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INTERNATIONAL

WHAT THE PARTY CONGRESS MEANS FOR CHINA

The story so far:

On October 16, the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) will convene in Beijing for a week-long gathering. The 20th National Congress of the CPC, a once-in-five-year event, will mark sweeping changes in the leadership of China's ruling party, amend the party's constitution, and set the policy direction for the next five years, which will impact both China's domestic and international policies.

What happens at a Party Congress?

The CPC convenes a national congress every five years. On September 25, the party announced it had chosen 2,296 delegates to attend this year's event, representing various provinces, the military, different ministries, branches of government, and society. Choosing new leadership, amending the party constitution, and setting the main policy direction are the three broad objectives of a congress. The delegates "vote" on various resolutions, including amendments to the CPC's constitution, and in theory, choose a new Central Committee, which in turn is supposed to "elect" a new Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). In practice, however, the amendments and personnel appointments are decided in advance by the party leadership, and not by the delegates who merely rubber stamp the decisions. The party briefly considered the idea of "straw polls" to elect the Politburo and PBSC, which was introduced in 2012. It was, however, discarded by current General Secretary Xi Jinping at the 19th Congress in 2017, with the party later saying the process had been "corrupted". Former security czar Zhou Yongkang and former Chongqing party chief Sun Zhengcai, who was once seen as a likely successor to Mr. Xi, were both purged and jailed for corruption by Mr. Xi. They were accused of "taking advantage of" the straw-poll system with "votes-soliciting corruption" activities. At the last congress in 2017, Mr. Xi abandoned the voting system and, according to the party, held "direct consultations" with 57 serving and retired party leaders to decide on personnel appointments. Mr. Xi is thought to have similarly done so ahead of this year's congress.

What are the likely changes in leadership in the offing?

Perhaps the most significant outcome of any congress is the selection of the next PBSC, the party's highest ruling body. Since 1992, congresses, every 10 years, have also selected a new party General Secretary, with Jiang Zemin taking the reins in 1992, Hu Jintao in 2002, and Xi Jinping in 2012. The 20th congress this year will mark a break in the 30-year precedent, with Mr. Xi, in 2018, ending term limits and the 10-year norm that had enabled smooth transitions of power, throwing into uncertainty how future successions in leadership will take place. There will, however, still be sweeping changes in the rest of the top leadership, including the 25-member Politburo and the 7-member PBSC, with leaders aged 68 and higher set to retire. Mr. Xi (69) is the lone exception to the "seven up, eight down" age rule. While at least two of the current PBSC will retire, four others, including second-ranked leader and Premier Li Keqiang, are under 68, so could continue. Mr. Li will, however, step down as Premier having served two terms. The composition of the next PBSC and the selection of the next Premier will serve as key indicators of the extent of Mr. Xi's influence, reflected in how many of his appointees will assume top positions in the next leadership, or whether Mr. Xi will have to compromise with other power-centres in the party and accommodate their preferred appointees instead, such as officials close to the former leaders, Mr. Jiang and Mr.



Hu. The Chinese military will also see a sweeping change in its top leadership, with the Central Military Commission, which Mr. Xi will continue to lead for another five years, set to choose new members.

What are the implications?

Besides the changes in personnel, the congress will pass amendments to the party constitution, and indicate the broad directions in policy for the next five years, which will be outlined by Mr. Xi in a speech to the congress. At the previous 19th Congress, Xi Jinping's ideology, officially called "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", was written to the constitution, elevating him on a par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping as the only leaders with eponymous ideologies in the constitution. New amendments may formalise Mr. Xi's status as a "core" of the party leadership. Recent pronouncements have called on the party to uphold what it calls "two establishes" — enshrining Mr. Xi's "core status" and his ideology as a leading priority for the party. This will likely indicate even more centralisation of power in the coming term.

On the policy front, continuity, rather than change, is expected. The current Central Committee's annual plenum in 2020 approved the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035, which emphasised some of Mr. Xi's campaigns, including "common prosperity" to reduce inequality as well as address monopolies, particularly with regard to private firms in the tech sector, which has seen a crackdown; "dual circulation" to give more primacy to the domestic market as a driver of growth to complement external trade; and self-reliance in key strategic sectors. The immediate concern for many in China, however, is whether Mr. Xi will decide to continue with his "zero-COVID" policy or begin to finally consider an exit strategy, after the conclusion of the congress which is expected to hail the success of China's pandemic response as one of Mr. Xi's biggest legacies.

RUSSIA'S PROLONGED CONFRONTATION WITH THE WEST IS PUTTING INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS UNDER STRESS

In abstaining once again on a major United Nations resolution on Ukraine, India has not surprised observers at home but has disappointed some of its friends abroad. But the issue at hand in the latest United Nations Security Council resolution — Russia's brazen violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity — has seen Delhi underline its "deep discomfort" with Moscow's action. India has been signalling its growing unease with Russia's Ukraine policy in the last few weeks. At a regional summit meeting in Samarkand last month Prime Minister Narendra Modi had told the Russian leader Vladimir Putin that this was not an "era of war". The PM's peace message has been amplified by the external affairs minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, during his engagements at the UN and in Washington DC during the last few days. India was not alone in conveying its anxieties with Russian drift in Ukraine. President Xi Jinping too had expressed Chinese concerns over Russia's Ukraine policy in his meeting with Putin in Samarkand.

Putin had promised the two leaders — and major partners of Russia — that Moscow would address their concerns but was in no mood to change course on Ukraine. He embarked on a significant escalation of the conflict by ordering a general mobilisation to reverse the Russian military setbacks in Ukraine, renewing the threat to use nuclear weapons, and annexing the occupied territories that he is not even fully in control of. The rest of the world has reacted with outrage. The resolution denouncing Russia's violation of the UN Charter got 10 votes in support; Russia opposed the resolution; and India along with China, Brazil, and Gabon abstained. Even as it abstained, Delhi sought to signal that Russian actions are becoming a political embarrassment



for India. While its long-standing reliance on Russia for its defence needs stops India from denouncing Russian actions, it can no longer turn a blind eye to the impact of Russian actions on its own strategic interests and political values.

Meanwhile, as Russia plunges into a prolonged confrontation with the West over Ukraine, India's growing partnership with the US and European states is coming under stress. That Delhi is acutely conscious of this danger is reflected in its active efforts to deepen multilateral cooperation with its Western partners. Last week, Delhi worked with the West to fend off the Chinese effort at the International Atomic Energy Agency to castigate Australia's acquisition of nuclear powered submarines from the Anglo-American powers. Beyond the challenge of navigating the tense dynamic among the great powers, Delhi must come to terms with the essential question in Ukraine — changing borders through use of force. As a nation brimming with diversity and confronting territorial expansionism on its frontiers, India can't accept the idea that a major power attacks its neighbour, seizes territory and annexes the occupied regions. Like the rest of the developing world, Delhi is acutely sensitive to concerns of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Delhi can't continue to let Moscow put India at odds with its natural constituency in the Global South that rejects Russian invasion of Ukraine and supports Kyiv's sovereignty.

THE DEMOCRATIC LEFTIST

On Sunday, Brazil will vote in the first round of presidential elections to determine the fate of incumbent Jair Bolsonaro who is expected to face a massive challenge from former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, mononymously called Lula. Polling has shown that the former President is ahead of Mr. Bolsonaro with some polls suggesting that the gap is more than 14% points, enough for Lula to win in the first round itself.

On first glance, this should not be a surprise — Mr. Bolsonaro, a far-right politician, presided over a disastrous COVID-19 pandemic response in the country with nearly 700,000 registered deaths and an economy that is slowly bouncing back but is still ravaged by high inflation (as high as 11% recently). The Bolsonaro regime consistently downplayed the threat of the virus and was lax in implementing vaccination and lockdown strategies to combat the pandemic. To shore up his sagging popularity, the regime resuscitated a cash transfer scheme to the poor to tamp down the effects of high inflation, but has also increased the government's gross debt to GDP ratio to a high 90%. Mr. Bolsonaro clearly does not enjoy the benefits of being an outsider to the establishment as he did in the 2018 elections. He has also got to reckon with the candidacy of Brazil's most well known politician, Lula.

A former union leader who has come from humble origins, Lula served two terms as the head of State between 2003 and 2010, before demitting office to his successor Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party (PT) that he helped found in 1980. As President, Lula led his country through a period of economic growth and utilised a period of high commodity prices in the international market to subsidise programmes such as Bolsa Familia that instituted conditional cash transfers for the poor and lifted an estimated 20 million people out of extreme poverty. Lula's two-terms coincided with the pink tide — the rise of left-wing regimes in Latin America — and he served as one of the key leaders of initiatives for intra-continental cooperation besides a promoter of multilateral international organisations such as BRICS. By the time he demitted power, Lula's personal popularity and that of his regime's philosophy, Lulismo, remained high in Brazil.

Lula's rule, however, was qualitatively different from the more radical socialist-oriented regimes in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. While his working class origins and leadership of a strong trade



union in the late 1970s during the military dictatorship in Brazil firmly put him in the Left, his government utilised policies of conciliation and negotiation to advance welfare, and did not quite disturb the hold of the traditional Brazilian elite over institutions of power.

Talk with the elite

The 2000s saw the participation of more Brazilians in the polity and a greater democratisation but the PT's strategy of negotiating with the elite in Brazil's Congress and other institutions ensured that the corruption in the highest circles in the country remained intact, affecting even Lula's party.

The controversial Car Wash scandal, which revealed systematic corruption in the way contracts were awarded by executives of the state-owned petroleum company Petrobras and implicated several politicians, administrators and businessmen, led to the fall of the Dilma Rousseff presidency by impeachment in 2014. Even if Ms. Rousseff was not directly implicated in the scandal, it resulted in the decline in popularity for the PT. Lula himself was arrested, convicted and was barred from participating in the 2018 presidential elections, but was released in 2019 after documents leaked by journalist Glenn Greenwald pointed to collusion by Judge Sergio Moro with the prosecution. Brazil's Supreme Court ruled in March 2021 that justice was biased against him, resulting in the cases against him being annulled and allowing him to run for President again.

THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN ITALY

The story so far:

On September 25, the right alliance, the left alliance, the Five-Star Movement and other traditional autonomous parties competed in Italy's snap elections. Among the four coalitions, the right alliance headed by Giorgia Meloni from Brothers of Italy with the League, Forza-Italia, and Nio Moderati emerged as the clear winner. It won with a majority of 237 seats in the Chamber of Duties (lower house) and 115 seats in the Deputies of the Senate (upper house). The left alliance led by Enrico Letta from the Democratic Party including the Green/left alliance, Più Europa, and Impegno Civico were able to secure only 85 and 44 seats in both houses.

Who are the Brothers of Italy?

The Brothers of Italy was founded in 2012 by Giorgia Meloni after her exit from the Former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's party. It included members from the Italian Social Movement (MSI), which was created by the supporters of Benito Mussolini. Starting from 2% in the 2013 elections, the Brothers of Italy gained a quick margin of 26% by 2022, surprising other traditional parties of Italy.

The main reason behind the rise of the party was the failure of other political parties. Mr. Berlusconi's threat to dissolve the government to pass the 2005 electoral reform, the shift of the League party to the Five Star Movement from the right alliance after the 2018 elections and a break in the coalition between Italia Viva, the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement in 2021, damaged the credibility of these parties.

On the other hand, the Brothers of Italy, neither changed its partnership nor its identity and used the failure of other parties to its benefit. The party's main focus includes stabilising financial markets, keeping debt in check and meeting Italy's energy crisis without regional dependency. It



has managed to keep true to its fascist roots even when it entered mainstream politics. Externally, the party focusses on transatlantic relations, siding with Europe in standing against Russia.

In power, the Brothers of Italy will now have to address two major challenges. First is Italy's economy which is heading towards contraction, besides COVID-19 induced debt, and energy crises, while the second challenge comes from within the coalition.

What does Italy's new coalition mean for Europe?

The region as a whole is alarmed by the majority won by the Brothers of Italy party. This is mainly due to two factors, one being the party's history of being evolved from Mussolini and containing members who are known for neo-fascist origins. Although Ms. Meloni's stance on EU's policies in terms of energy price cap, sanctions on Russia seem to be in line with the EU, Italian nationalism has always been the underlining priority. Ms. Meloni shares similar views with Hungarian leader Victor Orban with respect to the economy and issues regarding abortion, LGBTQ rights and migration, sending mixed signals for regional cooperation.

Secondly, Italy is one of the most volatile countries in the region in terms of political stability, with more than 65 governments coming to power since the end of the Second World War. The frequent breaking and making of coalition due to the misrule of Mr. Berlusconi, the shifting of the League party between coalitions, and the rain of reforms under each government has pushed Italy into a prolonged political crisis. Europe does not wish to see yet another government coalition break nor does it want Italy becoming another Hungary. Therefore, dilemma over stability and cooperation hangs in the air for the EU.

What is next for Italy?

In the past, most parties have concentrated more towards sustaining themselves in power by campaigning for electoral reform. They kept issues of identity, economy, and security in the backstage. The Brothers of Italy have shown that they intend to put Italy first and regional issues on the backburner. This indicates that the upcoming government will be more Italy-centric than Euro-centric.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NORD STREAM PIPELINES?

The story so far:

Four leaks were reported at different points in the Nord Stream pipelines, linking Russia and Europe, since September 26. Two of the leaks were in Swedish waters while the other two were reported from Danish waters. The European Union said they suspected "sabotage" behind the leaks while the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the ruptures to the pipelines took place in territory that was "fully under the control" of U.S. intelligence agencies.

What are the Nord Stream pipelines?

The \$7.1 (€7.4) billion Nord Stream 1 subsea pipeline has been operational since 2011, and is the largest single supply route for Russian gas to Europe. The Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom has a majority ownership in the pipeline, and while it was running at just 20% of its capacity since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, the company, in early September fully cut gas flows from the pipeline on the pretext of maintenance. According to Bloomberg, while 40% of Europe's pipeline gas came from Russia before the war, the number now stands at just 9%. The



construction of the \$11 billion-worth Nord Stream 2 was completed in 2021 but never began commercial operations. Even though both pipelines were not running commercially, they had millions of cubic metres of gas stored in them.

What is the extent of the damage?

Denmark's defence authority released footage of the bubbles forming on the surface of the sea resulting from gas spewing from the pipelines. The Danish Energy Agency said that while half of the gas stored in Nord Stream 1 and 2 had leaked out of the ruptures, the remaining volume was expected to escape by Sunday. Both Danish and Swedish seismologists picked up undersea explosions near the locations of the first two leaks before they occurred. Bjorn Lund of Sweden's National Seismology Centre told BBC that there was "no doubt that these were explosions".

What will be the impact of the leaks?

The Swiss-based operator of the pipelines, the Nord Stream AG consortium, said on Tuesday, "the destruction that happened within one day at three lines of the Nord Stream pipeline system is unprecedented. It's impossible now to estimate the timeframe for restoring operations of the gas shipment infrastructure." Al Jazeera quoted Eurasia Group analysts as saying, that with the timeframe for repairs being uncertain, the pipelines were unlikely to provide any gas to Europe in the forthcoming winter months, even if the political will to resume supply was found.

European gas prices spiked after reports of the leaks emerged; European Benchmark prices rose 12% on Tuesday, while Dutch and British Prices continued to rise on Wednesday. Additionally, while analysts have not yet quantified the environmental impact of the leaks, Reuters quoted the commercial methane-measuring satellite firm GHGSat as saying that a "conservative estimate" based on available data suggested that the leaks together were releasing more than 500 metric tonnes of methane per hour when first breached, with the flow decreasing over time.

What have international bodies said?

Ukraine called the leaks a "terrorist attack" and an "act of aggression towards the EU" planned by Russia. Incidentally, Russia said that the leaks were an act of "terrorism" possibly by a state-actor. While the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization called the leaks acts of sabotage, they did not name a country. The U.S. also hasn't blamed any specific actor for the leaks, with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stating that the country would stay committed to protecting Europe's energy security.

AT 34, BURKINA'S NEW JUNTA CHIEF IS WORLD'S YOUNGEST LEADER

Just a week ago, 34-year-old Ibrahim Traore was an unknown, even in his native Burkina Faso. But in the space of a weekend, he catapulted himself from Army captain to the world's youngest leader — an ascent that has stoked hopes but also fears for a poor and chronically troubled country.

Mr. Traore, at the head of a core of disgruntled junior officers, ousted Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had seized power just in January.

The motive for the latest coup — as in January — was anger at failures to stem a seven-year jihadist insurgency that has claimed thousands of lives and driven nearly two million people from their homes.



On Wednesday, Mr. Traore was declared President and “guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity... and continuity of the State”.

At that lofty moment, Mr. Traore became the world’s youngest leader, wresting the title from Chilean President Gabriel Boric, a whole two years older.

Mr. Traore’s previously unknown face is now plastered on portraits around the capital Ouagadougou.

Mr. Traore was born in Bondokuy, in western Burkina Faso, and studied geology in Ouagadougou before joining the army in 2010.

He graduated as an officer from the Georges Namonao Military School — a second-tier institution compared to the prestigious Kadiogo Military Academy (PMK) of which Damiba and others in the elite are alumni.

Posting in Mali

He served in the badly-hit north and centre of the country before heading to a posting in neighbouring Mali in 2018 in the UN’s MINUSMA peacekeeping mission.

WHAT ARE THE CHANGES IN THE UAE’S IMMIGRATION RULES?

The story so far:

The Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security began the trial run of the Advanced Visa System on September 6. It was first announced by the UAE Cabinet — led by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the UAE Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai in April.

What are the changes?

The changes in the UAE visa rules can be broadly classified into three categories — entry visa, green visa and golden visa. For the first time, the UAE has introduced entry visas that do not require a host or sponsor for visitors. All entry visas will now be available for single or multiple entries and will be valid for 60 days unlike the previous 30-day period. In 2020, golden visas were introduced, designed to enable exceptionally skilled foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need for a national sponsor, according to Emirates News Agency.

What are the different types of visas?

A job exploration visa will be granted if the applicant is classified in the first, second or third skill level as per the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, or is a fresh graduate of the best 500 universities in the world, or has a minimum educational level of a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent. Another kind of job visa includes the entry permit visa which allows employers to sponsor visitors for temporary work assignments on projects. Universities can also sponsor visitors for attending training and study courses.

A business entry visa allows investors and entrepreneurs to explore business and investment opportunities in the UAE.

For tourists, besides a regular tourist visa, a five-year multi-entry tourist visa enables them to enter multiple times on self-sponsorship and remain in the country for 90 days on each visit,



which can be extended for another 90 days. However, the applicant has to submit proof of having a bank balance of \$4,000 or its equivalent in foreign currencies for the last six months. A family visa allows parents to sponsor their male children till the age of 25, up from 18, while an entry permit to visit relatives allows a visitor to enter the country if they are a relative or a friend of a UAE citizen/resident.

What are the changes to the green residence and golden visas?

The new five-year green residence visa is aimed at attracting exceptional talent, skilled professionals, freelancers, investors, and entrepreneurs. It replaces the previous residence visa that was valid only for two years. Besides, a grace period of up to six months to stay in the country has been introduced after the residence permit is cancelled or expired.

Few amendments have been made to the golden visa scheme allowing more categories of people to secure the coveted 10-year visa. Scientists, skilled workers, exceptional talent, real estate investors, entrepreneurs, students, humanitarian pioneers, doctors and nurses have also been included in the list. Skilled professionals can get the long-term residency, if they have a minimum monthly salary requirement of AED 30,000 a month. Investors can also get the visa when purchasing a property worth at least AED two million.

How will Indians benefit?

The Indian expatriate community of approximately 3.5 million constitutes about 30% of the UAE population. The restructuring of its entry and residence system will further boost the country's image as an ideal destination for work and investment. Thousands of talented professionals are expected to find employment in the UAE and tourists can now experience a hassle-free vacation with the simplified visa system.

SRI LANKA IS ANTICIPATING A 'SIGNIFICANTLY LESSER' NUMBER OF FAVOURABLE VOTES AT UNHRC

Sri Lanka will get a "significantly lesser" number of favourable votes at the UN Human Rights Council, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry on Wednesday said, apparently resigned to reduced international support at the Geneva forum whose 51st session is underway.

"The number of votes will be significantly lesser. We have to be realistic," Mr. Sabry, currently in Geneva, told a media conference held virtually. Observing that the voting pattern "is not a fair reflection" of how all members think about Sri Lanka, he said "heavy lobbying" by powerful countries preceded the vote at the Council, which was "all geopolitics".

Shift in tone

The Minister's position signalled a shift in Colombo's tone from a month ago, when Mr. Sabry said Sri Lanka was "not interested in confrontation, we want to work towards consensus with all partners".

A resolution on Sri Lanka will be put to vote likely on Thursday, highlighting the long-pending demands for truth and justice for alleged war crimes from the civil war era and the years after it ended in 2009, apart from other rights violations since.

The proposed resolution this year also underscores the importance of addressing "underlying governance factors and root causes" that have "contributed to" Sri Lanka's unprecedented



economic crisis. It identifies “deepening militarisation, lack of accountability in governance and impunity for serious human rights violations and abuses”, as a central obstacle to the rule of law, reconciliation and sustainable peace and development in Sri Lanka. Further, it “recognises that the promotion and protection of human rights and the prevention of and fight against corruption are mutually reinforcing.”

In March 2021, Sri Lanka faced a UN resolution that was put to vote in Geneva. While 22 countries voted in its favour, 11 countries voted against it — endorsing Sri Lanka’s position — and 14 countries, including India, abstained. While it is widely expected that India may abstain yet again, more countries among the Council’s 47 members are likely to proactively back the resolution.

Contending that the Council was “polarised”, Minister Sabry said the international community, mainly the West that includes key economic powers, were “using Sri Lanka to test their agenda”. “Sri Lanka has repeatedly said we need time and space to address pending issues, but the Core Group is not willing to listen,” he said, referring to the group of countries led by the United Kingdom that are the main sponsors of the Sri Lanka resolution this year. The Group includes the United States, Germany, and Canada among others. Some 30 other countries are said to have joined the Core Group, backing the resolution.

Anti-terrorism law

Outlining the government’s efforts to repeal the country’s much criticised anti-terrorism law, and introduce a new one; bring about constitutional amendments to strengthen parliamentary mechanisms and redistribute “94%” of military-held lands in the north and east, Mr. Sabry said “none of it is credited” by the international community, even as he argued that some recommendations of the resolution sought to interfere with Sri Lanka’s Constitution.

Asked why the Sri Lankan government, which is willingly working with international actors including the International Monetary Fund — that makes its support conditional on several governance aspects — for economic recovery resisted foreign mechanisms on the rights front, Mr. Sabry said: “That is because Sri Lanka is a member of the IMF, we opted for IMF assistance, and we are part of the negotiations ...it is not imposed on us,” although Sri Lanka has been a Member State of the U.N. since 1955, engaging with its mechanisms and agencies.

