast and are brimming with billions of new consumers. These consumers will drive them to accelerated growth fuelled by new technologies.

After expansion, BRICS

will become a powerful group of growth economies of the world. The economies are populous and also immensely influential in global business routes. Egypt has the Suez canal, UAE is a global aviation hub, while Argentina and Brazil drive the South American economy. And South Africa is the link between countries

of the southern hemisphere. Three deep shifts are likely to occur as a result of the expansion.

- · Stronger demand for multilateral reforms
- Enhanced use of regional

currencies

 Increased collaboration among growth economies

In itself, the BRICS grouping has its internal contradictions. India and China relations are tense. Iran and Saudi Arabia joust over regional supremacy. Egypt and Ethiopia have a history of war and continuing dispute over the river Nile.

But they may be willing to rise above these regional issues to demand a stronger say in the global order. What is common between them is the urge to decide their own destiny in an increasingly multipolar world. At a time when North America and European Union are grappling with slowdown, the growth economies are demanding a voice in institutions like the UN and World Bank. The BRICS Declaration has demanded the inclusion of Brazil, India and South Africa in the Security Council of the United Nations.

A common currency is not a feasible idea but the use of local currencies within the expanded BRICS will rise and deepen financial linkages among these countries. "We have noted that there is global momentum for the use of local currencies, alternative financial arrangements and alternative payment systems. As BRICS, we are ready to explore opportunities for improving the stability, reliability and fairness of the global financial architecture," South African President Ramaphosa said in a statement. "The Summit agreed to task the **BRICS Finance Ministers** and/or Central Bank Governors, as appropriate, to consider the issue of local currencies, payment instruments and platforms and report back to the BRICS leaders by the next Summit." Even as trade linkages will

increase, the BRICS grouping plans to enhance linkages in critical sectors. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed collaboration for space exploration, confident with the success of Chandrayaan 3 Mission. Modi pitched the idea of establishing a BRICS space exploration consortium. "We are already working on the BRICS satellite constellation, but to move a step further, we should think about establishing a BRICS space exploration consortium," Modi said.

The growth economies of the world are uniting with a common cause with BRICS. As I returned to Delhi from Johannesburg via Addis Ababa, it appeared that I had witnessed a key turning point for the global economic order. Deeper collaborations could form among growth economies that don't want to remain overly dependent on legacy

Pranjal Sharma is a geoeconomic analyst and author based in New Delhi.

LAB MADE

## Synthetic Biology: Time to build a regulatory framework to protect good science

Engineering organisms leading to the restoration of extinct species like dodos and dinosaurs is an impulsive idea with less clarity on its potential benefits.



PAWAN K. DHAR

Synthetic Biology is the rational design and construction of biological components leading to applications. The components come in the form of parts, devices, circuits, cells, and organisms. Due to this reason, people also use the term "Biological Engineering" to indicate "Synthetic Biology".

Right from the time when Synthetic Biology was formally launched as a new discipline in 2004, there have been deliberations and annual meetings on building new compositional standards in biology, generating applications, and investigating biosafety and biosecurity aspects.

Over the past 19 years, amazing advancements in Synthetic Biology have emerged. Foremost among those is the ability to write very long pieces of DNA leading to the synthesis of whole genomes, editing DNA at predefined genomic locations, making brand new genes from the dark matter of the genome, hacking the genetic code, constructing a nonnatural DNA, biasing the inheritance pattern of genes (gene drives) and bringing back extinct organisms to life.

Though the term genetic engineering has been traditionally used for adding, deleting, and altering specific genes, in reality, we never engineered genetics. Scientists have practiced probability in the name of engineering. Only in the last two decades, a deliberate attempt towards engineering biological systems has begun.

The question is: What are

the opportunities and challenges for India? Designing a desktop DNA printer, creating a national BioFoundry for accelerating biological innovations, designing more efficient DNA editing technologies (beyond CRISPR-Cas9), repurposing the dark genome, establishing organoids and organ-on-the-chip technologies for drug testing, designing microbial factories for biomanufacturing, are some of the technologies where India could take a

As a consequence of rapid global scientific developments, recently a BioFoundry India group has emerged in Delhi with an aim to provide shared space for developing standards, tools, and applications and accelerating biological innovations. The need of the hour is increased participation in building an open science network for and collectively addressing emerging societal challenges.

However, all this and more can be achieved if we deal with regulatory challenges to ensure responsible inno-



regulatory guidelines customized to the scientific developments in synthetic biology, global research practices seem to have largely evolved with less government over-

The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) on synthetic biology has produced multiple reports but is yet to come up with a robust assessment and recommendations. The Self-regulation by people in academia, industry, and hobbyists in the form of "soft standards" is neither binding nor legally enforceable.

Transferring lab-made organisms into the wild can result in the proliferation of engineered traits in natural ecosystems, affecting the genetic diversity and adaptability of native species. The nature of science is such that unintended ecological effects cannot be ruled out at any stage of induced evolution, in the first place.

The development of sophisticated DNA writing and DNA editing technologies warrants real-time surveillance of the relevant data and the development of anti-DNA editing technologies to address the misuse. Also, regulating DNA writing technologies is a complex endeavour that involves balancing the potential benefits of scientific progress and its potential application for bioterrorism or biowarfare. Engineering organisms

leading to the restoration of extinct species is an impulsive idea with less clarity on its potential benefits. Bringing back dodos and dinosaurs can easily make cool media headlines. However, on a more responsible note, it is important to understand that habitats have evolved and new players have come up in the food chain. Putting lab-made pressure on the ecosystem can lead to unexpected consequences.

In India, the first foresight study in synthetic biology was organized by Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in collaboration with FLEDGE (The Forum for Law, Environment, Development and Governance), Chennai. An 85-page report was submitted to DBT, Ministry of Science & Technology in 2020 to help the Government build a more robust regulatory framework. The report was an outcome of national deliberations involving stakeholders from academia, industry, administration, and society.

There is a pressing need to mark a clear boundary between synthetic biology and Recombinant DNA technology to bring clarity. Declaring exclusion criteria is important so that the policy gaps in synthetic biology are clearly visible, leading to the strengthening of existing guidelines on genetic modi-

As part of the 12th five-year plan, India set up a Task Force on systems biology and synthetic biology research in 2011. India has informed international bodies that India can be a world leader in open-source biological platforms. However, this requires greater participation from stakeholders and a robust regulatory environ-

In the context of Indian science, the movement of synthetic biology research has been a bit slow. Greater interactions among scientists, students, and funding managers are needed to improve India's position globally. India needs to launch major scientific and education programs in synthetic biology, along with a dedicated task force on synthetic biology.

Furthermore, India needs to commission detailed foresight and technology landscaping studies at the global level (Quad, BRICS, ASEAN, Asia Pacific) to understand regional and global science, applications, and environmental and biosecurity challenges in synthetic biology.

To become future-ready, it's time to bring the stakeholders from academia, industry, and society on a common platform and build a robust regulatory framework to ensure the protection of good science within a responsible innovation framework.

Pawan K. Dhar is Professor & Head, Synthetic Biology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New

#### **META'S NEW AI SYSTEM CAN TRANSLATE 100 LANGUAGES**

CORRESPONDENT LOS ANGELES

**TECH-TALK** 

Meta has developed an AI model called SeamlessM4T that can translate and transcribe almost 100 languages in both text and speech as part of its effort to create AI that can comprehend a variety of dialects, TechCrunch reported.

A new translation dataset called Seamless Align is also available in open source. According to Meta, SeamlessM4T is a significant breakthrough in the field of AI-powered speechto-speech and speech-to-text.

According to Meta in a blog post shared with TechCrunch, "Our single model offers on-demand translations that help people who speak different languages to communicate more effectively." The source languages are implicitly recognised by SeamlessM4T without the requirement for a separate language identification mechanism.

In some ways, SeamlessM4T is the spiritual heir to Universal Speech Translator, one of the only direct speech-tospeech translation systems that support Hokkien, and Meta's No Language Left Behind, a text-to-text machine translation

Additionally, it expanded on Meta's architecture for massively multilingual speech, which offers technology for speech synthesis, language identification, and recognition across more than 1,100 languages.

Not just Meta is devoting efforts to the creation of cuttingedge AI transcription and translation systems.

As part of Google's larger effort to develop a model that can comprehend the 1,000 most widely spoken languages in the world, the tech giant is developing what it calls the Universal Speech Model, which goes beyond the wealth of commercial services and open-source models already offered by Amazon, Microsoft, OpenAI, and a number of startups.

In the meantime, Mozilla led the development of Common Voice, one of the most comprehensive collections of voices in multiple languages for teaching automatic speech recogni-

However, SeamlessM4T is one of the more daring attempts to date to integrate translation and transcription abilities into a single model.

According to Meta, SeamlessM4T outperformed the most recent state-of-the-art speech transcription model in voiceto-text tasks on an internal benchmark for background noise and "speaker variations" in speech-to-text tasks.

This is attributed to the training dataset's rich blend of speech and text data, which according to Meta provides SeamlessM4T an advantage over speech-only and text-only

"With state-of-the-art results, we believe SeamlessM4T is an important breakthrough in the AI community's quest towards creating universal multitask systems," stated Meta

## COMMENT& ANALYSIS

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor E. Frankl

#### PICK OF THE WEEK

Over the moon

School children celebrate the successful landing of Chandrayan-3 lander Vikram on the surface of the moon, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI



FOR GLOBAL SOUTH

## A neutral BRICS Plus is a win for India

The presence of PM Modi at the 2023 BRICS Summit proved to be an effective counter to what was expected to be the overwhelming influence of Xi Jinping.

#### ROOTS OF POWER

M.D. NALAPAT



t is a relief that there has not been a demand from Lthe G-7 that President Zelenskyy be invited to the BRICS Summit that has just concluded in Johannesburg. It would be a measure of diplomatic finesse on the part of the G7 were such a demand to also remain unsaid where the forthcoming G-20 Summit is concerned. Given the South Africa precedent, President Vladimir Putin will join the forthcoming summit only virtually if at all, given that his physical presence would convert the conference into a cacophony of recriminations. The British delegation, in particular, has from the start of the Ukraine-Russia conflict in February 2022 been particularly anxious to demonstrate a complete absence of the

calm and understatement that so many in the UK claim as their special trait. In the UNSC, the British delegation has been even more "frank" (to use diplomatese) than the US side, although neither can compare with the histrionics of that perpetual Special Invitee, the Ukrainian delegation. If there was ever a time when the UNSC was taken to be a serious and significant forum, ever since the repeated meetings on Ukraine, its proceedings have taken on the characteristics of a circus. Along the way, the G-7 has lost much of the goodwill that countries within the group had accumulated in the populations of those countries that are not situated on both sides of the North Atlantic. There is a perception that all that the Europeans and the Europhiles on the other side of the North Atlantic care about is themselves. Or in other words, about those who are either European or of European ethnicity, specifically Ukraine. After a hiatus, the perception that the world is divided into the West and the Rest has returned, with practically the

entire "Rest" unable to understand the fixation of the West on a country in Europe that is of strategic value only in the advent of a kinetic war with the Russian Federation. Small wonder that the Kremlin has become obsessed about the worry that NATO was going to do what it had avoided doing throughout the period when the USSR was around, which was to launch a war with Russia. The more the western resources and manpower that gets thrown into the quagmire that the Ukraine conflict had from the start been for the West, the greater the sense of a double standard in the rest of the world. In the US, a new crop of Republican leaders has been making their presence felt, of which Vivek Ramaswamy has been the most forthright. If elected President of the US, he says his first mission would be to go to Moscow and try and wean the Russian Federation away from the primary danger to the democracies, which is the People's Republic of China. As the 2024 Presidential election comes closer, the rising popularity of such a stand within US voters may perhaps even seep through the doors of the White House, which is presently throwing in a substantial amount of taxpayer dollars into the all-consuming fire that the conflict on Russia's borders has become for NATO, an organisation that

in its present form at least,

has outlived its utility. The

memo that the PRC is, in a much more potent form, the challenge to the US that the USSR was until the 1980s seems to have been misplaced on its way to the Oval Office. Included in the collateral damage that this has caused is a sharp diminution in the trust and therefore loyalty of several countries that the US had previously firmly

had in its corner. Several of converts to mild or serious strains of Westphobia have indicated their desire to join BRICS, a group in which neither side of the North Atlantic plays any role. Indeed, the effort by Putin and Xi is to refashion BRICS as a counter to the numerous post-1945 structures that continue to be dominated by the West. Had the two been successful in bringing Brasilia, Pretoria and New Delhi to their point of view, BRICS would have expanded not by just six additional members but by more than a dozen. Smuggling in bloc politics in the name of moving away from such games has been the PRC effort, but given the convention of unanimity, Xi joined by Putin was not able to get their way except on members that were approved for inclusion in January 2024 by the other three members of BRICS. The three, India, South Africa and Brazil (unlike Russia and China) are part of the Global South, as are four of the six new BRICS members, the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia and the UAE by

contrast to Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina and Iran. Of the six, only Iran is Westphobic, partly out of its clerical rulers and partly out of the reaction caused by the tearing up of the Obama-era pact between Iran and the US that set guardrails on that country's nuclear program. It was an agreement that was more generous to the other side than to Iran, but for the "All or Nothing" President Trump, it was not good enough to retain. Instead of his subsequent "Maximum Pressure" policy cutting back Iran's nuclear program, it has expanded to a level that the Obama-era agreement was designed to delay, if not avoid. Given that none of the new members of BRICS are within the PRC sphere of influence (except Iran by default), it is unlikely that Beijing would be able to exercise the degree of control over an expanded BRICS that Washington has long had over the World Bank and the IMF. Even as debts to China accumulate to unrepayable levels, the nightmare facing Beijing is that several countries may simply repudiate that debt, especially if they were able to garner support from countries opposed to PRC expansionism in such a move. In the past, the PRC poured money into the pockets of influential US citizens through various channels in order to ensure policies

suitable to itself, only to

virtue of their wealth being

part of the Global North, in

watch that investment go up in smoke once President Trump calculated in 2017 that taking measures against China was not a vote loser but a vote enhancer.

The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg proved to be an effective counter to what was expected to be the overwhelming influence of Xi Jinping. With the possible exception of Iran, which is still smarting over the cutting off by India of oil purchases as a response to the Trump sanctions, the other five countries that will in four months become members of BRICS (or BRICS Plus, as the group has been renamed) are friends of India, especially the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, with Indonesia expected to follow soon. Despite the presence in the group of Russia, China and Iran, BRICS Plus cannot be termed anti-West or Sino-centric. Often in diplomacy, something that does not happen is equally if not more significant than something that has happened. BRICS in its new form will not change, it will remain a bloc-neutral platform. At the same time, inspired untruths (such as that India was opposed to BRICS expansion) were promptly shot down by the MEA. All in all, the 2023 BRICS Summit has been a win for India and the rest of the Global **EDITORIAL** MOON MISSION

#### **CHANDRAYAAN SHOWS GLOBAL SOUTH'S METTLE**

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his joy and gratitude to the scientists, technicians and others responsible for the soft landing of the Vikram on the south surface of the moon, he was joined by the entire country in such an emotion. Under PM Modi, the full weight of the Indian private sector has been harnessed in the development of the space program, and multiple private entities played a role in the success of the Chandrayaan mission. For too long, the private sector was considered a much lower priority than its public counterparts, several of whom were converted into monopolies by a stroke of the pen. Not surprisingly, many did badly. It was only in the 1990s that this double standard was, if not abolished altogether, at least diluted. The consequence has been much faster economic growth. It needs to be remembered that a double digit growth is not just desirable but necessary for India, given its expanding young population. Unless the ten million and more young Indians coming into the job market are given the opportunity to work, unless they are educated in a manner that fits 21st century needs, the Demographic Dividend so often talked about would go to waste. The importance of the success of Chandrayaan is also in the demonstration effect that the feat has on investors looking at India, now that geopolitical tensions and domestic policies have made China far less attractive as a production base than before. Whether it be gadgets or semiconductors, India has shown that these can be made in India not only in a cost-effective way but in a manner that improves quality. Chandrayaan has shown that when the Prime Minister says that India is an ideal destination for investment, no matter how advanced the product, he is being completely accurate. Across the world, while in a few countries such as China that are competing with India in attracting investment and have caused tensions in bilateral relations, in other parts of the world, the feat was welcomed, particularly in the Global South. Although China under Xi Jinping claims to be a part of the Global South, both in terms of geography as well as in terms of GDP, the country is no longer part of the group, unlike India, which has become a champion of the interests of countries hitherto ignored. The success of Chandrayaan is the success of the Global South, which is why it must have been warmly welcomed by the leaders of South Africa and Brazil at the BRICS Summit. Given that a similar mission by Moscow failed a short while ago, the President of Russia may be excused for being as unenthusiastic as his PRC counterpart at the soft landing of the India-developed space vehicle on the south side of the moon, a first in the history of space travel dating back to the 1950s. Some years ago, when ISRO in India conducted a suc-

cessful space mission, there was a disparaging cartoon on the front page of a prominent US newspaper. The cartoon showed a skinny, evidently starving, man in rags carrying a rocket under his arm and knocking at the door of a large house, inside which a few wealthy people were having a laugh at the apparition at their doorstep. The message in the cartoon was unmistakable. It was that a country with a per capita income as low as India's ought not to try and break into the world of activities that were the prerogative of the wealthy, such as space exploration. If that cartoonist, and the editor who placed such a cartoon on the front page, are still around, they would have learnt of the success of the soft landing of the Chandrayaan mission to the moon and remembered their earlier work and its meaning. Certainly India has a per capita income that is far below what it ought to be (and will be within a decade). However, although not in per capita income but in brainpower, India is easily among the top countries in the world. Financial stringency had the benefit of making ISRO scientists work hard at rockets that were much lower in cost than those launched by other countries. India has the least cost per unit of output of any space program in the world, which is why countries across the world have started to rely on Indian launch vehicles to get the satellites made by them into orbit. Unlike other space programs that concentrate on military needs, with the civilian component piggybacking on the military, in India the nuclear and space programs have as their foundational mission civilian needs, with military applications only a by-product. At the BRICS Summit that took place in South Africa, India, Brazil and South Africa worked together to ensure that the Global South in the form of IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) was given its due, and would together become a symbol not of backwardness but of progress. The Chandrayaan mission is a major milestone in such a necessary road.

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NEW HICTORY

## New Camp David Summit: New Cold War?

The Camp David understanding clearly establishes a trilateral defence pact in the Indo-Pacific despite the open disclaimer that it is not a mini-NATO or a Pacific NATO.

#### **OPINION**

**CHINTAMANI MAHAPATRA** 



n 18 August 2023, US
President Joe Biden
announced a "new
history" at a new Camp David
Summit of three countries—
the United States, Japan and
South Korea. The old Camp
David Summit in 1978 is well
known for bringing Israel
and Egypt together by the
Carter Administration.

The hostility between Japan and South Korea is nowhere near the Egypt-Israel in the post-Second World War era, yet the mutual multiple grievances and political discomfort to forge security ties in Seoul and Tokyo for decades is palpable.

The United States has strategic alliance with both Japan and South Korea, but has been unable for decades to bring Japan and South Korea together until the recent new

Camp David summit on 18th August. The US strategy in the Asia-Pacific region during the prolonged Cold War years was characterized as hub-and-spoke alliance networks. The US was the hub and the alliance partners were Japan, South Korea,

the Philippines and Thailand.

The only collective defence

treaty then in the region was SEATO or Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation signed in Manila in 1954. SEATO became infructuous after the US withdrawal from Vietnam War in 1975. The hub-and-spoke arrangements, however, survived and continued in somewhat modified form after the Cold War. The Soviet Union collapsed and China became a major trade partner of the US and the hub-and-spoke pattern of alliances turned less relevant.

However, the economic and military rise of China to a point it has begun to compete with the US for more space in the global order and, more specifically now in the Indo-Pacific order, has altered the geopolitical landscape in

human rights situation in

the region. The four years of Trump Administration, meanwhile, undermined Washington's alliance partners in the region, particularly Japan and South Korea not only due to President Trump's lack of trust in allies but also because of his political outreach to Russia and North Korea.

President Trump subsequently started an economic cold war with China and Beijing openly roared against what it perceived a "new containment policy" of the United States. When Joe Biden became the president, US-China ties were already appearing confrontational. The Ukraine War and the Chinese position on it; the Sino-US political standoff in the Taiwan Strait and the Western talk about building alternative supply chain and de-risking trade and invest partnership with China contributed towards a path of new cold war in the Indo-Pacific.

China's aggressive postures in South China and East China Seas; rapid military modernization, fast naval expansion and rising technological capabilities appear to have rung the alarm bells in the American strategic community. President Biden, an old hand on foreign affairs, has systematically moved to reemphasize the importance of alliances, to strengthen the existing alliances, to build on strategic partnerships with

multiple countries, including
India and to show interest in
economic affairs in the IndoPacific region. Strengthening
of the QUAD; creating AUKUS; proposing Indo-Pacific
Economic Framework for
Prosperity (IPEF) and regular naval drills and exercises
in the Pacific are the hallmarks of the Biden Administration's approach to handle
the worrisome expansion of
Chinese power and influence.
As if those initiatives were
not adequate, Biden con-

As if those initiatives were not adequate, Biden convened a summit meeting with Japanese Prime Minister and South Korea President at Camp David. The summit ended with issuance of a Joint Statement, a set of Camp David Principles and "Spirit of Camp David".

The outcome of the Camp David summit testifies to the intensification of Sino-US cold confrontation (NOT COLD WAR) that has complicated the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific for quite sometime. But the significance of it goes beyond that. First, he was able to bring together on a common platform two key allies of the US who were unable to see many regional issues eve-toeye. Second, the Camp David understanding clearly establishes a trilateral defence pact in the Indo-Pacific despite the open disclaimer that it is not a mini-NATO or a Pacific NATO. In fact, it goes beyond the NATO and encompasses close cooperation and coordination in the fields of security, defence, cyber security, economy, and even education. Third, it is more comprehensive in its dimensions than AUKUS. The three countries have pledged to coordinate their responses to threats and challenges through consultation by using a hotline connecting all three capitals. Fourth, while the Camp David agreements highlight the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, it goes beyond the region and includes coordinated responses to the Ukraine War.

India has deeper interest in the geopolitical peace and geo-economic opportunities in the larger Indo-Pacific region. This development needs careful watch and serious analysis. There is no doubt that India's interests lie in Japan and South Korea burying their hatchets and shaking hands to confront the emerging challenges in the region. India has strategic partnerships with all three countries. While South Korea is not a part of the Quad, it has its own Indo-Pacific strategy and its inclusion in a separate trilateral arrangement is not antithetical to goals of the Quad. In a way, UK's participation in AUKUS also adds another country—the UK to multilateral initiatives, though in smaller groups, to address the challenges and promote peace and stability.

The US-Japan-South Korea trilateral has rightly drawn attention to China's aggressive naval expansion and assertive policies. North Korea's offensive statements and missile tests too pose considerable threats to regional peace.

Yet, the main question is whether it would further anger and isolate Beijing in the region. Chinese analysts see in the Camp David yet another move to create NATO-type arrangements targeting China. President Biden's assurances that the trilateral does not target China and his National Security Advisor's assertion that the trilateral pact is not a "mini-NATO" have no takers in China.

But what the Chinese analysts fail to see is the persistent efforts by China to intimidate smaller neighbours, grab territories of neighbouring countries, occupy islands in the Seas and practice predator economic practices through its Beltand-Road Initiative (BRI) constitute the provocations that have caused widespread apprehensions and have threatened peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

There is no New Cold War yet, but the cold confrontations provoked by China may lead to one and the key to its prevention is in Beijing.

Chintamani Mahapatra is Founder Chairperson, Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies, and formerly, Professor at JNU. BE FORTHRIGHT

#### Allies could thwart Congress revival

#### **BETWEEN US**

**PANKAJ VOHRA** 



More than the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress allies would have a greater reason to worry if the grand old party were to revive and make a comeback on the national stage. There are already indications that Arvind Kejriwal wants to throw a spanner in the works and by visiting

Chhattisgarh, where he has negligible presence, he declared that the Aam Aadmi Party would be contesting the elections, and people should try his outfit, since both the Congress and the BJP had failed to deliver.

This visit was completely avoidable, and it demonstrates how much commitment the AAP has towards Opposition unity to take on the BJP and its coalition partners, in the Parliamentary polls that could follow the Assembly elections. The AAP's logic of expanding its base in various parts, does not seem consistent with the collective resolve of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (I.N.D.I.A) to face the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The combined Opposition is meeting in Mumbai later in the week and its leaders propose to carry forward the intentions which were on view both in Patna and Bengaluru. However, it is not Kejriwal alone who has decided to apply pressure on the Congress, but even Sharad Pawar has started his power play by making ambiguous statements. The NCP is not making things clear regarding where it stands; there are several signs that show that a patch up between the two factions was on cards and the parting itself was just a well enacted drama.

Many political analysts believe that Pawar continues to play a deceptive game and is perhaps preparing a stage where he does not have to leave the I.N.D.I.A alliance but is ejected from it. This would help him gain sympathy in the four or five districts of Maharashtra, where he has some influence, while simultaneously it shall ensure that the Ajit Pawar group remains in power in the state, and the party collectively contests the elections whenever they are held.

Kejirwal is rattled by the unlikely prospect of the Congress tying up with the Shiromani Akali Dal through a secret understanding in Punjab, a pact that could be detrimental to the AAP, which, despite being in power in the state, could find it difficult to win in the Parliamentary elections.

While Pawar and Kejriwal have provided some evidence of what could be in their mind, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who is equally deceptive and devious in the way he plays his politics, could make moves that are detrimental to the interests of the newly born alliance. Nitish has in the past broken away from the BJP, only to return back as its alliance partner, and this kind of development cannot be ruled out in the future as well.

There are some who believe that West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, who is a mass leader in her state, could also throw some tantrums as the elections draw nearer. Yes, it is difficult for her to have any kind of understanding with the Left parties and the Congress in the state, but that is the only way the BJP can be stopped. Otherwise, even though she may manage to win the majority of seats in Bengal, the BJP's imprint would always remain.

The short point is that more than the BJP, the regional parties fear the Congress. The BJP is a known political adversary on the national front when they make the argument of saving democracy and the Constitution, but when it comes to realpolitik, the Congress remains an opponent as well. The success of regional parties in most places has been at the expense of the Congress, whose space has shrunk in order to provide an advantage to several of such parties, that are now seeking to align with it nationally.

It is not that the Congress leadership does not understand the dynamics at work, but while looking at a larger picture, the overall interests of the grand old party could be affected. As it is, there are enough troubles within the Congress, and to begin with, the organization needs to be strengthened and streamlined, which the new president, Mallikarjun Kharge is attempting to do.

The Congress at the Opposition conclave must do some plain speaking and take a commitment from its alliance partners regarding their true intentions. It would be less painful and more realistic, if the parting is now, rather than later. It is a known fact that if the alliance survives and delivers, it shall be solely because of the Congress, which is central to any agenda set against the BJP and its allies. None of the regional parties is capable of taking on the saffron brigade nationally, and their interests are only confined to their respective regions, where they wish to keep the Congress, at bay in order to survive politically.

This paradox has to be resolved amicably. Kharge recently constituted the new Working Committee, which is packed with many questionable names. There is very little presence of those under 50 years of age, and the CWC has members whose inclusion after they publicly announced they were retiring means that they were still valuable assets and politically relevant.