Impartial investigation

The resolution titled ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ was adopted by the Council after 20 of its 47 members voted in its favour. While 20 countries abstained, seven — including China and Pakistan — voted against it, effectively backing the Sri Lankan government. Prior to the vote, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told the Council that the government “categorically rejects” the “manifestly unhelpful” resolution. He had earlier said the Council was “polarised”, and that its resolutions were “all geopolitics”.

The resolution called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure the prompt, thorough and impartial investigation and, if warranted, prosecution of all alleged crimes relating to human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including for long-standing emblematic cases, with the full participation of victims and their representatives. It also urged the government to address the ongoing economic crisis, including “by investigating and, where warranted, prosecuting corruption, including where committed by public and former public officials”. Mr. Sabry accused the Core Group of nations that tabled the resolution of going beyond its mandate by including economic issues.



Sri Lanka's largest Tamil grouping in Parliament, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), thanked the Core Group for keeping Sri Lanka's rights record on the Human rights Council's agenda for a decade. "It has helped maintain international oversight on accountability and reconciliation. Although we would like to see more decisive action [on the ground], we know this is the intervention that is possible for the Council," TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran told The Hindu.

UN COUNCIL REJECTS DEBATE ON XINJIANG

The U.S. and allies presented the first draft decision to the UNHRC targeting China after former UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet gave her Xinjiang report, alleging torture, detention of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities.

Western countries thought that by going no further than simply seeking to talk about the findings, enough other nations would not block putting it on the agenda. The draft text, presented by the United States and a number of other Western countries, had merely asked the council to debate a UN report, citing possible crimes against humanity against Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in the far-western Xinjiang region.

But in a moment of drama, countries on the 47-member council in Geneva voted 19-17 against holding a debate on human rights in Xinjiang, with 11 nations abstaining. Amnesty International branded the vote farcical, while Human Rights Watch said it betrayed abuse victims.

The nations voting against a debate were Bolivia, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Gabon, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Sudan, the UAE, Uzbekistan and Venezuela.

Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Gambia, India, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico and Ukraine abstained. The draft decision was put forward by the U.S., Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Turkey, among others.

However, the decision by conflict-torn Ukraine, which relies heavily on Western backing as it battles Russia's invasion, to abstain in the vote caught some off guard.

And Ukraine itself appears to have had second thoughts.

Council takes note

In an unusual move, Ukrainian Ambassador Yevheniia Filipenko took the floor on Friday, asking that the "record of the proceedings reflect our position in favour of the adoption of the mentioned decision" on Xinjiang.

The president of the council, Federico Villegas of Argentina, said the council would "take note of your statement", but stressed that "in accordance with the rules and practices the result of the vote will remain as it was announced yesterday."

Even if the result had shifted to reflect the changed vote, the resolution on China would still have failed, by one vote.

WOMEN'S CHOICE: A THREAT TO IRANIAN STATE

If in India right-wing politicians are trying to deprive girls the freedom to wear hijab to school, the situation is diametrically different in Iran. The men, through the authority of the state, are seeking

3RD FLOOR AND 4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



to keep women under wraps from head to toe, depriving them of their right to choose. Amini's crime was to upset the male hegemony, a supremacy so delicate it could be ripped apart with the mere act of improper wearing or casting off hijab.

It is worth recalling that Prophet Muhammed did not even punish those who failed to turn up for Friday prayers. Why penalise a small misdemeanour by a young lady? The Quran through Surah Nur and Ahzaab provides a general guideline about social conduct and clothes permissible to be worn by both the sexes. Unlike the case of adultery, the book talks of no punitive measures for violation of the dress code, leaving it to the discretion of the Almighty. Further, the Quran explicitly forbids compulsion in religion through select verses of Surah Yasin and Kafirun. What is happening in Iran is a case of state trying to play God.

This strictness of the state in imposing dress code through morality police is not a mystery. At a time when Iranian women are beginning to speak up, particularly about gender discrimination in matters of dress code — a woman taken into detention by morality police is provided a lesson in hijab, then released, as a rule only to a male relative — the authorities wanted to make an example out of Amini. The plan to nip defiance in the bud backfired spectacularly. Not many knew Amini beyond her immediate circle when she was alive. With her death, she became a symbol of the new age Muslim woman taking on a regime that has often been oppressive, not infrequently cruel. Amini became a source of inspiration for women who thronged the streets of Iran, raising slogans, casting their hijab off, with one of them shaving her head and making a flag out of her locks. The reaction of the Iranian authorities was harsh, a mix of metal pellets, water cannons and tear gas lobbed at the protestors. It all stemmed from an overweening desire to perpetuate male monopoly of religion.

The oppressive regime

Just as Iran releases women detainees only under the protection of a male family member, for decades, Saudi Arabia did not allow women to drive. Ironically, around the same time, women were quoted the example of Hazrat Khadija, Prophet's first wife. Khadija was a wealthy businesswoman of the 7th century. So widespread was her business empire that she had hired Muhammed (before he became a Prophet) as her manager. Today's Muslim women are urged to be like Khadija in sermons by clerics, but often told to stay in the confines of their homes by the same men. If they do speak out, as in Iran, the result is there for all to see. Incidentally, under Iran's law, hijab was made compulsory for all women in 1983 and its violation attracted a punishment by lashing.

The latest round of repression continues a long series for Iran where the state's harsh punitive measures have compelled many filmmakers, writers and sportspersons, including men, to seek safer abode abroad. Not many would have forgotten the chequered journey of illustrious filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. He was an active revolutionary figure who was imprisoned and tortured before the 1979 Revolution. Later, when he parted ways with the ruling dispensation with films like Marriage of the Blessed and The Cyclist, followed by attendance at a festival in Jerusalem, he was forced to migrate from the country. For all his brilliance, he could not make films in Iran anymore. Forget dissent, even disagreement was frowned upon.

Women elsewhere too have been moved to cut off their hair in solidarity, including a Swedish MP who did so in the EU assembly. There is, of course, always the danger that a gesture with deep roots of anger and pain in one part of the world, becomes mere protest theatre elsewhere. As underlined by the choice of song in Binoche's video — the Farsi version of Italian protest song



'Bella Ciao', performed by sisters Samin and Behin Bolouri — this is a fight whose heaviest cost will be borne by the women and girls of Iran. Their courage in taking on the might of the state must not be upstaged.

Of course, the ongoing protest by Iranian women has given the West a handle to beat Iran with. In the past, the West has been disdainful towards Iran, and selective in speaking for women's rights. Its silence on Muslim women's right to wear hijab and avoidable punitive measures that followed the act in Europe was as wrong as Iran not permitting women the freedom of choice. Not that Indian clerics have been much better. Remember the hue and cry over the length of Sania Mirza's skirts?

Be it the girls in Karnataka or the women on the streets of Tehran, or those in Paris or Brussels, let women decide. Wearing a hijab or not wearing one should never be construed as a challenge to the state. It is a personal choice that should be unconditionally accepted.



DreamIAS



NATION

DEBATE OVER THE COLLEGIUM SYSTEM: HOW ARE SC AND HC JUDGES APPOINTED?

Union Minister for Law and Justice Kiren Rijju on Saturday (September 17) said the collegium system of appointments to the higher judiciary needs to be reconsidered in view of the concerns about the process.

Rijju's statements reopen a longstanding debate over the process of appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts of India. An attempt by the government to bring a law that would give the executive a strong say in the appointments was struck down by the Supreme Court several years ago. Thereafter, in 2019, a nine-judge Bench of the court dismissed a plea for a review of its 1993 verdict in the so-called 'Second Judges Case', which is widely understood to be instrumental in establishing the existing "collegium system" of appointing judges in the higher judiciary.

How are judges appointed, how did the collegium system come to be, and why has it been criticised?

First, what is the collegium system of appointment of judges?

It is the way by which judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts are appointed and transferred. The collegium system is not rooted in the Constitution or a specific law promulgated by Parliament; it has evolved through judgments of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court collegium is a five-member body, which is headed by the incumbent Chief Justice of India (CJI) and comprises the four other seniormost judges of the court at that time. A High Court collegium is led by the incumbent Chief Justice and four other seniormost judges of that court. By its very nature, the composition of the collegium keeps changing, and its members serve only for the time they occupy their positions of seniority on the Bench before they retire.

Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed only through the collegium system, and the government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegium. Names that are recommended for appointment by a High Court collegium reaches the government only after approval by the CJI and the Supreme Court collegium.

The role of the government in this entire process is limited to getting an inquiry conducted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court. The government can also raise objections and seek clarifications regarding the collegium's choices, but if the collegium reiterates the same names, the government is bound, under Constitution Bench judgments, to appoint them as judges.

Sometimes the government delays making the appointments, especially in cases where the government is perceived to be unhappy with one or more judges recommended for appointment by the collegium. Supreme Court judges have sometimes expressed anguish over such delays.

What does the Constitution say on the appointment of judges in the higher judiciary?

Articles 124(2) and 217 of the Constitution deal with the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts. The appointments are made by the President, who is required to hold consultations with "such of the judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts" as he may think is needed. But the Constitution does not lay down any process for making these appointments.



Article 124(2) says: “Every Judge of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with such of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary for the purpose and shall hold office until he attains the age of sixty-five years. Provided that in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of India shall always be consulted.”

Article 217 says: “Every Judge of a High Court shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with the Chief Justice of India, the Governor of the State, and, in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of the High Court.”

How did the collegium system of appointments evolve?

The collegium system evolved out of a series of judgments of the Supreme Court that are called the “Judges Cases”. The collegium came into being through the interpretations of the relevant provisions of the Constitution that the Supreme Court made in these Judges Cases.

FIRST JUDGES CASE: In ‘SP Gupta Vs Union of India’, 1981, the Supreme Court by a majority judgment held that the concept of primacy of the CJI was not really rooted in the Constitution. It held that the proposal for appointment to a High Court could emanate from any of the constitutional functionaries mentioned in Article 217, and not necessarily from the Chief Justice of the High Court.

The Constitution Bench also held that the term “consultation” used in Articles 124 and 217 did not mean “concurrence” – therefore, although the President will consult these functionaries, his decision was not bound to be in concurrence with all of them.

The judgment in the First Judges Case tilted the balance of power in appointments of judges of High Courts in favour of the executive. This situation prevailed for the next 12 years.

SECOND JUDGES CASE: In ‘The Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association Vs Union of India’, 1993, a nine-judge Constitution Bench overturned the decision in ‘SP Gupta’, and devised a specific procedure called the ‘Collegium System’ for the appointment and transfer of judges in the higher judiciary. It was this judgment of the Supreme Court that was sought to be reviewed in the petition filed by the National Lawyers’ Campaign for Judicial Transparency and Reforms, and which was turned down by the court in October 2019 (mentioned above).

The judgment in the Second Judges Case underlined that the top court must act in “protecting the integrity and guarding the independence of the judiciary”. The majority verdict in the case accorded primacy to the CJI in matters of appointment and transfers, and ruled that the term “consultation” used in the Constitution would not diminish the primary role of the CJI in judicial appointments.

“The role of the CJI is primal in nature because this being a topic within the judicial family, the executive cannot have an equal say in the matter. Here the word ‘consultation’ would shrink in a mini form. Should the executive have an equal role and be in divergence of many a proposal, germs of indiscipline would grow in the judiciary,” the court held in its judgment.

Ushering in the collegium system, the verdict in the Second Judges Case said that the recommendation should be made by the CJI in consultation with his two seniormost colleagues, and that such recommendation should normally be given effect to by the executive.



It added that although the executive could ask the collegium to reconsider the matter if it had an objection to the name recommended, if, on reconsideration, the collegium reiterated the recommendation, the executive was bound to make the appointment.

THIRD JUDGES CASE: In 1998, then President KR Narayanan issued a Presidential Reference to the Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution (advisory jurisdiction) over the meaning of the term “consultation”. The question was whether “consultation” required consultation with a number of judges in forming the CJI’s opinion, or whether the sole opinion of CJI could by itself constitute a “consultation”.

In response, the Supreme Court laid down nine guidelines for the functioning of the coram for appointments and transfers. This has come to be the existing form of the collegium, and has been prevalent ever since.

In its opinion, the Supreme Court laid down that the recommendation should be made by the CJI and his four seniormost colleagues — instead of two, as laid down by the verdict in the Second Judges Case. It also held that Supreme Court judges who hailed from the High Court for which the proposed name came, should also be consulted.

It was also held that even if two judges gave an adverse opinion, the CJI should not send the recommendation to the government.

On what grounds has the collegium system been criticised?

Critics have pointed out that the system is non-transparent, since it does not involve any official mechanism or secretariat. It is seen as a closed-door affair with no prescribed norms regarding eligibility criteria, or even the selection procedure. There is no public knowledge of how and when a collegium meets, and how it takes its decisions. There are no official minutes of collegium proceedings.

Lawyers too are usually in the dark on whether their names have been considered for elevation as a judge.

The collegium system of appointment and transfer of judges of the higher judiciary has been debated for long, and sometimes blamed for tussles between the judiciary and the executive, and the slow pace of judicial appointments.

How has the debate over these concerns played out over the years?

The BJP-led government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2003) had appointed the Justice M N Venkatachaliah Commission to examine whether there was need to change the collegium system. The Commission recommended that a National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) should be set up, consisting of the CJI and two seniormost judges of the Supreme Court, the Law Minister of India, and an eminent person from the public, to be chosen by the President in consultation with the CJI.

The creation of the NJAC was one of the priorities of the Narendra Modi government, and the constitutional amendment and NJAC Act were cleared swiftly by Lok Sabha. Subsequently, a clutch of petitions were filed in the Supreme Court, arguing that the law enacted by Parliament undermines the independence of the judiciary, and is violative of the basic structure of the Constitution.



In 2015, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the constitutional amendment that had sought to create the NJAC, in which a significant role had been envisioned for the executive in appointments to the higher judiciary. The Bench sealed the fate of the proposed system with a 4:1 majority verdict that held that the appointments of judges shall continue to be made by the collegium system, in which the CJI will have “the last word”.

“There is no question of accepting an alternative procedure, which does not ensure primacy of the judiciary in the matter of selection and appointment of judges to the higher judiciary,” the court said in its majority opinion. Justice J Chelameswar wrote the dissenting verdict, in which he criticised the collegium system, saying that its proceedings were “absolutely opaque and inaccessible both to public and history, barring occasional leaks”.

On October 17, 2019, the Supreme Court dismissed a plea to review the verdict in the ‘Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association and Another vs Union of India’ (Second Judges Case) on grounds of an “inordinate delay of 9,071 days in filing the...petition, for which no satisfactory explanation had been offered”.

The Bench of then CJI Ranjan Gogoi and Justices S A Bobde, N V Ramana, Arun Mishra, Rohinton F Nariman, R Banumathi, U U Lalit, A M Khanwilkar, and Ashok Bhushan passed the order, which was released on November 6. Justices Bobde, Ramana, and Lalit succeeded Gogoi as CJI.

THE CRITERION FOR SC STATUS

The story so far:

The Supreme Court of India has sought the most recent position of the Union government on a batch of petitions challenging the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950, which allows only members of Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist religions to be recognised as SCs.

Who all are included in the Constitution Order of 1950?

When enacted, the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950, initially provided for recognising only Hindus as SCs, to address the social disability arising out of the practice of untouchability. The Order was amended in 1956 to include Dalits who had converted to Sikhism and once more in 1990 to include Dalits who had converted to Buddhism. Both amendments were aided by the reports of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission in 1955 and the High Powered Panel (HPP) on Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in 1983 respectively. On the other hand, the Union government in 2019 rejected the possibility of including Dalit Christians as members of SCs, rooting the exclusion on an Imperial Order of 1936 of the then colonial government, which had first classified a list of the Depressed Classes and specifically excluded “Indian Christians” from it.

Why are Dalit Christians excluded?

Ever since the amendment to include Sikhs as SCs in 1956, the Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) has been reluctant in expanding the ambit of the Order beyond members of Hinduism or Sikhism. Responding to the Ministry of Home Affairs’s (MHA) 1978 request for an opinion on the inclusion of Dalit Buddhists and Christians, the RGI had cautioned the government that SC status is meant for communities suffering from social disabilities arising out of the practice of untouchability, which it noted was prevalent in Hindu and Sikh communities. It also noted that such a move would significantly swell the population of SCs across the country. However, the amendment to include Buddhist converts as SCs was passed in 1990, which at the time did not



require the approval of the RGI — a mandate introduced in the rules for inclusion framed in 1999. In 2001, when the RGI again opined against including Dalit Christians and Muslims as SCs, it referred to its 1978 note and added that like Dalit Buddhists, Dalits who converted to Islam or Christianity belonged to different sets of caste groups and not just one, as a result of which they cannot be categorised as a “single ethnic group”, which is required by Clause (2) of Article 341 for inclusion. Moreover, the RGI opined that since the practice of “untouchability” was a feature of Hindu religion and its branches, allowing the inclusion of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians as SCs could result in being “misunderstood internationally” as India trying to “impose its caste system” upon Christians and Muslims. The 2001 note also stated that Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin had lost their caste identity by way of their conversion and that in their new religious community, the practice of untouchability is not prevalent.

Is there a case for inclusion?

The petitions arguing for inclusion have cited several independent Commission reports that have documented the existence of caste and caste inequalities among Indian Christians and Indian Muslims, noting that even after conversion, members who were originally from SCs continued to experience the same social disabilities. This was substantiated in the First Backward Classes Commission’s report in 1953, the Report of the Committee on Untouchability Economic and Educational Development Of the Scheduled Castes in 1969, the HPP report on SCs, STs, and Minorities in 1983, the Mandal Commission Report, the report of the Prime Minister’s High-Level Committee formed in 2006, a 2008 study conducted by the National Commission for Minorities, the Ranganath Misra Commission Report and several other studies. In addition to this, the petitions have argued against the proposition that caste identity is lost upon conversion, noting that even in Sikhism and Buddhism, casteism is not present and yet they have been included as SCs. Furthermore, the above-mentioned reports argue that caste-based discrimination continues even after conversion, hence entitling these communities to SC status. However, the Union government refuses to accept the reports of the Commissions on the basis that these reports do not have enough empirical evidence to support their claims. Advocate Franklin Ceasar Thomas, who represents some Dalit Christian bodies, said that, “Such empirical evidence did not exist for including Sikh or Buddhist converts either and yet they were included as SCs in 1956 and 1990 respectively.”

Panel to study SC status of Dalits post conversion

The Union government has now formed a three-member Commission of Inquiry headed by former Chief Justice of India, Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, to examine whether the Scheduled Caste (SC) status can be accorded to Dalits who have over the years converted to religions other than Sikhism or Buddhism.

The notification for the formation of the commission was issued on Thursday, days before the Supreme Court on October 11 is expected to hear the Centre’s present position on a batch of petitions seeking the inclusion of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims and the removal of religion as criterion for inclusion as SCs.

The three-member commission will also comprise Professor Sushma Yadav, member, UGC, and retired IAS officer Ravinder Kumar Jain, and has been given a two-year deadline to submit a report on the issue — starting from the day Justice Balakrishnan takes charge of the commission.



The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment has said the commission's inquiry will also look into the changes an SC person goes through after converting to another religion and its implications on the question of including them as SCs.

These will include examining their traditions, customs, social and other forms of discrimination and how and whether they have changed as a result of the conversion.

Noting that several representatives of existing SC communities have staunchly opposed the inclusion of converts to other religions, the government has also tasked the Justice Balakrishnan Commission with examining the impact of such a decision on these existing SC communities.

THE MEDIATION BILL, 2021

The story so far:

The Mediation Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on December 20, 2021, with the Parliamentary Standing Committee being tasked with a review of the Bill. The committee's report to the Rajya Sabha was submitted on July 13, 2022. In its report, the Committee recommends substantial changes to the Mediation Bill, aimed at institutionalising mediation and establishing the Mediation Council of India.

Why does India need to promote mediation?

While there is no standalone legislation for mediation in India, there are several statutes containing mediation provisions, such as the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, the Companies Act, 2013, the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, and the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee of the Supreme Court of India describes mediation as a tried and tested alternative for conflict resolution. As India is a signatory to the Singapore Convention on Mediation (formally the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation), it is appropriate to enact a law governing domestic and international mediation.

What are the key features of the Bill?

The Bill aims to promote, encourage, and facilitate mediation, especially institutional mediation, to resolve disputes, commercial and otherwise.

The Bill further proposes mandatory mediation before litigation. At the same time, it safeguards the rights of litigants to approach competent adjudicatory forums/courts for urgent relief. The mediation process will be confidential and immunity is provided against its disclosure in certain cases. The outcome of the mediation process in the form of a Mediation Settlement Agreement (MSA) will be legally enforceable and can be registered with the State/district/taluk legal authorities within 90 days to ensure authenticated records of the settlement. The Bill establishes the Mediation Council of India and also provides for community mediation.

What are the concerns with the Bill?

According to the Bill, pre-litigation mediation is mandatory for both parties before filing any suit or proceeding in a court, whether or not there is a mediation agreement between them. Parties who fail to attend pre-litigation mediation without a reasonable reason may incur a cost. However, as per Article 21 of the Constitution, access to justice is a constitutional right which cannot be fettered or restricted. Mediation should just be voluntary and making it otherwise would amount



to denial of justice. Additionally, according to Clause 26 of the Bill, court-annexed mediation, including pre-litigation mediation, will be conducted in accordance with the directions or rules framed by the Supreme Court or High Courts. However, the Committee objected to this. It stated that Clause 26 went against the spirit of the Constitution. In countries that follow the Common Law system, it is a healthy tradition that in the absence of statutes, apex court judgments and decisions carry the same weight. The moment a law is passed however, it becomes the guiding force rather than the instructions or judgments given by the courts. Therefore, Clause 26 is unconstitutional.

Furthermore, the Bill considers international mediation to be domestic when it is conducted in India with the settlement being recognised as a judgment or decree of a court. The Singapore Convention does not apply to settlements that already have the status of judgments or decrees. As a result, conducting cross-border mediation in India will exclude the tremendous benefits of worldwide enforceability.

What next?

In order to enable a faster resolution of disputes, the Bill should be implemented after discussion with stakeholders. If the issues of the Bill aren't fixed, our aspirations to become an international mediation hub for easy business transactions could be crushed before they've even begun.

PARLIAMENT COMMITTEES, THEIR LEADERS, AND THEIR ROLE IN LAW-MAKING

A revamp of the Standing Committees of Parliament on Tuesday could potentially worsen the relations between the government and opposition parties. Of the 22 committees announced on Tuesday, the Congress has the post of chairperson in only one, and the second largest opposition party, Trinamool Congress, none. The ruling BJP has the chairmanship of the important committees on Home, Finance, IT, Defence and External Affairs.

What are Committees of Parliament, and what do they do?

Legislative business begins when a Bill is introduced in either House of Parliament. But the process of lawmaking is often complex, and Parliament has limited time for detailed discussions. Also, the political polarisation and shrinking middle ground has been leading to increasingly rancorous and inconclusive debates in Parliament — as a result of which a great deal of legislative business ends up taking place in the Parliamentary Committees instead.