Kharge needs to be more assertive and should also constitute the Parliamentary Board to include leaders with gravitas. While dealing with the alliance partners, he should be forthright. Saving the Congress from its allies is as important as saving the country from the BJP. Between us.

#### CHINA'S GREED

#### The cartographic face of Chinese colonialism

Tibetan resistance against Chinese occupation has refused to die despite all Chinese claims of economic development and building of a massive infrastructure in 'Tibet Autonomous Region' (TAR).

after the success of Mao's

communist revolution in

China, his mighty and re-

sourceful People Liberation

Army (PLA) defeated the

poorly equipped and out-

numbered Tibetan army on

the eastern Tibetan front at

Chamdo in Kham. Following

this victory, it was an easy

game for Beijing to force Da-

lai Lama's representatives to

sign on the dotted lines of its

"17-Point Agreement" on 23

May1951. Although signed



VIJAY KRANT

The story of China's greed in Tibet seems to have no end. This 1 September will mark the 58th anniversary of China's decision to break up and reorganize the geography of its occupied Tibet in 1965. Discovering that strong resistance from the Tibetan masses against Chinese rule over their country was refusing to die despite all political and military measures since, what Beijing claims "Tibet's Peaceful Liberation" in 1951, Mao decided to break Tibet into many pieces to create what we see today as the "Tibet Autonomous Region" (TAR). The remaining parts of the original Tibet, which belonged to the erstwhile eastern Tibetan provinces of Kham and Amdo, were merged into the adjoining Chinese provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu.

Mao had at least three special reasons behind this step. One was addressed at the international community who has been raising alarm over consistently deteriorating

Tibet. Afraid of the probability of Tibetan occupation becoming a major international issue, he created TAR, just a third of the original Tibet, to present it as the "Real Tibet". The second reason was to keep TAR within the confines of the Tibetan plateau in order to have a stronger administrative and military control over it. And the third reason was a personal and emotional one for Mao. It was in the areas of Kham and Amdo where Mao's PLA received strong resistance and non-cooperation from the self-respecting Khampas, Golokpas and other Tibetan communities as Mao's communist "Long March" from Yunnan and Sichuan passed through their regions to reach the heart of China. Therefore, Mao had good reasons to take away these areas from the main Tibetan body to contain the intensity of Tibet's resistance potential against Chinese colonial occupation. Moreover, by assimilating these sparsely populated Tibetan regions into adjoining populous Chinese provinces, he wanted them to be reduced to meaningless minorities in their new home provinces. China's official demographic data show that Tibetans in these regions form less than

ic data show that Tibetans in these regions form less than two to four percent of these provinces.

In October 1950, just a year ily of the motherland—the People's Republic of China."

What followed in the coming years simply proved that it was none other than the

under duress by the Tibetan delegation, who did not carry any formal authority from the Dalai Lama government of Tibet to sign any agreement on its behalf, yet this "Agreement" came handy for China to announce to the world the "Peaceful Liberation" of Tibet. Though the agreement was titled as "The Agreement of the Central People's government and the local government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful liberation of Tibet", the very first of the 17 points made it clear that Tibet was an independent country before this 'liberation'. This point read: "The Tibetan people shall be united and drive out the imperialist aggressive forces from Tibet; that the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the motherland—the

(CCP) and its PLA which had entered Tibet as 'imperialists' and the people of Tibet refused to have any union with the People's Republic of China (PRC). As the invader CCP and PLA started breaking all the 17 points of their own drafted agreement, open resistance from the ordinary Tibetan people and armed resistance of innumerable communities across Tibet, especially the Eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, lead to the final explosion of 1959. As the Chinese PLA General's plans to arrest the Dalai Lama unfolded in March 1959, Dalai Lama managed to escape to neighbouring India after an arduous two-week journey through high mountain passes of Himalayas. According to the report of International Commission of Jurists of United Nations, the PLA shot down more than 80,000 Tibetans in Lhasa and surrounding areas to suppress the uprising of Tibetan masses in that month. Since then Tibetan resis-

Chinese Communist Party

Since then Tibetan resistance against Chinese occupation has refused to die despite all Chinese claims of economic development and building of a massive infrastructure in TAR. In the initial decades Mao's sincere Marxist belief that once Tibetans' faith in religion i.e. Buddhism is broken, it would be easy to convert

them into 'patriotic Chinese' nationals. That explains why Tibet's monasteries, temples and religious social system had to go through severe destruction during the fateful decade of "cultural revolution". But a non-stop chain of public uprisings and resistance against China's rule in Tibet over following decades only proved that the impact of this policy was just opposite of what Mao and his fellow administrators of Tibet had expected. That realization among the CCP leadership led to the adoption of a new strategy which is aimed at occupying the Tibetan religious system from within. Official sponsorship of searching reincarnations of high-ranking lamas like the Panchen Lama and the Karma Pa during 1990s and new laws of making the CCP's formal official approval compulsory for every reincarnate Tulku (termed as the "Living Buddhas" by the CCP) since 2007 is indication of this new policy.

cation of this new policy.
Following President Xi
Jinping becoming the "Paramount Leader" of China in
2013 this policy has now
expanded to CCP's exclusive claims over search and
installation of the next Dalai
Lama after the present one
passes away. On August 31,
2005 while celebrating the
40th anniversary of establishment of TAR the then
President and General Sec-

retary HU Jintao and the Politburo had announced their commitment to transforming TAR in the 21st century by setting the goal of strengthening state security and moving the TAR from "basic stability" to "enduring peace and stability".

While the Tibetan regions, assigned to other Chinese

provinces, have been practically gobbled up and digested by the sea of host Han populations, Xi's war-scale development of roads, railways, military installations and new expansive modern towns across Tibet to host millions of fresh Han settlers from all over China reflects a new policy of converting Tibet into China's new fortress and its new gateway to South Asia, Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Xi's commitment to dominate Asia to finally dominate the entire world appears to be giving final shape to Chairman Mao's vision of making "Tibet as China's palm and Ladakh, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) as its fingers". This Chinese expansionist dream not only poses a serious challenge to South Asian countries like India, Nepal and Bhutan, but to the entire world.

Vijay Kranti is a veteran Tibetologist and Chairman, Centre for Himalayan Asia Studies and Engagement. **REMOVE GHULAMI** 

## A crash course in jettisoning a colonial mindset

PM Modi has regularly referred to the need for us as Indians to get back to our own culture and languages. The New Education Policy fortunately also encourages regional languages.

#### **OPINION**

#### **DARSHAN SINGH**



'n June 1834, Thomas Macaulay came to Ooty in India and spent under a year as a British historian and educationist. By 1835 after returning to London, he formulated an education policy for all colonies, but he knew that it would particularly be more important to establish his theory of English language and culture in the crown jewel which was, India. This policy was spread out quickly by the British and got known as Macaulayism, which amounted to thrusting the English language and customs; while simultaneously taking away the local language and customs from the colonial subjects. It became convenient to get Anglicised in this way as it was then easier to be an officer or servant in the service of the King Emperor. This was colonialism at its best and it came to stamping out the desire for your own culture and replacing it with English and all the allied

educational syllabi. Now since a few years, Prime Minister having realised this, has regularly referred to the need for us as Indians to get back into our

own culture and languages. The New Education Policy fortunately also encourages regional languages. Simultaneously also now there is a renaissance of Indian cultural revival. Many enlightened citizens are bringing back Indian art, Indian culture, Indian textiles, Indian clothing, Indian classical dance and most importantly an attempt to look at our own history and religion through the Indian lens. We are on the right track and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is further strengthening it.

To remove "ghulami" and the colonial mindset is at best a general statement. There are 100 ways of adopting new strategies to change our society, our laws, rules, and governance systems so as to shed the colonial hangover. Of the many steps that still need to be taken, a few are listed below. On any of the points mentioned below a chapter could be written, but for the time being, it is best to highlight these few areas in the hope that improvements will continue and, in some cases, even legislation may be considered.

are constituted from among our finest young talent. This is then the bureaucracy that runs our country appropriately according to "Rules". So we have a system that always ensures the valuable aspect of "Administration". We have inherited the easiest way out by following the British co-

\* At the cost of repetition,

our Administrative Services

the aspect of "Facilitation" is unfortunately left out. The British did not do this for the Indian "Subjects".

It is understandable that if a bureaucrat is honest, but then tries to help an industrialist or just any Indian citizen, then he or she, can be accused of giving unfair advantages. This could mean an inquiry against that person, and here lies the weakness in our system. The honest officer is afraid to help. Facilitation becomes a mirage. Our government machinery in addition to administration should facilitate, but currently there is no way for such decisions to be taken, which would not attract suspicion.

The government is indeed trying to solve this by bringing in various procedural practices that will enable facilitation, such as but not limited to, faceless Income Tax, 85% payment on successful arbitration in spite of continuing litigation (Vivad se Vishwas), and even withdrawal of minor cases from the CLB/SFI. Here it is important to note that the continuing litigation is mostly done by the Central government and the state government. A marvellous circular by the Finance Ministry refers to the State / Central governments, bravely but honestly, as "Compulsive Litigants". If this aspect is also tackled it will enable people to expend their energies on more productive tasks rather than fighting their own Government, especially even after winning at the stage of Arbitration. \* Needless to say, the judicial system is the other area where, on one hand many difficulties, and the inevitable impasse, get resolved by activism. But at the lower levels of courts in the districts there is a never-ending delay to even get a date.



at the inauguration of the 'Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam' at Bharat Mandapam'in Pragati Maidan on Saturday. This event commemorates the third anniversary of the National Education

There are 100 ways of adopting new strategies to change our society, our laws, rules, and governance systems so as to shed the colonial hangover.

A judge or some lawyer, can merely be missing, and the next date is three months away. This for many average citizens especially in villages and small towns, means that it is fair to assume that to get resolution, one lifetime may not be enough. As a parallel, how many persons do we have in jails, who are still not convicted, but disastrously await the next date. Is this not colonialism?

\* Coming back to the state of the floods and water mismanagement. In addition to what I have earlier written it should suffice to say that our ministries and government machinery have all the knowledge but shirk the ability to apply the knowledge. Simply put, everyone seems to be "reacting" to a situation rather than "anticipating" the possible situation. Merely using the

NDRF each time is proof that not enough attempts have made to reach a point where the NDRF is not nec-

\* If we are to shed the colonial era, we must also look at our cultural image. Have you ever tried Indian restaurants abroad? First of all, perhaps 80% of the restaurants in the UK are run by Bangladeshis to their own individual standards of each family restauranteur. There are many restaurants which slapdash chillies only because the western world thinks that all Indian food is made from "chilli", without realising that there are 30 other spices. As an example, the restaurants in Vancouver and many other cities are a letdown to our Indian food standards and quality. Yet they charge exorbitantly high at what they

think should be the rates and make them equivalent

to Western dishes in prices. Is it not possible for the Indian Ministry of Culture to get involved? After all it is a matter of the nation's image. Can we not have some standards for Indian food. Especially when Chinese, French, Italian and many other cuisines have not forgotten their quality standards? While we cannot insist on what an Indian restaurant serves in other countries, we can still have a full proof system of voluntary quality certification by some Indian department/standards for every Indian restaurant abroad (that wants to be certified). This would mean a certificate hanging on the wall for a restaurant that meets the standards regardless of whether it is run by an Indian, Bangladeshi, or any other nationality. There is a restaurant in Nantes run by French family with extremely good Indian food. Obviously, a bona fide certificate of quality would attract even more customers.

If we had a system of certifying good quality in Indian restaurants abroad, then surely an industry in India would come up to supply those restaurants with quality inputs, masalas, spices, etc. Chinese restaurants all over the world import ingredients from China and maintain quality. For them this a huge self-sustaining industry. \* Indian heritage and legacy

are not limited merely to

food or even dance, textiles and music. We have many other valuable items which should be collected and placed in museums. The Indian government (is it the Ministry of Culture?) should be more active in supporting museums and in fact encouraging them. There could be museums on village handicrafts, wall art, and many other items. We all know that when anyone goes abroad the chances are that he will have seen a museum somewhere in the Western world. We should also protect our culture, and this needs government support and not interference. We would have more museums, not only for the visitor, but also our own growing children who would learn and be aware of their legacy. \* One area that is most irksome is the desire of the bureaucracy through a testosterone-filled aggressive mentality to destroy automobiles. This happens because some old automobiles are polluting. But many old automobiles are non-polluting. Yet the fact that all automobiles over a certain the NCR is because even the

government cannot trust or manage to issue honest certificates for non-polluting automobiles. It is assumed that a pollution certificate can be obtained through a bribe; so, then what is the role of the government apart from destroying all automobiles? Or is it that the automobile manufacturing industry couldn't care less for this aspect for Indian heritage? Everywhere in the world, automobiles are considered heritage, and are displayed, if not deployed. In more ways than one, they carry the history of social change. But we are content to destroy and wipeout. In any case, do automobiles pollute more than millions of gensets? Does anyone bother?

\* We can even have museums on ancient Indian transport forms, like Bullock Carts, Horse Carts (Ekka), Donkey Carts and the like. These are random ideas. Why not also have a museum on all the types of roof tiles used so wonderfully in the coastal areas particularly Southern India. \* Another disaster was to cut and destroy the National wealth of 12,500 Steam Locomotives (Broad Gauge and Meter Gauge). Why does our culture, heritage conscience not be alert? Each loco could have stood on the campus of a University or School (as in the rest of the world). But Alas is Macaulay winning. I could go on for the list is

endless, but now I rest my

Darshan Singh is an entrepreneur who has worked in quite a few key areas that have been critical to the process of nationbuilding, including the railways and oil and natural gas exploration. He is also an educationist, currently the Chairman of the age are to be scrapped in Welham Boys' School in Deh-

#### People Of The Sacred Books

lonial system and therefore

#### Change in set-up, we get upset

Seeking the permanent from the ephemeral and the infinite from the finite is a mistake man constantly makes. We seek from the world what it is helpless to grant. Finite actions will always produce finite results. The Prime Minister or Minister are only temporary posts. We all seek "A" but all our lives slavishly work for "B". We strive for a lasting joy but carry a boarding pass for fleeting Joy. Swami Chinmayanandaji once said. "You can go on churning sand to get butter, but you can never get it, because it is not there." One seeks in vain for joy from worldly objects, relationships, situations and people. Our expectations are wrong, as they are

This however does not mean that we should hate the world or discard it. It is inherent in spiritual growth that one begins to put the correct value on everything. The value of anything is a mental concept, it's an evaluation you clothe it with. Once the mind understands the ephemeral nature of things, it grows out of the fascination for them. No adult wants to go on playing with toys. The older child happily "renounces" his "treasured" marbles for the younger sibling. (Vairagya) detachment comes from (Vivek) discrimination. Right and analytical thinking compels the mind to stop chasing fleeting joys, they are not worth the time and effort. As one grows in this wisdom, one doesn't need to drop sensuous toys with effort, they drop you!

Let's pray to the Lord to guide our energies to that which could serve mankind, wipe tears from faces, sooth hearts and troubled minds, that which could allay hunger and bring peace to the soul. Such effort minus 'I' is the only way to inject peace into one's frayed nerves and calmness into one's stressed muscles. Prarthna Saran, President Chinmaya Mission New Delhi. Email: prarthnasaran@gmail.com

This first appeared on 18 August, 2019. The writer is not writing due to

#### Facing the court

By (Late) Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Mr Manohar J. Pherwani, a government officer, rose in service to become Chairman of the Unit Trust of India and of the National Housing Bank, both highly rated posts in the Indian economic sphere. In 1991, the Reserve Bank of India issued a circular which stated that bank

funds should not be transferred to the stock market. Disregarding this circular, Mr Pherwani issued a cheque for Rs 3,078.63 crores to a broker. He was later brought to book for flouting government regulations. He resigned from his post on May 9, 1992. This chain of events was reported in the Hindustan Times of May 22 and June 3, 1992.

His case was handed over to the CBI for investigation, a development ultimately proved disastrous. He so feared being unable to exonerate himself of all blame in court, that only twelve days after resigning, he complained of severe chest pain around 2.25 a.m., and within five minutes he had collapsed. He was only 58 years of age.

The trauma of having to appear in a man-made court proved too overwhelming for Mr. Pherwani. But if he felt afraid of having to account for his actions in a court set up by human beings, how would he feel about appearing in a court set up by the Almighty? When having to face a human court proves so unnerving, what will a man's condition be when he finds himself standing trial in the divine court?

Death may spare a man from facing human judges, but it will immediately set him before his Maker, the greatest Divine Judge, which will be a much more terrifying experience. This is a matter of the utmost gravity. Were man to ponder upon it, he would be shaken to the very core.

#### Music is a medium, Friend of Jesus not the message

In the martial arts epic "Return of the Dragon", Bruce Lee's master points his finger at the moon. "What do you see", he asks. The young pupil is then advised, "do not focus on the finger, lest you miss the glory of the moon." In religious places, the holy message is conveyed in a sweet voice, and at times to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Music is one of the pointing fingers, and His apostles now want the devotee to start focusing on the real objective, His word. At times, the devotee is lost in the music, and misses the larger message. Some musicians even start to get preference over others in holy places, further stoking their egos! Saint Kabeer reminds us.

Those who believe in such high and low classes, They only sing chants of egotism.

A saint once told my mother that after he saw a congregation enjoying the drum beats and the singing, he asked them to repeat the words, and say what they had learnt. The devotees could not remember. The saint told them, "God cannot be fathomed merely by the beating of parched leather on drums!" We have been given music, and the apostles have given a lilt to the call of prayer, and set words to poetic meters

It is imperative to understand that music is a medium, but not the message itself. Saint Kabeer is direct in his advice to the devotee:

You may believe—these are just words of a song, But, it is a meditation on God.

The real sound is beyond the music we know. Guru Granth Sahib mentions it as anhad naad, the Unstruck, Unheard Melody. For His revealed words narrated by apostles, Guru Granth Sahib says: Emanated from the Primal Lord, these are His revealed

This first appeared on 26 June, 2016. The writer is not writing due to

words, they eradicate all fears, all anxiety.

By Rev. Dr. Richard Howell

Jeevan and Jyoti are an educated brother and sister born in a Christian home. Both are graduates and accomplished pianists. They have a problem, as they shamefacedly admitted, "We hate ourselves." When questioned why they hated themselves, they reluctantly admitted that they belonged to a low caste. Jyoti felt a double stigma because of her low caste and being a woman. Both caste and gender bondage weighed her down. 'We always feel inferior in the company of other educated people,' commented Jeevan and Jyoti. When confronted with the question, "Don't you believe that Jesus, the Creator of the universe, calls you friend?" the brother and sister remained quiet. 'Friendship involves respect and likeness. Jesus not only likes and respects you but also loves you and died to reconcile you with God and one another. He enables us to engage in the service of reconciliation in this broken and hurting world,' explained their friend Ramesh.

"Why do you allow others to define who you are?" challenged Ramesh. 'Believe in how your Maker defines your identity and gives you dignity.' It took about a week for the truth that Jesus calls them His friends to sink in. And what joy filled their life. The broad smile on their faces and the confidence and courage they experienced was visible in how they talked and greeted everyone. The spiritual truth of friendship with God broke their chains of bondage and the fact that they are created in the image and likeness of God. Both siblings now rejoice in the truth, as the Bible states, "Thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:57).

The seed of God's truth transformed Jeevan and Jyoti, who now move confidently among people of all strata, with their head held high. They spread the aroma of the Gospel of Jesus Christ boldly proclaiming that all people are made equal and in the image of their

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**SPACEFARER** 

# Focus on strategic implications of India's lunar ambitions

If China establishes a lunar base before India does, a space war between the two countries could occur as early as 2030. China could use advanced jamming and targeting techniques to thwart India's space missions and vehicles.

#### **OPINION**

#### **WG CDR S. SUDHAKARAN (RETD)**



ndia has long been a spacefaring nation, and ∟its lunar ambitions are no exception. The country has successfully launched several lunar missions and plans to send a human mission to the moon shortly. India's lunar ambitions have several strategic implications. First, they can help India assert its regional dominance and deter potential adversaries. Second, they can be used to develop new technologies that can be used for military purposes. Third, they can help India boost its economy and create jobs.

Some of the benefits of an ambitious lunar program

Technology leadership: India's success in lunar exploration would demonstrate its technological capabilities and its ability to compete with other spacefaring nations. This could give India a significant advantage in terms of technology leadership, which could be used to develop new products and services, improve its economy, and deter poten-

Economic benefits: Space exploration can also positively impact the economy. It can be used to develop new industries, such as space tourism and asteroid mining.

tial adversaries

Scientific discoveries: Lunar exploration can also lead to scientific discoveries. It can help us learn more about the moon and other celestial bodies. This knowledge can be used to develop new technologies and to improve our understanding of the universe.

Cooperation and competition: India's lunar ambitions could also lead to cooperation and competition with other countries. India has already expressed interest in working with other countries on lunar exploration projects. However, it is also competing with other countries for dominance in space. This competition could lead to tensions between coun-

From a military standpoint, India is one of the only four countries that have successfully reached the lunar surface. The competition in space is between the former superpowers, who are nearing the end of their glory, and two emerging powers. Space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities are the next frontier to conquer to maintain a military edge. Even a poor and bankrupt country like Pakistan can put up a good fight against any adversary on land. Space will be the decisive factor in the next generation of warfare. If India wants to be a major power in the future, it must have a presence and superiority in space.

China's Chang'e series of missions is now in its fifth phase. It is worth noting that China achieved what India's Chandrayaan-3 mission achieved a decade ago with its Chang'e 3 mission. While the Chandrayaan mission helped India reach the moon, India still has a long way to go before it can claim its place among the spacefaring nations. China aims to establish a permanent lunar base by 2027 with its Chang'e 8 mission. Hence, India must acceler-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with women scientists at ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC), in Bengaluru on Saturday. ANI

ate its space program and build on the momentum of Chandrayaan-3. If China establishes a lunar base before India, a space war between the two countries could occur as early as 2030. China could use advanced jamming and targeting techniques to passively thwart India's space missions and vehicles.

If India does not accelerate its space program in the next five years, China could establish a powerful optical surveillance and intelligence gathering system on the moon. This would give China a significant advantage in space surveillance, as it would be difficult to detect surveillance carried out from the moon. The moon is constantly visible from all parts of the earth, which means that a network of optical telescopes on the moon could provide continuous

surveillance of any target on earth. This could be used for a variety of purposes, such as monitoring military activity, tracking missile launches, detecting nuclear weapons tests, and spying on other countries.

Humanoid robots are poised to play a major role in future space colonization. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics have made it possible to create robots that are capable of performing complex tasks that were once thought to be the exclusive domain of humans. Humanoid robots could be used to perform a variety of tasks in space, such as exploring the surface of planets and moons, building habitats and infrastructure, conducting scientific research, repairing spacecraft and equipment, and providing companionship and support to human

astronauts

Some of the programs undertaken by various countries to develop humanoids for space:

USA: The US space agency NASA is developing a humanoid robot called Valkyrie. Valkyrie is designed to be a versatile robot that can perform a variety of tasks in space, such as exploring the surface of Mars and repairing spacecraft.

China: The Chinese space agency CNSA is developing a humanoid robot called Xiaofei. Xiaofei is designed to be a more affordable and accessible robot than Valkyrie or HRP-5P. It is also designed to be more user-friendly, which is important for applications such as space tourism.

Europe: The European Space Agency ESA is developing a humanoid robot called CIMON. CIMON is designed to be a companion robot for astronauts. It is not designed to perform tasks in space, but it is designed to provide companionship and support to astronauts.

and support to astronauts. India is actively involved in developing its humanoid missions to space. ISRO and DRDO are working on projects such as Vyommitra, Agastya, and Rudra. However, if India wants to accelerate its space race, private companies should engage the Indian youth in large numbers and simultaneously develop multiple competing products. While some

initiatives have already started, such as QROBOT-IX, we need greater government support to ensure that these companies are nurtured and grown into global

leaders in this field.

India and China have different approaches to space exploration. India is focused on traditional space goals, while China is aiming to lead in space-related technologies. China has a clear vision for space exploration and is investing heavily in space technology. It has also achieved several major milestones in space exploration. India needs to up its game in several areas to beat

China in space exploration.

The following are some aspects that could define the space race in the times to come.

\* India and China are emerging space powers, and their rivalry will likely intensify in the coming years. \* The outcome of this rivalry will have a significant im-

pact on the future of space

exploration and the global

space economy.

\* India needs to develop
a clear vision for space exploration and articulate its

goals for the next five years.

\* India must invest more money in space technology, research, and development.

\* India needs to collaborate with other countries to share resources and expertise.

If India can do these things, it will be well on its way to

beating China in space exploration. However, it is important to note that China is a formidable competitor, and India will need to work hard to catch up. India's lunar ambitions are ambitious but achievable. With careful planning and execution, India can become a major player in the space race and reap the benefits of lunar exploration. The success of Chandrayaan-3 is a stepping stone towards greater glory and achieving the position of a superpower. However, India should not rest on its laurels. It should build on this success and engage in parallel projects in multiple domains, such as developing humanoid robots for space exploration, building lunar bases, and developing new technologies for space mining. By doing so, India can truly cement its place as a leading spacefaring nation.

India should also consider the strategic implications of its lunar ambitions in the context of the larger geopolitical landscape. The competition between India and China in space is likely to intensify in the coming years, and India needs to be prepared. By building a strong lunar program, India can help deter China's aggressive behavior in space and protect its own interests.

Wing Commander S. Sudhakaran (Retd) is CEO, QuGates Technologies.

MAKE SPACE

#### Noteworthy: The journey of India's space technology

In this journey, there aren't any low-hanging fruits. China is our biggest competitor in this journey.

#### OPINION

#### **OM PRAKASH DWIVEDI**



With the successful landing of ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 on the moon's south pole, the global race to become a space superpower has intensified. Let it be stated that future geopolitical formations will be determined by the power of space technology. The United States, China and Russia are the major players in space technology, but, of late, India has also started punching above its weight in this sector given the robust push rendered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. ISRO's momentous success in satellite launches, and, also, in mitigating the production cost has pulled many countries'

attention to India.

But we are talking about

the journey of a space superpower, and in this journey, there aren't any lowhanging fruits. China is our biggest competitor in this journey. As evident, Russia is no longer able to lure foreign countries to sell its technology. Also, the lack of funding and the subsequent sparse budget for technology in the wake of the ongoing Ukraine war has constrained its space programmes. The Western sanction has only exacerbated its problem. Pavel Luzin, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, predicts a gloomy future for the Russian space programme, suggesting that "Russia will be able to launch some satellites. But it will not be an advanced space power. It will not be making steps beyond low Earth orbit". The recent Luna-25 crash turns Luzin's prophecy true to some ex-

And it is here that China gains momentum, a country

that is always seeking opportunities to exploit. While the competitors in this field seem to have been reduced, the rise of China may savour tensions and distrust within Asia as well as in the global geopolitical sphere. China's credentials are raucous, given its invariable disrespect for other countries and their borders. Judging China on the objective indicators of any democratic nation, one can find its performance has been pathetic and alarming. China shares its borders with 14 nations, and it is no surprise to find that it continues to exercise its muscle against 13 of them.

China's desperation to gain iconic status in the field of space technology is evident in its bid to produce and circulate more films on space science. This has two hidden motives. First, to cultivate in its youth a fervent belief about their ability to attain the top position in the space sector, while also inspiring them to join this mission. Second, the theme of such movies has utopian underpinnings for global peace. With its overt plan to lead Asia and the world, China is treading a careful path and does not want powerful nations to question and critique its ongoing space innovations. There is a diktat to the film industry

to produce films that pro-

mote Xi Jinping's thoughts. These films are more of an appeasement exercise to underplay the real agenda of its space mission, while also instilling in its citizens a sense of pride for their nation's progress. The Chinese movie, *The Wandering Earth*, is just one such example that foregrounds its peace mission that underpins space innovations.

However, a mismatch be-

tween their statements and intentions is largely evident. For example, Ye Peijian, the head of China's Lunar Exploration Program emphasizes that "If others go there [moon], then they will take over, and you won't be able to go even if you want to. This is reason enough.' Exactly the reason why the NASA administrator, Bill Nelson casts his apprehension about China's intention to colonize the moon. Nelson asserts, "I don't want China to get to the south pole first with humans and then say, this is ours; stay out." Casting a wary eye on China's intentions, Lloyd Austin, US Secretary of Defense identifies China as "the most significant threat going forward".

In this ongoing tussle related to the space sphere and also to lead the race for superpower, India has registered a noteworthy entry. PM Modi has convincingly



ISRO Chairman S. Somanath and others show the victory sign after the successful soft-landing of Chandrayaan-3 Lander Vikram on the surface of the moon, at ISRO in Bengaluru on Wednesday

demonstrated his bold vision for transforming the Indian economy. The "Make in India" and "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiatives are designed to put India on top of the global economic order. These initiatives also aim to position India as the most favoured destination for providing cutting-edge technological innovations. The recent developments in the international market augurs well for India. It has rendered a strong footing for  $India\,in\,this\,sector\,and\,there$ has been a palpable shift by many buyers to India.

Ever since the Modi government allowed the space sector for all kinds of private enterprise in June 2020, it has seen the rise and spread of a network of businesses,

mostly driven by homegrown talent. From a nation that depended on foreign technology to carry its space programme, India is becoming a self-reliant nation now. As a result of this push, India saw the registration of 140 space-tech start-ups, which have also boosted India's economy. The figures suggest that these start-ups have brought in an investment worth \$120 million, and this is expected to grow at a rapid rate in years to come. If one were to analyse the

relevance of the "Make in India" (2014) and Aatmanirbhar Bharat (2020) initiatives, it is evident that ISRO has triggered more launches under the Modi government in comparison to all previous

governments. Since 2014, ISRO has carried out 47 launches; they have all been carried out at a cost that is significantly lower than the launches conducted by other countries.

And, this is where we have reached. Our self-belief and self-reliance have started attracting even Elon Musk's SpaceX company. Until recently, Russia, China, and SpaceX were the major suppliers of satellite launches, but India is now gaining momentum. As a result, the NewSpace India Ltd., launched three dozen satellites for the UK-based One-Web Ltd, recently. This has invigorated India's position in the space sector.

in the space sector.

The rise in demand for high-speed internet has been brewing. For example, the chairman and managing director of the NewSpace, D. Radhakrishnan, says that "demand is so huge...there's going to be a lot of shortage of the heavy-lift launchers that will be required". Ernst & Young predicts that by 2025, the space economy will grow to \$600 billion from \$447 billion in 2020.

Going by the figures, it is estimated that the value of India's satellite launch services may reach \$1 billion by 2025. In our journey of space innovation, India still requires more investment and a robust culture to cultivate

a scientific temperament to compete with China. The Washington-based think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies, indicates that China owned 13.6% of all earth-orbiting satellites, compared to 2.3% for India until 2020.

As much as there seems

to be intensified competition, one also finds a lack of options in the field of space technology. It is very likely that the US, China, and India will be the key players in the race to become a space superpower, which will embolden its soft power as well. Unlike China, India has always harboured respect for other nations. "We are known to be a very friendly country and to live and let live has been the guiding principle of India approach or Indian world view," says the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), who also goes on to define soft power as the "ability to shape the long-term attitudes and preferences" of other nations towards one country. India's rise in space technology, therefore, is a celebratory occasion, and it will contribute to the establishment of a firm geopolitical order.

Om Prakash Dwivedi teaches at Bennett University, Greater Noida. He tweets @opdwive**GROWTH ENGINE** 

## **BUILDING BRICS BIGGER**

Several developing countries view BRICS as an alternative to global bodies dominated by the West and hope that membership will unlock benefits such as development and increased investment.



JOHN DOBSON

he world is changing", said South African President Cyril Ramaphosa at the opening of the plenary session of the BRICS summit on Wednesday. "New realities call for a fundamental reform of the institutions of global governance so that they may be more representative and better able to respond to the challenges that confront humanity", he continued. Chinese President Xi Jinping added a couple of dramatic words declaring, "The course of history will be shaped by the choices we

make". It has now been 14 years since BRICS was founded. The acronym, which did not originally include South Africa, was coined in 2001 by the then Goldman Sachs chief economist and later British government minister, Jim O'Neill, in a research paper that underlined the growth potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. South Africa joined the group after a Chinese-initiated invitation in 2012, a boost for the then President Jacob Zuma's administration, which was eager to pivot further towards the east. The bloc also benefited

from having a key African player and regional leader. Zuma was, however, jailed in 2021 for defying a Constitutional Court order to appear before a commission of inquiry investigating allegations of corruption during his tenure as president from 2009 to 2018. The group is not a formal

multilateral organisation like

the United Nations or World Bank, but an informal club where the heads of state and government of member nations convene annually, with each nation taking up a oneyear rotating chairmanship of the group. This year was the 15th summit and South Africa's turn to be host. It was planned to be the first face-to-face meeting at the highest level since the 2019 summit in Brazil, but President Vladimir Putin decided to attend virtually in order to avoid an International Criminal Court warrant for his arrest in connection with war crimes. In a 17-minute pre-recorded speech, the Russian leader criticised the impact of sanctions on his country because of the "special military operation", which the majority of the world calls an invasion, and indirectly accused the West by tetchily criticising the "trampling of all the rules of free trade and economic life which we thought to be immovable before".

The Chinese President was also absent from the beginning of the summit, even though he was in South Africa. No reason was given for this or why he did not give his opening speech, which was delivered by Chinese Commerce Minister Wang



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Presidents Lula da Silva, Xi Jinping, Cyril Ramaphosa, and

Wentao instead. China has long called for the expansion of BRICS as a means of fostering a multipolar world order to challenge Western dominance. "The world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation", claimed Xi in his speech on Wednesday. "We, the BRICS countries should always bear in mind our founding purpose of strengthening ourselves through unity", he said, code for China, a dominant force in global economics as well as a growing military powerhouse, testing the limits of the United States' influence.

The dominance of Washington and other Western powers was broached by India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the earlier BRICS foreign minister's meeting in South Africa on 1 June when he subtly described the current concentration of economic

power as one that "leaves too many nations at the mercy of too few". This is a sentiment that resonates across the developing world, where the United Nations Security Council's veto-holding power remains limited to five nations based on an understanding rooted in 1945, at the end of World War II. Many have argued that India, now the most populous nation in the world, should immediately be added to the

receding across the globe, the latest instance being in Niger and the Sahel, there is a growing chorus among Africa, Latin America, and emerging Asian powers like India to upend the post-Cold War unipolar system. Russia and China have pitched themselves as champions of this move away from a USled order, whose rules, in the eyes of the Global South,

With the West's footprint

Washington itself frequently flouts. There is certainly space for carving out a new world order, which has been created by not only the Global South finding its voice and looking for organisations like BRICS to champion its interests, but also by Russia and China finding themselves at odds with the West in an unprecedented way, largely because of the war in Ukraine. But "not so fast", says India which does not view the voice of Beijing as a voice of the Global South. Instead, New Delhi appears to view China behaving like a developed country as trying to impinge on the narrative of the Global South.

Dissatisfaction with the

global order among developing countries, exacerbated by Covid, when life-saving vaccines were hoarded by rich countries, has led to more than 40 countries expressing interest in joining BRICS. They represent a disparate pool of potential candidates, from Iran to Argentina, motivated largely by a desire to level a global playing field that many consider rigged against them. They view BRICS as an alternative to global bodies that are dominated by traditional Western powers and hope that membership will unlock benefits, such as development finance and increased trade and investment.

The debate over expansion topped the agenda at this year's three-day summit. Uppermost in the minds of current BRICS members is that although they are home to about 40% of the world's population and a quarter of global GDP, their economies vastly different in scale and have governments with often divergent foreign policy goals. This is a serious complicating factor for a bloc whose consensus decision-making model gives each member a de-facto veto. Additional members with divergent views and economies would only make decision-making even more difficult.

With this in mind, South Africa's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor on Wednesday said that BRICS leaders had agreed on mechanisms for considering new members. "We have agreed on the matter of expansion", she told a radio station run by her ministry. "We have a document that we've adopted which sets out guidelines and principles, processes for considering countries that wish to become members of BRICS." Officials said that India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, had proposed that of the 22 countries that

that the five BRICS nations would be expanded to eleven on 1 January 2024, the successful candidates being Argentina, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. "This membership expansion is historic, a new starting point for BRICS cooperation", claimed a delighted President Xi, "and will bring new vigour to the BRICS cooperation mechanism and

had formally applied for

membership, any success-

ful country should not be the

target of international sanc-

tions. There should also be

a minimum per capita GDP

News came on Thursday

requirement.

further strengthen the force for world peace and development." Brazilian president, Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, reminded the world that with the admission of six new members, the bloc would represent 46% of the world's population and an even greater share of its capital output. Russia, which enjoys support from its BRICS partners

at a time of global isolation, was delighted with the outcome. Iran, of course, is a big supplier of drones and missiles to Russia for its war in Ukraine. South Africa, China, and India have not condemned Russia's invasion, while Brazil has refused to join Western nations in

sending arms to Ukraine or imposing sanctions on Mos-

A big winner was China. The inclusion of Iran, strongly supported by China and Russia, has strengthened the anti-US axis in the BRICS, probably making it more antagonistic and challenging for the US and the West to deal with an organisation that contains two internationally sanctioned members. The decision to include Iran, a country with massive gas and oil reserves, also reflects the sway of China and Russia, which could not have been very comfortable for moderate members like Brazil and India. The fact that Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE will be members was unthinkable until recently and indicates another facet of diplomatic reconciliation among the three countries, facilitated by China.

As for India, the timing of this year's BRICS summit could not have been better for Prime Minister Modi. Nestled between his state visit to the United States, India's G2O presidency, and the incredible success of the moon landing, Modi has used the global stage brilliantly in declaring and reinforcing India as the "voice of the Global South" and the new growth engine of the world. So, not only did the summit build BRICS bigger, but it built India bigger too. John Dobson is a former British diplomat, who also worked in UK Prime Minister John Major's office between 1995 and 1998. He is currently Visiting Fellow at the University of

**RAISING QUESTIONS** 

#### PRIGOZHIN PRESUMED DEAD, WAGNER FIGHTERS ORDERED TO SWEAR ALLEGIANCE TO RUSSIA

CORRESPONDENT MOSCOW

Under the infamous Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group's presence extends from the ancient battlegrounds of Syria to the deserts of sub-Saharan Africa, expanding the Kremlin's global influence with mercenaries accused of using brutal force and profiting from seized mineral riches.

In what would become his final recruitment video, Prigozhin appeared in military fatigues, holding an assault rifle from an unidentified dry and dusty plain as he boasted that Wagner was "making Russia even greater on all continents and Africa even more free." On Wednesday, a private jet carrying Prigozhin and his top lieutenants crashed



Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin.

northwest of Moscow, two months after he led an armed rebellion that challenged the authority of Russian President Vladimir Putin. There is wide speculation that the mercenary leader, who is presumed dead, was the target of an assassination because of the Wagner uprising, although the Kremlin continues to deny involve-

The crash has raised ques-

tions about the future of Prigozhin's private army, which fought alongside Russian troops in Ukraine

before his brief uprising

against military leaders in

Moscow. Russian authorities have cited the need to await DNA test results to confirm Prigozhin's death, but President Putin expressed condolences after the jet fell from the sky. The Russian leader also ordered Wagner fighters to sign an oath of allegiance to the Russian state, effective immediately, according to a decree published on the Kremlin's website late Fri-

The order came on the heels of Moscow's denial of suggestions from Western officials and news media that the Wagner leader may have been killed on Putin's orders. In African countries where Wagner provided security against extremist organisations like al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, officials and commentators predicted Russia would likely maintain a presence, placing the mercenaries under new leadership. Others, however, say Prigozhin built deep, personal connections that Moscow could find challenging to replace quickly.

**'STERN WARNING'** 

#### China sends warplanes towards Taiwan days after US-approved arms sale

CORRESPONDENT BELJING

Taiwan's Defence Ministry on Saturday said that China had sent dozens of aircraft and vessels toward the island, just days after the United States approved a \$500 million arms sale to Taiwan. In a statement, the Defence Ministry said that 32 aircraft from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and nine vessels from the navy had been detected in the 24 hours between 6 am on Friday and 6 am on Saturday. Of these, 20 aircraft either crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait or breached Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone. In response, Taipei has tasked its own aircraft, vessels and missile systems to respond to the activities, its military said.

Beijing views self-ruled Taiwan as a renegade province to be taken by any force necessary. In the past year, the country has stepped up

vice president if the former

military drills around the island in reaction to Taiwan's political activities. The Chinese military had last week launched drills around the island as a "stern warning" after Taiwan's vice president stopped over in the US while on an official trip to Paraguay. The State Department on Wednesday said it had signed off on the sale of infrared search and track systems for F-16 fighter jets and other related equip-

ment to Taiwan worth half

a billion dollars. On Friday, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said that China opposed the arms sale, calling it a "gross interference" in the country's internal affairs and describing it as a "heinous act" that violates its "One China" principle, as well as three Sino-American joint communiques. Zhang also said that China urged the US to fulfil its commitment to disavow and not support the independence of Taiwan.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

#### OPEN TO RUN ON JOINT TICKET WITH PRESIDENT TRUMP, SAYS VIVEK RAMASWAMY

CORRESPONDENT WASHINGTON/LONDON

Vivek Ramaswamy, the Indian-American 2024 US presidential aspirant from the Republican party, has hinted that he may run on a joint ticket with former president Donald Trump as his running mate if he does not win the Republican nomination. Ramaswamy's comments come days after the 38-year-old entrepreneur-turned-politician said he was "not interested" in any job other than president.

Ramaswamy said he believed he could only "reunite this country" as president, but did not rule out running with 77-year-old Trump as

president and frontrunner wins the nomination for a third time. Asked on British national television whether he would be "happy to be (Trump's) VP", Ramaswamy replied: "See, this isn't about me. If this were about me, sure. That's a fine position for someone to have at my age. "This is about reviving our country and I can only reunite this country if I'm doing it from the White House as the leader and the face of our movement." He added that he had "fresh legs" and was "almost half [Trump's] age", but would ask him to serve as "my most valued adviser" in the White



**GOP** candidate Vivek

Rumours of a joint ticket between the two men in the 2024 race were fanned by the Trump campaign's praise for Ramaswamy after the first Republican primary debate on Wednesday, in which he emerged as a experience as an elected official has pledged to pardon Trump for any federal convictions on "day one" of his presidency and continue his legacy in the White House with an "America First 2.0" agenda. In previous interviews, Ramaswamy had denied becoming the former president's running mate, insisting that he could only change the country if he won the top job. "I'm not interested in a different position in the government. Frankly, I'd drive change through the private sector sooner than becoming number two or three in the federal government," he said on Saturday.

breakout star. A self-de-

clared "outsider" who has no

#### **IMPROPER CONDUCT**

#### FIFA suspends Spanish soccer body president for World Cup conduct

CORRESPONDENT

FIFA on Saturday suspended the Spanish soccer federation's president, Luis Rubiales, from office while its disciplinary committee carries out an investigation on his conduct at the Women's World Cup final, which included kissing a player without her consent. FIFA said Rubiales

has been removed from soccer duties for 90 days "pending the disciplinary proceedings opened" against him Thursday. Rubiales refused to resign from his soccer presidency Friday at an emergency meeting of the Spanish soccer federation's general assembly when he had been expected to leave under intense pressure from the Spanish government, women players, plus soccer clubs and officials.

The main soccer body has given no timetable for a ruling by its disciplinary panel. The organisation's disciplinary judges can impose sanctions on individuals ranging from warnings and fines to suspensions from the sport.

The move comes after the Spanish federation had even threatened action against star player Jenni Hermoso for refusing to accept Rubiales's version of the kiss that happened at the on-field medal and trophy presentation after Spain's 1-O win against England last Sunday in Sydney, Australia. FIFA's suspension should prevent Rubiales from working in soccer or having contact with other officials.

**SHUNNING BLOCS** 

## AHEAD OF G20 SUMMIT, MODI STEERS BRICS TOWARDS NEUTRALITY

the PRC, which under its pres-

ent leadership seeks to dilute the friendly relationships that India has with the powers (the US and Russia) that are the principal protagonists in a conflict in which Ukraine has become a proxy for NATO. It had been informally sought by an important country in Asia that President V.V. Putin come in person to the G20 Summit that is to take place in less than two weeks at Delhi. His physical presence at the conference venue would have resulted in the 2023 Delhi Summit being at risk of setting at naught the immense work done by several delegations in the preparation of policy briefs intended to better promote growth across the board, and across the globe, and not just in the nineteen countries that are part of the G2O together with the European

rica joined hands with India to champion the cause of several other countries as well, most of them being in the Global South. Instead, the 2023 Summit would have witnessed a cacophony of accusations and counter accusations by the two sides at each other, given the passions that the Ukraine war has ignited within both the G7 as well as the Russian Federation.

A malicious trope had been assiduously spread that President Putin had avoided going to the BRICS Summit in South Africa "in order to prevent his arrest under the international warrant issued in his name" thanks to the efforts of the G7 countries. The fact is that there is no way that the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, would have detained the President of Russia, a country that together with India had al-

National Congress during the dismal years when South Africa was in the grip of apartheid. However, the very presence of Putin in Johannesburg would have shifted international media focus away from the work being done by BRICS to the visit of the President of the Russian Federation. In order to avoid such a diversion, he disappointed troublemakers, and made sure that his presence would only be virtual. Interestingly, the very country that had informally lobbied to ensure that President Putin avoided going to the BRICS Summit in South Africa had been hyperactive in seeking to ensure his physical presence at the New Delhi G20 Summit in September. Once again, immediately after Moscow's clarification regarding the

physical absence of Presi-

dent Putin from the Delhi

Summit, the same malicious

trope has been spread that this decision was because of the possibility of arrest once President Putin arrived in New Delhi. In actuality, there was no way that the Russian President would be at risk of arrest in a country that is not even a signatory to the international convention that calls on international arrest warrants of the kind issued against the Russian President, unlike South Africa, which has.

As a consequence of his longstanding friendship with Prime Minister Modi, the Russian President resisted powerful voices, especially from an influential nearby country that sought to ensure that he go to Delhi for the G20 Summit. Instead of obliging such voices, the Kremlin publicly communicated to the Indian side that Putin would, instead, of coming to the Summit, remain in Russia. Being a man whose words need to

that there will be a spurt of activity on the Ukrainian front during the period when the 2023 G20 Summit is taking place. The ostensible reason given by Moscow for Putin's absence is after all his "preoccupation with the Special Military Operation" in Ukraine. By his statesmanlike decision to skip the meeting, perhaps even virtually, President Putin has shown that despite efforts by the G7 to terminally weaken him and in the process his country, he maintains to the extent present circumstances permit Russia's independence in foreign policy, especially where friends such as India are concerned. It needs to be said to the credit of another friend of Prime Minister Modi, US President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr, that he had confirmed his physical participation at the G2O Summit much before it

tin would not be making the visit to India, at least not at this time.

#### **OUTCOME DOCUMENT**

**NOT CRITICAL** There has been speculation about whether there will be an outcome document signed by all the members at the Summit. The fact is that the 2023 G20 mechanism created by India has ensured the completion of several policy papers that would serve as guideposts for the future. An outcome document would be icing on the cake, but would not be critical in judging the success of the 2023 Indian Presidency of the G2O. At the New Delhi Summit, India is likely to present the case made by Prime Minister Modi earlier, that the African Union (AU) be included as the 21st member of the group, following the precedent created by the admission of the European in reality comprises only nineteen countries, the EU being the twentieth member. There has been intense diplomatic activity by the Indian side led by the Prime Minister and assisted by the External Affairs Minister to try for the admission of the AU into the G20, perhaps in the 2023 Summit itself. The expectation is that the Modi Initiative will be supported by President Biden. The G2O would thereafter become the G21. Africa is a continent with enormous future potential, and the admission of the AU at the request of India would strengthen the G20, just as the admission of South Africa strengthened what till that time was simply BRIC but then became BRICS and will be BRICS Plus by January 2024.

In a year when high explosives are literally going off with abandon in significant

that India was able to navigate its way through such a minefield in both the BRICS as well as in the G20 without an implosion is a feat that may not be welcome to hostile powers, but is evidence of the success of the Modi government in weaving through the obstacle race that international relations has become since the onset of Covid-19 and the Ukraine war. Despite efforts by some of its members to convert the group into an instrument of bloc politics, BRICS has remained neutral. Despite similar efforts directed at causing disharmony within the 2023 G20, the proceedings have gone on smoothly. India has in 2023 shown that it is the UNSC that is the loser when the country with the largest population on the globe continues to be kept outside the list of Permanent Members of that now fractured body.

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT** 

## Chandrayaan-3 landing spot now 'Shiv Shakti Point'

 ${\tt CONTINUED\,FROM\,P1} \quad {\tt leges\, and\, universities}$ today. The treasure of scientific knowledge that India has, has been buried, hid-

den during the long period of slavery. In this 'Azadi ka Amrit Kaal', we have to explore this treasure too, do research on it and also tell the world about it",

"I was impatient and eager to visit and salute you for your diligence, dedication, courage, devotion and passion," the PM said in his address to team ISRO, his voice choking, "India is on the moon! We have our national pride placed on the moon."

Hailing the role of women scientists in the success of Chandrayaan-3, he said, "The country's Nari Shakti played a big role in it."

The Prime Minister stated that the point where Chandrayaan-2 left its imprints will now be called "Tiranga". This point, he said, will serve as an inspiration for every effort that India makes and remind us that failure is not the end. "Success is a guarantee where there is strong will power."

Declaring 23 August as the "National Space Day", PM Modi said it will "celebrate the spirit of science, technology and innovation, and inspire us for an eternity". A large number of people, many of them waving the National Flag, accorded a grand welcome to the PM outside the HAL airport, where he landed straight from Greece, and

**'DEBT TRAP'** 

at Jalahalli Cross, close to ISTRAC. He also held a road-show for a distance as people who lined up on either side of the roads cheered boisterously.

At ISTRAC, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath briefed the PM about the Chandrayaan-3 mission and its progress. In his address, PM Modi said in this period of 21st century, the country which takes the lead in science and technology, will move ahead. "Today, the name of Chandrayaan is resonating among the children of India. Every child is seeing his or her future in the scientists."

The Prime Minister requested ISRO to organise national hackathons on "Space Technology in Governance" in collaboration with various departments of the central and state governments. "I am confident that this national hackathon will make our governance more effective and provide modern solutions to the countrymen."

The PM also urged students across the country to take part in a huge quiz competition on Chandrayaan mission organised by Government of India portal MyGov from 1 September.

The soft landing of Vikram lander on the lunar surface was not an ordinary achievement, Modi said, adding the feat was a "roaring announcement" of India's scientific accomplishment in the infinite universe. "India is on the moon," he said, adding, "we have our national pride played on the moon."

"We reached where no one else had reached. We did what no one else had ever done. This is today's India, a fearless India, India with fighting spirit," the Prime Minister said. "This is an India, which thinks new and thinks in novel ways, which goes to the dark zones and spreads the rays of light. India of the 21st century has the capacity to solve major problems of the world," PM Modi said addressing the space scientists.

"Today, from trade to technology, India is being counted among the countries standing in the first row. In the journey from 'third row' to 'first row', institutions like our ISRO have played a huge role."

Hailing the space agency, the Prime Minister said it has taken "Make in India" to the moon.

On Wednesday evening as the lander module of Chandrayaan-3 mission successfully touched down on the lunar surface, PM Modi had joined the ISRO team at Mission Operations Complex (MOX) at ISTRAC virtually from Johannesburg, where he was attending the 15th BRICS summit. He had also flown down to Bengaluru on the night of 6 September 2019 to watch the planned touchdown of Chandrayaan-2

mission's "Vikram" lander. But in the early hours of 7 September, barely minutes before it was slated to land, ISRO lost contact with the craft, just 2.1 km above the lunar surface.

**STELLAR SUCCESS** 

was officially stated by the

#### **CHANDRAYAAN-3 PUTS INDIA INTO A** HIGHER GEOPOLITICAL ORBIT

CONTINUED FROM P1 cal clout as a result of our successful lu-

nar mission," an official said, add-

ing, "the forthcoming G2O summit will witness India's tremendous clout and profile which has been boosted by the successful lunar mission. PM Modi is all prepared to spotlight the successful lunar mission as a historic and stellar achievement at the conclave here.'

A source said: "PM Modi has already asked External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to activate diplomatic channels and networks to achieve the desired strategic goal." "India's success in the

lunar mission has come on the back of Russia's failure despite its greatness as a space power. This also lends more importance to the mission of Chandrayaan-3," an official said. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin was among the first few global leaders who sent across his congratulatory message to PM Modi as early as possible. UAE Vice President Sheikh Mohammed was also one of them. Putin said, "The historic event is evidence of India's impressive progress in the scientific-technological sphere." Putin congratu-

lated President Droupadi

Murmu and PM Modi. Ne-

pal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" also congratulated his Indian counterpart on the success of Chandrayaan-3. British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly described it as a historic moment. Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid congratulated India for creating history. Japan PM Fumio Kishida also joined them to congratulate PM Modi.

India has achieved success at a time when it is going to host the G2O summit in September. "India would like to hear more from global leaders during the G2O summit about its success in the lunar mission," a source said. "Every word that is spoken by the world leaders would be important, as it will mark New Delhi's growing status and profile in the geopolitical sphere," an official said. Strategic and foreign policy officials in New Delhi said that India's successful lunar mission will accelerate a space-race now. There are reports from China that the Communist government in Beijing has convened a meeting of its scientific advisors to give fillip to the country's lunar missions which have been in the pipeline for a long time now. This is being viewed by diplomats here as Beijing's panic reaction to the development in New Delhi.

**IDEATING** 

#### THOUGHT LEADERS DISCUSS A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES IN FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

tically. "The CONTINUED FROM P1 Congress is in denial about its problems," she

said, underlining the fact that the party has to understand that its cadre has seized to exit and it needs to be revived.

The opening day of the twoday event, offered opportunities to national politicians like Akhilesh Yadav, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party supremo, to share his and the Opposition bloc I.N.D.I.A's game plan for the big fight against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the NDA. Yadav was candid in indirectly admitting that he was one of the young leaders who could be considered to be the Prime Minister if the Opposition alliance won the parliamentary elections

Two psephologists, Sanjay Kumar, co-director, Lokniti, CSDS, and Yashwant Deshmukh, founder editor, C-Voter, said, going by the current scenario there was very little chance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi not returning to power in 2024.

Thinkers like Dr Sanjaya Baru, Neeja Chowdhury, Rasheed Kidwai and Suhel Seth also shared insights into the behind-the-scene actions in the power corridors. Their session on "How Leaders Decide", also saw a quick poll on who they thought



was the best PM in the country ever. They also discussed the chances of PM Modi occupying the seat again and whether Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was ready for the top post.