A Parliamentary Committee is a panel of MPs that is appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker, and which works under the direction of the Speaker. It presents its report to the House or to the Speaker.

Parliamentary Committees have their origins in the British Parliament. They draw their authority from Article 105, which deals with the privileges of MPs, and Article 118, which gives Parliament authority to make rules to regulate its procedure and conduct of business.

What are the various Committees of Parliament?

Broadly, Parliamentary Committees can be classified into Financial Committees, Departmentally Related Standing Committees, Other Parliamentary Standing Committees, and Ad hoc Committees.



The Financial Committees include the Estimates Committee, Public Accounts Committee, and the Committee on Public Undertakings. These committees were constituted in 1950.

Seventeen Departmentally Related Standing Committees came into being in 1993, when Shivraj Patil was Speaker of Lok Sabha, to examine budgetary proposals and crucial government policies. The aim was to increase Parliamentary scrutiny, and to give members more time and a wider role in examining important legislation.

The number of Committees was subsequently increased to 24. Each of these Committees has 31 members — 21 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha.

Ad hoc Committees are appointed for a specific purpose. They cease to exist after they have completed the task assigned to them, and have submitted a report to the House. The principal Ad hoc Committees are the Select and Joint Committees on Bills. Committees like the Railway Convention Committee, Committee on Food Management and Security in Parliament House Complex, etc. also come under the category of Ad hoc Committees.

Parliament can also constitute a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) with a special purpose, with members from both Houses, for detailed scrutiny of a subject or Bill. Also, either of the two Houses can set up a Select Committee with members from that House. JPCs and Select Committees are usually chaired by ruling party MPs, and are disbanded after they have submitted their report.

How do discussions/ debates in the Parliamentary Committees differ from those in Parliament?

The time to speak on a Bill is allocated according to the size of the party in the House. MPs often do not get adequate time to put forward their views in Parliament, even if they are experts on the subject. Committees are small groups with relatively less demands on their time; in these meetings, every MP gets a chance and the time to contribute to the discussion. Parliament has only around 100 sittings a year; Committee meetings are independent of Parliament's calendar.

Also, because the discussions are confidential and off-camera, party affiliations usually do not come in the way of MPs speaking their minds in ways they are unable to do in Parliament, whose proceedings are telecast live and members are often constrained to speak to their constituencies.

As a result, many MPs concede that “real discussions” happen inside the Committees — agreeing in principle with the former US President Woodrow Wilson who observed that “Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work”.

The Committees work closely with multiple Ministries, and facilitate inter-ministerial coordination. Bills that are referred to Committees often return to the House with significant value-addition. The Committees look into the demands for grants of Ministries/departments, examine Bills pertaining to them, consider their annual reports, and look into their long-term plans and report to Parliament.

How are the Committees constituted, and how are their chairpersons chosen?

There are 16 Departmentally Related Standing Committees for Lok Sabha and eight for Rajya Sabha; however, every Committee has members from both Houses. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha panels are headed by members of these respective Houses.

Among the important Lok Sabha panels are: Agriculture; Coal; Defence; External Affairs; Finance; Communications & Information Technology; Labour; Petroleum & Natural Gas; and Railways. The



important Rajya Sabha panels include Commerce; Education; Health & Family Welfare; Home Affairs; and Environment.

There are other Standing Committees for each House, such as the Business Advisory Committee and the Privileges Committee. The Presiding Officer of each House nominates members to these panels. A Minister is not eligible for election or nomination to Financial Committees, and certain Departmentally Related Committees.

Presiding Officers use their discretion to refer a matter to a Parliamentary Committee, but this is usually done in consultation with leaders of parties in the House.

The appointment of heads of the Committees is also done in a similar way. By convention, the main Opposition party gets the post of PAC chairman; it is currently with the Congress. Chairmanship of some key committees has been allocated to opposition parties in the past. However, this pattern has changed in the latest rejig.

The heads of the panels schedule their meetings. They play a clear role in preparing the agenda and the annual report, and can take decisions in the interest of the efficient management of the Committee. The chairperson presides over the meetings and can decide who should be summoned before the panel.

An invitation to appear before a Parliamentary Committee is equivalent to a summons from a court: If one cannot come, he or she has to give reasons, which the panel may or may not accept. However, the chairman should have the support of the majority of the members to summon a witness.

MPs typically have a one-year tenure on Parliamentary Committees. Usually, the composition of a Committee remains more or less the same in terms of representation of the various parties.

How important are the recommendations of the Committees?

Reports of Departmentally Related Standing Committees are recommendatory in nature. They are not binding on the government, but they do carry significant weight. In the past, governments have accepted suggestions given by the Committees and incorporated them into the Bill after it has come back to the House for consideration and passage. These panels also examine policy issues in their respective Ministries and make suggestions to the government. The government has to report back on whether these recommendations have been accepted. Based on this, the Committees table Action Taken Reports, detailing the status of the government's action on each recommendation.

However, suggestions by the Select Committees and JPCs — which have a majority of MPs and heads from the ruling party — are accepted more frequently.

DID THE BAN SPARE PFI'S POLITICAL WING?

The story so far:

A definitive crackdown on the Popular Front of India (PFI) and eight of its affiliates by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with the police last week was capped by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) declaring them as 'unlawful associations' under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and outlawing them for five years. The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), widely thought to be the political wing of the PFI, escaped the ban, with its national

3RD FLOOR AND 4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



president M.K. Faizy ascribing the action against the PFI to 'an undeclared Emergency' prevailing in the country.

What would have saved the SDPI for now?

There's no official word on what worked in favour of the SDPI, a political party that was formed in June, 2009, "for the advancement and uniform development of all citizenry including Muslims, Dalits, Backward Classes and Adivasis" and registered with the Election Commission of India (ECI) a year later. However, it is being surmised that the fact of it being a political dispensation with people's representatives in close to a dozen States and the lack of any tangible evidence of its involvement in 'planned unlawful' activities saved it.

While some top leaders of the SDPI also figured in the senior leadership of the banned PFI, the party was quick to distance itself from the latter, claiming to be an 'independent' entity featuring cadres, members and leaders from all communities and faiths.

"The MHA, if it so willed, could've acted against the SDPI as well, as the UAPA provides for overriding powers to act against any entity found to be involved in acts prejudicial to India's interests. But that wasn't done probably because there would not have been anything suggesting planned illegal activities on the part of the political party," was how Gopal Krishna Pillai, former Union Home Secretary, explained the MHA's action.

Could the ECI have acted against it?

The ECI is largely powerless to deregister active political parties, leave alone recommending a ban on them. "Over the last two decades, the ECI has gone to the Government of India several times over with a bouquet of proposals which include amendments to Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act of 1951, but there has been no progress in this regard," said N. Gopalaswami, former Chief Election Commissioner of India.

According to Supreme Court lawyer Kaleeswaram Raj, even the limited power of the ECI to deregister a party is not provided by statute, as the Representation of the People Act only empowers the ECI to register a party. "However, in a case between the Indian National Congress and the Institute of Social Welfare in 2002, the Supreme Court held that the ECI can deregister a party (i) if the registration is obtained fraudulently (ii) if there is alteration in the original name or other material particulars of the party or (iii) where a de-registration without even an enquiry is an imperative. For example, if the registration of the political party cannot be continued for the very party becoming unlawful by a declaration by the competent authority to that effect," he explained.

But the SC itself, in the context of hate speech, gave indulgence to the Law Commission to examine whether the ECI should be given the powers to deregister a political party and the grounds for deciding so. Mr. Raj added that the ECI, at the moment, has almost insignificant powers to deregister a party for non-furnishing of details of accounts or donations.

"If the system of electoral bond continues, even the Representation of the People Act or the provisions in the Model Code of Conduct will remain inconsequential to a considerable extent on the issue of fiscal transparency in the dealings of a political party. The Supreme Court has decided to hear the electoral bond issue soon. Unless the malpractice of electoral bond in the present form is totally abolished, our democracy cannot be rescued. Any change in law relating to political parties should begin with abolition of the electoral bond system in India," he said.



How does the SDPI view the development?

Much as it has been ruffled by the ban on the PFI, the SDPI harps on its independence and insists that it's steadfastly focused on social democracy and equal representation for all backward sections at all levels of government. "We have close to 800 seats in local bodies across States such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra. An internal survey is being conducted right now to identify at least 60 constituencies — where a Muslim-Dalit alignment could work — from where to contest the Lok Sabha elections of 2024," says Elyas Mohammed Thumbé, SDPI national general secretary.

Ashraf Moulavi, the party's Kerala president, vouches for its financial, ideological and functional transparency and accountability, stressing that the party worked for "India's pluralism, Constitutional guarantees and cultural ethos".

Any Indian citizen regardless of caste or faith who abides by these besides meeting the criteria such as being averse to corruption, social evils like alcoholism or substance abuse and not being a member of any other political formulation, could become a member of the party by paying a fee of ₹5, Mr. Thumbé maintains. Cadres are selected based on their commitment to the party ideology and activism and given two sessions — on social democracy and on the tenets of a cadre. "Even rationalists are party members. Only, the believers and the atheists should respect each other's belief systems," says Mr. Moulavi, adding that the party doesn't condone violence on the part of its members.

What is in the works now?

Two weeks ago, the Kerala State committee of the party decided to carry out an extensive campaign on October 2 against drug abuse and addiction. "A three-month national campaign, 'Ghulami Na-Manzoor' (Slavery isn't acceptable) had been planned from September, but that has been put off to a later date in view of the uneasy political developments," says Mr. Thumbé.

GUBERNATORIAL PROCRASTINATION IS UNREASONABLE

A Bill passed by the State Assembly becomes law only after it is assented to by the Governor. The Governor being a part of the State legislature, the process of law making is complete only when he signs it, signifying his assent. In all democratic countries, similar provision exists in their constitutions. It may look a bit strange that the law-making body does not have the final say in the process of law making and the Bill it passes gets transformed into law only when the Governor assents to it. Thus, the Governor's assent becomes the most crucial act in the whole law-making process.

But the Governor's assent has, of late, become a controversial issue in at least two States — Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, the Governor forwarded the Bill for exemption from the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) to the President after considerable delay. In Kerala the situation has become a bit curious with the Governor publicly announcing that he would not give assent to the Lokayukta Amendment Bill and the Kerala University Amendment Bill. Such actions by Governors throw the legislative programmes of governments out of gear because of the uncertainty surrounding the assent. Therefore, the question of whether a Governor is permitted by the Constitution to cause uncertainty in the matter of giving assent to the Bills passed by State legislatures assumes great importance.



Article 200 of the Constitution provides certain options for the Governor to exercise when a Bill reaches him from the Assembly. He may give assent or he can send it back to the Assembly requesting it to reconsider some provisions of the Bill, or the Bill itself. In this case, if the Assembly passes the Bill without making any change and sends it back to the Governor, he will have to give assent to it. This provision contained in Article 200 (proviso) unambiguously affirms the primacy of the legislature in the legislative exercise. The third option is to reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President. The provision concerned makes it clear that a Bill can be reserved for the consideration of the President only if the Governor forms an opinion that the Bill would endanger the position of the High Court by whittling away its powers. The Constitution does not mention any other type of Bill which is required to be reserved for the consideration of the President. Nevertheless, the courts have conceded a certain discretion to the Governors in the matter of sending Bills to the President. The fourth option, of course, is to withhold the assent. But it is not normally done by any Governor because it would be an extremely unpopular action. The legislature reflects the will of the people and is the constitutionally designated body to make laws. If the Governor who does not reflect in any way the aspirations of the people of the State refuses assent, and thereby defeats the legislative programme of the elected government, it would be against the spirit of the Constitution. The fact that the Constitution does not mention the grounds on which a Governor may withhold assent to a Bill shows that this power should be exercised by the Governor extremely sparingly and after very careful consideration of the consequences of such action.

Practices overseas

In this context it would be useful to examine the practice in the United Kingdom. There too royal assent is necessary for a Bill to be passed by Parliament to become law and the crown has the power to withhold assent. But it is a dead letter. By practice and usage there is no power of veto exercised by the crown in England now. Moreover, refusal of royal assent on the ground that the monarchy strongly disapproves of the Bill or that the Bill is very controversial is treated as unconstitutional. In the United States, the President is empowered by the Constitution to refuse assent and return a Bill to the House but if the Houses again pass it with two thirds of each House the Bill becomes law.

The lesson to be drawn from these practices is that refusal of assent is a practice which is not followed in other democratic countries. And in some contexts, it is unconstitutional or the Constitution itself provides a remedy so that the Bill passed by the legislature could become law even after the refusal of assent.

The Indian Constitution, however, does not provide any such remedy. The courts too have more or less accepted the position that if the Governor withholds assent, the Bill will go. Thus, the whole legislative exercise will become fruitless. It does not square with the best practices in old and mature democracies.

Issue of challenge

In this context, a legitimate question that arises is whether the government of a State can challenge the refusal of assent by the Governor in a court of law. Article 361 of the Constitution prohibits the court from initiating proceedings against a Governor or the President for any act done in exercise of their powers. They enjoy complete immunity from court proceedings. It is in fact a unique situation where a government is placed in a situation of having to challenge a Governor's action of withholding assent to a Bill. It may be noted that the Governor while declaring that he



withholds assent will have to disclose the reason for such refusal. Being a high constitutional authority, the Governor cannot act in an arbitrary manner and, therefore, will have to give reasons for refusing to give assent. If the grounds for refusal disclose mala fide or extraneous considerations or ultra vires, the Governor's action of refusal could be struck down as unconstitutional. This point has been settled by a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court in Rameshwar Prasad and Ors. vs Union Of India and Anr. The Court held: "the immunity granted by Article 361(1) does not, however, take away the power of the Court to examine the validity of the action including on the ground of malafides".

Of course, the court will not be able to direct the Governor to act in a particular way. Invalidation of the refusal to give assent to a Bill on the ground of mala fide, etc. leaves such other options to him to exercise — as mentioned in Article 200.

It is claimed that since the Constitution does not fix any timeline for the Governor to decide the question of assent, he can wait for any length of time without doing anything. This is illogical and militates against the constitutional scheme in respect of law making by the legislatures. Not fixing any time line does not and cannot mean that the Governor can indefinitely sit on the Bill that has been passed by an Assembly. Article 200 does not contain such an option. The Governor is required to exercise one of the options mentioned in that Article. We must understand the purpose of giving options is for the authorities to exercise one of them and not to do something which is not an option at all. All constitutional authorities are required to act in a reasonable manner. Unreasonable acts are unsustainable in law.

DECCAN DREAMS: WHY TRS'S NAME-CHANGE IS NOT ENOUGH FOR IT TO OCCUPY SPACE ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

On Wednesday afternoon, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao announced that his party, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), will henceforth be known as Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). The decline of the Congress has left a vacuum in the ranks of the national Opposition and the BRS is evidently trying to step into the space that has opened up. The transformation of TRS to BRS marks an audacious attempt by a regional party to shed its provincial character and launch itself as a pan-Indian party. But this is easier said than done.

For now, Rao's presumption that he could emerge as a national leader by rebranding his party stretches credulity. At the moment, the TRS is a Telangana outfit: Even if it wins all the Lok Sabha seats in its stronghold, it will have a total of 17 MPs. Moreover, the rebranding may hurt the original brand of the TRS. Rao, who was a middle-level functionary in Congress and the TDP, rose to prominence by investing in the cause for Telangana. He broke away from Congress and launched the TRS to capitalise on his leadership role in the struggle for a new state. It has paid him handsome dividends — the TRS has won consecutive assembly elections after the formation of Telangana state with enhanced majorities. By championing regional pride, it has come to dominate all political institutions in the state. However, Rao's record in office has been uninspiring: He has been a populist CM, whose tenure has been marked by controversial decisions — the expensive renovation of the Yadadri temple, making of a new secretariat and a bullet-proof CM's official residence, among them. Like many regional outfits, Rao has reduced the TRS into a family fief. In short, the TRS lacks a distinctive political or governance model to offer nationally.

In 2018, Rao promoted a federal front with Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar. More recently, he met the CMs of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Delhi. He has also reached out to farmers, trade unions and civil society groups. Rao's national outreach has



elements of a federal pushback in the time of an overreaching Centre. However, without a national organisation or a credible and resonant counter narrative to the BJP's pitch, he may find it hard to realise his dream.

DON'T LURE, PERSUADE

The Election Commission of India's proposal to require political parties to disclose the financial implications of the promises they make in their manifestos will add meaning and depth to electoral campaigns. The idea that parties should communicate to electors the fiscal rationale for promising delivery of goods or services that would involve a significant outgo from the exchequer is already part of the Model Code of Conduct from 2015. The ECI is now proposing a proforma for such disclosures. If parties agree and the idea is included in the Model Code, they will have to spell out the section of society that a particular promise is targeted at, the extent of coverage and the number of likely beneficiaries, and the cost of implementing it. They must also spell out how the required resources will be raised. To give the parties an idea of the fiscal challenge that their promised schemes may pose, the Centre and the States have been asked to disclose details of the budget revenue receipts and expenditure as well as the outstanding liabilities. The information, it is believed, will provide a framework under which a manifesto can be assessed by the voter from the perspective of its financial viability. It may also make parties treat manifesto preparation as a responsible exercise meant to persuade rather than lure the voter.

There is bound to be some resentment among sections of the political class. It may be argued that the ECI should not get into the nitty-gritty of manifesto formulation, especially the manner of its implementation, as that will be the political and administrative responsibility of the party that comes to power on the basis of its promises. The guideline itself arose from a Supreme Court judgment in 2013, upholding the right of parties to make electoral promises even if they involved distribution of consumer goods. It was held that such a promise would not amount to a corrupt practice, and as long as these were financed by budgetary allocations cleared by the legislature, they could not be invalidated. The Court also suggested that to prevent extravagant promises from upsetting the electoral level playing field, the ECI could lay down some guidelines. In practice, however, the ECI's guidelines did not elicit enough information, as parties made only routine and ambiguous disclosures. If implemented, detailed financial disclosures may help in informed voter choice, as rival parties are likely to subject manifesto promises to intense scrutiny. It may also have a more meaningful impact, be it positive or negative, on the prospect of a party winning over the electorate with a single flagship promise.

AMIT SHAH'S VISIT: LISTENING IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's first public rallies in Rajouri in Jammu and Baramulla in Kashmir were well attended. Both areas have a significant Pahari population and the announcement that Scheduled Tribe status would be extended to the community has clearly gone down well here. For the rest, his message seemed to fall back on the unvarying tropes of Pakistan and Kashmir's "three families". In its apparent sameness, Minister Shah's rhetoric seems not to account for the fact that realities have changed quite significantly on the ground in Kashmir and vis a vis Pakistan — even if no politician in Pakistan will admit this openly, the country in which the slogan used to be "Kashmir banega Pakistan" the talk is now, more, of statehood for J&K within the Indian Union. Pakistan's cross-border activities are no longer what they used to be. It is also not entirely accurate that Delhi no longer engages with Pakistan on Kashmir — the ceasefire on the Line of Control came after months, if not years, of back channel negotiations between the two



sides, and is a boon for the people of Rajouri which Shah visited, as it was for other places in the line of fire. Of course, the “three families” of Kashmir may still seem stuck in an older groove. But the reality also is that the Centre has been an accomplice — or an adversary — complicit in many of their errors of commission and omission. To blame politicians, as Shah did, for all the deaths in the Valley due to terror and militancy is, plain, wrong. Anyway, these three families have been relegated to the margins in the shifting political landscape in Jammu and Kashmir.

Shah struck a positive note when he said he would listen to Kashmiris. The people of the erstwhile state are waiting to be heard. On his last visit to Kashmir in October 2021, Shah made a similar promise, but so far, neither he nor anyone else in the Modi government has shown signs of readiness to engage with the Kashmiri people and to listen to them. Under the J&K Administration, run by Shah’s ministry, the communication appears to be top-down. Even among Kashmiri Pandits, who believed they had a natural ally in the BJP, there is a growing sense that they have not been given a hearing. The Home Minister must make clear what kind of engagement he has in mind in Kashmir and with whom. The media could have provided a forum for a dialogue between government and the people but three years of restrictions have had a chilling effect and severely eroded their autonomy. Civil society leaders have also retreated from public spaces.

Especially in these circumstances, where the executive is domineering and other spaces and institutions are constrained and constricted, there is no better way to listen to the people than through an election. A local bodies election after which the winners do not feel secure enough to step outside their safe houses, is not an answer. To bring the peace, development and welfare that the Modi government promises, it is time to hold an assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir. The sooner the better.

HIMACHAL PRADESH REVOKES ORDER DEMANDING ‘CHARACTER VERIFICATION’ OF JOURNALISTS ATTENDING PM MODI EVENT

Himachal Pradesh government officials have stated that a contentious order from the police demanding a ‘character verification’ of journalists attending Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s rally on Wednesday has been revoked and that entry of media persons will be facilitated.

“All journalists are most welcome to cover Hon’ble Prime Minister’s visit to Himachal Pradesh on October 5th. Himachal Pradesh Police will facilitate their coverage. Any inconvenience is regretted,” said DGP Sanjay Kundu in a tweet.

Earlier, in a letter to the district administration, the criminal investigation department (CID), Bilaspur, sought the ‘character verification’ of all press correspondents, photographers and videographers intending to cover the prime minister’s rally. The letter said that the verification needs to be submitted to the CID office by October 1. “Their access to the rally or meeting will be decided by this (CID) office,” read the letter.

Following criticism on social media, government officials issued clarification regarding media entry stating that accreditation or official identity cards will be sufficient to attend the event.

No such verification was sought for the prime minister’s scheduled rally in Mandi on September 24, which was cancelled owing to bad weather and later conducted as a virtual address.

On Wednesday, PM Modi will address a public rally at Luhnu Ground, Bilaspur and inaugurate the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).



UGC CLEARS 'PROFESSORS OF PRACTICE' IN ALL COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT WILL THEY DO?

If you are a distinguished professional in any field but do not have a formal academic qualification such as a PhD, you can still be eligible for appointment as faculty in any college or university in India. The higher education regulator University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued new guidelines under which higher education institutes can create a new teaching position called Professor of Practice to hire experts from various sectors, in line with provisions that already exist in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

Who can apply for the post of Professor of Practice?

To be eligible for appointment, an individual will have to be a “distinguished expert” who has “made remarkable contributions in their professions”, and has at least 15 years of service or experience.

It is open to the institutions themselves to decide the sector from which they want to rope in professionals. A professor of practice can be anyone with a background in a diverse range of areas from technology, science, social sciences, media, literature, armed forces, law, fine arts, etc.

However, the position is not open for those in the teaching profession — either serving or retired.

But there must be a minimum academic eligibility criterion for appointment as professor of practice?

No formal academic qualification is necessary in order to be considered for this position if a person has been an “exemplary” professional in their field of work.