In a session on "RSS From The Outside" Walter K. Andersen, American academic and author, took on questions on how the organisation could tackle public ignorance about it. "RSS affiliate groups need to interact more with society... it should work to ensure that people are not ashamed of their culture and are proud of what they have achieved."

The academic also suggested that RSS should play a bigger role as a mediation institution and make its autonomous affiliates more effective for the larger national good.

From India's achievements as the G2O host nation, China's economic aggression and India's Pakistan policy, the range of foreign affairs

issues discussed at the event was striking. As Prof Madhav Nalapat, Editorial Director of The Sunday Guardian and Ambassador Gautam Bambawale put it, the biggest takeaway from India's G2O presidency has been PM Modi's success in turning the grouping into an "action-oriented platform", with a rightful place for raising the voice of the Global South.

On the defence front, there was talk of the need for India to strengthen its military capabilities in the face of growing threats from China and Pakistan. The economy was also a major focus, with speakers discussing the need for reforms to boost growth and create jobs, reduce the gap between the Indian and the Chinese economies and further strengthen financial inclusion.

The film industry was represented by directors, actors, and producers, who shared their insights on the changing landscape of cinema. In

the book world, authors discussed the challenges and rewards of writing, as well as the challenges posed by generative AI to the printed word. And on the topic of influencers, there was debate about the role they play in shaping public opinion, while they make good money.

On films, speakers said that the Indian film industry was undergoing a period of change. They welcomed the rise of new voices and stories, but also warned against the dangers of commercialisation. On influencers, speakers said that influencers have a responsibility to use their platform for good. They called for more transparency and accountability from influencers.

The Festival of Ideas also featured a session on Hinduism, which explored the religion's rich history and traditions. Speakers discussed the importance of tolerance and understanding in a diverse society. Discussions on "India as a cultural superpower" added to the discourse on religion and its significance in the contemporary world. The soft power game's persuasive aspects were reflected upon by author Ashwin Sanghi.

Overall, the Festival of Ideas was a stimulating event that provided a platform for open and honest discussion on some of the most important issues facing the nation today.

#### FREEBIES GALORE IN RAJASTHAN AS **GEHLOT EYES RE-ELECTION**

BJP leader C.P. Joshi called the free electricity offered by the Gehlot government as a gimmick, alleging that the Gehlot government first raised the power rates and was now distributing free electricity during the election campaign. Rajasthan BJP leader Pramod Vashisht said the free smartphone scheme of the CM was sending a negative message. "People are so fed up with the outdated handsets that they

CONTINUED FROM P1 Senior

Even the free power scheme is a big scam, the invisible charges in the bills have been pinching consumers, alleged Vashisht. Asked about the sops being offered by the state government ahead of Assembly elections, he asked, "Why has the state

have started saying that they

don't need it," he said.

government woken up from its slumber just before elections? What was it doing for over four-and-a-half years?"

"The biggest issue in the state is that of law and order. Five to seven rapes are taking place in the state every day, including in cities like Jaipur," said Vashisht.

He criticised the Gehlot dispensation as a government of advertisements. "The freebies are being offered to distract voters' attention from issues of high crime rate and corruption in government," he said, pointing to lack of action against the accused in paper leaks that took place during Gehlot's term.

Economists point out that under Gehlot, the state's fiscal deficit—excess expenditure over its revenue-might jump to 4.36% of the state's gross state domestic product (GSDP) as against the set target of 3.98% of GSDP.

However, a state Congress leader justified the announcements on smartphones and free power made by Gehlot. "There is proper budget for these welfare schemes in the state budget. The CM is delivering on his promises in the social sector," said the former MLA.

Analyst Gautam Mukherjee said in a TV interview that when BJP offers welfare schemes, it calls it structural in nature-make it possible for people to have a road up to their house or provide water connection or gas—as this sort of thing they feel is structural in nature as it improves the quality of life of the citizens. In the case of the Congress, the model goes back to Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council where she had people who advocated a

handout to everybody who

was unemployed or women, and some of this was implemented. "It is like something for nothing, it is a subsidy that attracts people." Gehlot's offer to people on

free emergency care, even at private clinics, earlier sparked huge protests in the state with doctors. Rajasthan voters are known to follow the tradition of not re-electing an incumbent government. While the BJP is hoping that the "revolving door" system will bring it back to power, Gehlot seems to be doing his best to change the tradition and win himself a second successive term.

The elections to the Assembly are likely to be held before December. In the current 200-member Assembly, the Congress has 107 seats, while the BJP and others' tally is 93, according to the Assembly's

## FESTIVAL OF IDEAS CELEBRATES BOOKS. **AUTHORS AND CONVERSATIONS**

The two-day festival was organised by The Sunday Guardian, NewsX and India News in New Delhi.







'MISSION 2024 SESSION'

#### 'INDIA'S SUCCESS STORY TO CONTINUE UNDER MODI'

BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi says BJP has ensured that India's success story does not get disrupted.

RAHUL CHHABRA

howcasing the Narendra Modi government's achievement of taking India into the league of top five economies from the group of fragile five in 2013, BJP's Rajya Sabha MP and spokesman Sudhanshu Trivedi said his party has ensured that India's success story does not get disrupted.

"While other parties' electoral thinking is limited to two years to five years, just before polls, the BJP talks of India of the previous 5,000 vears and the one in the next 500 to 1000 years," said the BJP leader. The mechanical engineer-turned-parliamentarian said in 2013 when he visited the US, there was a gloomy image of India among Americans and questions were being raised about whether the success



story of India was over. "I told them that India's success story is not over, but it is just waiting for Narendra Modi," he said, sharing details of India's success story after Modi became the Prime Minister.

In the "Mission 2024" session at the Festival of Ideas, organised here by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, Trivedi in typical po-

etic style blasted the Opposition parties and gave a quick look into the social welfaredominated agenda of the NDA in 2024 elections.

He also touched upon the Modi government's Pakistan policy of "terror and talks can't go together", the Opposition parties' corruption-riddled background, attempts by some parties to mislead Muslims and the threats to Opposition unity after Congress' revival after

Karnataka poll victory. Talking about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "Bharat Jodo Yatra", Trivedi said the yatra had nothing to do with raising Rahul's popularity against Modi's. "The exercise was more to revive the Congress whose clout in the Opposition camp was Trivedi said the Congress' victory in Karnataka appeared to be bad news for

Nitish Kumar, Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal-all the leaders who were looking at the hitherto fall in the Congress' fortune as a chance to lead the Opposition bloc. "Now Rahul can remind the alliance partners that his party is present from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, so it is the rightful candidate to lead the bloc,' said the BJP leader. Talking about the issues before the elector-

ate in 2024, the BJP leader said, as rightly pointed out by the PM, changing a coalition's name does not rid it of its past sins and corrupt acts. "So, I.N.D.I.A replacing UPA is not going to make any difference to the voters," said the BJP leader. He also accused the Opposition parties of misleading the Muslim community for electoral gains and poisoning its minds with anti-BJP agenda. "Sharafat Ali ke secularism ko siyasat ne mara," said Trivedi with a poetic touch. The Indian voter has seen and acknowledged the positive, compassionate, motivating impact of India on the world under Modi, he said, adding that the scale of development, financial inclusion and priority on national security would continue to dominate the NDA agenda for 2024 elections.

**COALITION PRINCIPLES** 

#### For 2024, Opposition needs to forget differences: Akhilesh

Former UP Chief Minister says the Opposition will have to build its own narrative to win in the Lok Sabha polls.

RAHUL CHHABRA NEW DELHI

The 2024 road to Delhi passes through Uttar Pradesh and for the big fight against the BJP, the Opposition parties will have to bury the memories of mutual bad experiences of the past for a victory in parliamentary elections about nine months from now, said Samajwadi Party (SP) chief and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav.

Speaking at the keynote session of the Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network here on Thursday, Yadav said the SP will discuss seat-sharing with like-minded parties with a "large heart" to topple the NDA government, but claimed that the time had not come to discuss whether Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra should challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi in 2024.

The Opposition alliance will take all members together and reach its victory with the help of the PDA-Pichra, Dalit and Alpsankyak—communities' support. He took a diplomatic stand on the question of what the SP would do if Congress leader Rahul Gandhi fights the Lok Sabha contest from Amethi, and said the party would uphold the coalition principles by following the policy of "shishthachar" as

propounded by SP icon Ne-

taji Mulayam Singh.

Expressing the INDIA alliance's resolve to stop the BJP's march in Uttar Pradesh in 2024, Yadav said, "Road to Delhi is from Uttar Pradesh... UP nahin to Dilli Opposition will have to build nahin. The BJP had won the Lok Sabha elections only because of its success in UP, but this time we are confident of taking it on in the state." Yaday expressed confidence that there would not be any problems in the INDIA bloc on the issue of picking a Prime Minister after victory as there are multiple choices for PM candidate." "We have a youngster, woman and potential leaders from different

religion or castes," he said, without directly ruling out himself as a potential young Prime Ministerial candidate. Talking about the NDA, the SP chief said the NDA does not have so many choices for the op post.

"They talk of the double engine but the problem is that the two engines are colliding," he said. He said it would not be sensible to fight the BJP on the issues that it wants the rivals to and the its own narrative to win in the Lok Sabha polls. Asked about the best Prime Minister of the country in his view, the SP leader took a cautious stand, saying all prime ministers have done some good work. He also targeted the Uttar Pradesh government over uncontrolled tomato prices and targeting his party's supporters who had raised voice against costly tomatoes.

## Rahul Gandhi changed a lot after 2019

## polls: Aishwarya Pandit Sharma

**BADAR BASHIR** 

EVOLUTION

Speaking on "de-mystifying the Gandhis", author Aishwarya Pandit Sharma pointed out the relevance of the Gandhis in the present times, adding that "we need to first contextualise their relevance within the Congress party".

She said, "It is true in the present era of the grand old party that Congress is Rahul Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi is Congress. Therefore, he is pretty much relevant for the Congress. It is difficult to understand Congress without understanding Rahul Gan-

dhi and vice versa. However, unfortunately, we see his evolution only through the ability to evolve in electoral framework of politics where he has not been able to define himself and has had undersized presence. Beyond that, there is a lot of change in Rahul Gandhi after 2019 general election polls."

Sharma added, "I think the problem with all the Gandhis is that they do not see the problem before them and for long they remain in denial. They needed transformation out of it. I think the party failed to evolve with times

trying to protect their face. When you compare them (Congress) with other state parties, these state parties are strong, have their cadres intact and contest elections at the booth level. Congress' cadre has ceased to exist."

Author Sugata Srinivasraju was of the view that Rahul Gandhi evolution started the moment he stepped into the parliament. "There have been several phases of evolution in his political life. As an individual as well he has evolved. That's what happens I believe, our response system changes with times and our reactions evolve." He added, "Rahul Gandhi has started seeing problems in a manner that no one has. After Indira, he is the first one to look into emphasising upon ideology. He may be slow or incorrect, but he is trying. He is working on to build an ideological position. He knows that the BJP has tried to create an ideological front by making the voters go through the process of indoctrination and, therefore, he wants to counter it with his ideology." Political analyst Mayank Singh said, "Based on data

analysis, we need to see how much votes were polled by Congress in 2019 and what was it before that. It went down from 49% in 1984 to 19% in 2019. If he was evolving in the last two elections, it means he had got 10 years to evolve. It again went down from 2014 to 2019. Thus, data is nowhere showing Rahul Gandhi has evolved. Nowhere did I see that two times someone has lost the elections and then the third time the same person has come back and won. If it does happen, it will be historical."

HAD POTENTIAL BUT...

#### Rajiv Gandhi fits well as the worst PM: Vinay Sitapati

**BADAR BASHIR** 

On India's best and worst prime ministers till now, Vinay Sitapati, professor of law and politics at Shiv Nadar University, said, "It is a point of discussion whether one judges them according to the decisions they have made. Moreover, what mandate they have had while making those decisions. Did party control the parliament or did the parliament control the party? And now if you make judgement about Nehru, he had had soft landing."

Talking about PM Narasimha Rao who had formed a minority government in 1991 with other parties, he said, "Narasimha Rao was not liked by many. Moreover, he was dependent on other parties as he had formed a minority government. He had inherited a lot



of problems but he was able to take brave decisions. This is what Rao accomplished. I would say he was the best PM. He achieved so much with highest grades.'

He added that Manmohan Singh's government was doing better on the economic front as his economic decisions gave the country much needed growth as earlier, India wasn't doing good in economy. Asked about how Atal Bihari Vajpayee fared in governance, Sitapati said, "The BJP is a far more organised party. And it is not a party that encourages dissent."

"I keep thinking about it but Rajiv Gandhi fits well as the worst PM. I believe Rajiv Gandhi was the worst as he had unquestioned authority over party and had a huge mandate in parliament, the highest one could get. He had enormous power on the scale of numbers. He did inherit India in a bad form. When it came to economy, he was well-equipped to make brave decisions. But then he got into minority appeasement.'

He added, "His potential was enormous, but he could not live up to it, maybe because he did not have much experience. His instincts were right. But he did not want to be a politician and he wasn't made for it. A proper politician is one who from morning till evening is hungry thinking how to manipulate and how to keep things favouring him in every way possible.'

#### PARTY VS COALITION

#### STRONG LEADERS DON'T NECESSARILY BRING STRONG GOVERNANCE: ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI

**BADAR BASHIR** NEW DELHI

At the Festival of Ideas, organised here by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament from Congress and senior advocate, spoke on "One party rule vs coalition government".

He said, "It is not about which model of governance



works, but rather what works better for governance.

And in that case, whatever works better or governs a state better is the best. It's a myth especially within the power corridors of Delhi. It kind of feels good bringing about the idea that strong leaders bring about strong governance, but it is not necessarily so. Democracy allows more discussion." He added, "It's also a myth that

minority governments do not work proficiently, coalition government have made the best decisions if we look back in India's history of governance. There is also a perception that the coalition government does not warrant stability and everything is not organised. Actually, coalition government even after working with dissent, the diversity of views make for decision making."







Acharva Pramod Krishnam and Biplab Deb.



Shakti Rani Sharma and Venod Sharma as part of the audience.

#### **'MEDIATION PLATFORM'**

#### What RSS brings to the plate is Indian culture: Walter Andersen

US academic and author of 'The Brotherhood in Saffron' says RSS wants to unify all Indians.

INDRANI GHOSH

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which has had a huge impact on India>s politics and yet remains misunderstood is a mediation platform that with its discussions, debates and continued survey to infuse fresh blood into the organisation brings an amalgamation of diverse sections of society united by their Indian culture, said American academic and author of "The Brotherhood in the Saffron", Walter K. Andersen. He attempted to explain the Sangh for the audience at the opening session on Day 2 of Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of iTV network.

"What RSS adds to the plate is Indian culture. They want people to not be ashamed of the Indian culture. And people in fact are proud of what we-ve achieved. And it's not just landing on the moon but many other achievements of their past."

In conversation with Aishwarya Pandit Sharma, the American author said that at the core of the RSS ideology is the Hindutva philosophy



which has had a profound influence over a huge landmass and population that stretches from Asia to Asia Pacific and beyond across several countries.

It was by accident that Andersen got involved in working on the RSS while he was still studying at the University of Chicago. Preparing a dissertation on how young people get involved in politics, he was advised by the 2014 recipient of Padma Bhushan, Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph to do something on RSS. Easier said than done, Andersen found "there was very little written on the RSS up to that point". "One name that kept coming up was K.B. Hedgewar, the founder. He was in many ways a fascinating person. He came from a family of Hindu priests.

Young Hedgewar got involved in politics inspired by a communist politician in Maharashtra>s Central Provinces. In Calcutta, later where he studied Western medicine he attended revolutionary societies. When he got back to Nagpur, amid a communal trouble, Hedgewar and others around him realised that the Hindu community had not done well in responding to several challenges of the time. They found the Hindu community was divided by the caste system. Some of the divisions gave rise to the hierarchy

including on the lines of language, economic opportunity. Hedgewar felt the need to create a more united Hindu community. Andersen said Hedgewar felt "until that happened, you are not likely to get into a serious movement like Independence.» It was around 1925, that it turned into a moral decision and on Bijaya Dashami Day, that the plans were put into action. Hedgewar had realized that it would be an enormous effort to bring changes in Hindu society. Part of the objective of the RSS shakhas, or the local units, that came up in future under his guidance created a sense of oneness among the people by even dropping their caste

One day at these camps, a person may be serving food, the other day, they may be polishing shoes. So the idea was that you mix responsibilities, that there is no hierarchy at work. Work is work, explained Andersen.

Hedgewar was concerned about the goal of the RSS. which was to unify Hinduism. In his first major speech in Pune at a conference he directly attacked the caste system. M.S. Golwalkar, who became the leader of the RSS in 1940, being a social reformer, opened the door of the RSS for Muslims and Christians as well. And did not surprise those who knew him. He felt that these are people of India too. Golwalkar really transformed the RSS, said Andersen.

The Sangh has internal debates, discussions, it doesn>t work like a block. There's a greater discussion that's happening internally within the organization to be a better mediation institution.

The RSS has also moved out from its original social base. You have the example of the current prime minister, who was involved in the RSS at an early age, but his real effort was made to push the social boundaries. It showed that the idea of caste distinctions are not important. In fact, in any context, they should be ignored, said Andersen. RSS wants to unify all Indians and particular efforts were underway by the Sangh to reach out to Christians and Muslims. In fact, there is one of the affiliated groups which is specifically directed at Muslims. "And so you have to be careful how vou handle the negative narrative," he cautioned the opposition.

**SANATAN DHARMA** 

#### **DEMONISING HINDUTVA IS UNFAIR, UNCALLED FOR: VIKRAM SAMPATH**

INDRANI GHOSH NEW DELHI

When we talk about demonized Hindutva saying it is exclusionary as it is a departure from what Hinduism is, the usual defence being the creation of a false equivalence that is totally unfair and uncalled for, said historian and author Vikram Sampath at the recently concluded Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of iTV network.

"For when a faith as evolved as Sanatan Dharma (for there was no Hinduism at that time centuries ago) comes into a civilizational clash with Abrahamic faiths like many who do not believe in the philosophy of many roads lead to the same truth. Then what does the other faiths do. You cannot fight someone only on the strength of your philosophical truths and all these high principles. There has to be a sashtra spirit, a warrior spirit that is exactly what (Veer) Sa-

"Savarkar said 'we are not going to be the ones to proactively attack someone but organizing oneself to counter somebody's predatory moves, it is a very legitimate and justified attempt by any group



of people'." Even Rishi Shri Aurobindo did not wholeheartedly go for Gandhian philosophy, said the author of "Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past" and "Brave hearts of Bharat: Vignettes from Indian History", among several more. The historian said, "India is tolerant, free, the population are Hindus." There was legitimate Hindu anger even within the Congress when Gandhi supported the Khilafat movement, his co panellist and former MP and author Pavan Varma agreed, as he named the Shah Bano

case and pointed out that partial reforms to Hindu personal law was possible but not for others.

He agreed there was angst against minorities, but both "sar tan se juda" and hate conferences are equally at fault, he added. ICCR chief Vinay Sahasrabuddhe said: "Divisionary tactics of trying to belittle Hindus have to end," for Varma added that "India by definition is plural." Sahasrabuddhe said Nehru's ideas of plurality was based on error and Nehruvians are apologetic for their spiritual identity. Varma agreed that though the first prime minister's intentions were right his execution was wrong. "It was a mistake on his part to think India could move forward by obliterating the past. Negation of religion is wrong."

"We have to accept the broad vision of Hinduism, which alone has the audacity to say 'truth is one and people call it by many names', 'the world is a community' democratic because most of or 'let good thoughts flow to me from all sides'. We have to accept 'no one was ever burnt on the stake for blasphemy' by the Hindus," said Varma, to which Sahasrabuddhe added that only Hinduism says "everyone should be imbibed by all".

#### IN FULL GLORY

#### 'India is not just a nation but a civilization'

INDRANI GHOSH

The idea of India that was once junked by the colonial regime has started blooming to its fullest glory, as experts and historians amid the Amritkaal dust away the last vestiges of ignorance making it their mission to bring to the world's fore, a civilization that has existed since Puranic times in continuity, as India holds the presiden-

cy of G20 nations. Speaking at the Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of iTV Network, on Day II during "The Many Ideas of India" session, as moderator and NewsX senior executive editor Priya Sahgal raised the question as to why suddenly "liberal has become a bad word" and what then is the "India idea", ICCR president Vinay Sahasrabuddhe said: "It is all a matter of interpretation. Politicians do so according to convenience." Amb Pavan Varma, author-diplomat,

and former Rajya Sabha

MP added: "India is not just

multiple—be it politically or culturally.

Thereafter, BJP's Rajya Sabha member Sudhanshu Trivedi said: "India itself is an idea and it is embedded in its very name Bharat, which emerges from two Sanskrit words 'Bha' meaning knowledge, the light of knowledge and 'rat' meaning attached so together it implies the ever-unending quest for knowledge that India has taken up since the days of Puran that today soft landed Chandrayaan-3 on Moon's south pole a pioneer-

contend that they too are all of these, but the difference that he always finds he said "in them and us is the sense of optimism".

"Charaiveti, as they say, is

Sanskrit and is the life motto of this nation,» Deshmukh explained it means "chalte raho, keep moving may what come, and that national character has been instrumental in strengthening the social fabric of India. Author Harinder S. Sikka put it as the coming together of thousands of years of conscience and knowledge that have enriched the soil of the country. As a young nation with a plethora of culture, sensibilities, custom, language that have only added over the centuries, filmmaker Suparn Verma felt India as an idea will take great strides across the globe "not just in the next few decades but half a century at the speed we are going". Ashwin Sanghi, author of bestsellers like Chanakva's Chant asserted, "India is an idea of civilization that has withered all storms and continues to do so.'

#### POLITICAL ECOSYSTEM

#### 'Appeasement is a word associated with Congress since 1950s'

INDRANI GHOSH NEW DELHI

"Politics of appeasement" is one of the most common phrases widely debated in the Indian political ecosystem not just for how it is used but also who is using it, for it also can be argued to be taken as "politics of inclusiveness" depending on who's at the awarding and receiving end, experts said. Prof Badri Narayan debated with Aishwarya Pandit Sharma at the opening session of the Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of iTV network, as to whether institutionlisation of the phrase has contributed to its capturing our political space.

Appeasement is a word that came to be associated with the Congress since the 1950s, said the professor, for favouring one group over the other, and BJP was able

to raise this bogey against the grand old party.

Prof Narayan, who authored books like Kanshiram: Leader of the Dalits and Republic of Hindutva, said "things have to be contextualized in the 1950s as against today as we have to see how it has been operating and its impact".

Rashid Kidwai, the moderator who is a prolific writer and has authored many books on the Congress, said as per the Sachar Committee report, a particular community benefitted due to this brand of politics.

The 2006 report sparked unending discussions on Muslim Indian inequality.

#### **THE CONGRESS FACTOR**

Dr Pandit Sharma, who has authored "Claiming Citizenship and Nation", said this kind of politics has a colonial legacy. "Where we were

not seen as individuals but blocks-Hindu blocks, Muslim blocks, Christian blocks, later these became community interest like Rajput, Kurmi, etc. And a big part of the reason for appeasement concentrated power to communities.

She stressed that in Congress' extensive use of the term "secularism" that had its own definition for each one. Muslims fell short and were shunted out of services. The representation is symbolic and only to certain sections, Kidwai pointed out. Only the elite of these sections make it to such merit list as they were visible and have the power to speak

Of late, the PM's outreach to various sections of the community has showed that Muslim voting have added to electoral success of the BJP even in the politically crucial state of Uttar Pradesh. Professor Narayan pointed out that same used to happen with Kanshiram's politics. The Bahujan Samaj Party leader saw the community as a stakeholder not a recipient, he explained.

So was there oversight by the makers of our Constitution? Badri Narayan said it depends on how one views that document - a popularity or political discourse, and how a political party uses that discourse.

a nation but a civilisation," and pointed at the cultural unity of the land that is now a voung modern nation despite being one of the few ancient civilisations. Indian historian Vikram Sampath agreed that there can be no one idea of India, but several, for everything here is in

ing feat."

Founder Editor of C-Voter psephologist Yashwant Deshmukh said India's idea is "inclusive, vibrant and always forward marching". There are so many societies, democracies who might

#### **OUTCOME DOCUMENT**

## 'G2O presidency strengthens Indian's case to lead the Global South'

'China might try to ensure India does not succeed in achieving a fulfilling outcome document at the G20 summit'.

RAHUL CHHABRA

The great outcomes from India's presidency to host the G2O summit would strengthen the country's case to lead the Global South, said experts at the two-day Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network

Analysts observed that the success of the Summit will not just be judged by the shape and content of the outcome document but the way the country has left an imprint on the grouping. "The abstract of the document cannot take away the credit from India which has brought together a completely fractured world to the discussion table. It was possible to bring together nations on the same platform and produce large suggestions for use as policy in several countries," said Prof Madhav Nalapat, editorial director, The Sunday

Guardian Even before Russia confirmed that President Vladi-

**NATIONAL SECURITY** 

mir Putin would not attend the G20 Summit physically in New Delhi due to strategic and diplomatic concerns, Nalapat had shared information for such a possibility at the Festival. Even if Putin keeps away from G20 Summit, as he did in the case of BRICS, such an action "will resonate very well with Indians" who are friendly with Russia.

Nalapat also hailed India's ability to organize numerous sessions of the pre-Summit working groups, saying that the achievement of New Delhi lies in bringing everybody together. "One thing is clear, this is taking place at a time of widening chasm between two groups of countries," he said, referring to the divide within nations over the stand to take over the Ukraine-Russia war.

He said India aspires to be the leader of the global south and the G2O platform is offering it a great opportunity to help these countries. He, however, cautioned that China is not the hurdle in India becoming the voice of the global south but "China has a problem with India



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representing these countries".

Hailing the success of India's moon landing, Nalapat said so far as the global south is concerned the immense success of Chandrayan has made India a role model in terms of technology for these countries. He said India's models in health and digital education are most sought-after. Ambassador Gautam Bambawale. former envoy to China, justified India's stand on the Ukraine war, saying there has been pressure on India

but it has held its ground.

He also hinted that China might try to ensure India does not succeed in achieving a fulfilling outcome document at the G2O summit that is set to see participation by US President Joe

## No talks with Pak: Terror and talks can't go together, says BJP

**RAHUL CHHABRA** 

It's unfortunate that questions are being asked whether nationalism will be a poll issue in the Lok Sabha election while as patriots we should be flaunting our nationalism all the time rather than just before elections, the BJP has said, reiterating the Narendra Modi government's Pakistan policy of "terror and talks cannot go together".

Dismissing suggestions from Congress leaders that India should restart dialogue

with Pakistan, BJP's Rajya Sabha MP and spokesman Sudhanshu Trivedi said at the two-day Festival of Ideas. organised here by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, there would be no "compromise on the issue of national security under Modi and terror and talks cannot go together".

"It is because of Modi's tough stand against Pakistan that our neighbour, who is smaller in size than us, now goes around the world saying that India is breathing down its neck. Under earlier governments, the same neighbour used to hit us at will," said Trivedi. Earlier, Congress leader

and former envoy to Pakistan Mani Shankar Aiyar advocated a rethink by the Modi government over its decision to have no talks with Pakistan. The veteran Congressman said "it would be in the interest of India to engage with Pakistan as living in hostility with the neighbour is not in our interest".

He even claimed that contrary to the common belief both the neighbours have made much more progress in discussion during Army rule in that country, rather than during the tenure of elected governments.

Aivar called for engaging with Pakistan-with the discussion being structured in whatever way we want—as for nine years we have not been in touch with them and nothing has been engaged from this strategy.

"Why don't we have the guts to sit across the table and talk to them?" said Aiyar, who had even served as a diplomat in Pakistan.

Rooting for greater peo-

ple-to-people interaction between Indians and Paksitanis, Aiyar recalled a dinner he and his wife had at the home of a former PoW Pakistani and how his wife wondered if they were really present in an "enemy country".

"The question still haunts me even though I have been out of Pakistan for 40 years," said Aiyar. He even called the Pakistani people, who like to watch Indian movies and exude warmth towards Indian actors, as the biggest asset for India in that coun-

#### HITTING BACK

#### SURGICAL STRIKE TURNED PAIN INTO OPPORTUNITY: LT GEN DUA

RAHUL GAHLAWAT

The surgical strike of 2016 was a good turning point for the country as it helped India to draw a new line under the nuclear threshold while

dealing with Pakistan. "The strike helped us turn the pain of losing 18 soldiers in Uri into an opportunity to hit back," said Lt. Gen. Satish Dua at the Festival of Ideas, hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian, and India News that are a part of the iTV Network.

At a session moderated by The Sunday Guardian editor Joyeeta Basu, Lt. Gen. Dua said the surgical strike was a good turning point for the country as the government, for the first time, took ownership of a cross-border

He said for the first time, the government said that "we did this to you because you did wrong to us. We had no intention of escalation but wanted to hit back as retaliation".

In an earlier session on India's risk analysis, Lt. Gen. (R) P.J.S. Pannu said that "talking about the risk is risky enough because



what you identify as a risk and admit that it is risky for you and you're looking at it, obviously those who are the ones, your adversaries, would be noting exactly what you think is a risk and what you're looking at.

And not to talk about risk is even more risky because maybe you're brushing a lot of problems under the carpet, and then you're not even prepared".

"We've had a problem with proxy wars and insurgencies. We've had a problem dealing with the neighbouring states. From there, we've

had issues or not issues; the Maoists actually had almost one third of the country affected in the Red Corridor about a decade and a half ago," he said.

"Today, when you look at the number of factors that we have to look at, we certainly look at the adversaries; and two major adversaries that everybody knows are China and Pakistan. And Pakistan has been a traditional adversary, and it shall remain so. Pakistan has been a western constituency ever since it was created. It actually got created as a western constituency,"

"Pakistan is a state in di-

chotomy and denial, and they can only survive if they have a notion of an enemy, and that is India. And that is not going to change. In fact, today, Pakistan is more dichotomous. Pakistan has more problems. Now, from being a constituency of the West and the US, they are turning into a constituency of China. And once they become a constituency of China, again, bigger adversities, technology-wise, military-wise, claim-wise-all those elements are going to be put together, which will translate into a threat to the economy, to technology, to industry, or to commercial trade," he said.

"So, we are going to have stiff competition, not only in terms of direct security implications but also in terms of the larger understanding of challenges and threats emanating from these two states put together. On Chinese soldiers, he said, China has never tested its military power. It has built the industrial complex, which is now the defence industrial complex. But we have

no respect for the Chinese soldiers, for the simple reason they say, Oh, our ITPP and Army are on the borders; we have fought Kargil operations; we are on the Siachen glacier; and so on and so forth. So the Chinese

can't do anything about it." "Listen to this. They would want to test their equipment somewhere. In fact, all the defence industrial complexes in the world actually manage the business of warfare in such a manner that you must get an excuse to fight so that your military equipment can be tested, and if it is proven successful, then you are open to global sales," he said.

"And I think that is where the danger comes from as far as China is concerned. Political diplomatic intentions aside, if you don't take a nation to war, how are you going to say the Chinese equipment lies? Even when you talk about the western world and how the western equipment is very good, how are you going to show on television how you can fight a remote control precision battle unless it is

shown and demonstrated,"

**NARRATIVE 2024** 

#### 'INDIA'S WORLD IMAGE HAS GONE UP DUE TO PM MODI'

INDRANI GHOSH

Well-known psephologists say the mood of the nation is in contradiction to such an extent that PM Modi with his tall stature takes up all of the space in the voters' psyche, being both the perpetrator and the savior. The one big hindrance though that the Bharatiya Janata Party faces ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is the failure of the "doubleengine government" as BJPruled states' performances have nose-dived since 2019 eroding away 50 per cent of its victories across the coun-

#### **BOTH FRIEND AND FOE**

Yashwant Deshmukh, the founder and director of C-Voter, said while speaking at the Festival of Idea's "Narrative 2024" session that although the housewives' "kitchen budget" is going out of hand, and the general public is worried about both inflation and unemployment, yet when surveys on the ground are held amid the opposition calling for ousting of the Modi government on these two accounts among many more, the voter of the next election feels there is no alternative to PM Modi just yet.

Even when the opposition faced with the question of what should be the solution to these burning issues, they throw the ball into the prime minister's court. They say "let Modi provide that solution". It is a weird situation where Narendra Modi is both the problem as well as the solution.

Since the run-up to the 2014 general elections and till date, the biggest challenge that Modi's BJP have had not to face is corruption at the central level. Corruption under Modi has been erased from Union government actors' surroundings. said Deshmukh, adding that as such the "40 percent" and "50 percent" government of the Karnataka and Haryana BJP at the states' level has been huge blows to the party.

#### **TOWERING WORLD IMAGE**

Lokniti Co-Director Sanjay Kumar, on the other hand, said the mood of the nation is running on parallel tracks – people's anxieties on price rise (and that is a

majority of the population) and a humongous popularity of Modi that has only improved in leaps and bounds over the past decade. "India's image in the world

has gone up after PM Modi took the stage. He has asserted the image of India everywhere he went, be it national, international," said Kumar explaining how that has only gone to aid the party's image, keeping it dominant since 2014, be it assembly elections or the

2019 general elections. As moderator Priya Sahgal raised the point of "PM scoring above all others", author and journalist Rashid Kidwai accepted that while Modi is nearly untouchable scoring 47 percent on popularity quotient, his nearest opponent Congress scion Rahul Gandhi hovers at 27 per cent.

Kidwai though raised a word of caution that unlike 2019 when BJP got the boost from the Pulwama attack, the Balakot strike, this time around the scenario has changed. The opposition now has a pre-poll alliance and are acting battleready.

Sahgal raised the question whether ahead of 2024, anyone can come up from the opposition who would deliver better than the prime minister? Deshmukh said: "Modi with his solution provider image, his doer/ go-getter image that could be a tough call for anybody." Elaborating his point the C-Voter director said that despite many huge failures that an exercise like the demonetization tops, Modi's image has not been dented at all.

#### **MODI'S MEHNAT V/S RAGA'S MOHABBAT**

Kumar says the narrative that the government is trying to set, is that it is definitely all about Modi, and while the image of Rahul Gandhi, though it has changed post the Bharat Jodo Yatra, is not sufficient. "Yes he has kind of shed the 'pappu' from his name but that is not enough to take on Modi himself."

Sahgal reminded that narrative is also a tool for marketing, to which Kumar added that it is exactly why there is a difference between narrative and evidence. "Nationalism is being used to cover the deficiencies of the government," said the Lokniti co-director.

It is here that Kidwai, who has written a plethora of literature on the Gandhis and the grand old party, reminded that sometimes narratives backfire, just like India Shining of 2004 during Atal Behari Vajpayee's time. But he accepted that there is a huge difference between Vajpayee and Modi.

If the 2024 polls turn out to be even closer to a 60:40 BJP to Opposition ratio in terms of vote share, it would still make a huge difference to the saffron party, Kidwai

#### 2014 TO 2019 TO 2024

All these narratives have aided the facilitation of taking away the focus from the fact that the BJP has lost 50 percent of all elections since 2019, said Deshmukh, pointing to the fact that this basically translates to "others are in fact improving slowly and steady".

Congress' state units are getting better, thanks to their president Mallikarjun Kharge, the warring factions in Karnataka are one unit and successful, Rajasthan has also stopped being in news for the Gehlot-Pilot

"Localisation of election is good for the opposition, but when it comes to the BJP, while national leadership is their asset, the states are its speed breakers," said Deshmukh elaborating with the famous helmet advertisement. "Marzi aapki sar hai aapka," he added.

#### LEGAL MATTER

#### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM TO ENSURE SPEEDY JUSTICE, SAYS MAHESH JETHMALANI**

Claiming that the proposed changes in the Jan Vishwas Bill would help dispense speedy justice, noted jurist and Rajya Sabha MP Mahesh Jethmalani stopped just short of saying that the bar has an entrenched interest in delaying matters.

Sharing his view on the issue of "Rewriting India's Criminal Justice System" at the Festival of Ideas, organised here by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, Jethmalani denied there was any political motive behind the proposed legal reform.

His co-penalist and Rajya Sabha MP, Vivek Tankha, claimed that there seemed to be excessive haste in pushing judicial reforms. "There should have been a larger debate and discussion on



the issue," he said, hinting that the change in the criminal justice systems seems to have been carried for the sake of change

Jethmalani said court appearances through video conference would greatly speed up justice and help reduce judicial backlog. He also pointed to the introduction of community service as the punishment for firsttime offenders for offence of defamation and said this could help people like Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who are facing such charges. In another session on "Continuing Legal Education for Judges", Jindal Global University, VC, C. Raj Kumar called for reimagining the need, in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, for training of judges. Calling for the need to reduce the burden on judges and freeing up their time for updating knowledge and perspectives, Raj Kumar said the judicial officers need a lot more time for intellectual engagement.

'IDEAS WE FIGHT FOR'

## Excitement comes looking for us in the Army: 1971 war veteran Maj Gen Cardozo

He also called for the defence authorities to use marigold flower to honour the fallen heroes, not poppy.

**RAHUL GAHLAWAT** 

efence and internal security issues were discussed extensively as war veterans, analysts and retired generals, including some who were part of the Uri surgical strike op-Editor Joyeeta Basu, Major eration, shared their heroic stories in multiple sessions of General Cardozo hailed the the Festival of Ideas that saw military leadership and said, an overflow of patriotism. "A jawan fights for his officer, great armies have great Addressing the audi-

ence at the event, hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian, and India News that are a part of the iTV Network, Major General Ian Cardozo narrated absorbing anecdotes from the Pakistani-Bangladesh War of 1971and also encouraged the young to join the Army for an exciting career. "Excitement comes looking for us in the Army," he said.

fence authorities to use marigold flower to honour the fallen heroes rather than the red poppies that have been used in wreathmaking since the colonial era. At a session on "The Ideas We Fight For", moderated by The Sunday Guardian

He also called for the de-

commanding officers who can motivate their men to lay down their lives with him." Author and journalist Sandeep Unnithan said India cannot afford to feel safe or secure just because Pakistan continues to face internal disturbances, but, on the contrary, there could actually be more terror attacks from across the border

as decision-makers there

might use such attacks as a tactic to divert the attention of the protesting masses in that country.

Unnithan said, "India is confronted with two nuclear-powered powers with whom it has unsettled boundaries." In such a scenario, India cannot afford to relax, he said, adding that we were living in a world of VUCA-volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Pakistan is facing internal imbalances, which ultimately hamper our national security. The development of friendly ties between Pakistan and China has added to it. To counter the Chinese, the Indian Army recently deploved counter-drone systems to counter swarm drones because there have been reports of swarm drones, small anti-person-



Major General Ian Cardozo speaking at the event.

nel drones, being spotted in the North East. The Chinese have been using this standoff, which is now 3 years old and entering its 4th year, to deploy a lot of technologies of the kind that they would use against us in actual combat. And how the Chinese work is very simple; they

hide their strength and bide their time, as Deng Xinping had said. This is exactly what they have done over the last 10 years.

They have built up a kind of thing of allowing to firewall South Asia. Till they could bring their economy up to scratch, build up their infrastructure, and come on the border, once they built up their infrastructure, they pushed their armed forces forward to present a threat, said the panelist.

And the threat is much more than just military power; it is also cyberattacks. It could be instigated by North

Eastern groups, which have deep linkages with the countries of the North East. "We have 4000 km of unsettled boundaries with China, and this is the world's longest unsettled boundary. They have built up an infrastructure that allows them to pressure you at any point

that they choose.' "And at the same time, you have an unsettled border with Pakistan, which is again a nuclear power and uses terrorists as an instrument of state policy. There are very few countries in the world that use terrorism as an instrument of state policy in the blatant way that Pakistan has been doing for the last 10 years. It is not just aggression; it is a no war, no peace kind of threat. You can never be secure or safe assuming that Pakistan has internal problems and

therefore there won't be any 26-11 kind of strike. I argue that there could actually be more terrorist attacks," said the expert.

As far as Pakistan is con-

cerned, Pakistan has really been a test bed for foreign equipment. They tested that equipment. A lot of Chinese equipment is also now coming into Pakistan through proxy. Even if the Chinese don't directly fight with us, they would expect somebody else to fight with us to test their equipment, and I think that is where we have to prepare ourselves. They might feel that in 1999 we were the hot toys. Today, China is a bigger dictatorship than it was 50 years ago. China is going back to where Mao was, and Xi Jinping is not Gorbachev; he is another Mao, said the panelist.

DRAWBACKS

#### 'In a new India, madrasas need to be modernised'

Lt. Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah (Retd), ex-V-C, Aligarh Muslim University, says madrasa teachers are only educated in Islam.

**ANJALI SINGH** 

Speaking on "Educating a Modern India" at the Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX. The Sunday Guardian, and India News, former deputy chief of Army staff and former vice-chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Lt. Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah (retd), said: "Madrasas need to be modernised, and we are on the path to reformation."

Speaking about why he ioined AMU, he said that AMU required discipline in both students and teachers. "Today AMU is known for its research and has done

'NOT BOUND TO SCRIPTS'

the most important research, like cleaning up the Ganga, and we also presented a paper to the Prime Minister. who gave us a responsibility to clean the Ganga in 5 years, not by sewage treatment drugs, but by green technology. The second thing we are working on is the desalination of seawater," he added.

Acknowledging the drawbacks of madrasas, he said, «The problem with the madrasas is that the teachers do only the Quran and nothing else; they are not widely travelled, they are not well educated, they are only educated in Islam.»

«So, we have carried out a programme of trained teach-



Lt Gen Zameeruddin Shah

ers where we get madrasa teachers to try and communicate modern knowledge, and only once they have invited modern knowledge will they be able to pass it on,» he added.

Asked about the meeting in 2022 he had with RSS chief India that is simulated; all Mohan Bhagavad with the prominent members of the Muslim community, he said, the meeting was very impor-

tant and should continue, and "we are having another one; we had already two, and this is the third one. See, the problem between both the communities is the lack of communication: we need to understand each other>s point of view; we need to just dispel the misunderstanding; so it is important to have a constant dialogue between the leaders of the social organisations and the masters of themselves."

«We want an India that communities, all languages, and all regions think this is the opening of the dialogue,» he added.

#### 'BE ORIGINAL, DON'T COPY'

#### 'GANGS OF WASSEYPUR' CHANGED MY CAREER **COMPLETELY: NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI**

**ANJALI SINGH** 

On the first day of the Festival of Ideas, one of the most prominent stars of Bollywood, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, gave an exclusive interview where he shared his experience on his role in "Gangs of Wasseypur". Siddiqui has been an actor who has never shied away from experimenting with his roles in films. and he has been successful in bowling the audience over each time.

«When I was offered the role of Faizal Khan (GOW) and started acting like Al is progressing; we want an Pacino, Anurag Kashyap suggested I be Nawaz. Then I started looking for someone around me from the area I belong to from whom I could take inspiration, and



then he finally found someone. So, that's how it worked. I stayed Nawaz despite being Faizal Khan,» said Siddiqui.

«Be original; don't try to copy anyone; be yourself,» he added. Asked which film actor, he said: "I feel all films change your life in some way. However, if I had to pick one, I would say 'Gangs of Wasseypur' changed my career

completely."

cinema is seen internationally, Siddiqui said: «There is a long way to go, and it's not like we lack talent, but the thing is, those who have helped establish him as an money don't want to work those who want to work on such cinema lack funding.»

Talking about how Indian

Recalling his debut on OTT, he said he wasn't aware of the term OTT and thought it was a TV serial. Then, Anurag Kashyap happened to show him that these shows would make him visible to 190 countries, and that fascinated him enough to do Sacred Games, which turned out to be a great success. Currently, he is not doing OTT because he feels like passion is what is lacking in todays series, and he doesn't want to be part of such a project.

On how he chooses roles, he said he wants his characters to be developed; there should be conflict; they should be quirky and more alive than heroic, where everything about them is not good. He shared his experience of preparing for Thakre's character, where he happened to keenly observe Thakre and practice his vocals.

#### **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

#### **CINEMA CAN BE AN AGENT TO COMBAT** PATRIARCHY: TAHIRA KASHYAP KHURRANA

Having won the battle with breast cancer, today she pushes for greater female involvement in filmmaking.

**ANJALI SINGH** 

In a conversation with Tahira Kashyap Khurrana at the Festival of Ideas 2023, celebrating The Tale of India's Women, Khurrana mixed humour and wit, with a healthy dose of snark.

In 2018, Tahira drew praise for sharing moments from what was possibly the most trying period of her life—her battle with breast cancer. Today, a champion of women's rights, she pushes for greater female involvement in filmmaking through Indian Women Rising, an organisation she co-founded, and breaks stereotypes surrounding mothers and «the weaker sex» through her writing and her book "7 Sins of Being a Mother". Now, she's coming up with her film, *Sharmaji ki Beti*, as a director.

"I believe cinema can be an agent to combat patriarchy, as I believe we live in a country that is obsessed with stories. I think ever since we were born, we used to tell our grandparents and



Tahira Kashyap Khurrana being felicitated by Ambala Mayor Shakti Rani Sharma.

grandmothers to tell us stories, and that's how we have lived. That's how we have lived. Our moral compass is based on the stories, whether there is the Mahabharata or mine. We thrive on stories and cinema," said Tahira Kashyap Khurrana

Responding to the question of whose ideas have inspired her, she said, "Many, and it's just not men or women. My children. I will not go the cliched route, but recently, I have been really inspired by my children and how woke they are. I think when you become an adult, you see how clear kids are in their thoughts, how clear things are in their heads, and how they beautifully live in the present without begrudging the past or worrying about the future. It's something so marvellous and remarkable. I think kids are the biggest teachers.'

Sharing her writing and debut experience, she said, "I have been writing since childhood, but then I went to study biotech in order to as I grew up, I realised it's just not me; all of us have the power to have a voice that can change, so it's just not me; all of us have a unique voice."

earn money, but then and

"So, for my first film, I borrowed money from my husband to make my first short film, about which I was very conscious. I knew this was what I wanted to be, but I needed a sort of push. I'm very grateful for those little openings. But after a point, you are on your own," she

## BABIL KHAN, FACE OF NEXT-GENERATION ACTORS, SHARES HIS DREAMS TIKAM SHARMA NEW DELHI

Glamour kids and Bol-

lywood's next generation of actors and filmmakers are not bound to scripts as they aim to bring raw emotion, authenticity, and a unique blend of traditional and modernity in their acting, admitted many stars who joined the two-day Festival of Ideas hosted by NewsX, The Sunday Guardian (TSG), and India News, which are a part of the iTV Network.

Young talents like Babil Khan, Vatsal Neelakantan, Shriya Pilgaonkar, Suparn Varma, Shweta Tripathi, among others, shared their thoughts and journey at the Festival and interacted with the audience in a filmy interplay of tinsel town realities and dreams.

Babil Khan, son of late actor Irfan Khan, shared his journey. He said, «I never planned my debut; I just wanted to work. By the time I liked the story of QALA, I had decided to act in the film. He further said. No one can decide their future; it>s their journey and destiny that decide what he or she will do.»



Telling about the character that he was performing in his upcoming film «Friday Night Plan,» Babil said, «Previously, I had performed an intense character in QALA, so this time I tried to do something different so that the audience could see something different and enjoy it.

Babil further said I started acting by seeing my (BABA) movie (Irfan Khan>s movie). I was very young when I realised that I wanted to do acting, but at the same time, I was scared that people would compare me with my father. Babil added, «One day I told Baba that I wanted to be an actor, and then Baba told me to first go and complete your studies and come

and I will teach you acting, but by the time I came back it was too late. I remember the last time Baba went to the hospital. I asked him that, and he said, You will teach me. Then he said, I will teach you; let me come back from the hospital. By that time, I never realised that he would never come back. So now that I realise there is no one to teach me, I am working to learn on my own.

He added that performing or implementing spirituality in cinema is very hard; very few people in the industry can pull it off, but the way Baba did it inspired me to perform spirituality in cinema. I don>t just play characters; I inhabit them.

He further said the envi-

ronment is very important when we do a film. So we create that kind of environment on the sets that we want in the movie. So as you all see in the trailer, Friday Night Plan> is a very cool kind of movie, so our director used to keep a very light environment on the sets to achieve this.

Responding to the bond with Netflix, he said, My first movie is on Netflix; my second movie is also on Netflix; and I hope my third movie will also come on Netflix. Netflix has been like family to me. Netflix has allowed me to showcase my work all around the world, so I accept its proposal. Babil expressed his thoughts on fashion and said, Every opportunity to express your individuality is important, so feel free to express yourself.

This next generation of actors is the new era of our cinema. These actors break free from conventions and blur the lines between reality and fiction. They create an unparalleled connection with audiences. So that the audience could witness a redefinition of cinematic expression. The art of acting reaches new heights.

## The Sunday 27 AUG-02 SEP 2023 ITULAN

## ROUSSETY BRINGS ON STAGE GERMAN PLAY HAMLETMACHINE IN HINDI AND ENGLISH

Dr Roussety's approach to NSD students' involvement was highly collaborative in nature. The idea was to create a linguistic fusion wherein each student brought their unique perspective to the play.



**MURTAZA ALI KHAN** 

🗖 n a daring and innovative re-adaptation, the acclaimed German actress and theatre director Dr **Iacqueline Roussety recent**ly staged Heiner Müller's iconic play 'Hamletmachine' with the National School of Drama (NSD) final year students, both at NSD's Bahumukh Auditorium as well as the German Embassy in New Delhi. Müller, a German playwright and theater director, wrote the postmodernist drama 'Hamletmachine' in 1977. Loosely based on William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet,' 'Hamletmachine' was inspired by Müller's attempt to translate 'Hamlet' from Shakespeare.

Coming back to the recent adaptation, Dr Roussetv didn't just direct the play but she also helmed the set, costume, and choreography

departments. Known for its strong political and sexual undercurrents, the play's themes were brought to life through a fusion of Hindi and English dialogues, creating a unique theatrical experience that pushed boundaries and ignited thought-provoking discussions. "I was drawn to 'Hamletmachine' because of its fearless exploration of societal and personal turmoil. The play's themes are universal, and I believed that the energy and passion of NSD's final year students was a perfect match for such a provocative work," rejoiced Dr Roussety.

Blending Hindi and Eng-

lish was a conscious choice made by her. "I wanted to transcend linguistic barriers and allow the audience to experience the emotional intensity of the play directly. Blending Hindi and English was a conscious choice to amplify the universality of the emotions portrayed," she explained. The play serves as a mirror to our times. The re-imagined 'Hamletmachine' allows one to draw parallels with current political and social struggles, inviting introspection and dialogue. Its



A still from Dr Roussety's re-adaption of Heiner Müller's iconic play Hamletmachine at the NSD

daring narrative cocktail makes room for strong political and sexual overtones, keeping the audience immersed throughout its running time of 90 minutes.

Dr Roussetv's approach to the students' involvement was highly collaborative in nature. The idea was to create a linguistic fusion wherein each student brought their unique perspective to the play. A major challenge for her was to let the creative iuices flow while ensuring that the essence of 'Hamletmachine' wasn't lost in the process. In order to achieve

this, she held discussions,

workshops, and improvisations with the keenness and the resolve to delve into the more complex layers.

"The beauty of 'Hamletmachine' lies in its uncompromising examination of societal upheaval. As far as I remember, I yearned for a canvas as daring as possible for the students to paint this vivid tapestry of chaos and introspection," she recollected.

Another important task for Dr Roussety was to tackle the larger themes at play. "The potency of the play's political and sexual themes had to be unveiled with care.



Dr Jacqueline Roussety

Our aim was not to shock, but to engage in conversations about power dynamics, oppression, and identity. We wanted the audience to feel the disquiet and urgency of the issues reflected in the play," revealed Dr Roussety who isn't averse to pushing the boundaries of traditional theatre. "Witnessing the students' growth and commitment was truly inspiring during the rehearsals. There were moments of uncertainty, but their enthusiasm and dedication were unwavering," she added.

Right from the very outset, Dr Roussety wanted to infuse 'Hamletmachine' with a fresh lens, one that illuminates the undercurrents of feminism. The play's exploration of power dynamics,

identity, and societal rebellion resonate deeply with this theme.

In Dr Roussety's adaptation, the feminist voice is as prominent as the beating heart of the play. A clear attempt has been made to amplify the female characters' narratives, weaving threads of liberation, strength, and resilience. It's a tribute to women who defy norms and challenge the status quo. «While Müller's 'Hamletmachine' is a powerful discourse on societal turmoil, our rendition navigates through the prism of diversity. Our ensemble consists of 4 boys and 5 girls, each imbuing their characters with a distinct energy. This diversity enhances the narrative, reflecting the vibrant tapestry of humanity,» she explained.

Dr Jacqueline Roussety's adaptation of 'Hamletmachine' can best be described as a transformative experience that will hopefully succeed in pushing the boundaries of theatre and sparking conversations that resonate far beyond the stage. As for the students, the experience will certainly fuel their artistic journeys and empower them to challenge norms.

#### HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PASSIONATE ABOUT JEWELLERY: MEHER JETLEY ON HER BRAND NOYRA



**NOOR ANAND CHAWLA** 

It's official - the Indian festive season has begun with the festival of Raksha Bandhan leading the way. During this wonderful time of the vear, everyone looks forward to dressing up in their festive best. It's also a time to scout for good gifts. Noyra, a brand that creates ageless jewellery handcrafted in Jaipur provides ideal gifting options. The Sunday Guardian speaks to founder and designer Meher Jetley on what Noyra stands for.

#### **EXCERPTS FROM AN EDITED INTERVIEW:**

Q: How did you enter the field of design?

A: I graduated from NIFT, Gandhinagar with a Bachelor's degree in Design (Fashion). I've previously headed the design team of an e-commerce fashion brand, worked with textile weavers in Gujarat, and worked in sales and marketing for a legacy brand. Over the past eight years, I have had exposure to design, marketing, sales, as well as customer experience and these fields have enhanced my knowledge. My journey has helped me understand the

nuances of the industry and the customer, and it felt like the right time to channelise this knowledge into my own business.

Q: How did you transition from fashion to jewellery? A: Jewellery is something

I have always been passionate about. I have extensively researched it and would even create custom jewellery for myself much before launching Noyra. Since the designs I used to create myself were stylish, of good quality and affordable, they were admired by a lot of people, which made me realise that I had a knack for it. In the middle of the pandemic, I was faced with a pay cut at my job. So, I took a leap of faith and decided to start Noyra. I knew I had extensive experience working with artisans as well as customers, and knew how to create and sell a product, and I felt confident about it. That's how the jewellery business began.