Currently, under the UGC’s minimum qualifications for appointment of teachers and other academic staff, an individual needs a PhD to be recruited as a professor or associate professor, and also needs to have cleared the National Eligibility Test (NET).

How will these appointments be made?

Universities and colleges will carry out appointments on a nomination basis. In other words, vice-chancellors or directors have been authorised to invite nominations for filling up posts, which cannot exceed 10 per cent of the sanctioned faculty strength of an institute.

After nominations are invited, those interested can send their applications with detailed biodata and a brief write-up about the ways they can potentially contribute. The applications will be considered by a selection committee comprising two senior professors from the respective institute, and one “eminent external member”.

Based on the recommendations of the committee, the academic council and the executive council of the institutes will take the final call on appointment.

Will professor of practice be a full-time position?

It can be either a full-time or a part-time engagement for at least four years. Initially, the hiring will be for one year. Based on performance, extensions may be given. “The maximum duration of service of Professor of Practice at a given institution should not exceed three years and is extendable by one year in exceptional cases and the total service should not exceed four years under any circumstances,” state the guidelines.



How much will these faculty be paid?

The remuneration will be decided at the level of the institutes and the experts being hired. In some cases, universities can even approach industries for financial support.

Will the professors of practice be involved in regular teaching?

The guidelines say that the professors of practice will be involved in the development and designing of courses and curriculum, and will deliver lectures as well. They will also be expected to focus on enhanced industry-academia collaborations. They can also carry out joint research projects or consultancy services in collaboration with the regular faculty members.

What is the objective behind the initiative?

Firstly, India's higher education institutes are understaffed, with thousands of vacancies across central and state universities. So the UGC is hoping that recruiting industry experts and professionals will help "augment faculty resources" in universities and colleges.

Second, it is aimed at addressing concerns about the quality of graduates being produced by Indian colleges and universities. The guidelines bluntly state: "Today's industry looks for graduates with specific skill sets. But the higher education system is churning out graduates who fall short of the required skills."

Around the world, the idea of a professor of practice aims essentially to facilitate and promote the integration of academic scholarship with practical expertise and experience. The UGC hopes that the professors of practice will introduce real world practices and experiences into classrooms for churning out industry-ready graduates.

Will this result in a reduction in the number of posts for qualified professors?

The UGC has clarified that the engagement of professors of practice will be exclusive of the total sanctioned posts of a university or college. It will not affect the number of sanctioned posts and the recruitment of regular faculty members.

INDORE BAGS CLEANEST CITY AWARD FOR SIXTH YEAR, M.P. RANKS FIRST AMONG STATES

Indore has been adjudged the cleanest city of India for the sixth year in a row, while Madhya Pradesh is the cleanest State in the country. Surat is the second cleanest city and Navi Mumbai ranks a close third in the category of cities with a population more than a lakh.

In the population category of less than one lakh, Panchgani and Karad from Maharashtra bagged the first and third positions respectively, while Patan from Chhattisgarh bagged the second position.

Tirupati received the best city award in Safai Mitra Suraksha category, while Haridwar in Uttarakhand received the award for the best Ganga town in more than one lakh population cities. Shivamogga in Karnataka received the fast mover city award.

The State awards saw Madhya Pradesh emerge as the Cleanest State in the category of "more than 100 Urban Local Bodies", relegating Chhattisgarh, the cleanest State of the previous three years, to second place. Maharashtra emerged as third cleanest State.



Similarly, Tripura got the cleanest state award in the “less than 100 urban local bodies category”, dislodging Jharkhand, which had won in the last two consecutive years. Jharkhand and Uttarakhand received the second and third spots respectively.

The awards were given away by President Droupadi Murmu as part of the Azadi@75 Swachh Survekshan 2022 hosted as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission. She also released the Swachh Survekshan 2022 dashboard.

Ms. Murmu said: “I congratulate all the awardee cities for their commitment to the cause of Swachhata (cleanliness)”. She exhorted the citizens to join in the three-week source segregation campaign set to begin today.

REMOVE ONLINE BETTING ADS, CENTRE TELLS TV CHANNELS, NEWS WEBSITES

Stating that any violation might invite penal action, the Ministry said despite its advisory dated June 13, 2022, some online offshore betting platforms had started using news websites as surrogate products to advertise on TV channels. It pointed out that betting and gambling were illegal in most parts of India, and therefore advertisements of betting platforms could not be shown.

‘Similar logos’

“In respect of the advertisements of the surrogate news websites operated by the online betting platforms, it may be mentioned that the logos of the concerned news websites are strikingly similar to the betting platform. The concerned betting platforms, and the corresponding news websites, are also not registered with any legal authority under Indian laws,” said the Ministry.

The Consumer Affairs Department said such companies have been advertising themselves as professional sports blogs and sports news sites, etc. It provided an indicative list of online betting platforms that were using news for surrogate advertising.

In view of the Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements-2022 under the Consumer Protection Act, read with the Advertising Code under the Cable TV Network Regulation Act, advertisements of the news websites that were, in fact, surrogate promotions did not appear to be in strict conformity with the laws, said the Ministry. The Ministry observed that promotional content and advertisements of betting platforms were still visible on certain news and OTT platforms.

Earlier advisory

The June 13 advisory to the various platforms had advised against publishing advertisements of online betting in larger public interest. It had also asked the online advertisement intermediaries not to target such advertisements toward the Indian audience.

EVERY DROP COUNTS

One of the most significant commitments of the Narendra Modi government is to ensure piped water to every rural household by 2024. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, led by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, 10.2 crore rural households, or about 53% of the eligible population, now have tap water access. This, the Government claims, is a 37-percentage point rise from 2019 when the scheme was announced, where its stated aim is to ensure at least 55 litres



per person per day of potable water to every rural household — which implies a mere connection does not suffice. The Government commissions annual surveys to evaluate the success of the scheme. A recent audit, by a private agency, found that around 62% of rural households in India had fully functional tap water connections within their premises. A report of a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources in March, based on numbers provided by the nodal Jal Shakti Ministry, stated that 46% households had such fully functional tap water connections. It is important to note that for the purposes of the survey, only 3% of rural households were surveyed by the agency for the updated numbers and so the margin of error may be substantial and subject to the way the survey was designed. If the numbers are accurate, however, this represents an impressive rise in potable, tap water accessibility and suggests that the mission is well on its way to meeting its 2024 target.

The survey, however, revealed wide disparities in achievement. Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Puducherry reported more than 80% of households with fully functional connections while less than half the households in Rajasthan, Kerala, Manipur, Tripura, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim had such connections. About 75% of households received water all days of the week, and only 8% just once a week. On average, households got water for three hours every day. Moreover, the report mentions a problem of chlorine contamination. Though 93% of the water samples were reportedly free of bacteriological contamination, most of the anganwadi centres and schools had higher than the permissible range of residual chlorine. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the progress of the scheme but with the economy now close to pre-pandemic levels, it is likely that the challenges of labour and material have softened somewhat to aid the progress of the scheme. The Centre should liaise better with States that are falling behind in targets and ensure that the infrastructure created as part of the scheme is long lasting and not merely to meet election targets.

TO TACKLE MALNUTRITION, MOTHERS IN NANDURBAR LEARN BREASTFEEDING METHOD DEvised AT IIT-B

Meenabai Sachin Pawra gave birth to a boy on July 27 in Taloda Taluka of Maharashtra's Nandurbar district. The child was underweight — like many others in this tribal-dominated district, among those with the highest burden of malnourished children in the country.

But just within the first week of August, his weight increased from 2.18 kg to 3 kg, a much faster rate of weight gain than the earlier norm, thanks to a set of modified breastfeeding techniques developed at Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B).

Like Meenabai's child, hundreds of newborns across Nandurbar have benefitted from these techniques. For the first time, the district is witnessing a 30-40 gram per day weight gain among newborns, as compared to 10-12 gram earlier.

The technique improvised on the “cross-cradle hold”, mentioned in WHO guidelines for low birthweight babies. With the U-shape contouring of the breast so that the mother's fingers are parallel to the baby's lips, this helps with proper attachment of the baby's mouth to the lower part of areola.

“In this position, the baby is brought very close to the mother and also the baby's head is well controlled by the mother's hands to allow extension of the neck backward. This makes it easy for the baby to swallow,” she said.



IIT-B's CTARA has made several animated tutorials on the techniques which are being translated into 20 Indian languages. Researchers under Dalal use these videos to educate Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) supervisors who, in turn, sensitise the mothers. The ICDS staff are trained with dummy babies and breast-shaped props.

Anganwadi workers and health officials regularly visit the new mothers to check if they are using the right technique.

Karanwal said the district has an exclusive breastfeeding rate of 86.6 per cent. By this calculation, the incidence of malnutrition should have been minimal. But as per NFHS-5 data, Nandurbar's stunting, wasting and underweight indicators are unsatisfactory. As per the records for the district, 30.7 per cent children are wasted, 57.2 per cent are underweight and 45.8 per cent are stunted.

INDIA-MADE COUGH SYRUPS AND DEATHS IN GAMBIA: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

Earlier this week, the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued an alert about four Indian-manufactured cough syrups that it said could potentially be linked to acute kidney injury in children and 66 deaths in the small West African nation of The Gambia.

The syrups — Promethazine Oral Solution, Kofexmalin Baby Cough Syrup, Makoff Baby Cough Syrup, and Magrip N Cold Syrup — were manufactured by Maiden Pharmaceuticals, based in Sonipat, Haryana.

What happened in The Gambia?

At the end of July, the country's Epidemiology and Disease Control Department was informed of a "sudden" increase in cases of children ages 5 months-4 years reporting to hospital with acute kidney injury. By August, 32 cases and 28 deaths had been reported — a case fatality ratio at 87.5 per cent — local media quoted the Ministry of Health as saying.

In a press release issued in early August, the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, the biggest in the country, said: "There is a rare condition currently under observation in paediatric outpatient. Samples were collected from the affected children and awaiting results from the lab. Our doctors are working very hard to establish the cause of the condition."

In September, The Gambia reported the four syrups, used for fever, cough, and allergic cold, to the WHO. In its alert, the WHO said laboratory analysis of samples of each of these products had confirmed the presence of "unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol as contaminants".

The Gambia initiated a nationwide recall of the syrups on October 5, beginning with three of the worst-affected regions.

What do diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol do?

Both are chemical contaminants that may be present in the solvent that is used in the syrups. It is toxic to humans, and can result in abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, inability to pass urine, headache, and altered mental state. It can also lead to acute kidney injury that may be fatal in children. In 2020, 17 children died in Jammu and Kashmir after consuming a syrup with high levels of diethylene glycol.



Should you be worried?

No. The four medicines were manufactured by the Haryana-based company only for export to The Gambia. “These 04 drugs are not licensed for manufacture and sale in India. In effect, none of these four drugs is sold domestically,” the Union Health Ministry has said in a release.

According to an official, the company had taken special permission to make the medicines with specifications of the export country in mind after receiving a purchase order.

Why are the syrups not sold in India?

A drug regulatory expert who was part of the investigation into the 2020 J&K deaths said India has phased out syrups in favour of suspensions.

In syrup, the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) is completely mixed in the solvent — imagine a sugar solution. In a suspension, on the other hand, API particles are suspended uniformly in a solvent — imagine cooked dal.

“That is why it says on labels on the bottles, ‘shake well before use’, otherwise the API will settle at the bottom,” the expert said.

APIs such as paracetamol and others contained in the four syrups are not water-soluble, and hence need a base solvent like propylene glycol. “Propylene glycol is available in two varieties — one type is meant for industrial use, the other for pharmaceutical use. To save on costs, some companies use the industrial propylene glycol that may contain diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol as contaminants,” the expert said.

Suspensions do not need propylene glycol as the active ingredient does not have to be dissolved. They use a liquid base called carboxymethylcellulose (CMC), with no risk of containing the two contaminants.

What are the Indian authorities doing?

After being informed about the incident on September 29, India’s apex regulatory body, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), along with the state authorities, opened investigations and lifted control samples — from the same batch of syrups — which are being tested in a Chandigarh-based lab.

Should the control samples be found to contain high levels of contaminants, “proportionate action will be taken against the company, which may include suspension of the licence to export the drug”, said an official. “However, we are unsure whether we can initiate criminal action because the deaths did not happen in India,” the official added.

Pharmaceutical expert C M Gulhati said it is the responsibility of the importing country to test medicines before releasing them in their market. “India tests what is imported... If Indian authorities start testing all the drugs that the country exports, then that is all they will be doing,” Gulhati said.

The Health Ministry has asked the WHO to share a report on causal relationship — confirmation that the syrups led to the deaths in The Gambia — at the earliest. “The exact one to one causal relation of death has not yet been provided by WHO to CDSCO. As a robust National Regulatory Authority, CDSCO has requested WHO to share at the earliest with CDSCO the report on



establishment of causal relation to death with the medical products in question,” an official release said.

OVER 6,000 TREES ILLEGALLY CUT FOR TIGER SAFARI PROJECT IN CORBETT RESERVE, SAYS FSI REPORT

The much-awaited tiger safari project of the Uttarakhand government is under scanner after a Forest Survey of India (FSI) report stated that over 6,000 trees were illegally cut in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) against the permission for 163 for the Pakhru Tiger Safari. The State Forest Department, however, denied the FSI’s claims, and said that there were some technical issues which needed to be resolved before finally accepting the report.

The FSI was asked by the Uttarakhand Forest Department to access the status of illegal felling in and around the Pakhru Tiger Safari. They were asked to estimate the number of trees felled in the illegally cleared area based on expertise and technology available with the organisation. The Forest Survey Institute was also tasked to scan the area in and around the Pakhru Tiger Safari for illegal felling and to analyse any area within the Kalagarh Tiger Reserve, which was seen to be exhibiting forest cover change.

“After compiling the report in around nine months in Pakhru block, Kalushaheed block, Nalkhatta Block and Kalagarh block, the FSI has come up with an observation that the area cleared under the CTR is estimated as 16.21 hectares. The trees estimated on the cleared area are 6,093 in number with the lower bound of 5,765 and the upper bound of 6,421 with 95% confidence interval and 2.72% standard error,” said a senior official from the department.

The matter of thousands of trees being felled illegally was highlighted by Gaurav Bansal, an environment-activist and lawyer based in Delhi.

Anoop Singh, Director-General, FSI, could not be contacted even after repeated attempts. Prakash Lakhchaura, Deputy DG, FSI, said that he cannot comment on the reservations of the Forest Department on FSI report as he is not aware of the matter.

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

Both hail from Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand and were commissioned into 11 Gorkha Rifles of the Indian Army three years apart — 1978 and 1981. They are India’s first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) late Gen. Bipin Rawat and the second CDS Gen. Anil Chauhan, who took over the top military post on September 30.

However, they are contrasting in their demeanour. Gen. Rawat was outspoken, including while speaking at public forums or interactions with the media. Gen. Chauhan is calm and measured, but firm in putting across his views, said a serving officer who had worked with him closely on several occasions. “He likes to keep a low-profile,” the officer said, requesting anonymity.

It is unprecedented in India’s military history that a retired three-star officer is brought back to Service, 16 months after he ‘hung up the uniform’, elevated as a full General and appointed first among equals, before the three Service Chiefs. As CDS, Gen. Chauhan will also function as the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister on all tri-service matters as well as head the Department of Military Affairs as Secretary. He will also be the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Post-retirement, Gen. Chauhan took charge as the Military Adviser in the



National Security Council Secretariat, where he was working closely with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, till the appointment. Gen. Chauhan was the Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO) at the Army Headquarters from January 30, 2018 till August 31, 2019 when Gen. Rawat was the Army Chief. During this time, he was closely involved in India's response to the Pulwama terror attack, which resulted in the death of 40 personnel.

While the institution of the CDS is still evolving, the groundwork for it and the tasks ahead had been laid down by Gen. Rawat, before his untimely death in a chopper crash last December. With that, Gen. Chauhan has his tasks cut out and has to pick up the threads from where they were left. Among the several tasks lined up, the top priority would be the roll-out of the process of theatrisation, the reorganisation of the armed forces into theatre commands meant to bring in synergy and optimise resources.

Gen. Chauhan has a good understanding of theatrisation and made positive contributions during the earlier deliberations, said another officer.

With the maximum age limit for the CDS set at 65, Gen. Chauhan, 61, has a tenure of nearly four years and will likely outlast the next batch of Service Chiefs. The Defence Ministry statement on his appointment had only said "with effect from the date of his assumption of charge and until further orders." This gives him enough time to build consensus, ensure a smooth roll-out of theatrisation and see their stabilisation as well.

THE INDIAN-MADE LCH 'PRACHAND' AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The story so far:

The indigenously developed Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Prachand, meaning fierce, was formally inducted into the Indian Air Force at the Jodhpur airbase on Monday. The multi-role attack helicopter has been customised as per the requirements of the Indian armed forces to operate both in desert terrains and high-altitude sectors. The LCH is the only attack helicopter in the world that can land and take off at an altitude of 5,000 metres (16,400 ft). It is also capable of firing a range of air-to-ground and air-to-air missiles.

What is the LCH project?

The LCH project can be traced to the 1999 Kargil war when the armed forces felt the need for a dedicated platform capable of operating at high altitudes and delivering precision strikes as the existing attack choppers couldn't effectively hit targets.

In October 2006, the government sanctioned the design and development of the LCH. The Indian Army joined the programme in December 2013. The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) built four LCH prototypes flight-tested them with over 1,600 total flights logging 1,239 flight hours.

The ground run was first carried out in February 2010 and the first prototype 'TD-1' took its maiden flight on March 29, 2010, as the crew carried out low-speed, low-altitude checks on the systems. After extensive flight testing in diverse terrains and weather conditions, the LCH received initial operation clearance on August 26, 2017. It was declared ready for production in February 2020. A year later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the LCH to the Indian Air Force.



Earlier this year, the Cabinet Committee on Security, headed by PM Modi approved the procurement of 15 limited series production (LSP) variants at a cost of ₹3,887 crore — 10 for the IAF and five for the Indian Army.

The Indian Army formally inducted its first Light Combat Helicopter on September 29.

What are the main features of LCH?

Powered by twin Shakti engines, a collaborative effort of the HAL and France's Safran company, the LCH is a 5.8-tonne class combat helicopter with potent ground attack and aerial combat capability. The helicopter can fly at a maximum speed of 288 kmph and has a combat radius of 500 km, which can go up to a service ceiling of 21,000 feet, making it ideal to operate in Siachen. It incorporates several stealth features such as reduced radar and infra-red signatures, crashworthy features for improved survivability, armoured-protection systems and night attack capability.

How will the LCH give an edge to the armed forces?

The induction of the LCH into the Air Force has been termed as a “big boost” to the combat prowess of the armed forces and a “potent platform to meet the operational requirements of the IAF and the Army”.

The LCH helicopters can be deployed to assume air defence, anti-tank roles in high-altitude, counter-insurgency, and search and rescue operations, and are equipped with advanced technology which can be used to destroy the enemy's air defence, as per HAL. It can be deployed to perform Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR), bunker busting operations, counter-insurgency operations in the jungle and urban areas and support the ground forces, Defence Ministry officials said.

As per HAL, the Indian armed forces have an overall requirement of 160 LCH — 95 for Army and 65 for Air Force. The fleet of first four helicopters was inducted into the 143 Helicopter Unit 'Dhanush'. The helicopters are likely to be deployed along the Line of Actual Control along with Apache choppers.

AATMANIRBHAR IN DEFENCE PRODUCTION: WHERE INDIA STANDS AMONG INDO-PACIFIC NATIONS

India ranks fourth among 12 Indo-Pacific nations in self-reliant arms production capabilities, according to a study released this month by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a widely respected independent resource on global security. China tops the list, Japan is second, South Korea is in third place, and Pakistan is at number 8.

The study, which measures self-reliance until 2020, is based on three indicators of self reliance in each country:

* Arms procurement — imports, licensed and domestic production as a proportion of the government's total procurement of major conventional arms;

* Arms industry — the study presents the five largest arms companies in each country, where data are available, ranked by sales of arms and military services in 2020 to both domestic and export customers;



* Uncrewed maritime vehicles, the sea equivalent of drones — covering both uncrewed surface vehicles (USVs) and uncrewed underwater vehicles (UUVs), meant to provide a qualitative understanding of how countries are engaging domestic research institutes and firms to produce such cutting edge systems.

The study's choice of maritime domain was because the Indo-Pacific region is a “maritime theatre”, and most of its flashpoints involve navies. The 12 countries in the study were selected because they have the highest military spending in the region — Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

According to the study, understanding and determining the extent of self-reliance in the Indo-Pacific region, which has several ongoing flashpoints, is crucial for trust and confidence-building among states. This region has also seen a growing allocation by states for defence procurement. Eighteen arms manufacturing companies based in the region were ranked among the world's largest arms companies in 2020. “[I]n a region where tensions among neighbours are rising, this report contributes to transparency with regards to levels of self-reliance in domestic arms production, allowing for an independent assessment of the region's respective arms industries,” the study says.

China was the world's fifth largest arms importer in 2016-20. Its self-reliance policies, and its high economic growth in that period meant that the Chinese arms industry now increasingly fulfills the requirements of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Its high volume of imports in absolute terms accounts for only 8 per cent of total procurement for the period, the lowest share for any of the 12 governments studied in this report.

China's arms industry primarily involves nine large state-owned enterprises (SOEs). All eight companies for which data are available are in the top 100, with four in the top 10 in 2020. Four are dominant in the aerospace and aviation sectors, two in land systems, one in electronics, one in shipbuilding, and one in nuclear power.

The PLA is the main customer for the arms companies. China also has 17 ongoing projects, in collaboration with universities and other agencies to develop “long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment”.

India is ranked as the second largest importer of arms for its armed forces in 2016-20. India is highly dependent on imports of complete foreign major arms, including many produced under licence or as components for its domestic production.

Of India's total volume of procurement in 2016–20, 84 per cent was of foreign origin. Domestic arms companies provide only 16 per cent of its total procurement. According to the study, the significant arms sales of local firms and the high level of licensed production push India to fourth position in the list.

Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Indian Ordnance Factories, Bharat Electronics, Mazagaon Docks and Cochin Shipyard are among the major Indian arms servicing companies. Ashok Leyland, one of the largest suppliers of trucks to the Indian Army, is the only company ranked in the top 50 in the Indo-Pacific. India has seven Uncrewed Maritime Vessel projects ongoing. In the private sector, Larsen & Toubro has been developing AUV prototypes on its own and in collaboration with foreign partners, such as Italy's EdgeLab, while DRDO and the Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute have been considering development of AUV prototypes.



LOOK UP

For tourists visiting Ladakh, the itinerary is most likely to include the Pangong Lake in the State's capital Leh, and for the more adventurous lot, an expedition to the Khardung La pass. What many don't know is that the region's arid landscape, sparse population and therefore minimal artificial light also makes it a destination for stargazing. And soon, India will have its first Dark Sky Reserve in Hanle, located about 250 kilometres from Leh. The initiative mooted by the Department of Science and Technology, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, is expected to give astro tourism in India a boost.

Globally, designated dark sky regions developed by tourism boards of different countries, in collaboration with astronomers and local communities, are equipped with facilities to aid astro tourism. Since stargazing requires driving to remote locations at night, tourists look for accommodation facilities and this, in turn, can spell revenue for local tourism.

Some of the visitors to Leh might be aware of observatories and homestays that facilitate stargazing experiences. Astro tourism is courted by a niche section of tourists, propelled by astronomy clubs in different cities. A few groups venture into remote locations in Ladakh, Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, and the deserts of Gujarat and Rajasthan to gaze at the clear night skies and spot the stars, nebulae, the Milky Way and other far off galaxies, guided by astronomers.

Dark sky zones

A designated dark sky region has the potential to bring in domestic and international tourists. The International Dark Sky Association (IDA), in the U.S., has so far certified 200 dark sky destinations as part of its International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) programme. Following a rigorous application procedure, places are certified as International Dark Sky Sanctuaries, Reserves, Communities or Parks.

Ashley Wilson, IDA's director of conservation and lead for IDSP, says on an average, IDA certifies around 20 nominations a year. 2021 was an exception with the certification of 37 new places. The 200th place to be certified, in September 2022, was Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area in Nebraska, USA.

In an email interview, Ashley states that "the IDSP certification brings attention to light pollution and the need to preserve the night sky as a natural resource. Applying for the certification supports management agencies in achieving long-term conservation targets and connecting people to nature. Additionally, it serves as an economic driver by fostering increased tourism and local economic activity."

He cites examples, as reported by the Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative: In 2019, a study by Missouri State University examined the economic impact of dark sky tourism on the Colorado Plateau economy. According to the study, astro tourism could lead to \$5.8 billion in visitor spending and support the creation of over 11,000 new jobs annually, over the next decade.

Certification woes

There are dark sky regions across North and South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, developed in coordination with local tourism and government bodies, with an understanding of astronomy and the need to have lighting conditions that do not hinder the views of the night skies.



Not all of these regions are certified by international bodies such as the IDA or the Starlight Foundation in Spain. Reports suggest that among the 63 national parks in North America, only 12 have been certified by the IDA.

The dark sky reserve coming up at Hanle is not yet certified by the IDA. Ashley says the IDA has contacted local officials and is working with this team to prepare their IDSP application.

Tourism boosters

Regions closer to the Himalayas offer unhindered views of the night skies for avid astro tourists and a nomenclature such as a dark sky reserve or a sanctuary can further help boost tourism, says Sonal Asgotraa, founder of Astrostays, which works closely with the local community in Maan village in Ladakh, on the banks of Pangong Tso in Leh.

While tourists have explored astro tourism activities in Leh, she says driving further away to Hanle and Zaskar can offer unhindered views of the night sky. "For people travelling all the way, developing accommodation facilities in the hamlets will be key," adds Sonal.

During the pandemic, with international travel out of bounds, Ashley points out to reports that suggest a surge in visits to parks and other close-to-nature destinations. "Naturally dark and quiet environments can boost this sense of tranquillity, which makes IDSPs more appealing."

DOES SCRAPPING OF AWARDS SIGNAL MISPLACED PRIORITIES?

Each year, September 26 is celebrated by the Indian Scientific Community as the birthday of Prof. Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar, a stalwart of Indian science in the 1940s and 1950s and the founding head of CSIR. This is also a day when the government announces the yearly Bhatnagar Awards aimed at honouring the most outstanding researchers (under the age of 45) working in India. But this year was an exception. There was no announcement of award winners.

Instead, the government released a copy of minutes of a high-level meeting held the previous week. The minutes reveal that the government has resolved to scrap most of the existing awards, including those instituted through private endowment, and introduce a 'select few high-stature' awards instead.

Unfair means

The decision raises more questions than it answers. It remains unclear what the rationale was for the sudden scrapping of most awards. One reason could be that the government is of the impression that the current awards are handed out in an unfair manner.

While bias and prejudice cannot be ruled out, there is a strong notion that winning an award becomes easier when the potential awardee is a favourite of one or more members of the selection committee. But these supposedly bad choices have been only a few and most of the time, the current system of selection has undoubtedly rewarded excellence.

Since the minutes have not listed out the reasons, speculations about the government's motive are rife. It was thought that this cull is part of the overall austerity measure, in light of the economic downturn. But that seems unlikely as the total annual budget of all these cancelled awards is so small that it is less than rounding error in the Union Budget. Secondly, this order also shuts down all awards instituted through private endowments, for which the government was not spending anything.



Strangely, the order does not clarify what would happen to the said endowment if it is not used for giving those respective awards. Another oddity about this order is that all the ministries have been told to stop all 'non-core-domain' awards.

It is no secret that only a small fraction of the Indian scientific community align themselves with the questionable scientific agenda of the current government. Centralising all the awards is seen as one way of giving the government a greater control over the selection committees and reward scientists who are seen favourably by the government. This will help in raising the profile of such scientists, paving the way for their eventual elevation to the leadership positions in different research institutes and universities.

Delayed fellowship

There is apprehension that social media activity of prominent scientists is being monitored and that the government has not taken kindly to the critical comments made about its scientific policies. Even before the pandemic, there were occasional instances of fellowships of young researchers getting delayed by 2-3 months. But since the last three years, an astonishingly large fraction of researchers have been experiencing delays. These delayed fellowships and grants not only means that skilled researchers are just sitting in their labs without being able to procure necessary samples, chemicals or equipment but it also leads to a large number of PhD students quitting mid-way as they are unable to support their families.

Recently, the government issued another order asking researchers to open a new bank account for each new project and meeting all expenses of that project only through that specific account. This would not just lead to more unnecessary paperwork but would create comical situations such as placing multiple orders of the same chemical for the same lab, because it must be billed to multiple projects. Thankfully, after backlash, the government promised reconsideration. Few months back, the government raised the GST on purchase of scientific equipment from 5% to 18%, which has been playing havoc on the research budget of many institutions.

Mandating permissions

International collaborations have been made almost impossible by mandating multiple permissions just to invite a foreign researcher to an institute or to sign an MoU with a foreign university. Anything which involves foreigners or foreign currency is viewed dimly and has to clear multiple hurdles, which hampers research. The whole procedure has become needlessly cumbersome.

It has been said that the government plans to replace all these awards with a 'few high-stature' awards, tentatively called Vigyan Ratna. Only time will tell if these new awards adequately cover the diversity in not just research disciplines but also in researchers themselves. More importantly, the scientific community would be keenly watching if the new awards are decided on quality of research or they become a vehicle to promote scientists who are favoured by the government.

THE ATROPHY OF THE NEO-BUDDHIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

Every year in October, thousands of people assemble at Nagpur's Deekshabhoomi to pay homage to B.R. Ambedkar and remember the historic day of October 14, 1956, when he and half a million of his followers embraced Buddhism. Ambedkar chose Buddhism after examining various religions to understand the suitability of each to liberate socially marginalised communities from the exploitative caste order. He found that Buddhism is rooted in India's civilization, supplements

3RD FLOOR AND 4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



modern ethical values and is averse to social hierarchies and patriarchal domination. Neo-Buddhism was proposed as a mass movement that would elevate former 'Untouchables' and help them achieve self-respect. He hoped that Buddhist principles would mobilise them into a robust community to battle the ruling Brahmanical elites.

Struggles of neo-Buddhism

Neo-Buddhism emerged as a maverick phenomenon that offered strong psychological solace to the struggling Dalit masses. However, Ambedkar's grand hopes remain unfulfilled. Today, the Buddhist population in India is one of the smallest minorities, its ideological challenge against the Hindu social order has not been taken seriously, and even within the Dalit community, conversion to Buddhism is not perceived as a suitable path to achieve social emancipation. Instead, it is the BJP that often fashions itself as the new torchbearer of Buddhist identity.

A large majority (close to 80%) of Indian Buddhists resides in Maharashtra. The neo-Buddhists have established social and educational institutions, initiated cultural movements, and organised popular public festivals to make Buddhism a visible force in Maharashtra's public sphere. However, it is mainly the Mahar caste and recently, smaller sections within the Matang and the Maratha castes which have identified themselves as neo-Buddhists. Other socially marginalised groups are still defined by Hindu caste nomenclatures and traditional occupations.

The Dalit sociopolitical movements in States including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have also not promoted conversion to Buddhism. In U.P., during the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)'s regime, cultural symbols related to Buddhism, such as the Rashtriya Dalit Prerna Sthal and Green Garden, were erected in public spaces, but there was still hesitation in suggesting religious conversion as an alternative to fight the battle for social justice. Even in States where the Scheduled Caste population is relatively high, such as in Punjab, West Bengal and Odisha, Dalits have shown restraint in adopting Buddhism to challenge their social location.

Importantly, India's neighbouring Buddhist countries also have not identified neo-Buddhists as significant partners in their theological engagements. Several Buddhist countries have built their own pagodas and temples in Bodhi Gaya and are more concerned with adding new sites in India's Buddhist Circuit. Certain individuals and Buddhist associations from Japan, Thailand and the U.K. have established some close links with the neo-Buddhists of Maharashtra, but this is small support.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MAHATMA'S THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY

As yet another Gandhi Jayanti goes by, Irfan Habib in this article dated October 1, 2019 remembers the father of the nation and his developing ideals and principles

The reader need not be reminded that it was in South Africa that Gandhi perfected the mode of Passive Resistance, which he later called "satyagraha", to defend the interests of the Indian community in South Africa. During this period he was greatly influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin: from the former he derived mainly his hatred of violence and consumerism, and from the latter, respect for labour and concern for the poor. But he took their critiques to apply to the Western industrial society alone, and held that old Indian society was free of the evils the West suffered from. This basic thesis was advanced in his Hind Swaraj, composed in 1909.



The evils of western societies which India on obtaining Swaraj was to abstain from, as listed in this text, are startling: Electoral democracy was one such evil, for Parliaments were “really emblems of slavery”. Women were to have no employment outside the home: otherwise there would arise evils such as the suffragette movement in the West (demanding women’s right to vote). Above all, modern industry based on machinery was to be shunned. There were some faults in existing Indian society that he conceded, such as child marriage and polyandry, but no mention is made of polygamy or untouchability. The caste system is indirectly praised for having barred market competition by assigning a fixed occupation to everyone. It is proclaimed that India was being ruined by the three evils brought by the British, viz. railways, lawyers and doctors. He goes on even to say that rather than build cotton mills in India, India should continue to buy from Manchester! There was no need for compulsory education; “religious education” imparted by “Mullas, [Parsi] Dasturs and Brahmans” was enough.

On the poor

It is remarkable that while Gandhi shows so much concern for the poor, he does not present any proposal in Hind Swaraj for the removal or alleviation of poverty itself. This is, perhaps, mainly because of his belief, unexpressed here but firmly held, in the sanctity of rights of property. As for political action for people to obtain what they legitimately wanted, ‘passive resistance’ was to be the means, to be undertaken, but only by those who “observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth, cultivate fearlessness”. No further guidance on how India under Swaraj was to be governed is provided. The only modern notion adopted is that of ‘nation’, which, as in the rest of the world, says Gandhi, is not to be identified with any one religion.

When Gandhi arrived in India early in 1915, these were his views, despite a reprimand over them from his chosen guru, Gopal Krishna Gokhale (d.1915), who had visited South Africa in 1912. Yet there proved in time to be a teacher for Gandhi, far severer than Gokhale, namely, the Indian poor themselves, for they too had ideas for their own salvation quite different from what Gandhi had chosen to prescribe for them in Hind Swaraj .

The very first issue he encountered in India was that of untouchability, a matter ignored in Hind Swaraj . Immediately after he established his ashram at Ahmedabad in 1915 a crisis erupted when he admitted to it an ‘untouchable’ couple. But he withstood it, the couple stayed; and henceforth on this matter Gandhi would give no concession. If he yet went on affirming his faith in varnashram, this was done more or less to keep peace with the bulk of the upper castes.

When Gandhi initiated his first popular agitation in India in 1917, namely, the Champaran struggle against indigo-planters, the issues raised certainly impinged on what the planters regarded as their proprietary rights; and in 1918 when Gandhi went on a hunger-strike in favour of striking textile mill workers, this could hardly be regarded as consistent with his own nihilistic attitude towards modern industry.

Gandhiji’s ideas were put to test still more fundamentally during the Non-Cooperation movement, 1920-22. The main demand initially was for protection of ‘Khilafat’, a purely Islamic institution under the aegis of Ottoman Turkey, now threatened by the victorious Allies, Britain and France. This could well be justified by the invocation of religion as a legitimate source of political action, implicit in Hind Swaraj . But for larger mass support the demand for Swaraj was added to it; and this essentially meant drawing peasants into the struggle. Their role, however, could only be effective if they ceased paying rent to the landlords, who in turn would not then be able to pay the land-tax to the Government. But this struck against Gandhi’s notion of protection of property, and



he specifically prohibited such action by peasants in U.P. through his “instructions” issued in February 1921. Yet peasants, especially in U.P., defied the injunction in many places.

The village connect

The experience of the Non-Cooperation movement, led Gandhiji to formulate in 1924, his ‘Constructive Programme’. He had by now made his peace with electoral democracy by advocating optional universal suffrage for legislative bodies in an article in 1924. His Constructive Programme concentrated on work in the villages, involving the promotion of Khadi (hand-woven cloth out of hand-spun cotton), which was in line with his rejection of machine-made cloth, though here opposition to use of foreign, especially British, manufactured cloth was also involved. Allied with this project was a campaign for Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability. Simultaneously Gandhi developed his theory of the property-owners as custodians of the poor, the mill-owners looking after their workers, and landlords, after their tenants. This was part of an obvious bid to overcome class antagonisms. However, the approach was bound to have little practical consequence, since few Zamindars came forward to shower money on their tenants.

When the next cycle of Civil Disobedience began in 1930, the acute distress of peasants owing to the Great Depression of 1929-32, tended to convert it largely into a peasant struggle. There was also now a growing industrial working class. To both peasants and workers the radical approach of Jawaharlal Nehru, himself greatly influenced by the Soviet Revolution of 1917, made a special appeal. Gandhi had already recognised the importance of Nehru as a figure commanding great popularity; and there is no doubt that he was now prepared to make concessions to Nehru’s approach. So came about his readiness to espouse Nehru’s draft resolution on Fundamental Rights, which Gandhi himself moved at the Karachi session of the Congress on 31 March 1931.

This resolution established many principles in favour of which Gandhi had not yet pronounced, such as equality between men and women not only as voters, but also in appointments to public offices and exercise of trade: reduction of agricultural rent and levy of tax on landlord incomes, state ownership or control of key industries, and, finally, scaling down of the debts of the poor.

Perhaps, Gandhiji later wished to draw back from some of what he had conceded (“a heavy price for the allegiance of Jawaharlal”, in the words of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru). Thus to Nehru’s clear chagrin, he assured zamindars in U.P. that he would stand by them, if anyone attacked their rights; and when in September 1934 he resigned (formally) from the Congress, he cited as a grievance the rise of the “socialist group” in the Congress. Yet there is no evidence that he opposed in any manner the Congress Provincial Governments in U.P. and Bihar in 1937-39 when they framed their legislation restricting zamindars’ rights in relation to their tenants.

Poona Pact

During these years, in fact, Gandhi chose for his main activity the welfare of the Depressed Castes, whom he now called Harijans. Provoked by the British Government’s Communal Award of August 1932, he went on fast against separate electorates created for depressed castes. This led to the well-known Poona Pact between depressed caste leaders, and caste Hindu representatives. Contrary to present-day denunciations of the Pact, it actually improved the representation of the Depressed Castes by more than doubling the seats reserved for them in the Provincial Legislatures, and providing 18% reservation (against none in the Communal Award) in the Central Legislature. There was also provision for an initial vote among Depressed Caste voters to select four eligible candidates for each reserved seat.



The Poona Pact proved a signal for Gandhiji from 1932 onward to initiate a nationwide campaign against untouchability and for 'Harijan' uplift. Increasingly, Gandhi now avoided giving any sanction to the caste system, or any philosophical defence of varnashram.

It is difficult to assess how much the experience of the Second World War II (1939-45) and the Quit-India movement of 1942 further altered Gandhiji's social views. It is possible that he continued to cherish some nostalgia for a rural India, content with its poverty, as envisioned in Hind Swaraj, and a reassertion of the responsibilities of the rich as custodians of the poor. But, by and large, his rejection of the inequities of the caste system and of discrimination against women became only sharper.

Above all, his concerns for Hindu-Muslim unity became ever more focused as he stood rock-like against communal violence that enveloped the country in the year of Independence. In his last great act, he went on fast in January 1948 to make India pay ₹Rs55 crore, the sum due to Pakistan, while both countries were at war with each other, and to get Muslims in Delhi back to their homes, from which they had been driven out. Here in practice, was a real assertion of internationalism and sheer humanity — for which he paid with his life on 30 January 30, 1948. It is fitting to remember that on the issue of communal amity Gandhi thus remained as firm till the end as he was at the time of writing Hind Swaraj.

DUSSEHRA BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Imagine, for a minute, an extra-terrestrial alien, or even an ill-informed American, lands up at a Durga puja pandal, or the final day of Ram Leela, or the celebrations for Dashain. The stranger is bound to ask: What are you celebrating? And the answer — wrapped in tales, texts, myths and history — so often ends up being about the symbolic "triumph of good over evil". From the very first textbooks, that's what children are taught — Ram vs Ravan, Durga vs Mahishasur. These stories are the stuff of myth and religion — and politics too.

But in all the creative pandals of Kolkata and the spectacles of Ravan, Kumbhakarna and Meghnath being set aflame, there is more than just the religious or moral tale. The festive season is also about celebration — the joy in food, fairs, family and friends. After all, the kathi roll and the luchi-kosha mangsho are as much part of the festive meal as the bhog served in view of the goddess; the Ferris wheel and make-shift merry-go-round as much a moment of joyful ecstasy as the effigy of Ravan exploding.

Good and evil are abstract concepts, all too malleable for profane ends. Festivities, on the other hand, are what all societies need. When you work hard all year, and know you must do so again the next, the sacred calendar provides a divinely mandated break, it spells out a time for indulgence and revelry. So much of life is drudgery and routine. Fortunately, every year, there is also a celebration that acknowledges a fact that is so often forgotten in the high-minded morality of good vs evil — in the crowds of devotees and the meetings with friends and family, there is a spark of divinity.

YUNQING TANG BAGS SASTRA RAMANUJAN PRIZE 2022 FOR HER CONTRIBUTION IN MATHS

The award, instituted by the Shanmugha Arts, Science, Technology & Research Academy (SASTRA) in 2005 with a cash prize of \$10,000, is presented annually to individuals aged 32 and



below, who made outstanding contributions in the field of mathematics, influenced by Srinivasa Ramanujan in a broad sense.

A release by Krishnaswami Alladi, chair of SASTRA Ramanujan Prize Committee, said Ms. Yunqing's works "display a remarkable combination of sophisticated techniques, in which the arithmetic and geometry of modular curves and of Shimura varieties play a central role, and her results and methods are bound to have major impact on future research in this area."

It said, "Tang's most recent joint work with Frank Calegari and Vesselin Dimitrov on modular equations is of great significance and also has ties with Ramanujan's own work."

Ms. Yunqing, born in China, completed her B.Sc in Peking University in 2011, following which she went to Harvard University. She completed her Ph.D in 2016 at Harvard under the supervision of Mark Kisin. After stints in Princeton University, she joined UC Berkeley in July as Assistant Professor.

The prize will be awarded at the International Conference on Number Theory during December 20-22, at SASTRA University.



DreamIAS



BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

NO RESPIRE FROM INFLATION: OPEC+ DECISION TO CUT OIL SUPPLIES WILL TIGHTEN THE MARKET

On Wednesday, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies announced their decision to slash crude oil output by two million barrels per day ahead of the peak winter months. The decision will come into effect from November this year. The deep production cuts, equivalent to around 2 per cent of global supply, will only tighten the global oil market. Crude oil prices, which had fallen off the highs seen in June, and hit a recent low of \$82 barrel last week, rose above \$93 per barrel on Wednesday following the news.

Such sharp supply cuts, driven by the desire to maintain prices, will offset the release of strategic oil reserves that was designed to bring down the price of oil and help consumers at a time when inflation has surged across the world. After the OPEC+ meeting in Vienna, Timipre Sylva, the Nigerian minister of state for petroleum resources, is reported to have said that, "OPEC wants prices around \$90". This suggests that \$90 per barrel will effectively become the floor price. Such high oil prices will only complicate the task before central banks across the world who have been hiking interest rates to tackle surging inflation. Following the announcement by the OPEC+ countries there are reports that the US government may "ease sanctions" on Venezuela, paving the way for a potential reopening of US and European markets to oil exports from the country in order to boost oil supplies.

For oil importing countries like India — the country imports around 80 per cent of its requirements — elevated crude oil prices pose problems at multiple levels. Over the past few months, India has in fact benefited from lower oil prices. Recent trade data showed that in September oil imports had dipped to \$15.6 billion, down from \$17.6 billion in August, with much of the decline due to a fall in crude oil prices — the price of the Indian crude oil basket has declined from \$105.59 in July to \$97.4 in August and further to \$90.71 in September and \$90.29 in October as per data from the Production Planning and Analysis Cell. However, a reversal in prices will increase the cost of oil imports, exerting pressure on the current account deficit. Further, high crude oil prices will also be inflationary. The RBI's recent inflation forecast of 6.7 per cent for 2022-23 assumes crude oil to average \$100 a barrel. Deep cuts in global supplies, elevated prices, imply little respite from high inflation.

THE IMPOSSIBLE TRINITY: HOW THE FREE MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL COMES WITH A COST

The impossible trinity, or the trilemma, refers to the idea that an economy cannot pursue independent monetary policy, maintain a fixed exchange rate, and allow the free flow of capital across its borders at the same time. According to economists, any economy can choose to pursue only two out of the three policy options noted above simultaneously in the long-run. The idea was proposed independently by Canadian economist Robert Mundell and British economist Marcus Fleming in the early 1960s.

A difficult choice

Practically speaking, in today's world in which capital is largely free to move across borders with ease, the choice before policymakers is between maintaining a fixed exchange rate and pursuing independent monetary policy. If policymakers choose to peg or maintain the value of their



currency at a certain level against a foreign currency, this decision will limit the kind of monetary policy they can adopt in the long-run. This is because the decision to peg the exchange value of the currency can tie down the hands of central bankers when it comes to their domestic monetary policy stance. For example, if a country's policymakers want their currency to appreciate, or become stronger, against foreign currencies, they cannot achieve this goal and maintain the external strength of the currency over a considerable period of time without adopting a tight domestic monetary policy stance which will weaken domestic demand. This is because loose monetary policy will put pressure on the country's currency to depreciate in value. Thus, policymakers will have to choose between maintaining the strength of their currency and upholding nominal demand in the domestic economy which is heavily influenced by monetary policy.