Q: What kind of jewellery do

you specialise in? A: At Noyra, we specialise in high-quality, handcrafted jewellery at affordable price points. All the jewellery takes inspiration from art, culture, history, and my many moods and is carefully made by talented jewellery artisans from Jaipur, India. We focus on working with the best plating techniques and certified semiprecious stones for all our pieces, while pledging to provide our patrons with as much information as pos-



sible in order to be transparent. We work on a made-toorder model as a conscious effort to lower our carbon footprint. Owning a piece from Noyra is like owning an ageless, crafted, rare museum piece.

Q: How do you stand apart

from competitors? A: Noyra is a unique jewellery brand where we design and craft our pieces from scratch. A thorough design process is followed, where we start right from the type or design of stone we need, to what base metal it will finally be set in (we work majorly with brass and 92.5 silver). The most important thing is our plating technique. We use micron plating, for all our products and rhodium plating for the shiny silver finish. Our designs are unique, and we work with only the highest quality semi-precious stones. Our products are nickel and leadfree, and we offer a stellar after-sale service that includes replating, refurbishing, and



Stella Tennis Bracelet



Naulakha Haar Choker

fixing the piece in case of any damage, to increase its longevity. Plus, our customisation is very affordable.

Q. What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far? A: Noyra is a bootstrapped business without a legacy. It has been hard to break into a competitive market where people come from much more comfortable backgrounds and situations than I presently have. Market the products consistently, or spending money on social media campaigns and celebrity endorsements can be challenging. I also feel we lack international exposure, but I'm sure that with time as we continue to grow, these problems will cease to exist. Q: What have been your biggest



Omega Nebula Bangle



Astraea Necklace

rewards so far?

A: Even though we follow a made-to-order model, we have managed to create a loyal customer base and earned the trust of our customers. I'm so proud that niche, high-end marketplaces stock our products now. We have managed to create a name for ourselves where admirers and customers of the brand

really appreciate our brand ethos and story. We especially loved launching our third collection called 'Supernova' in under three years. It's a big deal for a new brand like ours to launch annual collections, and fortunately, ours have always been well received by both marketplaces and individual customers. I also take pride in being

able to sustain my original artisans and vendors who have seen the growth of the brand from the first day. It is my dream to make the brand international and have it stocked at well-reputed global stores. As I'm a big fan of Sabyasachi Mukherjee, it is my dream to have Noyra products stocked at Bergdorf Goodman someday! Q: Tell us about your design process.

A: Each piece at Noyra first begins its journey in my head. I believe I have the gift of creative visualisation which allows me to formulate an entire design from start to finish, without lifting a pen, and translate it directly into materials with the help of my artisans. Artistic themes, history, psychology, science, anything and everything that inspires me at that particular moment, acts as an inspiration while I design the pieces.

Q: Where can customers find your designs?

A: All the jewellery at Noyra retails through our own ecommerce website noyra.co and designer marketplaces such as Tata Cliq Luxury, and Nete.in, IKKIVI, The Yarn Story, etc. Currently, our physical designs are on display and for purchase at Jewelry Box by Arnav in Bangalore, Meraki Lifestyle in Pondicherry and Studio 108 at Kochi.

Noor Anand Chawla pens lifestyle articles for various publications and her blog www.nooranandchawla.com.

**BEAUTY AND** 

**PANACEA** 

## PINK IS JUST A COLOUR

#### **FEMALE GAZE**

SANDHYA MENDONCA

y latest acquisition is state-of-the-art and comes in a pink case. A new mobile?

Since you'll never guess what it is, I'll tell you.

Sunglasses?

Having paid an arm and a leg for a dental implant and crowns just a year ago, I was pretty sure I wouldn't have to go back to the clinic in this lifetime. Unlike earlier days when going to the dentist made grown people cry, the dental work itself is now fairly painless but wallets take a big hit. So I was miffed with myself when I absent-mindedly bit into something hard and broke a crown. After replacing it, the dentist also presented me with a mouthguard to make sure that I didn't further damage my teeth in my sleep.

The state-of-the-art 3D-

printed mouthguard came in a spiffy case. A pink one. I asked lightly, "So is it pink for women and blue for men?". Though my tone was conversational, the dentist froze before answering hesitantly, "Yes, I hope that's not a problem." I sympathised with him as negotiating a politically correct path is rather tricky. I smiled as best as I could between rinsing my mouth, and reassured him, "It's just a colour, doc. It's cool."

When did pink become a feminine colour anyway? Time was when girls and boys wore pink, blue or any colour. Some American records show that boys used to be dressed in pink; the colour border red which was considered a strong 'masculine', and girls used to be dressed in blue. Perhaps gender assignment of colours began with chain stores that wanted to boost sales. Perhaps hospitals birthed the trend when they began using blue and pink to differentiate the genders of the babies. Gender reveal parties blew it out of proportion alongside the mega balloons.

Palace. The infusion of pink

(Accredited Social Health Activists) in pink saris and salwars, and tough cops in pink cars. That pink is a feminine colour became a

When we started the Un-

der The Raintree women's

cultural festival, India's first

women-centric multi-arts

festival, we had to distin-

guish it from other cultural

events that we held under

the same brand name. A

designer suggested that we

add a touch of pink to the

green foliage to differentiate between the two. I remem-

ber feeling a bit conflicted

about the typecasting but

we had to move things along

and we went with it. Over

time. I have come to accept

and revel in it. My feminist

friends and I see the festi-

val not just as a platform to

bring about gender empow-

erment but also to rejoice in

our femininity.

fait accompli.

Perhaps, as the Europeans believe, it began with Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's mistress, who wore it to flaunt her wealth and status. She inspired the porcelain company Sèvre to launch a line called 'Rose Pompadour', in her signature colour. Perhaps, as the Americans believe, 'Mamie Pink' became a rage because of Mamie Eisenhower, the American First Lady. She loved pink so much that the White House began to



ber playing with a doll as a child. This statement is not a lament. What I had were sisters, cousins and neighbours to play with. We played several games and invented many with our imaginations fuelled by books and comics. Perhaps I overcompensated by playing with my son's toys - a UFO that fired discs, a Star Wars lightsabre, a train set. Barbies were by then available in India. Mea culpa raised within the gendered construct of society as it was then, my view was that a doll was an acceptable gift for a girl but not the Barbie doll; I judged its appearance and deemed it unfit as a gift to any girl. But we are woke now! The subversive plot of the film lured me impossible-sized anatomy, there are many positive sides to Barbie. She owns her own house. She has a career that keeps up with the aspirations of women in a changing world. And she rocks the colour pink.

rocks the colour pink. PS: Years ago, my company had an unusually generous client who would bring gifts for everyone in the office along with his cheque. In one instance, he had an extra gift for me - a Marks & Spencer T-shirt for my son. A high schooler then, said son refused to accept the gift as it was pink in colour. Cut to some years later, his wardrobe includes very many bright colours including pink. Just like Ranveer in a pink Valentino, men like my son are cool wearing pink as and host of the 'Spotlight with

# Restore health of damaged hair Healthy, shiny hair is basic to beauty. Yet, we see so much hair damage today! The most common causes of hair damage are hair styling techniques that employ chemical lotions, like colouring, dyeing, bleaching, straightening and waving. These procedures alter the structure of the hair and weaken it. Damage is also caused by heat applications, like styling wands, irons and tongs. Some amount of damage is also caused by excessive use of hair dryers, wire brushes and the habitual tying back of the hair tightly. All this can cause SHAHNAZ HUSAIN BHRINGRAJ AMLA HAIR OII. Hair Growth Formula Nat Va. 30 ad

# BHRINGRAJ AMLA HAIR OIL Hair Growth Formula Net Vol. 200 ml BHRINGRAJ AMLA HAIR OIL Hair Growth Formula Net Vol. 200 ml

Bhringaraj Amla Hair Oil

enough trauma to the hair, over a period of time. Other causes of hair damage are excessive exposure to the sun and the use of harsh shampoos. The cause of damage in individual cases is not difficult to establish. The first thing to do is to discontinue the procedure till health is restored to the hair.

The outermost layer, the cuticle, protects the hair and contributes to hair lustre. In damaged hair, the cuticle is stripped off in an uneven manner. The hair loses its shine, becoming dry, dull and brittle. Damaged hair is in a fragile condition and should be treated gently. Discontinue the use of brushes for some time. Use a wide toothed comb with smooth edges, especially for wet hair. To disentangle the hair, start at the ends and work upwards. Avoid pulling or stretching the hair.

In cases of excessive dryness, twice a week, heat coconut oil and apply on the hair. Apply on ends too. Dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. Avoid vigorous massage. Massage the scalp gently, using only the finger tips, actually moving the scalp in small circular movements. This stimulates blood circulation to the follicles. Keep oil on overnight and wash the hair next day, using mild herbal shampoo. Avoid very hot water.

To dry the hair, wrap the towel around the head and allow it to absorb excess water. Allow the hair to dry naturally. Regular conditioning is extremely important. Hair conditioners and hair serums soften the hair, improving its look and texture. They coat the hair and also help to protect it.

# FLOWER BOTANICS CARNATION-HIBISCUS Hair Conditioning Powder 7.0 oz. 1 200 g C

#### Carnation-Hibiscus Hair Conditioning Powder

Indeed, the hair is like a delicate fabric, so treat it that way. Here are some home remedies to restore health to damaged hair: Mix one teaspoon each of apple cider vinegar and honey with one egg. Massage the mixture lightly into the scalp. Wash hair after half an hour. Or, beat yogurt and egg together, to make a nourishing hair pack, which also adds body to the hair.

Hibiscus cold infusion: Allow the flowers and leaves to stand overnight in cold water, in a ratio of one to six. Next day squeeze the flowers and strain the water. Use the water to rinse the hair. Or add the water and the flowers to your henna paste for a total hair-food treatment.

Have a green tea rinse after shampoo. Make tea-water by adding hot water to green tea leaves, or using green tea bags. You should have 5 to 6 cups of tea-water. Cool, strain, add the juice of a lemon and use as a last rinse.

Mix Banana and Avocado pulp together and add one tablespoon olive oil. Apply the mixture as a hair pack. Wash off after an hour.

Fish oil is said to restore health to damaged hair. This is mainly because Fish oil contains Omega-3 fatty acids. Make fish a part of your diet, or get Omega-3 fatty acids through supplements.



## That's why I wore pink like many other folks when I trotted off to see Barbie, the movie. I don't remem That's why I wore pink and it has since dawned on me that Barbie was always and bost of the 'Spotlight with the movie. I don't remem a gender-agnostic colour. Sandhya Mendonca is an authout and host of the 'Spotlight with the movie. I don't remem dent women. Except for her Sandhya' podcast.

Influencers of Suicides

RENÉE RANCHAN

**A SHARED SLICE** 

I know that this strip is going to be filled up by perturbing matters, so starting off the way I intend to (despite trying to harness my pen to touch on this some other day!) might strike an unbefitting note but then that is not, the remotest intention, so I hope this submission is taken at face value. Thus, after drawing in breath---perhaps, to muster the courage---I want someone, anyone to let me know what does the expression, ``died by suicide" mean?! How does one snuff out one's life `by" suicide?! Note the word ``by". Would we say, `he died by dengue?!", ``died by AIDS?!", ``died by cancer?!". In the stated three illustrations, do we not use the word, ``of"?! S/ he died of dengue, of AIDS, of cancer?! Now, returning to the heart-breaking act of willfully, perhaps after spending painfully long hours of planning, how and when, to stub out one's life, can the expression ``died by suicide'' come into play?! ``By"?! Suicide is not a bite by a pernicious

snake that we can, with lit-

tle care, state, ``by snake

bite". Though even here the appropriate word would be ``of" snake bite, ``of poisoning".

This is beginning to sound like a grammar class; this despite, I doubt if I, with even fiddle-footed zigzagging attention, thumped through Wren and Martin, the ultimate Bible in Grammar, that Rahul, my Wordsmith brother, would swear by! So much so, that he would be buying en masse this book, to gift to anybody and everybody...Cross my heart, this not distantly an amplification of the truth, no gilding the lily, but Wren and Martin was distributed with a league of its own flourish by Rahul. No occasion needed. And then, as of now, I wonder how yawningly boring was/ would it be to the recipient of such a gift presented by a spiritedly whole-hearted

Anyways, had my hypercorrectionist brother still been in this world, he I can say, would have rallied, till his voice went hoarse, where no amount of saline gargling would have helped, against this wrong usage. Incorrect deployment of not only, ``died by suicide" as opposed to ``committed suicide"! Not giving a pass to a boundless number of other expressions as well. Speaking of brothers, when last year, my other brother was visiting from California, I mentioned how very ridiculous it was to hear on TV, ten times over, how, one died ``by" suicide, ditto for the print media, I was informed that in America, this had become a regular

this had become a regular expression. That good Ol' U.S. of A. had coined it, and were swell-headed that the world had, in the blink of an eye, hammer and tongs, adopted it! Enough of ambling--- so to address the painful, to say the very least, matter of suicide. For the past couple of years, so very many students aspiring to be engineers, doctors or police officers or whatever top-notch posts that exist, where, once one clears the entrance exams, and whatever else it takes to graze the skies, believe that if they are unable to succeed, the only option for them is to do away with themselves. To commit suicide. And thus, the growing number of slashing one's wrist, hanging oneself by

the neck, overdosing on sleeping pills (which supposedly are not available across the counter!) making a drinkable concoction of rat-poison...need not go on! It seems that a chain affect is at work, an out-of-hand spreading like wildfire plague. And then what do we do with this unbridled pop-psychology?! On television you'll find counsellors, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, therapists, mental well-being mediators (whatever that is supposed to allude to!), life-coaches who throw up cut and dried, brain-free reasons for suicidal young people such as parental pressure, peer pressure... Excuse me, but this genre of insistent goading, of pestering pressurization has been there since ever. Dinosaur years ago, when I was in college, these pressures were as ubiquitous as today. And so many of us piled ourselves, as it is very much so now, with this single-minded tireless drive of becoming someone worthy. This bound and determined approach wore us out...yet was committing suicide the answer if one failed to clasp the stars or find some specks

of sparkle to rub against

the palm of one's hands?! Of course, things back then were not as sanitized as I may, unwittingly, be projecting but...but...but... as this pen pauses, I recall a hand-made poster posted on the wall of a friend who intended to become a doctor. It roared in, very uncalligraphic writing `Do or Die!" (Doctors as we know, are not known for a legible, easily decipherable writing, so Aditya, naturally was cut out to be a doctor!) I am quite sure that with all the hours, days, weeks, months he clocked in to making it to medical school the war-cry was an inspirational nudge, not the voice of doom, had he not had his name prefixed with ``Dr." Yes, even then, youngsters suffered from depression, brought on often not by having shoulders slumped by stratospheric expectations (though the condition wasn't, unfortunately, as highlighted as it has been for a long while now).

Depression is a kind of inflammation of the brain. Call to mind: the brain being on fire. And yes, if one is lucky, enough to have a psychiatrist/counsellor to lend you his ears, to steer you out of the mind's maze, then the world would

visibly be a more agreeable place. Cannot move on without halting to make mention that as far as depression goes, `age is no bar" and lamentably, even in this day and age, there is a rooted shame, besmirchment attached to mental health matters.

No pop-psyching but it's not far-fetched to believe that the spiraling suicide rate amongst our youth could be because of our tech-propelled traits where every move is Instagrammed---from the breakfast platter to the latest I-Phone uploaded with pictures of one's life's raison d'être. Sometimes donning SRK's ``Pathan" look, crying from the mountain top that Bollywood beckons, at other hours dressed like a business tycoon giving a true ring to the money bags landscape by posing in front of a 3-D picture of ``Antilia", Mukesh Ambani's 27-storeyed home, notifying the world that Ambani is in for serious

competition.

And when those dreams, so publicly aired, go kaput then there's this intense need, until hell freezes over, to make oneself invisible and that's when toying with suicide comes into play?!

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'SBI'S COUNTRYWIDE PRESENCE, DIGITAL **BUSINESS KEY TO** 



INDIA'S EV ADOPTION **CHAIN DEVELOPS** 



**UNION BANK RAISES EQUITY CAPITAL OF RS 5,000 CR** 

#### **DIGITALIZATION PUSH IN G**20 TRADE TALKS

Jaipur: During the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting in Jaipur, French trade minister Olivier Bech emphasised the importance of digitalization in trade documents. Becht believes this will simplify import/export for companies particularly benefiting SMEs by improving their global reach. He remarked on France's prioritisation of this digital shift, mentioning a recently completed report on required legislative changes Additionally, Becht stressed the need for technical aid to developing nations, ensuring their businesses can also leverage these digital advancements.

#### **DGCA PROBES AIR INDIA'S**

**DISCREPANCIES New Delhi:** A recent inspection by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) found discrepancies in Air India's internal safety audits The probe revealed that Air India falsified reports for 13 safety checks across Mumbai, Goa, and Delhi stations. These inconsisten cies were confirmed with CCTV footage and various official records. The DGCA also found that some reports lacked authorised signatures from the Chief of Flight Safety (CFS) and were signed by unauthorised auditors. In response, Air India stressed its commitment to regular safety assessments and addressing any concerns raised by authorities. DGCA is further investigating these

#### **BOEING BOOSTS AMETHI'S HEALTHCARE**

New Delhi: Union Minister Boeing's literacy initiative, 'Room to Read', and a medical Uttar Pradesh. Partnering with the renowned non-profit to uplift literacy in 60 Amethi primary schools for four years Additionally, the Boeing-funded diagnostic centre, equipped with state-of-the-art medical tools like CT scans and digital X-rays will offer free tests and training to medical staff for three years Irani oversees the women and child development and minority affairs ministries

#### AI'S ROLE: **ASSISTANT OR** INDEPENDENT?

New Delhi: Salesforce India's CEO, Arundhati Bhattacharya, emphasised that current Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies act more as assistants and still require hu man intervention. At a recent media roundtable, Bhattacha rya mentioned the uncertainty of Al's potential to operate independently in the future. She praised the specific problem-solving capabilities of Generative AI over blockchain and crypto. Addressing data concerns in the BFSI sector she highlighted Salesforce's focus on data localization and having a strong presence in India, plans to expand its six centres. Salesforce's recent report reveals that 87% organisational role, with concerns rising around generative

#### **GIFT IFSC EYES GLOBAL FINTECH HUB**

New Delhi: On August 26, a Committee of Experts led by G. Padmanabhan, ex-RB executive director, presented ternational Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) on Onshoring Indian Innovation to Gujarat's GIFT IFSC'. The committee, comprising key stakeholders from venture capital, fintechs, and legal firms, proposed strategies to make GIFT IFSC a global fintech destination. Their goal? To encourage Indian startups to establish domestically and lure back those overseas by aligning regulatory norms

Agencies

**G20 TRADE MINISTERIAL** 

## **G20 MINISTERIAL ARRIVES AT CONSENSUS ON 5 DELIVERABLES**

NIVEDITA MUKHERJEE

India has scored a significant goal on steering 🚣 a global move towards a rules-based, open, inclusive, multilateral trading system holding the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core -with the G2O Trade and Investment Ministers' meeting under India's Presidency arriving at an all encompassing and inclusive consensus on five concrete deliverables which could have far reaching and favourable implications for rejuvenating global trade demand, bringing in targeted investments in quality physical and digital logistics, enhancing supply chain resilience, promote economic growth and foster prosperity. The mutual agreement on these areas assumes greater import amidst a multi-dimensional global crisis that raises challenges of macroeconomic in-



stability, food insecurity and disruptions across GVCs, as acknowledged in the 'Outcome Document of Trade Ministerial Meeting' which concluded in Jaipur on Friday. The joint communique flags the uncertainty over near-term prospects of glob-

al trade and investment and the prediction that growth in cross-border trade will remain subdued at 1.7 per cent in 2023. These underline the significance of the G2O acting together to ensure that trade, along with domestic production, plays a vital role

in improving global food security in all its dimensions, that trade-related investment initiatives foster resilient, diversified and sustainable economic growth and that use of technology for facilitation of cross-border trade promotes integration Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the G20's responsibility to rebuild confidence in international trade and investment order, setting the future template. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had clearly stated that the focus of G2O Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting (TIMM) will be on easing barriers to international trade and investment, helping boost productivity and output and fostering economic growth and prosperity for all.

A key priority for action agreed upon at the Jaipur Ministerial is building resilient and inclusive global value chains that can withstand future shocks and ensure higher participation of MSMEs in global trade. In a recognition of the important role of free, fair and open markets in maintaining resilient GVCs, the G20 Ministers have agreed to work

of MSMEs in global trade. towards GVC mapping and a mapping framework to help members identify opportunities for building resilience within GVCs. The G20 Generic Mapping Framework for GVCs endorsed by the trade ministers contained key building blocks of data, analysis and representation of GVC data. The framework will move along identifying key dimensions to help evaluate the resilience of GVCs both at the sectoral and product levels.

The voluntary and nonbinding nature of the "G2O Generic Framework for Mapping GVCs", however, leaves room for inaction by countries and thus robbing the intent of effective action but the G2O trade ministers expect to close the significant gap between some developing and developed countries in GVC participation and capacity of members to attract global production, by promoting and fostering

linkages between foreign enterprises and domestic companies, particularly MSMEs. Since sustainable and inclusive GVCs require investment, G20 ministers have emphasised on investment facilitation to enhance relevant investment flows in this regard.

Facilitation of trade is of critical importance to MSMEs and India's consistent advocacy for this cause reflects in an unanimous G20 trade ministers' Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing access to information for these businesses. This will help MSMEs, particularly in developing countries, who often lack the requisite resources to collect and analvse all the relevant information for their target markets. For the first time, the International Trade Centre (ITC). Geneva has been mandated

to work on a detailed imple

**CAPITAL MOBILISATION** 

#### **B20 SUMMIT ADDRESSES CLIMATE TRANSITION** FINANCING CHALLENGES

CORRESPONDENT

The B2O Summit, held at the Taj Palace, deliberated 'Financing the Climate Transition' this Saturday, spotlighting the world's urgent need for capital mobilisation towards climate action. Mark Carney, the UN's voice for Climate Action and Finance, emphasised the pivotal role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in catalysing this transition. Carney highlighted the vast sums needed, particularly in tough sectors, advocating

for developed nations to commit \$100-150 billion annually in aid to emerging economies. He urged these nations to establish regulations fostering renewable energy adoption, diminishing fossil fuel reliance, and promoting carbon market development. Moderated by Lynn Forester De Rothschild, the discussion saw key global business figures stress collaborative approaches. Bernard Looney, BP's CEO, stressed the urgency of addressing emissions, emphasising a prompt, structured transition. Uday Kotak, Kotak

Mahindra Bank's CEO, called for a symbiotic relationship between businesses and governments

to propel clean technology. Mark E Tucker of HSBC pledged a whopping 1 trillion USD by 2030 for climate transition. Simultaneously, Verena Lim from Macquarie Group spotlighted mature technology acceleration, like solar and wind, as pivotal in developing nations. Tata Steel's CEO, T V Narendran, underscored steel's significance in decarbonization. The B2O discussions highlighted the necessity for innovative financial solutions, global collaboration, and governmental backing to address the monumental climate challenges ahead. Macquarie Group spotlighted mature technology acceleration, like solar and wind, as pivotal in developing nations. Tata Steel's CEO, T V Narendran, underscored steel's significance in decarbonization. The B2O discussions highlighted the necessity for innovative financial solutions, global collaboration, and governmental backing to address the monumental climate challenges ahead.

FTA TALKS

#### India-EU free trade talks progress, challenges remain

CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI** 

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions between India and the European Union (EU) have seen progress, but hurdles still remain, stated EU Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis. Speaking at a press conference in India, he expressed that the relationship between India and the EU holds vast untapped potential.

Although strides have been made in the FTA talks. Dombrovskis stressed that



significant challenges need addressing. Emphasising the importance of the partnership, he noted, "India and the EU are foundational allies sharing core values and interests." He further highlighted the EU's role as

India's second-largest part-

The geopolitical backdrop of the FTA negotiations underlines the growing emphasis on trust and credibility in global relations. Detailing

**HEALTH IMPACTS** 

#### 'India needs to rethink its tobacco laws' wean themselves off tobacco

SHANTANU GUHA RAY NEW DELHI

seasoned lawmaker has said India needs to seriously take a relook at its tobacco laws, and those relating to e-cigarettes and heated tobacco because the health ministry's ban on e-cigarettes is a missed public health opportunity.

MV Rajeev Gowda, vicechairperson, State Institute for Transformation of Karnataka and former Rajya Sabha member strongly feels e-cigarettes could have been an option to help smokers

in India, the world's second largest consumer of tobacco. Gowda says tobacco is India's largest threat to public health, reducing life expectancy among both men and women by more than a decade. Hence, the government must make efforts to curb tobacco consumption. But the Health Ministry missed the trees for the woods when it banned the Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS). Gowda says the gov-

ernment probably wanted to

prevent the emergence of a

large user base particularly

among the youth but when it banned ENDS, it did not consider the different types of ENDS and Heat Not Burn (HNBs) devices, their differential health impacts, and the use of HNBs as a tobacco harm reduction product.

Gowda feels the term "e-cigarettes" is used as a catch-all term but in reality, there are actually a range of devices with distinct technologies and characteristics. "Policymakers should have evaluated and regulated each kind of device based on their individual features and implications

SIGNIFICANT GROWTH

#### **INDIA SAW 80 PLUS NEW STARTUPS IN** MILLET SECTOR IN PAST YEAR AND A HALF

**NIVEDITA MUKHERJEE** 

A significant growth of startups in the millet sector has turned the attention of the highest levels of Government to making the millet movement a mass movement in India and globally. Engagement of younger individuals and innovation from large retail organisations have sparked a vibrant startup movement for promoting millets with India witnessing the



emergence of more than and a half, responsible for 80 startups in the millet developing well-packaged sector within the past year products.

The nation's culinary history bears witness to millets being extensively used across all cultures, states, and cuisines in India before being overshadowed by rice and wheat. Millet is also being associated with environmental responsibility, as a low environmental impact grain, especially concerning water consumption. Khader Vali, known as the Millet Man of India points to the sustainable cultivation of millets, which requires minimal water.

**FESTIVAL OF IDEAS** 

#### 'SBI'S COUNTRYWIDE PRESENCE, DIGITAL BUSINESS KEY TO SUCCESS'

**NIVEDITA MUKHERJEE** 

aving witnessed the economic, political and social history of India for more than 200 years, India's largest bank has successfully remained competitive amidst a fierce turf war by private peers over India's financial services landscape. The most instrumental factor in the State Bank of India's growth journey has been

its penetration into India's every nook and corner, the hinterland and deepest points, said Rajnish Kumar, former SBI Chairman on the "SBI Story" in the FestivalOfIdeas event presented by the iTV Media Group and Prabha Khaitan Foundation on Thursday.

"The Bank has been a witness to the economic, political and socialist history of India for more than 200 years. "When you visit the remotest place in India, be it



find a branch of SBI or its ing the intense rivalry with

Ladakh or Kashmir, you can ATM," said Kumar. "Follow-

private banks after the 1991 banking sector reforms, the SBI is holding its placard. So there are some things which it does well," said Kumar, who pointed out that SBI has managed to reinvent the image because of the kick in the competition. "I have seen the bank in the pre-reform era and beyond. It has been able to withstand based on work culture and efficiencies," he said.

According to Kumar, the ability to reach the grass-

roots is key to SBI touching the life of every Indian. "The digital transformation has left a deep impact. The digital arm of the bank YONO is the largest in the world with 60 million user base. It has enabled the bank to shed its image amongst the young generation. People have realised that it is more tech savvy than any other private bank," said Kumar. Kumar agreed that as a Government bank there are some defined processes but there is no

way that a large organisation can avoid that, "Still despite that and by not diluting the rigours of the process, there have been many changes to enable us to achieve a certain level of efficiency and serve people," said Kumar. Kumar agrees that the challenges of multiple schemes of the Government and ensuring that the benefits reach, require banks to emphasise financial literacy and its dissemination. "For transformation to a USD 5

trillion economy, the banks are the most important instruments for channelising investments.