On the other hand, if policymakers of a country choose to pursue independent monetary policy, they may not be able to maintain the foreign exchange value of their currency at a desired peg. This is because the kind of monetary policy adopted by an economy's central bank invariably influences the exchange value of its currency against foreign currencies. For example, if a country's central bank adopts easy monetary policy with the aim of boosting domestic demand, this will naturally cause the value of its currency to depreciate against foreign currencies if foreign central banks adopt tighter monetary policy.

If so, it would be difficult to maintain the foreign exchange value of the currency unless the central bank holds sufficient foreign exchange reserves to prop up the currency's value. In fact, over the long-run, it may be impossible for the country's central bank to defend the foreign exchange value of its currency as it may soon run out of the foreign exchange reserves necessary to prop up the value of its currency.

Restricting movement

It should be noted that only a few decades ago, when strict capital controls were used to regulate the flow of capital across borders, economies could choose to pursue independent monetary policy and still hope to maintain a certain exchange value against foreign currencies. Whenever monetary policy exerted an undesirable effect on the currency's exchange rate, policymakers could impose controls on the flow of capital to maintain the foreign exchange value of their currency.

For example, if a country's central bank decides that it wants to adopt easy monetary policy that could weaken the exchange value of its currency, it could impose capital controls to stop the depreciation of its currency. It should be noted, however, that capital controls come at a price. They hinder the free flow of capital and adversely affect economic growth by preventing the efficient allocation of scarce resources across the globe.

Current trilemma

The trilemma has come under focus recently as the U.S. Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates to fight rising prices. In a world where capital is largely free to move across borders, this has led many investors to pull money out of the rest of the world and rush to the U.S. in search of higher yields, thus putting pressure on many currencies such as the Indian rupee. In fact, even developed markets like Japan and the Eurozone have seen their currencies depreciate significantly against the U.S. dollar. Notably Japan, in contrast to other national central banks, has been unwilling to tighten its monetary policy in response to rising interest rates in the U.S. This has caused the Japanese currency, the Yen, to depreciate about 25% against the U.S. dollar so far



this year. In essence, the Bank of Japan has allowed its currency to fall, preferring to maintain control over its domestic monetary policy.

The Reserve Bank of India may also face the dilemma of choosing between maintaining the value of the rupee and holding on to its monetary policy independence. As the U.S. Federal Reserve has raised interest rates, there has been increasing pressure on the rupee, which has depreciated almost 10% against the U.S. dollar this year. For now, the RBI seems to be fairly happy tightening its monetary policy stance to defend the rupee as it also helps to rein in price rise which has been a concern even in India. But if the U.S. Federal Reserve continues to tighten its policy stance even after price rise in India is reined in by the RBI, then the Indian central bank may have to choose between defending the rupee and upholding domestic demand.

AS RSS SOUNDS ALARM, TAKING STOCK OF INDIA'S POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

In a webinar organised by RSS-affiliate Swadeshi Jagran Manch, RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale flagged issues of poverty, unemployment and rising inequality in the country.

What did Hosabale say?

“The poverty in the country is standing like a demon in front of us. It is important that we slay this demon. That 20 crore people are still below the poverty line is a figure that should make us very sad. As many as 23 crore people have less than Rs 375 income per day,” he said on poverty. Quoting United Nations observations on poverty and development, Hosabale said: “A large part of the country still does not have access to clean water and nutritious food. Civil strife and the poor level of education are also a reason for poverty”.

He also commented on the high levels of inequality in the country.

“One figure says that India is among the top six economies of the world. But is this a good situation? Top 1 per cent of India's population has one-fifth (20%) of the nation's income. At the same time, 50% of the country's population has only 13% of the country's income,” he said.

Lastly, he also highlighted the widespread unemployment in the country.

“There are four crore unemployed people in the country. The labour force survey says we have an unemployment rate of 7.6 per cent,” he stated.

Why is this important?

Both official (when available) and unofficial estimates suggest that India has been sliding on these key metrics — poverty, inequality and unemployment — for a while now. However, the incumbent BJP government has more often than not chosen to either deny such reports or ignore them.

For instance, when in early 2019, it was reported that the government's own Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2017-18 had found that unemployment hit a 45-year high of 6.1%, the government flatly refused to accept the findings. For the longest time everyone from then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to CEO of Niti Aayog Amitabh Kant kept arguing that India cannot be growing at over 7% without creating jobs. After the general elections of 2019, however, the government accepted the very same findings.



The truth is that India's growth process has failed to create a commensurate number of jobs and that is why the stress of unemployment keeps rising each passing year. Not to mention that India's GDP growth itself had decelerated sharply since the start of 2017; notably in 2019-20, that is, just before the Covid pandemic, India's GDP grew by just 3.7%. The rosy growth numbers — India's GDP grew by 8.7% in the last financial year and is expected to grow at 7% in the current year — benefit from the low base effect thanks to the contraction in GDP during 2020.

Similarly on inequalities, too, the government has chosen to question the findings. The World Inequality Report 2022 released in December last year found that India is one of the worst when it came to rising inequalities and stated the following: "India stands out as a poor and very unequal country, with an affluent elite". However, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman rubbished the findings by claiming that the report was "flawed" and used "questionable methodology".

Similarly on poverty, too, the government is guilty of ignoring the evidence. For instance, when the Global Hunger Index ranked India at 101 (out of 116 countries) in October 2021, the Ministry of Women and Child Development claimed that the methodology used was unscientific. "It is shocking to find that the Global Hunger Report 2021 has lowered the rank of India on the basis of FAO estimate on proportion of undernourished population, which is found to be devoid of ground reality and facts and suffers from serious methodological issues. The publishing agencies...have not done their due diligence before releasing the report," said the Ministry.

Hosabale is the deputy to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and his comments suggest that there is growing acknowledgement within the RSS of economic distress in the country.

What is the status of poverty, inequality and unemployment?

1. Poverty

Officially, India used to estimate poverty rate by looking at the consumption expenditure of people in relation to the official poverty line.

The last revision of the poverty line was done by the Prof Suresh Tendulkar-led committee more than a decade ago. The Tendulkar poverty line was a consumption expenditure of Rs 29 per day per person in urban areas and Rs 22 per day per person in rural areas. Before Tendulkar's revision, India's poverty line was Rs 12 for rural areas and Rs 17 for urban areas.

The consumption expenditure data was taken from "Consumption Expenditure Survey" conducted by National Sample Survey (NSS) organisation, which comes under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. These CES is conducted once every five years and the data is used to update the poverty estimates.

Since 2011, however, there has been no update on poverty rate. That's because the Indian government disregarded the findings of the last CES (for 2017-18), much like it did at that time with the findings of unemployment (PLFS for 2017-18).

The CES 2017-18 had shown that consumption expenditure had fallen for the first time in four decades. In other words, if CES 2017-18 data was used, poverty estimates would have risen sharply.

In 2019, two academics, Santosh Mehrotra and Jajati Parida, used the consumption expenditure data from PLFS to estimate the status of poverty level in the country.



It shows two noteworthy trends.

One, as a proportion of the whole population, India has been able to bring about a sharp reduction in poverty — from around 55% in 1973 to just 20% in 2019.

However, the period between 2011 and 2019 saw an increase in the absolute number of people below the poverty line. Using only the Tendulkar poverty line, the total number of poor people fell by 137.4 million between 2004 and 2011 and then rose by 76.5 million between 2011 and 2019.

2. Inequality

India is one of the most unequal countries in the world. It shows that the incomes of the top 10% of India's population is 22 times that of the incomes of the bottom 50%. An annual income of Rs 12 lakh would place an individual in India in the top 10% of the income earners because the country average is just Rs 2 lakh. The top 1%, however, have an average annual income of well over Rs 44 lakh. Such inequalities are not, of course, limited to income. They pervade all aspects of Indian society be it health or education or gender.

For instance, when India's Human Development Index (HDI) score, which is ranked 132 out of 191 countries, is adjusted for inequality, it falls by a whopping 25%. Globally this fall is 19%, in China (ranked 79) it falls by 15% and in Switzerland (which is ranked number 1 in HDI) it falls by 7%.

3. Unemployment

India has been witnessing widespread unemployment. But apart from high unemployment rates, India also suffers from a declining labour force participation rate (LFPR). The LFPR gives the total number of people demanding jobs. Unemployment rate is just the total number of people who failed to get a job as a proportion of the total number of people demanding jobs. But since India also has sharply falling LFPR, unemployment rate (which is expressed as a % of LFPR) often fails to capture the stress in the labour market.

The better metric to look at is Worker-Population Ratio (WPR), which is the percentage of persons employed among the persons in the population. The WPR was largely stagnant between 1978 and 2005 and then fell sharply between 2005 and 2018; suggesting that India's fast growth did not create as many jobs as the growing population needed. Since 2018, however, the WPR has started inching upwards.

THE CHALLENGING TASK OF RECOVERY AMID A SLOWING GLOBAL ECONOMY

With the global economic environment taking a turn for the worse, the outlook for the Indian economy also appears to have dimmed. On Thursday, the World Bank lowered its forecast for India's economic growth this year to 6.5 per cent, down from its earlier assessment of 7.5 per cent. The downward revision is based on the Bank's assessment that monetary policy tightening across the world and the spillovers from the Russia-Ukraine war will "weigh on India's economic outlook". This revised assessment comes days after the RBI had lowered its own forecast for the country's growth to 7 per cent, down from its earlier projection of 7.2 per cent. Till now the ruling dispensation had been rather sanguine about the country's growth prospects — after all, even despite these downward revisions, India is still likely to be one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, policymakers have now begun to voice concerns over the state of the economy.



On the domestic front, the concern is that even as the economy has recovered to its pre-Covid level, large parts continue to be mired in stress. For instance, micro, small and medium enterprises continue to struggle. An indication of this is that 16.4 per cent of those who availed credit under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme of the government defaulted and have not been able to repay their obligations owing to financial difficulties. Considering that MSMEs employ a sizeable section of the labour force, their continuing struggles are bound to affect labour market prospects. In fact, as per the latest periodic labour force survey, the labour force participation rate in urban areas is lower than pre-Covid levels, while in rural areas, wage growth continues to be subdued indicating labour market slack. And there is still no firm evidence of a broadbased revival in the private investment cycle even though the twin balance sheet problem — an over-leveraged corporate sector and banks saddled with bad loans — that was believed to be holding back investments no longer appears to be an obstacle. In such a scenario, tighter monetary policy is only going to complicate matters further. And with already stretched government finances, the possibility of worsening growth prospects, a higher subsidy outgo and uncertainty over revenues, the capacity of public spending to provide a fillip to growth is limited.

On Wednesday the World Trade Organisation lowered its forecast for global trade volume growth to 1 per cent, down from 3.4 per cent earlier. The effects of a slowing global economy are already being felt. After growing at 22 per cent in April-June, growth has tapered off sharply in the months thereafter. In such an environment, with the drivers of growth exhibiting weakness, policy-makers will have to carefully weigh their options as they provide support to the economy while navigating this tumultuous period.

BOXED IN

The Reserve Bank of India's rate decision on Friday was ultimately inevitable. Monetary policymakers were left with little choice but to raise interest rates by 50 basis points, as a bout of extreme volatility in international financial markets combines with persistently high domestic retail inflation to threaten macroeconomic stability, globally and in India. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das cited the 'aggressive monetary policy actions and even more aggressive communication from advanced economy central banks' as a third shock -- following the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine — which he said had thrust the 'global economy into the eye of a new storm'. "Emerging market economies, in particular, are confronted with challenges of slowing global growth, elevated food and energy prices, spillovers from advanced economy policy normalisation... and sharp currency depreciations," Mr. Das explained, elaborating on the external challenges confronting emerging economies, including India. The rupee too has been under pressure, weakening by more than 7% against the dollar since the start of the current fiscal year in April. And this has added upward pressure to price stability by way of imported inflation. The RBI's September issue of the Monetary Policy Report in fact pertinently observes that the 'second-round effects of low growth and high inflation globally could keep domestic inflation at elevated levels even beyond eight quarters, necessitating appropriate monetary actions to anchor inflation expectations'.

The central bank's own projections, in fact, do not anticipate a slowing in India's retail inflation below its upper tolerance threshold of 6% till the January-March quarter. And Mr. Das was right to point out the multiple factors that could upend the RBI's inflation outlook. These include the likelihood of higher pass-through of input costs by service providers on increased demand, as well as upside risks to food prices from both the lower kharif output of rice and pulses, and the unseasonably excess spells of rainfall in some regions that have pushed up the prices of



vegetables. The surfeit of liquidity or cash in the banking system, which is expected to be buoyed by enhanced government spending in the coming months, could also threaten price stability and the RBI Governor was at pains to note that the policy stance of a calibrated 'withdrawal of accommodation' had become an imperative. Specifically, he pointed out that 'even as the nominal policy repo rate had been raised by 190 basis points since May, the rate adjusted for inflation still trailed the 2019 levels'. With the RBI's latest surveys of households' inflation expectations and consumer confidence too signalling that price pressures will continue to restrain consumption, inflation control will have to remain the top policy priority.

TOKENISATION FOR CREDIT AND DEBIT CARD TRANSACTIONS: WHAT IS IT, AND HOW DOES IT HELP YOU?

From Saturday (October 1), the Reserve Bank of India's card-on-file (CoF) tokenisation norms have kicked in, which aim at improved safety and security of card transactions.

Now, for any purchases done online or through mobile apps, merchants, payment aggregators and payment gateways will not be able to save crucial customer credit and debit card details such as three-digit CVV and expiry date.

After multiple extensions, the RBI decided not to give any further relaxation in implementing these norms.

The RBI's Deputy Governor T Rabi Sankar said on Friday that many extensions were given to the system for a comfortable switchover.

"We just wanted to make sure that the customer's safety doesn't get compromised because of problems faced in the implementation of tokenisation. The feedback we have from all stakeholders is that it is perfectly ready and the system can go on," he said.

Close to 35 crore tokens have already been created. In September alone, 40 per cent of transactions, valuing around Rs 63 crore, were done using tokens, Sankar said.

What is tokenisation?

Tokenisation refers to the replacement of actual card details with a unique alternate code called the 'token', which shall be unique for a combination of card, token requester, (i.e. the entity which accepts requests from the customer for tokenisation of a card and passes it on to the card network to issue a corresponding token) and the device.

How did India decide to carry out tokenisation?

In September 2021, the RBI prohibited merchants from storing customer card details on their servers with effect from January 1, 2022, and mandated the adoption of card-on-file (CoF) tokenisation as an alternative.

Following a series of representations from several industry players and digital payment platforms who anticipated disruption in online transactions from January 1, 2022, the RBI extended the implementation date of card-on-file (CoF) tokenisation norms by another six months to June 30, 2022.

The June 2022 deadline was further extended as the RBI felt that although considerable progress had been made in terms of token creation and transaction processing based on these tokens had



also commenced, the concept was yet to gain traction across all categories of merchants. Subsequently, the deadline was extended till September 30, 2022.

Deputy Governor Sankar said that ever since the regulation on tokenisation was issued, the central bank was constantly talking to all stakeholders to ensure that the transition to the tokenisation framework was smooth.

“There are a few participants who may not be ready, but that would probably be because of their unwillingness to comply. And we don’t believe that we should hold back efforts to ensure customer protection because of such laggards,” he said, adding that these players may take some more time but they will eventually join the framework.

But how will tokenisation work?

A debit or credit card holder can get the card tokenised by initiating a request on the app provided by the token requester. The token requester will forward the request to the card network which, with the consent of the card issuer, will issue a token corresponding to the combination of the card, the token requester, and the device.

“In case of an online transaction, instead of card details, a unique token will be stored on the server. The merchant or transaction platform sends out a message to Visa or Mastercard or a payment gateway, who asks for a token against that card number and will then pass it on to the bank for allowing the transaction,” NTT DATA Payment Services India CEO Dewang Neralla said.

The customer will not be charged for availing the tokenisation service.

Earlier, the facility for card tokenisation was available only for mobile phones and tablets of interested card holders. Subsequently, with an uptick in tokenisation volume, the RBI decided to extend the scope of tokenisation to include consumer devices – laptops, desktops, wearables (wrist watches, bands, etc.) and Internet of Things (IoT) devices.

Who can offer tokenisation services?

Tokenisation can be performed only by the authorised card network and recovery of original Primary Account Number (PAN) should be feasible for the authorised card network only. Adequate safeguards have to be put in place to ensure that PAN cannot be found out from the token and vice versa, by anyone except the card network. RBI has emphasised that the integrity of the token generation process has to be ensured at all times.

What do customers gain from tokenisation?

A tokenised card transaction is considered safer as the actual card details are not shared with the merchant during transaction processing. Actual card data, token and other relevant details are stored in a secure mode by the authorised card networks.

The token requestor cannot store Primary Account Number (PAN), or any other card details. Card networks are also mandated to get the token requester certified for safety and security that conform to international best practices/globally accepted standards.

“With card tokenisation, a card and merchant specific token is generated. Going forward that token can be used for all online transactions with that merchant. This will ensure enhanced



security. In case of any data breach or hacking attempt at the merchant's end, the customer's card details will be protected," said Sanjeev Moghe, president & head – cards & payments, Axis Bank.

Worldline India's senior vice president – products and solutions Jagdish Kumar believes that tokenisation lends greater credibility to seamless and secure payments experience.

What is the size of the industry?

During 2021-22, payment transactions carried out through credit cards increased by 27 per cent to 223.99 crore in volume terms and 54.3 per cent to 9.72 lakh in value terms, as per the RBI's annual report for 2021-22.

Though the RBI provides total credit and debit card transaction data in terms of value and volumes, it does not provide separate numbers for online and offline transactions.

"What is relevant will be the number of cards issued. When you look at the debit and credit card transactions data (provided by RBI), they have not given a bifurcation between online and offline. Tokenisation is required wherever you are storing your card details for recurring payments," NTT DATA Payment Services India's Neralla said.

However, the number of debit and credit cards in the system can give some idea of the tokenisation industry, experts feel.

Till end July 2022, while the number of credit cards issued stood at around 8 crore, debit cards in the system were 92.81 crore, recent RBI data showed.

BIDS INVITED FOR IDBI BANK STAKE SALE; GOVT, LIC TO SELL 60.72%

The government on Friday invited expressions of interest (EoIs) for IDBI Bank and offered to sell a total of 60.72 per cent stake in the bank, including major portions of the shares held by the government and state-run Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).

IDBI Bank's stock closed 0.71 per cent higher on the BSE on Friday. At the current market price, the stake being offloaded is worth Rs 27,800 crore. With the consent of the regulators — the Reserve Bank of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India — the government has made the mandatory glide path for stake reduction for the buyer more flexible than what is specified for promoters of private banks. The buyer, therefore, would get 15 years to bring down the equity to 26 per cent. Of course, in the first five years, 40 per cent of the equity capital would be locked in, as per the RBI guidelines.

The last date for submission of EoI is December 16. While the Centre is keen to conclude the transaction during the current financial year, it may spill over to the next year, given the formalities to be completed. Banks, non-banking financial companies and private equity funds have already shown interest in IDBI Bank.

The Centre's disinvestment receipts so far this fiscal year have been Rs 24,544 crore, as against the annual target of Rs 65,000 crore. "A cumulative 60.72 per cent of the shareholding shall be divested. GoI shall divest such number of shares representing 30.48 per cent and LIC of India shall divest such number of shares representing 30.24 per cent of the equity share capital of IDBI Bank, along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank," the department of investment and public asset management (Dipam) said in a statement.



Currently, LIC holds 49.24 per cent in IDBI Bank, while the government holds 45.48 per cent. On May 5, 2021, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had granted in-principle approval for the strategic disinvestment of IDBI Bank along with transfer of management control.

IDBI Bank posted profit after tax of Rs 2,439 crore in FY22.

Its net interest margin stood at 3.73 per cent and return on equity at 13.60 per cent. The bank's capital to risk (weighted) assets ratio stands at a comfortable 19.06 per cent.

As per the EoI conditions, private sector banking companies, foreign banks, NBFCs, and alternative investment funds registered with Sebi are among the entities eligible to bid. However, large industrial/ corporate houses and individuals (natural persons) aren't eligible.

WHAT LED TO THE CREDIT SUISSE CRISIS, AND WHAT IS THE ROAD AHEAD?

Over the past few days, the share price of Credit Suisse, one of the oldest and historically one of the most influential banks in the world, has hit an all-time low. Since the beginning of 2022, Credit Suisse's share price has fallen close to 60 per cent. At the same time, the spreads on credit default swaps (CDS) on Credit Suisse debt have spiked to a 14-year high — the highest since the global financial crisis of 2008.

These two trends have led many, especially those on social media, to speculate if Credit Suisse is about to collapse, much like Lehman Brothers, an iconic American investment bank, did in 2008. Reportedly, Credit Suisse had just over 50,000 employees and 1.6 trillion Swiss francs (\$1.62 trillion) in assets under management at the end of 2021.

However, it has been losing its market value since the 2008 global financial crisis (see chart). The share price has witnessed almost a secular decline. The reason for this is fairly straightforward — Credit Suisse has made several risky bets and ended up losing a lot of investor money. That, in turn, has hurt its profitability, eroded investor confidence, and has made raising fresh capital costlier.

For instance, Credit Suisse directed many customers to invest as much \$10 billion in Greensill Capital. Greensill was itself a lender of sorts — it intermediated between suppliers and clients. In other words, it paid suppliers upfront cash and took their place in waiting for the clients to pay. The business attracted a lot of attention and money, thanks to banks such as Credit Suisse.

But there were increasing question marks over Greensill's ability to remain solvent. By March 2021, Greensill had filed for bankruptcy, denting Credit Suisse and its rich investors. When Archegos Capital Management, a hedge fund run by Bill Hwang, collapsed, also in March 2021, Credit Suisse lost another \$5.5 billion.

Such losses were punctuated by high-profile managerial malpractices and exits, further undermining investor confidence. For example, in 2020, then CEO Tidjane Thiam had to quit after it became clear that he had been spying on Credit Suisse's wealth management executive Iqbal Khan.

'UNFULFILLED CONDITIONS': PROSUS AXES \$4.7-BN BILLDESK TAKEOVER

Dutch consumer internet conglomerate Prosus NV, the parent of fintech company PayU India, said Monday it has terminated the agreement to acquire Mumbai-based payment aggregator BillDesk.



The \$4.7-billion deal, announced last August, would have become the biggest fintech M&A deal in India if it had gone through, and proposed to merge BillDesk with PayU India.

Notably, the companies had received the CCI's nod only last month. However, certain approvals, including that of the RBI, were still pending.

The company did not detail the unfulfilled conditions that led to the deal's termination.