A lot of this happening in infrastructure is being driven by Government. However, there are signs that private sector investments are coming back," Kumar added. He also suggested that a workforce which is skilled and alive to the competition and motivated is a crucial aspect of the leadership's task of talent management.

**INAUGURATION** 

#### **G20 MINISTERIAL ARRIVES AT CONSENSUS ON 5 DELIVERABLES**

mentation plan, in consultation with UNCTAD and WTO, for

upgradation of ITC's global trade helpdesk which would address the informational gaps faced by MSMEs.

Interestingly, the G20 Policy Guidelines on Boosting MSMEs' International Competitiveness from the Saudi Arabian Presidency and the G2O non-binding MSMEs Policy Toolkit under the Italian Presidency have served as the template for the Jaipur Ministerial to push for digital technology and technology-based tools, along with appropriate policy and institutional measures in enhancing MSMEs' access to information, finance and markets. To ensure rapid digital enablement of MSMEs, India's G20 Ministerial has recognised the importance of lowering entry barriers for them on digital platforms. The other point of consensus on trade driven under India's G20 Presidency is digitalization of trade documents encompassing 10 broad principles that comprehensively cover various dimensions of an effective transition to paperless trade. These principles pave way for paperless trade which will drive productivity gains and economic growth by reducing trade costs and lowering barriers to entry for MSMEs, including

women-owned or womenled MSMEs. Recognition of electronic trade documents as equivalent to their paper counterparts will support such a transition. If successfully implemented, they will create a secure interoperable and transparent paperless cross-border trade environment.

Recognising that reliability and predictability of international trade and cargo operations and developing logistics infrastructure through targeted investments are vital for rejuvenating global trade demand and that MSMEs are vulnerable to disruptions and cost increases in logistics services, the G20 Ministerial have agreed on the importance of enhanced domestic monitoring to minimize the effects of such disruptions on world trade and importance of more stable and predictable transport freight rates.

Another breakthrough which will also facilitate trade is the consensus by G20 Ministers on mutual dialogues to reduce regulatory divergences and associated trade costs. The G2O Ministerial has underlined the importance of effective regulatory dialogue to reduce regulatory divergences and associated trade costs. India's Presidency has successfully moved a consensus on holding a G20 Standards Dialogue in 2023 that will bring together members, policymakers,

India saw 80 plus new startups in

millet sector in past year and a half

regulators, standard-setting bodies and other stakeholders to discuss topics of common interest such as good regulatory practices and standards. The G2O intent also involves preventing unnecessary trade frictions, monitoring trade and investment-related measures and solving existing irritants.

The fifth important pillar which will see collective action by G2O trade ministers is voluntary sharing of best practices on mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) for professional services. This has important implications services trade given its importance in global growth and in generating employment. Moving towards sound. predictable and transparent domestic regulatory frameworks for trade in services, the agreement on MRAs will be further supported by the development of a Presidency's Compendium of best practices on MRAs for professional services. The compilation of such good practices will spur successful entering into MRAs which in turn will enable recognition of technical qualifications of the G20 members' doctors, nurses, lawvers, architect and other professionals by other countries. It will thus immensely help professionals in providing their technical services across the world. While there is no specific plan of

unified action on WTO, the G20 trade Ministers have recognised that the WTO remains indispensable for advancing the shared objectives of inclusive growth, innovation, job creation and sustainable development amidst mounting global challenges that are adversely affecting predictability and resilience of global trade, aggravating poverty and inequality. The Director General of WTO Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala however, wants all the G2O Ministers to narrow down realistic deliverables for

agreement at the WTO's

13th Ministerial Confer-

ence (MC13) in early 2024.

As a step towards this call, the G2O Ministerial recognized the importance of WTO's "Aid-For-Trade Initiative" to enable developing countries, notably LDCs, to effectively participate in global trade, including through enhanced local value creation and will welcome all efforts to mobilize necessary resources in this regard. The G20 Ministers also agreed to continue to work constructively to ensure positive outcomes including on WTO reform at the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference. Noting the ongoing discussions on dispute settlement reform, the G20 Ministers have restated commitment to having a fully and well-functioning Dispute Settlement System, accessible to all members by 2024.

#### **PARTNERSHIPS**

#### Maharashtra boosts trade ties at India-ASEAN council meet

CORRESPONDENT

The India ASEAN Trade Council, in an effort to enhance trade ties between Maharashtra and ASEAN nations, held a conference led by the Indian Economic Trade Organization. The MAH-ASEAN event, slated for November, is set to spotlight companies from Maharashtra keen on collaborating with ASEAN partners.

The council's regional office was launched in Pune by Maharashtra's Social Welfare Minister, Dileep Kamble, alongside MLA Eknath Khadse. A pivotal announcement during the event was the appointment of Dr. Sachin Kate as the Trade Commissioner for the

India ASEAN Trade Council. Notable attendees included the Consul of Myanmar Prof. Dr. Ranganthan, Pune's esteemed businessman Shailendra Goswami, and Dr. Asif Iqbal, President of the Indian Economic Trade Organization.

Amidst the presence of Pune's vibrant business community, Dr. Kate acknowledged the virtual participation of ambassadors from Myanmar and Laos, reiterating India's commitment to fostering robust partnerships with ASEAN nations. With a wealth of opportunities spanning sectors like MSMEs, Pharma, Education, Agriculture, and Manufacturing, this collaboration also aims to facilitate

business alliances, academic

partnerships, and bilateral delegations.

The ASEAN bloc, encompassing nations like Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, and others, plays a pivotal role in India's foreign policy, thanks to the nation's Act East Policy. ASEAN ranks as India's fourth-largest trade ally, accounting for 11.28% of India's total exports. The completion of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area solidifies this relationship further.

In his capacity as the Trade Commissioner, Dr. Kate outlined ambitious plans for bolstering multilateral relations. Scheduled delegations to Malaysia in October and Indonesia in November are strategic steps towards this goal.

These visits will focus on

a plethora of sectors, from education and agriculture to startups and IT.

India's contributions to ASEAN, especially in trade and development across member states, have been significant. A noteworthy gesture during the event was the presentation of an appointment certificate to Dr. Kate by the Minister of Maharashtra.

Highlighting future endeavours, the Trade Commissioner's office is set to release an annual ASEAN report at EXCON 2023 in Bangalore, emphasising global infrastructure materials. This initiative, led by HAS-BER Pune, underscores the 'MAKE IN INDIA' concept's potential in ASEAN nations.

**HEALTH IMPACTS** 

#### 'INDIA NEEDS TO RETHINK ITS TOBACCO LAWS'



clubbing them together under a blanket ban," he

can buy ENDS and e-cigarettes at local shops, online, and even through WhatsApp. All these point to the ban's failure to meet its objectives. It's a similar story to alcohol prohibitions, which have resulted in huge black markets as well as unintended health risks from the consumption of spurious liquor.

"The government must study the balance of risk and reward in regulating e-cigarettes, an approach it has already applied to alcohol and tobacco -- products that have impacts on health, but which are difficult to ban and which also generate income for the government," said Gowda.

He said India's India's tobacco cessation strategy is largely focused on nicotine replacement therapies (NRT), but products like ENDS which do not contain tobacco and HNBs which do not entail combustion of tobacco, offer alternative and innovative tobacco harm reduction strategies.

"India has an opportunity to adopt a risk-proportionate regulatory framework for such devices, based on

scientific evidence, which would allow the government to simultaneously protect non-smokers, discourage smoking tobacco, and Gowda says it is strange protect tobacco smokers by that anyone and everyone providing regulated access to lower-risk products."

> But is that happening? Gowda says public policy should be based on scientific evidence and not assumptions or biases. The Health Ministry did constitute an Expert Committee which supported a ban. But a lot of analysis has emerged since then. There are very interesting lessons for India to learn from how other jurisdictions have regulated

> ENDs and HNBs. "Scientific and academic consensus on the regulation of e-cigarettes has been growing. India can and should learn from all this evidence to design its own scientific framework for tobacco harm reduction," said Gowda

> "The government can commission a thorough scientific investigation into the regulation of e-cigarettes and their impact on key parameters of concern. Whether this is conducted by a parliamentary committee, expert committee, ICMR or other relevant body, it is essential that all

> available evidence, both for

and against the regulation of

So what is the alternative?

e-cigarettes, be objectively evaluated on its merits before arriving at any conclu-

"Given the scale of tobacco harm in India, be it in terms ferent nations. of lives damaged and lost. or costs to public health expenditure and the economy, all avenues for innovative tobacco harm reduction must be scientifically explored.'

Gowda said it is important to understand the distinction between ENDS and HNBs or HTPs. "ENDS do not contain tobacco and instead vaporise a liquid nicotine solution for inhalation.

HNBs do contain tobacco which is heated just enough to release an aerosol, rather than being burned. HNBs have been proven to reduce tobacco-related harms compared to combustible cigarettes, and to aid the transition away from combustible cigarettes.

"By clubbing HNBs with ENDs under a blanket ban, tobacco consumers have been deprived of a possibly safer, lower-risk alternative to combustible cigarettes and their right to make informed decisions.'

Gowda said the G2O Summit is an ideal platform to exchange knowledge and perspectives on complex issues. India should showcase its ability to be a pioneer in policy design that is

proactive, flexible, and scientific. At the G2O Summit, India can raise the issue of e-cigarette policy and learn from the experiences of dif-

tire issue leave the tobacco farmers, and tobacco products like cigarettes and bi-

"On the demand side, tobacco-related harms remain one of India's most serious public health concerns. Beedis produce five times more tar compared to manufactured combustible cigarettes, yet they remain the most popular combustible tobacco product. Smokeless tobacco remains hugely popular especially among users from rural areas and from economically and socially disadvantaged groups.

The regulation of beedi production alone is a complex and standalone issue since it is a largely informal sector. Given the scale of tobacco production, it is vital to consider how any changes to regulation would impact the livelihoods of the millions of people involved.

This is part of the reason why farmers' associations have spoken out against the WHO's recommendation that tobacco crops be replaced with alternative food crops to help combat the global food crisis.

#### **FTA TALKS**

#### India-EU free trade talks progress, challenges remain

the dialogue's progress, Dombrovskis, who doubles as the EU Commissioner for Trade. mentioned both entities' intensive engagement. He underlined the FTA's potential benefits, giv-

ing India preferred access to the

world's largest single market, the EU. Earlier this week, Dombrovskis participated in the G2O Trade and Investment Ministers Meeting in Jaipur. Additionally, he co-led the EU-India High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment alongside India's Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal in Delhi. The EU-India FTA discussions, initiated in 2007 but halted in 2013, were revived in 2021, underscoring a mutual commitment to amplifying economic ties and encouraging unobstructed trade. FTAs

aim to dismantle trade barriers. streamlining import and export procedures, and bolstering trade relationships. The ongoing talks cover broad subjects, ensuring trade not only benefits both sides but also respects environmental and labour rights.

wards a sustainable future, outlines the policy implications for the next 10 to 15 years, production aspects, awareness creation, innovation, and market development for millets. The report emphasises the need to create both domestic and international demand for millets given their role in ushering in economic prosperity along and proposes ways to achieve these goals. To mainstream millets and bringing the "Shree Anna" to every plate, the report proposes a fourpronged strategy centred on

SIGNIFICANT GROWTH

A new FICCI

PwC Knowledge

Report on propel-

ling India's millet sector to-

production enhancement interventions which entail crop and varietal improvements. It calls for concerted efforts on value-added product development, innovations in production and processing technologies and holistic policy support for millet promotion. Shashi Kant Singh, Part-

aspect of the proposed strategy in the report. "The report highlights the importance of mainstreaming millets and prioritising the interests of cultivators, consumers, and investors alike," says Singh. The third area of action is innovations for increasing the area under millet cultivation along with dedicated product development endeavours. This would be helpful in increasing consumption. "Demand generation through public-private partnership models and global initiatives would be helpful in the long run to sustain the fervour,' adds Singh. Acknowledging the significant work done by the government in promoting millets, Singh also suggests that this can well be a jewel in India's soft power diplomacy.

ner at PwC India, prioritises

awareness creation as a key

There are however formidable challenges as highlighted by the report. In most production areas in India, millets are still cultivated using indigenous traditional knowledge (ITK) by smallholder farmers who already lack resources for the adoption of farm mechanisation for millet cultivation. The core reason for this is not the lack of modern millet production technologies but farmers either lacking the awareness or accessibility to those innovations. Another obstacle that needs to be addressed is the short shelf life of processed millets. While prepared meals quickly go rancid, millet flour can only be stored for very short durations. This raises storage concerns and renders processed products more prone to pest infestation.

Going ahead, the Government is looking to drive continuous efforts to provide guidance and support to small entrepreneurs and startups in the millet area, recognising the need for handholding rather than focusing solely on large export houses. There is also focus on

after the launch of the campaign to take it to the next level. Looking further, President of TAFE, TR Kesavan advocates for integrating millets into the regular diet given its nutritional value and climatic resilience and income generation for farmers. To ensure millets receive conscious attention from all stakeholders to transform them into an attractive and profitable crop for millet-growing farmers. Kesavan feels the concept of farmer producer organisations (FPOs) must be intensified, functioning as the cornerstone of this transformation. By seamlessly integrating FPOs with forward and backward linkages, empowering millet FPOs with knowledge and best agricultural practices, a robust supply chain can be forged that spans from the farm to the market. This has the potential to revolutionise the agricultural landscape, adds Kesavan.

sustaining the momentum

## INDIA'S EV ADOPTION TO STAY SUPPRESSED UNTIL LOCAL EV SUPPLY CHAIN DEVELOPS

NIVEDITA MUKHERJEE

s Tata, Maruti Suzuki and Hyundai increase their local EV (including plug-in hybrids) production in India, growth in sales is expected to accelerate and if Tesla moves to produce EVs in India over the medium term, consumers may hold off on buying an EV as they wait for Tesla-branded vehicles, says a research by BMI, a Fitch Solutions Company. The report remains bullish in FY2O23 and expects India's passenger EV sales to increase by 64.1 per cent yo-y to reach nearly 80,000 units sold annually and a passenger EV penetration rate of 1.9 per cent.

Over the long term, the development of a local EV supply chain (mining, refining and cell production) will set the pace of EV adoption in India. However, this will give the local industry time to develop the required skill base to support higher value



add manufacturing such as EV batteries and electronics. Over FY2O22 (April-March), passenger EV sales in India increased by around 143.2 per cent y-o-y to reach an annual sales volume of just over 48,000 units. which represents a passen-

ger EV sales penetration of only 1.2 per cent of the market's total passenger vehicle sales. As more EV models become available in India over 2023-2027, there is likely to be stronger EV uptake; however, it will depend heavily on whether

the Government continues to severely tax imported vehicles and components from mainland China. Over FY2O22 (April-March), BMI estimates that commercial EV (buses and trucks) sales in India reached just under 9,000 units annu-

ally. This represents an EV penetration ratio of only 1.0 per cent. In July 2022, India announced its intention to invest around USD10 billion (or around 50,000 electric buses) in its electric bus fleet to aid in decarbonising the road transport sector.

The report cites lack of a local EV supply chain (mining, refining, battery cell and pack production), as one of the most significant barriers to EV adoption in India, given that the Government has implemented very restrictive import policies for autos and components, especially from China which currently produces over 80 per cent of the global battery supplies. This means higher EV costs, long delays at ports and slow supply of EVs. The Union Budget has

removed the customs duties on imported capital equipment for lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing (which previously ranged from 5 per cent to 20 per cent), which will offer some support. However, the BMI report expects that strong competition for investment in battery manufacturing in other markets such as the US (following the adoption of its Inflation Reduction Act), the EU, China and South Korea, among others, will see the cost of the capital machinery likely increasing over the coming quarters. Over the long term, we expect that plug-in hybrid electric vehicle sales in India will accelerate as automakers such as Maruti Suzuki and Tovota focus on hybrid vehicles instead of battery electric vehicles.

This, along with the po-

tential increased supply of more affordable EVs from mainland China (MG, Wuling And BYD) and a likely 'price war' in India will offer strong upside risk to BMI's current forecast over 2023-2032. We currently expect India's passenger EV sales to average annual growth of 23.1 per cent over 2023-2032 to reach a high of around 355,000 units sold annually representing 4.6 per cent of total sales.

India's EV adoption incentives include reduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on EV sales from 12 per cent to 5 per cent while GST on chargers on charging stations for EVs has been reduced from 18 per cent to

5 per cent. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways announced that EVs will be given green license plates and will be exempted from permit requirements. Over its 2023-2032 forecast period, BMI expects exponential growth in commercial EV sales in India as the government electrifies fleets to control the high level of pollution in cities. In FY2O23, BMI expects commercial EV sales in India to rise by 166.7 per cent as the government moves ahead with its planned bus electrification.

As per the research, commercial EV adoption will face a strong challenge over the medium term from natural gas-powered vehicles. Compressed natural gas (CNG) trucks may fill the gap between internal combustion engine vehicles and EV adoption because it is more affordable. The electrification of India's CV fleet will also benefit from increased interest in hydrogen fuel cell vehicles (FCVs).

#### **BHARAT NCAP**

#### **AUTO INDUSTRY, EXPERTS HAIL NEW CAR TESTING NORMS**

CORRESPONDENT

The Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP) launched on 22 August 2023 and set to be implemented from 1 October, 2023, has received a rousing welcome by the auto industry and sector analysts as a localised, costeffective testing system, potentially boosting the appeal to Indian OEMs to get the vehicle tested. The initiative will also bolster the auto component industry's value chain as well as stimulate the production of cutting-edge components, encourage innovation and create global excellence, in the opinion of component

The Bharat NCAP which makes India the fifth country globally to introduce its own car crash test rating system, aims to enhance car safety standards in India, focusing on vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes and aligns with the government's vision to make the country a global automobile hub. "We welcome the BNCAP safety initiative by Government and believe this effort will raise safety standards, empower

consumers with vital information, and make Indian roads safer for al," assures Hyundai Motor India's Unsoo Kim, MD & CEO, highlighting Hyundai Motor's commitment to delivering the highest safety standards across our entire

product range. According to Prabhudas Liladhar research, the testing cost is Rs 60 lakh per car under Bharat NCAP, compared to Rs 2.5 crore if done overseas. The system involves three kev tests -frontal impact at 64kph, side impact

and side pole impact at 29kph for cars rated 3 stars or more. Cars rated 3 stars or above must possess electronic stability control and front seat belt reminders. Prabhudas Liladhar view is that while this is entirely voluntary and will likely be slow in adoption, "there could be more emphasis on manufacturing of safer vehicles by the OEMs and increased awareness

in customers' mind due to localisation of the testing process over the years".

The roll out of BNCAP norms is, according to Myung-Sik Sohn, Chief Sales and Business Officer, Kia India, an enhanced road safety movement that ex-

BEARAINE CARASSESSMENT PROC

much beyond just safety ratings for cars. Sohn assures the company will wholeheartedly comply with the Government's "visionary approach to safety, encompassing both active and passive safety components". Finding it 'aligned with the Atmanirbhar Vision of the Government' Sohn says,

"this move eliminates the need and associated costs of testing vehicles outside. It will also elevate the global reputation of products from India to the world with good ratings in a big way."

The Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) calls the launch of BNCAP a transformative initiative towards safer vehicles in India. "The launch of

BNCAP protocol is in-

deed historic. It will

lead to the integration of advanced safety features in vehicles thus minimising the risk of road accidents and fatalities," says Vinnie Mehta, Director General, ACMA. "The Indian auto component industry embraces this ini-

tiative wholeheartedly, recognizing its pivotal role in driving growth and global competitiveness," says Mehta Toyota Kirloskar Motor also lauds the Government's decision to introduce

Bharat-NCAP as a step in the right direction. The decision comes at a time when consumers are looking at highest standards of safety

and seeking for safer vehicles, which is steering the purchase decision, points out Vikram Gulati, Country Head & Executive Vice President, TKM. "In addition to empowering consumers, this will also help bring about greater awareness and further transparency by allowing them to know comparative safety aspects of various products on offer," says Gulati, adding that for TKM, safety is non-negotiable. "We have always taken all measures to ensure that our offerings meet the highest standards in all respects. Looking ahead, we will continue to follow a holistic approach which includes making of ever safer cars, with advanced features, as well as focusing on safety educational activities," affirms

Industry body ACMA is anticipating a safer automotive landscape and a future where Indian auto component manufacturers thrive on the global stage, while also contributing to responsible driving practices, reduced healthcare burdens and potential incentives from the insur-

#### **NEW LAUNCH**

#### All new Lexus LM debuts in India

CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI** 

Lexus India, the leading luxury automobile manufacturer, has commenced bookings for its flagship MPV, the new majestic Lexus LM. Lexus India offers environment-friendly electrified vehicles including the LC 500h, LS 500h, RX 350H, RX 500h F-Sport Performance NX 350h and the Made in India ES 300h.

The first-generation Lexus LM was launched in 2020. Offering both 4-seat and 7-seat configurations in the ultra-luxury segment, the new Lexus LM was very well received across markets. In the intervening years, the needs and desires of the global luxury market have further intensified and diversified. In response, the new LM has been completely redesigned. "We are thrilled to announce the much-awaited arrival of the all-new Lexus LM in India," said Lexus India President Naveen Soni. "This is a new category for Lexus in India and we received an overwhelming response for the previous generation LM showcased at Auto Expo ear-



Naveen Soni. President Lexus India

lier." said Soni.

a multi-purpose vehicle delivers comfort, innovative design and craftsmanship. The exterior design projects an elegant presence and aerodynamic form in line with the Lexus design language, the vehicle's lines reflecting functionality and dynamic performance. In the interior, the front cabin design combines practicality with refinement to allow drivers to focus, while the spacious rear suite offers meticulously crafted seats and trim alongside a variety of features and technology to make the most of customers' precious travel time. With its impeccable attention to detail, advanced technologies, and exclusive

amenities, Soni is confident The luxurious all-new LM as that the majestic Lexus LM will redefine ultra-luxury mobility experience for discerning customers in India.

The company which marked its sixth anniversary in India. is looking to expand its customer base in India, enhance sales infrastructure as part of its strategy to grow sustainably in the country. More recently. Lexus India unveiled the all-new 5th generation RX at its first participation in the Auto Expo 2023. Housing a long list of innovations including electrification, intuitive technology, performance & design, the Lexus RX India comes with two powertrains to meet the diverse needs of Lexus guests.

#### **STRATEGY**

#### Tata Motors commits to net zero emissions by 2045

CORRESPONDENT

Tata Motors, India's premier commercial vehicle manufacturer, has pledged to transition its facilities to achieve net zero in greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. The ambitious plan will encompass a variety of technologies, including electric and hydrogen fuel systems. This was shared by Girish Wagh, the company's Executive Director, in a recent interview.

With an annual investment of over Rs 2,000 crore in the commercial vehicle business, Tata Motors is rigorously pursuing a sustainable future. Wagh stated, "Tata Motors is committed to become net zero

in greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. Consequently, we aim to ensure our facilities become zero-emission and are working across multiple vehicle tech-

Currently, Tata Motors operates five plants for commercial vehicles and two for passenger vehicles. Wagh emphasised the company's commitment by explaining that all these facilities will migrate to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

The strategies for this impressive shift include battery electric and hydrogen fuel technologies, both of which can be incorporated in internal combustion engines or fuel cell electrics. Signifying its dedication, Tata Motors has inked



a memorandum of understanding with the Jharkhand government to establish a manufacturing unit for these technologies. The initial focus

will be on the hydrogen internal combustion engine, followed by battery electric or fuel cell electric, as determined by their technology roadmap.

In a related development, vehicles are produced at the TCPL Green Energy Solutions, a subsidiary of Tata Cummins Pvt Ltd, partnered with the Jharkhand government. They aim to invest over Rs 350 crore in the coming years to manufacture fuel-agnostic powertrain solutions. This will include technologies like hydrogen Internal Combustion Engine (ICE), battery and fuel cell electric vehicle systems, and fuel delivery frameworks. Tata Cummins Pvt Ltd itself is a joint collaboration between Tata Motors and global power tech giant, Cummins Inc.

Highlighting Tata Motor's significant presence in Jharkhand, Wagh noted that more than 80% of their heavy commercial Jamshedpur plant, in tandem with the Tata Cummins joint venture facility which produces engines.

The company's investment in the state is further illustrated by their plan to invest over Rs 350 crore in the first phase. This will cater to manufacturing hydrogen internal combustion engines with an annual capacity of 10,000 units. Regarding employment, Wagh revealed that their engine manufacturing plant would initially create 350 jobs. Given the extensive supply chain, this move is expected to generate employment almost tenfold in associated sectors. Emphasising the company's deep ties with Jharkhand, Wagh

remarked, "Our initiative will make Jharkhand a hub for green and next-gen technologies, contributing significantly to reducing India's carbon footprint."

Reaffirming Tata Motors' commitment to the nation's 'Make in India' initiative, Wagh also mentioned that the firm's annual capex in the commercial vehicle sector would remain around Rs 2,000 crore in the upcoming fiscal. In Q1 ending June 30, Tata Motors reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 3,300.65 crore and a revenue of Rs 1,01,528.49 crore. A member of the USD 128 billion Tata group, founded in 1868, Tata Motors remains a global frontrunner in automobile manufacturing.

## India's soil tech surge: Paving the way for green farming

#### **OPINION**

#### MELIND DESHPANDE



griculture has been the backbone of In-Adia's economy for centuries, providing sustenance and livelihoods to millions. In recent times. however, the sector has faced numerous challenges, including degrading soil health, dwindling water resources, and unpredictable weather patterns. In this era of rapid technological advancement, the marriage of agriculture and innovation has become essential to ensure food security, sustainability, and economic prosperity. One such groundbreaking innovation that promises to transform Indian farming is advanced soil testing technology. India, with its rich history of farming, is poised to lead the way by integrating cuttingedge soil testing technologies into its agricultural

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF **SOIL HEALTH**

practices, thus ensuring a

more productive, sustain-

able, and resilient future.

Soil is the foundation upon which the entire agricultural ecosystem rests. The health of the soil directly affects crop yields, nutritional val-

ue, and environmental sus-

tainability. Over the years, improper land management, excessive use of chemical fertilizers, and monoculture farming have taken a toll on soil health, leading to nutrient depletion, erosion, and reduced water-holding ca-

Recognizing the criti-

cal role soil health plays in agricultural productivity, researchers and scientists have been striving to develop advanced soil testing technology that goes beyond traditional methods. These new tools offer a deeper understanding of soil composition, nutrient levels, and microbial activity, enabling farmers to make informed decisions and implement targeted strategies. Coupled with data analytics and machine learning algorithms, these technologies can generate real-time recommendations tailored to the specific needs of a farmer's plot. This not only optimises resource allocation but also mitigates the excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, reducing environmental impact.

#### THE ADVENT OF AD-**VANCED SOIL TESTING TECHNOLOGY**

Advanced soil testing technology involves a combination of cutting-edge techniques such as remote sensing, spectroscopy, and molecular biology. These techniques allow for rapid, accurate, and cost-effective assessment of soil health parameters. One of the most promising advancements is the use of hyperspectral imaging, which provides a detailed analysis of soil

properties by capturing the reflected light spectra. This non-destructive method enables farmers to identify nu-

Furthermore, molecular biology techniques, such as DNA sequencing, can reveal the microbial diversity present in the soil. This knowledge is invaluable as it helps farmers choose the right crop varieties and implement practices that support beneficial microorganisms, fostering a healthy and balanced soil ecosystem.