ON FODDER SHORTAGE, POLICY MAKERS MUST LOOK BEYOND THE SHORT TERM

Wheat and paddy yield not just grain for human consumption. These — and other foodgrain, oilseeds, sugarcane and cotton — are also grown for meeting the fodder and feed needs of livestock and poultry. Not for nothing, then, that a poor wheat crop this year has led to straw prices doubling, and more, to Rs 10-15 per kg. The official wholesale price index for fodder in August was 25.5 per cent higher than a year ago. But it isn't only dry fodder. Over the last one year, prices of de-oiled bran (a by-product of paddy milling) have doubled to Rs 20 per kg, while going up from Rs 22-23 to Rs 29-30 for rice polish and from Rs 20 to Rs 25/kg for maize. Their price increases — and also of molasses and protein ingredients such as mustard, soyabean and cottonseed oil cakes — have meant that farmers are paying around Rs 23 per kg for cattle-feed, against Rs 17-18 last year. And that's ultimately getting passed on to consumers.

Those price pressures should, hopefully, ease in the coming weeks for two reasons. The first is the surplus monsoon rains, which should translate into overall improved green fodder availability. The second is the start of the kharif marketing season. Ground reports suggest reasonably normal soyabean, cotton and groundnut crops. Prices of cottonseed extractions have already fallen to Rs 30-31/kg, having crossed Rs 45 levels last year. Sugar factories and rice mills, too, will begin operations with the harvesting of the new cane and paddy crops. A third source of hope is the late-September rains, which are good for the wheat, mustard and other rabi crops. In all, the fodder and feed situation should look better from here on.

That said, there's a need for some long-term thinking on the livestock sector, which today accounts for about 30 per cent of the total income from farming in India. Take dairying, where animals are largely fed on crop residues and expensive compound cattle feed. Farmers should, instead, be encouraged to grow high-yielding proteinaceous green fodder that can supply the basic nutritional requirements of their cattle round the year. This will reduce the need for giving costly feed and concentrates mainly when they are producing milk. Fodder crop breeding — both for yields and drought tolerance — has not received adequate attention in India, which is perhaps a reflection of animal husbandry being relegated as a residual/subsidiary activity to "regular" agriculture. The current wheat straw and feed shortage should end soon. But policymakers must look beyond the short term. There can be no nutritional security for India without feed security for its livestock and poultry.

MGNREGS TO FUND WORK TO REVERSE DESERTIFICATION OF LAND ACROSS THE STATES

With limited funds to deal with the gargantuan task of restoring degraded land and reversing desertification in the country, the government is now planning to bring convergence between the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

According to the Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas published by the Environment Ministry in 2021, at least 30% of India's total geographical area is under the category of "degraded land".

Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Delhi, Gujarat and Goa have more than 50% of land area undergoing desertification or degradation, while States with less than 10% land degradation are Kerala, Assam, Mizoram, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Arunachal Pradesh.

In a recent jointly signed advisory, Nagendra Nath Sinha, Secretary, Rural Development, and Ajay Tirkey, Secretary, Department of Land Resources, urged the Chief Secretaries of the States to ensure that the two schemes work in tandem. Under the latter, activities such as ridge area treatment, drainage line treatment, soil and moisture conservation, rainwater harvesting, nursery raising, afforestation, horticulture and pasture development are done.

The Union government now wants the States to undertake these activities using MGNREGS funds, which go towards both material and wage components.

In 2019, the government raised its target of restoration of degraded land from 21 million hectares to 26 million hectares by 2030 following a commitment made during the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (COP14). Nearly three years on, the government is nowhere near this target.

Though the Ministry has been making efforts to contribute towards meeting the international commitment, the constraints posed on economy by the pandemic restricted the target to 4.95 million hectares by 2025-26. Therefore, there is a compelling reason for the Ministry to explore alternative opportunities to fulfil the commitment, the advisory read.

The Rural Development Ministry is now hoping that by making use of the MGNREGS, which for the financial year 2022-23 has a budget of ₹73,000 crore, the government can scale up the area to be covered.

As of now, there is Central allocation of ₹8,134 crore for developing 4.95 million hectares.

By the Ministry's own estimate, a convergence with the MGNREGS could help take up treatment of about 30% more land than feasible with the current scheme size.

WHAT IS THE INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY CODE?

The story so far:

Speaking at the sixth anniversary of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) on October 1, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the country could not afford to lose the "sheen" of its insolvency law, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Addressing the issue of haircuts — or the debt that banks forgo — she said it was unacceptable that banks should take a hefty haircut on loans that go through the resolution process.

What is the IBC?

In a growing economy, a healthy credit flow and generation of new capital are essential, and when a company or business turns insolvent or "sick", it begins to default on its loans. In order for credit to not get stuck in the system or turn into bad loans, it is important that banks or creditors are able to recover as much as possible from the defaulter, as quickly as they can.



In 2016, at a time when India's Non-Performing Assets and debt defaults were piling up, and older loan recovery mechanisms were performing badly, the IBC was introduced to overhaul the corporate distress resolution regime in India and consolidate previously available laws to create a time-bound mechanism with a creditor-in-control model as opposed to the debtor-in-possession system. When insolvency is triggered under the IBC, there can be just two outcomes: resolution or liquidation.

What are the challenges for the IBC?

According to its regulator IBBI, the first objective of the IBC is resolution — finding a way to save a business through restructuring, change in ownership, mergers etc. The second objective is to maximise the value of assets of the corporate debtor while the third is to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit, and balancing of interests. Keeping this order in mind, when one looks at the IBBI data for the 3,400 cases admitted under the IBC in the last six years, more than 50% of the cases ended in liquidation, and only 14% could find a proper resolution. Furthermore, the IBC was touted as a time-bound mechanism. Timeliness is key here so that the viability of the business or the value of its assets does not deteriorate further. The IBC was thus initially given a 180-day deadline to complete the resolution process, with a permitted 90-day extension. It was later amended to make the total timeline for completion 330 days — which is almost a year. However, in FY22, it took 772 days to resolve cases involving companies that owed more than ₹1,000 crore. The average number of days it took to resolve such cases increased rapidly over the past five years, experts said. When we come to haircuts — the debt foregone by the lender as a share of the outstanding claim — the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance pointed out in 2021, that in the five years of the IBC, creditors on an average had to bear an 80% haircut in more than 70% of the cases. As per The Hindu Data Team, in close to 33 of 85 companies so far that owed more than ₹1,000 crore, lenders had to take above 90% haircuts. In case of the resolution of the Videocon Group for instance, creditors bore a haircut of 95.3%.

What are experts saying?

In order to address the delays, the Parliamentary Standing Committee suggested that the time taken to admit the insolvency application and transfer control of the company to a resolution process, should not be more than 30 days after filing. The IBBI has also called for a new yardstick to measure haircuts. It suggested that haircuts not be looked at as the difference between the creditor's claims and the actual amount realised but as the difference between what the company brings along when it enters IBC and the value realised.

IS IT TIME FOR THE GIG ECONOMY?

The story so far:

Moonlighting — or employees working for remuneration with entities other than their employers — has been a hot topic in recent months. During the pandemic, those with desk jobs had more time on their hands and thus it was easier to take on a few projects outside of work. In July, Kotak Securities said in a study that at least 60% of 400 employees surveyed said they themselves had, or knew someone who had engaged in moonlighting.

How are companies reacting to moonlighting?

In August, Wipro chairman Rishad Premji tweeted: "There is a lot of chatter about people moonlighting in the tech industry. This is cheating — plain and simple." The company sacked 300



employees following the discovery that they were working for rival firms on the side, leading to conflict of interest. Infosys has warned staff against moonlighting, saying it could lead to termination.

Another software firm DXC Technologies said that moonlighting by employees was a challenge for employers but that wouldn't affect its WFH (work from home) policy that has worked well for both the firm and its staff. Swiggy announced a 'moonlighting policy' that allows employees "to pursue their passion for economic interests alongside their full-time employment."

What does the law say?

Moonlighting is not defined in any of the statutes in India, says S. Ravindran, Senior Advocate who specialises in labour laws. "To my knowledge so far, no Constitutional Court has rendered a decision on the subject," he says. However, there are enactments that deal with double employment. Section 60 of the Factories Act deals with restriction on double employment stating that "No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work in any factory on any day on which he has already been working in any other factory, save in such circumstances as may be prescribed". However, this enactment is applicable only to employees working in factories, Mr. Ravindran points out.

There are State enactments which deal with employment of persons working in offices, banks, shops, etc. In Tamil Nadu, it is termed as "The Tamil Nadu Shops & Establishments Act, 1947". However, there is no provision wherein dealing with dual employment.

However, moonlighting is subject to law of the land. Mr. Ravindran refers to the Supreme Court's observation in the case of Glaxo Laboratories (I) Limited vs Labour Court, Meerut and others. The apex court held that "The employer has hardly any extra territorial jurisdiction. He is not the custodian of general law and order situation nor the Guru or mentor of his workmen for their well-regulated cultural advancement. If the power to regulate the behaviour of the workmen outside the duty hours and at any place wherever they may be was conferred upon the employer, contract of service may be reduced to contract of slavery." This case was not specifically about moonlighting but the court's observation gives us an idea as to how the law may view such cases.

Moonlighting is subject to law of the land. The sphere of employment cannot be extended by the employer beyond working hours and outside his place of employment, which is the principle laid down in the above judgment. In other words, the employee can choose to arrange his affairs as he pleases beyond the working hours of the employer.

Does the law lay out punitive action against moonlighting?

Mr. Ravindran avers that unless an employer is able to prove that an employee acted against the interest of the company, Courts may not uphold severe punishment of termination of employment. "We have to wait for precedents in this regard," he says.

The Courts of law in India dealing with employment are Writ Courts and Labour Courts. These Courts exercise jurisdiction based on equity or fairness. Therefore, the Courts may lean in favour of the employee unless the contravention of the employee has led to serious prejudice and loss to the employer, he adds.

The Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Electronics and IT, Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that employers should not to suppress employees who want to monetise,



develop and demonstrate but also urged employees not to violate their agreements with employers.

In today's world, every company ought to have a gig economy strategy. Paul Estes, author of the book Gig Mindset, said, "Not having one is like missing the Internet revolution of 1990 or the mobile revolution in 2010."

In the last century, work from home was never thought of. But in the current times, it has become a common norm.

Likewise, maybe we are indeed on the cusp of change when it comes to the gig economy.

CCI ORDERS ANOTHER PROBE AGAINST GOOGLE

The Competition Commission has ordered another detailed probe against Google for alleged unfair revenue sharing terms with respect to news content.

The case will be clubbed with two other ongoing matters against the search engine major where the allegations are substantially same, according to the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

The latest order has come on a complaint filed by the News Broadcasters & Digital Association.

In January this year, CCI ordered a probe against Google on the complaint filed by the Digital News Publishers Association. Later, the Indian Newspaper Society also filed a similar case and that was clubbed with the first one.

Now, the regulator's probe arm Director General (DG) will submit a consolidated investigation report, the watchdog said in an order released on Friday.

The News Broadcasters & Digital Association had alleged that its members are forced to provide their news content to Google in order to prioritise their weblinks in the Search Engine Result Page (SERP) of Google. As a result, Google free rides on the content of the members without giving them adequate compensation, as per the complaint.

Among others, it was alleged that Google exploited the dependency of the members on the search engine offered by Google for referral-traffic to build services such as Google News, Google Discover and Google Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP).

The search engine major provides news content to user through Google Search and through news aggregator vertical, Google News.

According to the complaint, in Google Search, users can either search directly for news through News Tab or receive news through result in SERPs. Google incorporated news content in its SERPs through featured snippets including "Top Stories" carousels.

However, the revenue distributed by Google to news publishers doesn't compensate for the real contribution made by the association's members to these platforms, it added.

In a four-page order, dated October 6 and released on Friday, CCI said the allegations are substantially the same as that of the matter which is already being probed by the regulator.

CCI has directed the DG to club the matters and submit a consolidated investigation report.



Cases where there is prima-facie evidence of violation of competition norms are referred by CCI to its investigation arm DG for a detailed probe.

The complaint has been filed against Alphabet Inc, Google LLC, Google India Pvt Ltd, Google Ireland Ltd and Google Asia Pacific Pte Ltd. The association consists of national and regional private news and current affairs broadcasters and digital news media entities as its members.

THE RACE TO PROVIDE EXHAUSTIVE SATELLITE BROADBAND SERVICES IN INDIA

The race for providing satellite broadband connectivity in India is heating up as companies like Jio, OneWeb, Hughes and Tata-backed Nelco are preparing to provide these services.

Satellite communication has been gaining prominence globally and is seeing a lot of interest, investments, and innovations. The two biggest developments in the global satellite communication space are the emergence of LEO (low-earth orbit constellations) that promises to provide truly global coverage and lower latency service, and HTS (High Throughput Satellites Service) which offers unprecedented capacity and flexibility. India is quickly catching up with global trends and we are optimistic about India's prospects in the global satellite communication market, Shivaji Chatterjee, executive vice president, Hughes Communications India (HCI) said to The Hindu. Although the satellite broadband industry in India is still at a nascent stage, the growing demand for connectivity and Internet — the Digital India drive — calls to connect all unserved terrains and this is what satellite broadband players like Hughes can do, he added.

However, different reports indicate that although India is about to see the roll out of 5G services, infrastructure woes like inadequate tower fiberisation questions the success of 5G in connecting different parts of the country which do not have even 4G access till now.

Different satcom players

Different players offering satellite broadband services are preparing to start operations in the country.

Jio has received approval from the Department of Telecommunication (DoT), in the second week of this month, to provide satellite broadband services in India. Earlier, in February this year, Jio Platforms Ltd, the digital arm of Reliance Industries (RIL), and Luxembourg's SES, formed a joint venture, Jio Space Technology Ltd to provide satellite-based broadband services in India. The DoT has granted the Letter of Intent for global mobile personal communication by satellite (GMPCS) services to the company that the firm had applied for earlier this year. The licences are for a period of 20 years and include voice and data services via satellite.

Parallely, in January this year, satellite communication companies, OneWeb and Hughes Network Systems, announced a six-year agreement, to bring low Earth orbit (LEO) connectivity services in India. OneWeb will then bring these solutions to enterprises, governments, telcos, airline companies and maritime customers. However, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis forced OneWeb to cancel the planned launch of 36 satellites on Russia's Soyuz rockets after Russia cancelled its agreement with the Bharti-backed U.K. based company. This led the satellite major to delay the commercial launch of its satellite communication services in India to early 2023.

OneWeb has also partnered with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Elon Musk's SpaceX to resume its satellite launches. The pending release of the new Spacecom policy by the Department of Space brings a layer of



uncertainty over the launch of commercial services in India. The policy is supposed to lay out the guidelines on which the newly liberalised space sector will operate.

Satellite service provider Hughes Communications India, (HCI) and Bharti Airtel announced a joint venture in January to provide satellite broadband services in India. The joint venture was created after the agreement, announced in May 2019 and received all statutory approvals, including those from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and Department of Telecom. Last week, HCI also announced the commercial launch of India's first HTS broadband service to deliver high-speed broadband across the country, including to the most remote areas beyond the reach of terrestrial networks. HTS provides more throughput than conventional communication satellites. Higher-throughput refers to higher data processing and transfer capacity than conventional satellites, while using the same amount of orbital spectrum.

Tata-owned satcom company Nelco, and Canada's Telesat have also successfully conducted the first in-orbit demonstration of high-speed broadband connectivity in India in May this year. Telesat services will deliver significant benefits for applications like 4G/5G backhaul, mobile hotspots, telemedicine, village connectivity and more, P. J. Nath, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of NELCO said in a press release. Telesat will also help accelerate 4G and 5G expansion, and set new levels of performance for enterprise, telecom, mobility and government broadband connectivity on land, air and sea, Glenn Katz, Telesat's Chief Commercial Officer said in a release.

Changing the Internet landscape

Satcom companies reckon that satellite broadband services can connect the most remote parts of the country which are otherwise difficult to connect through fibres. Satellite broadband services can, therefore, help in addressing the need of the market for fibre-like connectivity in the remotest parts of the country with high reliability and flexibility, Mr. Nath said. Mr. Chatterjee also echoed the sentiment by stating that the rollout of satellite broadband communication services can close the digital divide in India.

For example, Hughes India has partnered with Bharat Broadband Nigam Limited (BBNL) and Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. (TCIL), as part of BharatNet, to provide high-speed satellite connectivity to 5,000 remote gram panchayats. These panchayats are located in northeastern States, including Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh — places that lack terrestrial connectivity like fibre or cable. With the Bharatnet project, India aims to better facilitate e-governance applications like telemedicine, access to land records, treasury, police stations, Internet access, and many other services in rural India. "We are going to see a very open market space where there is going to be, foreign operators, In Flight and Maritime Connectivity (IFMC) providers, Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) service providers, all of them being able to provide connectivity and, they will all be able to service this whole ecosystem of mobility on land, on water and in the air," Mr. Chatterjee said.

Challenges ahead

Satellite data transfer provides very slow Internet speeds and limited satellite bandwidth because of the distances the signals have to travel and all the potential obstacles in between, according to Resilio, a technology company. Connection times can also be impacted by your surroundings, the length of your message, and the status and availability of the satellite network.



However, if the user is located under trees with light or medium foliage it might take over a minute to send a message, while the same message takes 15 seconds to be sent in ideal conditions with a direct view of the sky and the horizon. Users might not be able to connect to a satellite at all if they are located under heavy foliage or surrounded by other obstructions, Apple said in a blog earlier this month. The Emergency SOS via satellite might not also work in places above 62° latitude like northern parts of Canada and Alaska.

Additionally, satellite Internet latency can be a significant problem. This can be a matter of only a second or two, but a delay on that scale can seriously affect real-time applications like video chats. Unlike terrestrial communications, minor changes in weather can have a massive impact on both the speed and latency of satellite data, according to Resilio. Because satellite networks are complex, satellite Internet providers like Hughes often charge based on throughput. This along with the complex equipment like satellite dishes being used to avail these services makes the service expensive, the company added.

CENTRE PLANS CUTTING COAL SUPPLY TO PLANTS THAT DON'T COMPLY ON BIOMASS CO-FIRING

India has been severely lagging in ensuring that at least 5% of coal used in thermal plants was mixed with biomass despite guidelines mandating them to do so. This recalcitrance by power manufacturers has prompted the Power Ministry to consider cutting coal supply to non-compliant plants, it emerged from the proceedings of an inter-ministerial meeting of the Environment, Agriculture and Power Ministries on Monday.

The Power Ministry in October 2021 had decreed that all thermal power plants ensure 5% compliance by October 2022. Biomass pellets have the same calorific value as coal and mixing them with coal saves consumption as well as reportedly cuts emissions.

The meeting to review progress of biomass co-firing in thermal power plants was held in New Delhi to prepare for the coming post-monsoon season that saw farm fires in north India and worsening air pollution. Biomass from stubble, which is often burned by farmers in open fields, can be used in coal plants to reduce pollution.

The meeting was co-chaired by Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav and Power Minister R.K. Singh.

DreamIAS



LIFE & SCIENCE

FAST-MELTING ARCTIC ICE IS TURNING THE OCEAN ACIDIC, THREATENING LIFE

A team of researchers has flagged the changing chemistry of the western region of the Arctic Ocean after discovering acidity levels increasing three to four times faster than ocean waters elsewhere.

The team also identified a strong correlation between the accelerated rate of melting ice and the rate of ocean acidification. The study, published on Thursday in 'Science', the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is the first analysis of Arctic acidification that includes data from 1994 to 2020.

Scientists have predicted that by 2050, Arctic sea ice in this region will no longer survive the increasingly warm summers. As a result, the ocean's chemistry will grow more acidic, creating life-threatening problems for the diverse population of sea creatures, plants and other living things that depend on a healthy ocean. Crabs, for example, live in a crusty shell built from the calcium carbonate prevalent in ocean water. Polar bears rely on healthy fish populations for food, fish and sea birds rely on plankton and plants, and seafood is a key element of many humans' diets.

Seawater is normally alkaline, with a pH value of around 8.1.

The first author on the publication was Di Qi, who works with Chinese research institutes in Xiamen and Qingdao. Also collaborating were scientists from Seattle, Sweden, Russia and six other Chinese research sites.

They point to sea-ice melt as the key mechanism to explain this rapid pH decrease, because it changes surface water in three primary ways.

First, the water under the sea ice, which had a deficit of carbon dioxide, now is exposed to the atmospheric carbon dioxide and can take it up freely.

The seawater mixed with meltwater is light and can't mix easily into deeper waters, which means the carbon dioxide is concentrated at the surface.

The meltwater dilutes the carbonate ion concentration in the seawater, weakening its ability to neutralise the carbon dioxide into bicarbonate and rapidly decreasing ocean pH.

MEDICINAL FUNGI MAY BE SUITABLE FOR IDENTIFYING NOVEL DRUGS

An analytical study of medicinal fungi carried out by researchers from the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai (IMSc), shows that some chemicals they secrete may find use as novel drugs. They used a database, MeFSAT (Medicinal Fungi Secondary Metabolites And Therapeutics), which compiles information on 184 medicinal fungi, including mushrooms.

The researchers analysed the structure of 1,830 secondary metabolites of medicinal fungi.

Fitness booster

Secondary metabolites are chemical compounds that fungi produce when they are stressed. They enhance the fungus' ability to survive. The work has been published in the preprint server BioRxiv.



Cordycepin, a secondary metabolite produced by Cordyceps species of fungus, is known to have anti-tumour properties. “Not only cordycepin, in general, several secondary metabolites are known to be beneficial for humans in terms of both therapy and health,” says R.P. Vivek Ananth, a PhD student from IMSc, who has contributed to this research.

Diverse structures

In their analysis, the researchers, guided by Areejit Samal from IMSc, found that the secondary metabolites were structurally distant from existing drugs. Also, their ‘scaffolding’ was different from known drugs. About 94% of the chemical scaffolds identified in secondary metabolites of medicinal fungi were not present in approved drugs. As for the complete chemical structure, the secondary metabolites were quite dissimilar to the approved drugs.

This alone cannot tell that there are metabolites in fungi that can be used as drugs. However, the secondary metabolites of medicinal fungi have molecular properties, which are important for drug likeness, similar to approved drugs. “This makes the secondary metabolites of the medicinal fungi suitable for identifying novel drugs with hitherto unknown chemical scaffolds,” explains Dr. Samal.

Used in medicine

Medicinal fungi belongs to two taxonomic divisions namely, basidiomycota and ascomycota. Mushrooms belong to the basidiomycota division. An example is Agaricus bisporus, the button mushroom, which can be consumed. Fungi belonging to the ascomycota division are generally not mushrooms.

“In future, we plan to map the scaffolds to their biological targets, which will further pave the way for identifying potential lead molecules for drug discovery,” says Mr. Ananth.

ANNIE ERNAUX: MEMOIRIST OF THE PERSONAL, POLITICAL AND THE UNIVERSAL

In *Happening* (2000), translated into English by Tanya Leslie, French writer Annie Ernaux writes, “Maybe the true purpose of my life is for my body, my sensations and my thoughts to become writing, in other words, something intelligible and universal, causing my existence to merge into the lives and heads of other people.”

In the book, Ernaux recalls the traumatic experience of undergoing an abortion in France in 1963, before it was legalised. She had only been 23 at the time, single and terrified, and the horrors of the experience would never leave her. Ernaux, 82, memoirist of visceral experiences, is the winner of this year’s Nobel Prize for Literature “for the courage and clinical acuity with which she uncovers the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory.”

Ernaux, who has long been in the running for the world’s most prestigious literary award, is only the 17th woman writer to have won the Nobel Prize since its inception in 1901. In recent years, other women to have won the award include Louise Glück (2020), Olga Tokarczuk (2018) and Svetlana Alexievich (2015).

Who is Annie Ernaux?

A celebrated writer in France, Ernaux has only been discovered by the English-speaking world with the arrival of her books in translation in recent years. In 2019, *The Years*, her autobiography



of sorts spanning from her birth in 1940 upto 2007, was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize. It won the Prix Renaudot in France in 2008, and the Premio Strega in Italy in 2016.

Born in Seine-Maritime in Normandy to parents who were grocers, Ernaux began writing when she was in college. Yet, after several rejections, her first book, *Cleaned Out*, would eventually be published only in 1974. She was 34 years old at the time, stuck in a difficult marriage and working as a French teacher. Since then, Ernaux has published over 20 books.

After her first three thinly-veiled autobiographical novels, that include *Cleaned Out*, *Do What They Say or Else* (1977), and *The Frozen Woman* (1981), the writer moved on to focus solely on memoirs with *A Man's Place* (1983), writing with abandon about her working-class upbringing, the class shame she felt, her ill-fated marriage, her relationship with her father, the romantic liaisons she had had, her mother's descent into Alzheimer's and eventual death and her own struggle with cancer. Some of her most well-known works include *A Woman's Story* (1987), *Simple Passion* (1991), and *A Girl's Story* (2016).

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR 2022: A STATEMENT AS RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR RAGES

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2022, awarded to a jailed Belarus civil rights activist, and a rights organisation each in Russia and Ukraine, puts the focus on Russia's war in Ukraine, now in its eighth month. The common thread among the winners of the Prize is that they stand, directly or indirectly, against Russia or an ally of Russia.

The Nobel Committee's choice of the winners made a statement — and it came, as Kenneth Roth, the former head of Human Rights Watch, noted, on the 70th birthday of President Vladimir Putin.

Ales Bialiatski, who is in jail since 2021, is a vocal critic of Putin's ally, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus. Memorial, the Russian civil rights group, was shut down by Putin, and Center for Civil Liberties is a Ukrainian rights organisation that is documenting alleged war crimes by Russia in Ukraine.

Their Nobel citation said: "The Peace Prize laureates represent civil society in their home countries. They have for many years promoted the right to criticise power and protect the fundamental rights of citizens. They have made an outstanding effort to document war crimes, human rights abuses and the abuse of power. Together they demonstrate the significance of civil society for peace and democracy."

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said "[t]hrough their consistent efforts in favour of humanist values, anti-militarism and principles of law, this year's laureates have revitalised and honoured Alfred Nobel's vision of peace and fraternity between nations — a vision most needed in the world today".

A SYNTHETIC CLICK

The Nobel Prize for Chemistry has been awarded to Carolyn Bertozzi, Morten Meldal and Barry Sharpless, the last of whom features in a group of only five to have won the Prize twice. The three chemists have been awarded for pioneering 'click chemistry' or getting molecules that wouldn't normally bond together to do so in an efficient and uncomplicated manner. The 'click' comes from an analogy Sharpless drew of molecules snapping together, like airline seatbelts fitting into their buckles. Historically, chemistry has sought to imitate nature. From medicine to fertilizer, the chemist has sought to make synthetic products that mimic natural molecules. The artificial

3RD FLOOR AND 4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



synthesis of indigo, instead of extraction from plants, had disastrous consequences for colonial India's economy. On the other hand, several molecules have been synthesised in ingenious ways to create drugs and medicines to kill bacteria and relieve pain. The flip side is that these processes are likely laborious, can create unwanted by-products, many toxic. Often, the number of intermediary steps is so great and complicated that the desired result is usually too expensive to be useful.

Sharpless began the conversation, almost immediately after winning his first Nobel Prize, of creating molecular building blocks — like Lego blocks — that could snap together quickly and efficiently. The first breakthrough came when Meldal and Sharpless, independently of each other, discovered what has become the foundational stone of click chemistry, namely the copper catalysed azide-alkyne cycloaddition. Two kinds of chemicals — azides and alkynes — react very efficiently when copper ions are added, Meldal discovered in his Copenhagen laboratory, and form a very stable structure called a triazole. Previous attempts to join azides and alkynes were cumbersome, but the trick this time was copper. From then on, if chemists wanted to link two different molecules, all that was required was to introduce an azide in one molecule and an alkyne in the other. They then snapped the molecules together with the help of some copper ions. This has now become an industry standard. However, Bertozzi took click chemistry to a new dimension and showed that it could be used in living organisms. Copper is toxic to living cells, but she figured out a way to produce a copper-free click reaction, called the strain-promoted azide-alkyne cycloaddition, and showed it could be used to treat tumours. The awards demonstrate that it pays to rethink the fundamentals of a field and persevere at it for long enough to spark a revolution.

NO LONGER BIZARRE

The quantum revolution ushered in a new phase of science and technology, with transistors changing electronics forever and lasers providing the foundational cornerstones in fields from communication to medicine. This year's Nobel prize for physics awards yet another milestone in quantum physics. This has been dubbed a revolution in the making, with many possibilities for applications in quantum computation, quantum cryptography and quantum networks. Alain Aspect (France), John F. Clauser (the U.S.) and Anton Zeilinger (Austria) have been awarded for experimental work 'on entangled photons, establishing the violation of Bell inequalities and pioneering quantum information science'. The common concept in their work is quantum entanglement. This is a quirk of quantum mechanics which allows two or more particles to exist in an 'entangled state' such that what happens to one particle affects the others immediately, irrespective of how far they may be. This is what Einstein called 'spooky action at a distance' and prompted him, along with Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen to come up with the thought experiment (1935)— the case of Schrodinger's cat which can be alive and dead at the same instant. The idea that challenged the very foundations of quantum mechanics was that there could be 'hidden variables' that decide the state of the particles that were separated in space, and there was no real quirk in quantum mechanics that caused them to be entangled.

John Stewart Bell, in 1964, came up with a mathematical way of testing whether quantum mechanics was compatible with the local hidden variable theory. After further improvisations, these inequalities were named Bell's inequalities. John Clauser and Alain Aspect have been awarded for showing experimentally the violation of Bell's inequalities. This implies that entanglement is indeed intrinsic to quantum mechanics, and there are no local hidden variables dictating the correlation between the properties of the entangled particles. This led to further development of the field. Anton Zeilinger and his team took up the challenge of establishing



‘quantum teleportation’. Though this phrase sounds magical, physical particles are not teleported; however, information about their quantum states is moved through a distance — helping in new forms of communication and cryptography. Today, entangled quantum states between photons have been demonstrated when the photons have traversed tens of kilometres of optical fibres. Also, entangled states have been demonstrated between photons on earth and those on a satellite. It is likely that researchers will find ways of using this property which is both exotic and promising.

EXHUMING NEW LIGHT

The Nobel Prize for Medicine this year will be awarded to Svante Pääbo, a Swedish geneticist and a director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany. Science being of an increasingly collaborative and competitive nature, recent trends in Nobel Prizes suggest that there are usually multiple winners for every prize. It is a tribute to the originality and revolutionary implications of Pääbo’s research that in a world perennially reshaped by advances in biology, he has been chosen as the lone winner of the Medicine or Physiology Prize this year — something not witnessed since 2016. Pääbo, 67, has quietly instigated a Copernican revolution. Much like the latter placed the sun at the centre and demoted the earth to another circumscribed, perambulatory planet, Pääbo brought Neanderthals — believed to be among the many human-like species and losers of the evolutionary race — to the centre on the question of human evolution. Thanks to his work, it is now known that Europeans and Asians carry anywhere between 1%-4% of Neanderthal DNA. Thus, a large fraction of humanity will be influenced in terms of propensity to disease and adaptability to conditions by a species that evolved, like humans, in Africa, but 1,00,000 years earlier. Pääbo demonstrated this by pioneering and perfecting techniques to extract DNA from fossil remains, a herculean task as they contain too little and are easily contaminated. By building on these methods, Pääbo and his colleagues eventually published the first Neanderthal genome sequence in 2010. To put that in perspective, the first complete sequence of the human genome was only completed in 2003. Comparative analyses with the human genome demonstrated that the most recent common ancestor of Neanderthals and Homo sapiens lived around 8,00,000 years ago; that both species frequently lived in proximity and interbred to an extent that the Neanderthal genetic stamp lives on.

In 2008, a 40,000-year-old fragment from a finger bone yielded DNA that, in Pääbo’s lab, turned out to be from an entirely new species of hominin called Denisova. This was the first time that a new species had been discovered based on DNA analysis. Further analysis showed that it too had interbred with humans and 6% of human genomes in parts of South East Asia are of Denisovan ancestry. These discoveries throw up philosophical questions on what it means to be a ‘species’. Pääbo’s win must inspire future biologists in India to pursue deep questions and use science to shed new light rather than compartmentalise themselves in an academic straitjacket.

NEW RESEARCH: SCIENTISTS ENGINEER MOSQUITOES THAT CAN’T SPREAD MALARIA, OFFER HOPE OF ERADICATING DISEASE

Scientists have genetically modified mosquitoes to slow the growth of malaria-causing parasites in their guts — an advancement that can help prevent transmission of the disease to humans.

The disease is transmitted between people through a female mosquito after it bites someone infected with the malaria parasite. The parasite develops into its next stage in the mosquito’s gut and travels to its salivary glands, ready to infect the next person it bites.



Now, the mosquitoes have been engineered to produce compounds that slow the growth of malaria-causing parasites.

Though only around 10 per cent of mosquitoes live long enough for the infectious parasite to develop, malaria remains one of the most devastating diseases globally, putting at risk about half of the world's population. In 2021, it infected 241 million people and killed 627,000 people.

The research

Researchers from the Institute for Disease Modelling at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation developed a model to assess the impact of such modifications and found it could be effective even where transmission is high. While the technique, described in a paper published in Science Advances journal on September 21, has been shown to dramatically reduce the possibility of malaria spreading in a lab setting, if proven in the real world it could offer a powerful new tool to help eliminate malaria.

Researchers from the Transmission: Zero team at Imperial College London, UK, genetically modified the main malaria-carrying species of mosquito in sub-Saharan Africa, *Anopheles gambiae*, such that the mosquito produced antimicrobial peptides in its gut when it had a blood meal.

How it works

The peptides impair the malarial parasite's development and also cause the mosquitoes to have a shorter life span. The co-first author of the study, Tibebu Habtewold, said new tools are increasingly needed as mosquitoes develop resistance to insecticides and treatments.

To prevent malaria spread via genetic modification, the change needs to be spread from lab-bred mosquitoes to wild ones. The innovation is so designed that it can be coupled with existing 'gene drive' technology. "Gene drive is one such powerful weapon that in combination with drugs, vaccines and mosquito control can help stop the spread of malaria and save human lives," study co-lead author Professor George Christophides said. Gene drive would cause the anti-parasite genetic modification to be preferentially inherited, making it spread more widely among any natural populations.

Applicability

It would, however, require extremely careful planning to minimise risks before any field trials. The Transmission:Zero team is, therefore, creating two separate but compatible strains of modified mosquitoes — one with the anti-parasite modification and one with the gene drive.

They can then test the anti-parasite modification on its own first, adding in the gene drive once it has been shown to be effective. With partners in Tanzania, the team set up a facility to conduct some first tests. They are also risk-assessing potential releases of modified mosquitoes and taking into account potential hazards, but are hopeful that their intervention can help eradicate malaria.

'BEST BEFORE' LABELS SCRUTINISED AS FOOD WASTE CONCERNS GROW GLOBALLY

As awareness grows around the world about the problem of food waste, one culprit in particular is drawing scrutiny: "best before" labels.



Manufacturers have used the labels for decades to estimate peak freshness. Unlike “use by” labels, which are found on perishable foods like meat and dairy, “best before” labels have nothing to do with safety and may encourage consumers to throw away food that’s perfectly fine to eat.

“They read these dates and then they assume that it’s bad, they can’t eat it and they toss it, when these dates don’t actually mean that they’re not edible or they’re not still nutritious or tasty,” said Patty Apple, a manager at Food Shift, an Alameda, California, non-profit that collects and uses expired or imperfect foods.

To tackle the problem, major UK chains like Waitrose, Sainsbury’s and Marks & Spencer recently removed “best before” labels from prepackaged fruit and vegetables. The European Union is expected to announce a revamp to its labelling laws by the end of this year; it’s considering abolishing “best before” labels altogether.

In the US, there’s no similar push to scrap “best before” labels. But there is growing momentum to standardise the language on date labels to help educate buyers about food waste, including a push from big grocers and food companies and bipartisan legislation in Congress.

The United Nations estimates that 17% of global food production is wasted each year; most of that comes from households. In the US, as much as 35% of food available goes uneaten, ReFED says. That adds up to a lot of wasted energy — including the water, land and labour that goes into the food production — and higher greenhouse gas emissions when unwanted food goes into landfills.

There are many reasons food gets wasted, from large portion sizes to customers’ rejection of imperfect produce. But ReFED estimates that 7% of US food waste — or 4 million tons annually — is due to consumer confusion over “best before” labels.

Date labels were widely adopted by manufacturers in the 1970s to answer consumers’ concerns about product freshness. There are no federal rules governing them, and manufacturers are allowed to determine when they believe their products will taste best. Only infant formula is required to have a “use by” date in the US.

Since 2019, the Food and Drug Administration — which regulates around 80% of US food — has recommended that manufacturers use the labels “best if used by” for freshness and “use by” for perishable goods, based on surveys showing that consumers understand those phrases. But the effort is voluntary, and the language on labels continues to vary widely, from “sell by” to “enjoy by” to “freshest before.”

A survey released in June by researchers at the University of Maryland found at least 50 different date labels used on US grocery shelves and widespread confusion among customers. “Most people believe that if it says ‘sell by,’ ‘best by’ or ‘expiration,’ you can’t eat any of them. That’s not actually accurate,” said Richard Lipsit, who owns a Grocery Outlet store in Pleasanton, California, that specialises in discounted food. Lipsit said milk can be safely consumed up to a week after its “use by” date.

Gunders said canned goods and many other packaged foods can be safely eaten for years after their “best before” date. The FDA suggests consumers look for changes in colour, consistency or texture to determine if foods are all right to eat.

“Our bodies are very well equipped to recognise the signs of decay, when food is past its edible point,” Gunders said. “We’ve lost trust in those senses and we’ve replaced it with trust in these dates.”



Some UK grocery chains are actively encouraging customers to use their senses. Morrisons removed “use by” dates from most store-brand milk in January and replaced them with a “best before” label. Co-op, another grocery chain, did the same to its store-brand yogurts. It’s a change some shoppers support.

Ellie Spanswick, a social media marketer in Falmouth, England, buys produce, eggs and other groceries at farm stands and local shops when she can. The food has no labels, she said, but it’s easy to see that it’s fresh. “The last thing we need to be doing is wasting more food and money because it has a label on it telling us it’s past being good for eating,” Spanswick said.

But not everyone agrees.

Ana Wetrov of London, who runs a home renovation business with her husband, worries that without labels, staff might not know which items should be removed from shelves. She recently bought a pineapple and only realised after she cut into it that it was rotting in the middle.

In the absence of federal policy, states have stepped in with their own laws, frustrating food companies and grocers. Florida and Nevada, for example, require “sell by” dates on shellfish and dairy, and Arizona requires “best by” or “use by” dates on eggs, according to Emily Broad Lieb, director of the Food Law and Policy Clinic at Harvard Law School.

The confusion has led some companies, like Unilever, to support legislation currently in Congress that would standardise US date labels and ensure that food could be donated to rescue organisations even after its quality date. At least 20 states currently prohibit the sale or donation of food after the date listed on the label because of liability fears, Lieb said.

Clearer labelling and donation rules could help nonprofits like Food Shift, which trains chefs using rescued food. It even makes dog treats from overripe bananas, recovered chicken fat and spent grain from a brewer, Apple said. “We definitely need to be focusing more on doing these small actions like addressing expiration date labels, because even though it’s such a tiny part of this whole food waste issue, it can be very impactful,” Apple said.

BABIES TASTE, REACT TO DIFFERENT FOOD CONSUMED BY THEIR MOTHERS, STUDY FINDS

Researchers have found that not only can babies taste and smell in the womb, they also react differently to flavours their mothers consume.

In a study led by Durham University’s Fetal and Neonatal Research Lab, the team of researchers studied the reactions of foetuses in the womb after they were introduced to different foods — from sweet tasting to bitter — that their mothers ate. In their findings, published in the journal *Psychological Science* on September 21, the team found that while foetuses exposed to carrot flavour displayed a “laughter-face” expression, those exposed to kale consumed by their mothers showed more of a “cry-face” response.

The study

The study examined the foetuses of 100 British women, aged between 18-40, who were 32-36 weeks pregnant. Two experimental groups were created, with 35 women in each of them. In the first, the mothers were given a capsule containing 400 mg of carrot powder, and in the second the participants consumed capsules containing 400 mg of kale powder. Carrot was chosen because its



flavour is described as sweet by adults, while kale contains a more bitter flavour profile, the study said. Another 30 mothers were placed in a control group and were not exposed to any flavour.

All participants were asked not to eat or drink anything one hour before their scan, while mothers in the experimental groups were asked to avoid consuming anything containing carrot or kale on the day of their scans. After waiting for 20 minutes, the team took 4D ultrasound scans of the mothers for about 25 minutes. They then examined the facial expressions and movements of the foetuses, by analysing each frame of the ultrasound footage.

The results

The team found that after the mothers consumed a carrot capsule, the foetuses were more likely to display “laughter face” reactions, which include facial movements like lip-pulling, compared to those that consumed kale or no capsules. On the other hand, among the mothers that consumed a kale capsule, the foetuses were more likely to show “cry face” reactions, like upper-lip raises, lower-lip depressor and nasolabial furrowing. The facial reactions of foetuses in both the sweet and bitter flavour groups, compared to those in a control group who were not exposed to either flavours, showed that ingestion of even a small amount of powdered carrot or kale (400 mg) was sufficient to stimulate a reaction.

Additionally, both the “laughter face” and the “cry face” reactions occurred only 30 minutes after the mothers ingested the capsules. “Thus, in this short time, the flavour content of the capsules undergoes digestion, absorption into the mothers’ bloodstream, metabolism and circulation through the placenta and foetus, collection in the amniotic fluid, and fetal chemoreceptors,” the study found.

The significance

While other studies based on post-birth outcomes have shown that babies can taste and smell in the womb, the team claims that this is the first to see their reactions before birth. The researchers claim that food consumed by pregnant women can have a long-term impact on a child’s food preferences and improve their eating habits later in life.

“We think that this repeated exposure to flavours before birth could help to establish food preferences post-birth, which could be important when thinking about messaging around healthy eating and the potential for avoiding ‘food-fussiness’ when weaning”, said lead researcher Beyza Ustun, a postgraduate researcher in the Fetal and Neonatal Research Lab, Department of Psychology, Durham University,

ELON MUSK WANTS TO CREATE AN ‘EVERYTHING APP’; WHAT IS IT?

Why is Elon Musk suddenly thinking about creating an “everything app,” and what does that even mean? The question arose on Tuesday after the billionaire chief executive of Tesla Inc reversed course on his earlier decision not to buy Twitter Inc. Musk is now willing to proceed with his original plan to buy the social media company for \$44 billion and late on Tuesday he tweeted: “Buying Twitter is an accelerant to creating X, the everything app.” The concept of an everything app, often referred to as a “super app,” is massively popular in Asia and tech companies across the world have tried to replicate it.

A super app, or what Musk refers to as an “everything app,” has been described as the Swiss army knife of mobile apps, offering a suite of services for users such as messaging, social networking,



peer-to-peer payments and e-commerce shopping. These mega apps are widely used in Asia because mobile is the main form of access to the internet for many people in the region, wrote Scott Galloway, a New York University professor of marketing and co-host of tech podcast “Pivot,” last year.

What are some examples of super apps?

Chinese super app WeChat has more than 1 billion monthly users, according to one estimate, and is a ubiquitous part of daily life in China. Users can hail a car or taxi, send money to friends and family or make payments at stores. In 2018, some Chinese cities began testing WeChat for an electronic identification system that would be tied to users’ accounts, according to the South China Morning Post.

Grab, a leading super app across Southeast Asia, offers food delivery, ride-hailing, on-demand package delivery and financial services and investing.

LOVE AND LOSS

As tragic as the stampede in the Kanjuruhan Stadium, in East Java, Indonesia, that killed at least 125 people after a football game on Saturday night, was, the most telling comment on the incident was made by an injured survivor, who rightfully blamed the police for “dehumanising” the spectators. When some spectators descended onto the pitch after the game and engaged in scuffles, the police over-reacted with the use of tear gas, leading the fans on the pitch and others to scamper to the nearest gate, only to find it closed, resulting in a crowd rush and asphyxiation. This accident is reminiscent of other crowd-related tragedies such as the deaths of eight people in January 2022 during the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon, those of 74 spectators in Port Said, Egypt in 2012 and 97 Liverpool supporters at Hillsborough in Yorkshire, England in 1989. In all three cases, the deaths were less the result of hooliganism and more to do with police incompetence and crowd control failure. FIFA, football’s governing body, has come up with a clear guideline on stadium safety — “no firearms or crowd control gas shall be carried or used” by police or stewards in charge of crowd control. This guideline is not without reason. Policing of this kind is done to bring order when violence goes beyond control and descends into riots and there is little thought for public safety. With stadiums being regulated and closed spaces, using firearms or tear gas for crowd control would only result in furthering chaos and threats to public safety. It is only apt that the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights is planning to investigate the use of tear gas by the police and civil society organisations are asking for the organisers and police to be brought to trial.

With legions of passionate supporters across several countries, football is unquestionably the world’s most popular spectator sport, largely due to its simplicity and emphasis on skill and team work. But the flip side of spectator passion is that their tribal emotions for and against some teams or players overcome their appreciation of the abilities of the players or actual play. This false consciousness of identifying with the actual participants in a competitive game while merely being a spectator, is a key reason for the inflamed passions that come with the territory of spectator sports, which are also fanned by commercial and political interests. While the blame for the deaths in Kanjuruhan should be on the police for overzealous crowd control, the recurrent nature of such tragedies should also make every sport fan introspect on the role of a spectator. It’s one thing to appreciate the beautiful game, it’s quite another if that appreciation turns into a fatal attraction.