#### **BENEFITS FOR INDIAN FARMERS**

India's vast and diverse agricultural landscape makes it an ideal candidate for the adoption of advanced soil

testing technology. With varying soil types, climate conditions, and cropping patterns, a one-size-fitstrient deficiencies, organic all approach is ineffective. matter content, and even Through precision agriculpotential disease outbreaks. ture enabled by these technologies, Indian farmers can fine-tune their practices, op-

> timizing yields and conserving resources.

The adoption of advanced soil testing technology holds immense promise for Indian farmers. By accurately assessing soil health,

farmers can tailor their agricultural practices to maximize yields, reduce input costs, and minimize environmental impact. Precise knowledge of nutrient levels allows for targeted fertilization, minimizing overuse of chemicals and preventing nutrient runoff into water

Moreover, this technology empowers farmers to engage in precision agriculture, where they can optimize planting patterns, irrigation schedules, and pest management strategies. In a country where smallholder farmers dominate, these innovations level the playing field, enabling them to compete in a global market while practicing sustainable agriculture.

#### **GOVERNMENT INITIA-TIVES AND PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT**

The Indian government has recognized the potential of advanced soil testing technology and has taken steps to promote its adoption. Initiatives such as the Soil Health Card Scheme aim to provide farmers with per-

sonalized soil health information and recommendations. These cards are based on comprehensive soil testing, empowering farmers with data-driven insights to improve productivity and sustainability.

Additionally, the private sector has been actively contributing to the development and dissemination of these technologies. Startups and agri-tech companies are designing user-friendly, portable soil testing kits that can be used on-site, even in remote areas. These kits provide instant results, allowing farmers to make immediate decisions and adjustments.

#### **CHALLENGES AND** THE WAY FORWARD

While the future of farming

with advanced soil testing technology looks promising, challenges remain. The initial investment required for adopting these technologies might deter some farmers, particularly those with limited resources. Moreover, ensuring that farmers can effectively interpret and implement the results of

these tests is crucial. Train-

ing and capacity-building

efforts are essential to

bridge this knowledge gap. Interpreting the complex data generated by these technologies can also pose a challenge, especially for those without access to technical expertise. Userfriendly interfaces and training programs can bridge this knowledge gap, ensuring that even the most remote farmers can benefit

from these innovations.

#### **A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT**

The integration of advanced soil testing technology into Indian agriculture is not a task for any single stakeholder. It demands collaboration between government bodies, agricultural research institutions, technology providers, and farmers themselves. Policy support in the form of incentives, subsidies, and regulations is crucial to incentivize adoption. Research institutions can drive innovation by tailoring these technologies to India's unique agricultural context. Technology providers need to develop userfriendly tools that can be easily operated by farmers, regardless of their technical prowess.

Advanced soil testing technology has the potential to revolutionise Indian agriculture, paving the way for sustainable, productive, and resilient farming systems. By harnessing the power of innovation, Indian farmers can address the pressing challenges of soil degradation, water scarcity, and climate change. As the nation strives for food security and economic growth, investing in advanced soil testing technology is not just a choice but a necessity. The time has come for a new era of farming - one driven by knowledge, data, and sustainable practices. However, realizing this potential requires a collective effort, driven by the conviction that technology, when harnessed wisely, can pave the way for a greener and more prosperous tomor-

The author is the Founder and CEO of BhoomiSeva, HCF Tech Private Limited and distributor for Bhu-Vision (Krishi-RASTAA) which is an IOT based automated soil testing and agronomy advisory platform.

**URBANIZATION** 

#### PROS AND CONS OF WIRELESS ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING



ASHISH DESWAL

Over the past ten years, there has been a tremendous increase in the development of wireless charging systems for electric vehicles. Amidst the rapid urbanization happening worldwide, the need to move away from gasoline and diesel-powered cars to usher into cleaner cities is the most powerful catalyst. Simultaneously, electric vehicles are becoming more effective and competitively priced, which is another crucial factor responsible for their unprecedented growth. Parallel to this revolution,

Wireless Electric Vehicle (EV) charging technology is transforming the entire mobility ecosystem into a desired shape.

Wireless charging technology eliminates the need for physical cables and connectors, making the charging process more convenient, efficient, and user-friendly. Besides, a slew of other benefits make this technology incredibly impactful in the future. Some of the pros associated with wireless charging technology are listed below.

#### **CONVENIENCE:**

**1.** Wireless EV charging eliminates the need for physical cables and connectors. Drivers can park their vehicles over a charging pad, and the charging process initiates automatically, making it more convenient and user-friendly. 2. Reduced Wear and Tear: Without physical connections, there is less wear and tear on the charging infra-



structure and the EV's charging port, potentially leading to increased longevity and reduced maintenance costs.

#### 3. SAFETY:

The absence of exposed cables reduces the risk of tripping hazards and electrical accidents, making wireless

EV charging a safer option, especially in public spaces. **4.** Increased Adoption: The convenience of wireless charging can encourage

more people to adopt electric vehicles, as it alleviates range anxiety and simplifies the charging process for consumers.

mous Vehicles: Wireless charging is well-suited for autonomous electric vehicles, as it allows for seamless charging without human intervention, further supporting the development of autonomous driving technology.

Every pro has an effect and while the pros outweigh the cons, some of them are as fol-

#### LOWER EFFICIENCY:

1. Wireless charging systems typically experience lower efficiency than traditional wired charging due to energy losses during induction. This could lead to longer charging times and slightly higher

energy consumption. 2. Higher Implementation Costs: The installation and maintenance of wireless charging infrastructure can be more expensive than wired charging systems, which may hinder widespread adoption, especially in the early stages.

3. Electromagnetic Interfer-

Ashish Deswal is the Founder of EarthtronEV.

As technology advances

cerns about potential elec-

tromagnetic interference

with sensitive electronics,

though extensive testing

and safety standards aim to

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

mitigate these risks.

and infrastructure expands, wireless EV charging can encourage the adoption of electric vehicles by alleviating range anxiety and simplifying the charging process. Embracing this technology can support India's ambitious goals to reduce pollution and promote sustainable transportation, making it the future of EV technology in the nation. Even though wireless EV charging has some challenges, the benefits it offers are more extensive and lasting, which encourages stakeholders to adopt it and facilitate the growth of EV infrastructure in India.

#### LEGALLY SPEAKING

**ELECTION IN JEOPARDY** 

## SC CHIDES LADAKH FOR **ELECTION SYMBOL DENIAL**

CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI** 

The Supreme Court has recently termed the act of the Ladakh administration as "unfair" of not granting the 'plough' poll symbol to the National Conference for the forthcoming Ladakh Hill Council elections despite a

The bench comprising of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah orally observed while hearing the appeal of the Union Territory of Ladakh against the order of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court that, "It is unfair, we will set aside the election schedule if need arises."

directive from the high court.

The Union Territory (UT) has lodged an appeal against the order of the High Court mandating the allocation of the 'plough' symbol to the concerned party. Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, who represents the party, conveyed that the closing date for filing nominations was on the 16th of August.

The bench posted the UT administration on Monday as the first item and cautioned it that the court may set aside the poll schedule.

Previously, the National Conference communicated that the apex court refused



to suspend the order of the Jammu & Kashmir High Court regarding the concession of the 'plough' poll symbol to the party for employment in the Ladakh Hill Council elections.

The Jammu & Kashmir High Court dismissed the plea presented by the Ladakh administration against the ruling of a single bench,

which authorised NC candidates to engage in the impending polls for the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Kargil, under the banner of the party's symbol.

The administration approached a division bench of the high court, opposing the singular bench's decision dated August 9, which order of the High Court will prevail".

According to a notification published by the election department on the 5th of August, the election for 26 out of the 30 seats on the LAHDC, Kargil, is scheduled for the 10th of September, counting of votes will take place four

#### POCSO court sentences juvenile to life imprisonment

CORRESPONDENT

A POCSO court has handed down a life imprisonment verdict to a juvenile offender in connection to double murder and gang rape.

The court has further imposed a cumulative fine amounting to Rs 46,000 on the convicted individual.

Brijesh Kumar Pandey, the designated Special Public Prosecutor, stated after holding the juvenile guilty on August 22, the Special POCSO Court, presided over by Additional District Judge Rahul Singh, officially delivered the sentences on Friday.

The sentence was pronounced under various sections of law in which the juvenile was found culpable.

Pandey stated that the court, in accordance with the provisions of Section 302/34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), meted out a life imprisonment sentence accompanied by a fine of Rs 15,000. Additionally, the court sentenced the offender to 5 years of imprisonment along with a fine of Rs 5,000 under section 452 of the IPC.

A five-year jail term with a fine of Rs 5,000 was imposed under section 363 of the IPC. Furthermore, a 6-year imprisonment term and a fine of Rs 5,000 were assigned under section 201 of the IPC. Notably, a oneyear imprisonment period was accompanied by a fine of Rs 1,000 under section 323 of the IPC. The court imposed upon the juvenile offender a rigorous imprisonment term spanning 20 years, in addition to a fine of Rs 15,000, in line with section 5g/6 of the POCSO Act.

Pandey stated that in the double murder and gangrape of two minor girls, took place on September 14, 2022, there were a total of 6 accused among whom 4 were adults and 2 were juveniles.

He stated that on the 14th of August, the 4-adult accused were subjected to sentencing. Zunaid and Sunil were sentenced to life imprisonment, while Karimuddin and Arif received a 6-year rigorous imprisonment term.

It is noteworthy that the juvenile age of 16 - 18, underwent trial within the specialised jurisdiction of the POCSO court. Consequently, a sentence was pronounced on Friday. Meanwhile, the trial for the 6th juvenile accused is currently underway at the juvenile justice board.

Tragically, two teenage girls in a village located within the jurisdiction of the Nighasan police station area were subjected to a horrific sequence of events on the 14th of September, 2022. They were abducted from their residence, subjected to a heinous gang-rape, and brutally strangled to death. Their lifeless bodies were subsequently found hanged from a tree within a sugarcane field. In response to this heinous incident, authorities promptly constituted a Special Investigation Team tasked with unravelling the complexities of the case. This endeavour led six ac-

cused individuals involved

in the gruesome act.

**PM DEGREE ROW** 

#### SC DENIES RELIEF TO KEJRIWAL AGAINST GUJARAT HC ORDER

CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court has recently declined to entertain Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea challenging the high court order rejecting his request for staying criminal defamation proceedings initiated by Gujarat University against him.

These proceedings came from Kejriwal's comments regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's educational qualifications.

Gujarat University Registrar Piyush Patel instituted a defamation lawsuit against Kejriwal and AAP leader Sanjay Singh, citing their alleged remarks subsequent to the Gujarat High Court's annulment

**FAILURE TO APPEAR** 

of an order from the Chief Information Commissioner. This order directed the disclosure of information concerning Modi's degrees to them under the RTI Act.

A bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and SVN Bhatti communicated that they are not serving notice on the plea due to the ongoing proceedings before the Gujarat High Court, which are scheduled for a hearing on the 29th of

The bench conveyed that both Gujarat University and Kejriwal can address their concerns before the high court.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, stated initially that the high court denied an interim suspension of the defamation proceedings against him.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the University, asserted that Kejriwal had suppressed certain facts.

On August 11, the Gujarat High Court dismissed the rejected their plea for a plea made by Kejriwal and Sanjay Singh, seeking an interim halt to the criminal defamation proceedings against them.

Previously, a metropolitan court in Gujarat summoned Kejriwal and Singh in connection with the defamation case, prompted by their "sarcastic" and "derogatory" statements related to

PM Modi's degree. This matter is scheduled for a hearing on the 31st of

the polls.

Subsequently, the two AAP leaders lodged a revision application in the sessions court, contesting the metropolitan court's summons in the case.

directed the NC to approach

the Election Department of

the Administration of Union

Territory of Ladakh to notify

the allocation of the reserved

'plough' symbol already as-

signed for employment in

The National Conference

stated that if the order to al-

lot the party in its symbol is

not issued then "contempt

However, on the 7th of temporary suspension of the trial, prompting them to approach the Gujarat High Court. The sessions court will now deliberate on the revision application on September 16.

Only Kejriwal moved the apex court challenging the high court order of August

The complainant asserted that these comments, aimed at Gujarat University, were defamatory and detrimen-

tal to the university's reputation, which holds a respected position amongst the public.

Patel stated in his complaint, "Their statements were sarcastic and intentionally made to hurt the

August, the sessions court prestige of the university." On the 31st of March, the Gujarat High Court quashed a 2016 order from the Central Information Commission, which directed the Gujarat University to divulge information about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's degree to Kejriwal. The high court deemed Kejriwal's RTI request as "politically vexatious and motivated," rather than being rooted in "sound public interest considerations."

**PMLA CASE** 

#### **CBI COURT DENIES ANSARI'S PLEA SEEKING CLEAN CHIT**

CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A special CBI court has recently declined the plea of mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari seeking a implicated in the PMLA clean chit in a Prevention of Money Laundering Act ber, 2022. It was alleged he (PMLA) case. While de-

livering the verdict, Judge Anurodh Mishra stated the existence of preliminary evidence against Ansari that subjects him to a legal trial.

Mukhtar Ansari had been case on the 7th of Novemearned crores in an illegal

manner from a construction firm, which he has unlawfully seized. Notably, his wife Afsa Ansari and brother-inlaw Atif Raja were reportedly affiliated partners.

The court has fixed the framing of charges against Ansari to take place on the 13th of September.

IN MUZAFFARNAGAR

#### FIR registered against teacher for communal remarks

CORRESPONDENT

An Uttar Pradesh-based lawyer SM Haider Rizvi has recently moved to the NHRC seeking registration of an FIR against the teacher of a private school in the Muzaffarnagar district.

The teacher has been accused of making communal remarks and instructing her students to physically assault a fellow classmate belonging to the Muslim community, studying in class 2.

This development transpired shortly after a video recording of the alleged incident went viral across the internet. Consequently, the Muzaffarnagar Police initiated the registration of an FIR against Tripta Tyagi, a teacher of Neha Public School

The complaint submitted by Advocate Rizvi advocates for the initiation of an FIR, to be probed by an impartial agency, against Tyagi under the provisions of Sections 153A, 295A, 298, 323, 504, and 506 of IPC. Additionally, the complaint requests compensation for the victim schoolboy, alongside his enrollment in a school within Delhi or any other district at the state's expense.



the incident reveals a "flagitious" mindset of the teacher who "nurses' hatred against a particular community".

Further, the complaint states, "The video, which was circulated on social media all across the globe not only impacts the image and reputation of our country but also casts a blow on the secular fabric of the country, which is already dented considerably because of similar unscrupulous elements whose intent is only to ridicule and mock the country and the administration, with a view to further their nefarious intent of creating a faction amongst the various religious sects which hitherto lived amidst comity and brotherhood."

Furthermore, it has also been contended in the complaint that the criminal act of the teacher has the potential to stoke inter-community tensions, thereby fostering a potentially explosive situation in the State and the Country, which may have bigger, larger ramifications.

Moreover, the complaint has sought a probe into the matter by an independent agency like CBI, ATS by claiming that the SSP Muzaffarnagar has "tried to cover up the issue" by mentioning that the child was beaten up was not able to learn a particular table and that was the reason why he was beaten up.

Further, the complaint submits, "This statement is not only a sham, but a misstatement which is factually also incorrect and goes on to prove that the District Police of Muzaffarnagar would not be in a position to carry out a free and fair investigation.'

#### Delhi Court awards 4-month sentence to ex MLA Rambeer Shokeen

CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Rouse Avenue court awarded 4 months' sentence to former MLA Rambeer Shokeen on Saturday due to his failure to appear before

Additionally, a fine of Rs 15,000 was imposed upon

Shokeen had been declared a proclaimed offender and was indicted alongside Neeraj Bawania and others in the MCOCA case, all of whom were subsequently acquitted.

Special Judge Geetanjali Goel pronounced a fourmonth sentence for Shokeen, accompanied by a Rs 15,000 fine, in accordance with Section 174 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Previously, on August 23,



acquitted jailed gangster Neeraj Sehrawat alias Neeraj Bawania, his sibling Pankaj Sehrawat, maternal uncle Ex MLA Rambeer Shokeen, and other accused in a case registered under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCO-

CA) that had been initiated 8

of the Delhi Police in 2015.

However, the court convicted Shokeen for nonappearance before the court even after proclamation against him.

Special MP-MLA Court Judge Geetanjali Goel subsequently acquitted the accused Pankaj Sherawat,

aj Bawania, Naveen Dabas alias Bali, and Rahul Dabas alias Kala, asserting that they were acquitted of the charges under Section 3 of MCOCA.

Regarding accused Rambeer Shokeen, the court acquitted him of the offences under Sections 3 (2), 3 (3), 3

tion 174-A (non-appearance before the court) of the IPC. The court directed the acquitted accused for furnishing bail bond in terms of Section 437-A Cr.PC. Furthermore, the court in-

(5), and Section 4 of MCOCA.

However, he was convicted

for the offence under Sec-

structed the State to provide an affidavit detailing the expenses incurred by the prosecuting agency within two days, as per the ruling of the Delhi High Court in the case of Karan v. State NCT of Delhi.

The court stated, "This being a matter pertaining to an MLA it needs to be disposed of expeditiously." Advocate M S Khan ap-

peared for accused Neeraj Bawania and Advocate Sumeet Shokeen for convict Rambeer Shokeen

**BANKING SECTOR** 

## **UNION BANK RAISES EQUITY** CAPITAL OF RS 5,000 CR VIA QIP

CORRESPONDENT

n one of the largest equity capital raising issue in public sector banking space in the recent past, Union Bank of India has successfully raised equity capital of Rs 5000 crore via qualified institutions placement (QIP) on 25 August, 2023. The issue which opened on 22 August, 2023 received 100 per cent subscription.

India's 5th largest public sector bank allotted 57.77 crore shares at a price of Rs86.55 per share (including premium of Rs 76.55 per share) aggregating to Rs 5,000 crore representing a discount of 4.9945 per cent to the floor price determined as per regulatory guidelines. The Managing Director and CEO A Manimekhalai views the successful capital raising as a demonstration of continued faith of investors on the bank's growth trajectory and

prospects. The bank has received significant and encouraging re-



sponse from the market and seen participation by diversified investor base which include banks, asset management companies, insurance companies and foreign

portfolio investors. The QIP proceeds will augment the

capital base and help us pur-

sue growth opportunities as

we endeavour to create value

for the customers and share-

The overall allocation is a mix of 13 FPIs and 38 domestic institutional investors (DIIs) mostly long only investors, thereby also

of the shareholder base of Union Bank of India. As on 30 June, 2023, the bank's capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR) and Common Equity Tier was 15.95 per cent and 12.34 per cent respectively. Amount raised through this QIP issue will augment Bank's Common Equity Tier I ratio & overall Capital Adequacy ratio, each by about 84 basis points.

As on 30 June, 2023, the public shareholding in the Union Bank of India stood at 16.51 per cent. Consequent to the equity capital raising, the public shareholding in the bank increased to 23.01 per cent and consequently, the shareholding of Government to 76.99 per cent. The Union Bank of India, established in 1919, has a total business of 19.46 trillion as on 30 June, 2023, customer base of over 21.8 crore and operates through 8,558 domestic branches, three international branches, 10,195 ATMs and workforce of over 75,300 employees.

#### **HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

#### RIL, Oberoi to co-manage three hospitality projects



CORRESPONDENT

Reliance Industries has entered into an understanding with The Oberoi Hotels and Resorts to jointly manage three properties across India and the UK. These include the upcoming Anant Vilas Hotel in Mumbai's Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), the iconic Stoke Park in the UK and another planned project in Guiarat.

Anant Vilas has been con-

ceived as the first metro-centric property as part of the iconic luxury 'Vilas' portfolio run by Oberoi. Anant Vilas is located in the bustling business district of Bandra Kurla Complex in Mumbai which is fast becoming a mixed use destination with business, hospitality, shopping, F&B, arts and culture, educational and residential uses and high footfall of citizens and visitors to the city.

Stoke Park, a subsidiary of Reliance Industries, owns

Adani deploys Rs 2.36 lakh cr

sports and leisure facilities in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire. The facilities include a hotel, sports facilities and one of the highest rated golf courses in Europe. Oberoi will assist with RIL to upgrade the facilities that will include a comprehensive upgrade of Stoke Park, including golf and other sports facilities.

The new project in Gujarat, envisaged as another hotel project to augment the tourism potential in the state of Gujarat, is under implementation.

#### FINANCIAL LITERACY

#### SEBI CALLS FOR STEPPING UP INVESTOR PROTECTION, GREATER FINANCIAL LITERACY

CORRESPONDENT

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has called for collective responsibility of regulators and market players to convert savers into investors and is keen to explore for itself the role of providing a level playing field for the issuers, intermediaries and investors. The last few years have seen a definite move from savings to investing but the pace has been slow and the market regulator feels there is now need to constantly engage with market participants, spread awareness and speed things up for the economy to grow and become a developed nation.

These are the key takeaways of an ASSOCHAM conference on investors protection, education and awareness, timed well when investors looking at the Indian market with a long term growth perspective, want to be sure of protection of money, says Nitin Jain, AVP, Resurgent India. "A strong investor protection is a



great confidence booster," says Jain. The increased participation of Indian institutional investors has made the economy more resilient, according to VS Sundaram. Executive Director, SEBI. "Investors are the backbone of the entire financial system. In India, we all are good savers but a few steps behind as investors. It is the collective responsibility of the regulator, intermediaries and issuing companies to educate the savers and con-

vert them into investors." Sundaram told industry and stakeholders. While with the adoption of technology and systemic improvements, many of the earlier existing problems have been eliminated, the number of investors coming into the system has increased due to the realisation that the process is reliable, sustainable and beneficial. Because of increased retail investors and institutional investments dependence on FPI's to sustain market momentum has decreased comparatively. Moreover, the investor base is heavily skewed with a majority of investors constituting about 60 per cent coming from Tier-I cities. which has made increased outreach to smaller cities to raise education and awareness and highlighting the available protection for investors as an imperative. "We are writing and rewriting rules to protect the investors. Investors must follow basic safety precautions like making nominations," Sundaram added.

A key constraint in the system is the prevailing lower perception of how much investor protection has happened in India than the global perspective of investor protection, points out Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth. "We calculated household savings at Rs 670 lakh crore using data from RBI and other sources. The assets under management of equity and mutual fund is lower than savings. If equity in a structured format

is not going to be a part of India's household savings, it will never beat inflation," explains Azeez.

These can be overcome, ac-

cording to Hitender Mehta, Senior Member Managing Partner, Centrum Legal, if topics like investors protection, education and awareness are widely discussed beyond metros while Chairman of Farsight Group, Naresh Maheshwari, puts emphasis on investors being aware of their rights and obligations, the type of product they are investing in and the remedies available to them. "SEBI as a regulator has come up with a robust system of investor protection which needs to be widely disseminated," suggests Maheshwari. "Promoting investors protection, education and awareness is closely linked to financial literacy," agrees Sameet Gambhir, Company Secretary, DCM Shriram who points out that with most information available in the internet, the key is to understand which information is relevant to an

#### CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI** 

INITIATIVE

The Adani Group, through a series of strategic initiatives, has increased its liquidity position at the portfolio level to finish with a cash balance of INR 42,115 crore at the end of the June quarter of FY24. The portfolio companies diligently focused on bolstering their financial standing, ensuring a robust foundation for their ambitious projects.

The key measures that contributed to this positive transformation include significant deployment of equity resulted in total equity increasing to 55.77 per cent of the total assets as compared to 40.16 per cent at the end of FY19. Equity deployed by the end of FY23 was INR 2,35,812 crore, much higher than net debt of INR 1,87,087 crore. Well-diversified finance sourcing from global as well as domestic banks, capital markets and others has eliminated concentration risk while conservative planning has provided for a robust maturity cover.

Maturity profile of debt for all the companies exceeds cover period in all cases, ensuring refinancing protection and eliminating systemic risks.

Through a 10-year equity programme with long-only global investors formulated in 2016, the Adani portfolio has attracted over USD 9.5 billion (does not include the recent stake sale in Adani Power to GQG Partners) since 2019. This programme has supported strategic priorities, including pre-payment of marginlinked share-backed financing. Promoter level entity has generated INR 30,900 crore (does not include recent stake sale in Adani Power to GQG Partners) through secondary market transactions since March

The Adani portfolio delivered a robust well-rounded performance in the June quarter with portfolio-level EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) increasing to INR 23,532 crore, 42 per cent higher year-onyear. The core infrastruc-

worth equity by end FY23 ture and utility platform, which generates stable and assured cashflows, accounted for 86 per cent of the total portfolio EBITDA and stood at INR 20,233

> The success of incubation story continued under the Adani Enterprises as airports, green hydrogen and other businesses under the flagship incubator saw their profits almost double year-on-year. The robust portfolio performance was primarily driven by the renewable power business under Adani Green, infrastructure businesses under Adani Enterprises and cement businesses under Adani Cement.

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#### **KOREA TOURISM FESTIVAL CELEBRATES 50-YEAR DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH INDIA**

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Marking 50 years of diplomatic relations between Korea and India, the Korea Tourism Festival commenced with a glamorous gala, highlighting the rich cultural ties between the two nations. Notable figures like Young-

geun Lee of Korea Tourism Organization and Roshan M. Thomas from India's Ministry of Tourism, graced the event, emphasising the value of such international collaborations. An emblem of the deep-rooted bond, Indian celebrity Anushka Sen

**Dive Deeper into KOREA! KOREA CULTURE** & TOURISM **FESTIVAL 2023** 

was appointed the Honorary Ambassador of Korea Tourism for India. One of the evening's highlights was the introduction of Korean temple food to India, presented by Grand Master Temple Food Guru Wookwan.

Addressing attendees, Myongkil Yun of Korea Tourism Organization remarked, "The festival stands as a beacon of the enduring cultural relationships be-

look forward to further enriching these bonds and welcoming more Indian travellers to explore Korea." Aligned with the 'Visit Korea Year 2023-24' initiative,

tween our countries. We

the event's triumph highlights Korea's escalating allure for Indian tourists. With over 49,580 Indian visitors recorded by June 2023, expectations are set to soar to 120,000 by year-end.

Furthermore, the Korea Culture and Tourism Festival is set to entertain the masses at Ambience Mall. Gurugram, showcasing various aspects of Korean heritage and lifestyle.

#### Reliance Retail launches youth fashion retail format

CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

'YOUSTA'

Reliance Retail has launched its youth-focused fashion retail format, Yousta with the opening of its first store in Hyderabad's Sarath City Mall. With contemporary tech-enabled store layouts, Yousta offers high-fashion at affordable prices targeted at young consumers. All products, for instance, are priced below Rs 999, with a majority priced below Rs 499. Yousta is planned as a young and dynamic brand which will grow and evolve with the youth of this country. The team will continuously work with India's younger generation to



understand their evolving fashion needs. Yousta stores will have several tech touch points, including QR-enabled screens for information sharing, self-checkout counters, complimentary Wi-Fi and

charging stations. Reliance Retail Limited reported a consolidated turnover of Rs 260,364 crore (\$ 31.7 billion) and net profit of Rs 9,181 crore (\$ 1.1 billion) for the year ended 31 March, 2023.