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INTERNATIONAL

INTERNECINE SQUABBLING

After a prolonged spell of costly indecisiveness, the U.S. House of Representatives has finally elected a Speaker, Representative Mike Johnson of Louisiana. Recent weeks have seen convulsions rock the House as Republicans struggled to find a consensus candidate to lead the majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress. After the political debacle of the ouster of the previous Speaker Kevin McCarthy on October 3, laying bare the deeply factionalised landscape of the House Republican caucus, several party notables tried and failed to secure the confidence of the House majority in their bids for the top post.

BRAZIL PRESIDENT LULA VETOES BILL LIMITING INDIGENOUS GROUP'S ANCESTRAL LAND CLAIMS

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will veto a core stipulation of the bill which would have only recognised Indigenous peoples' right to claim territories they occupied or were legally disputing in October 1988, when the Constitution was ratified, Minister of Institutional Relations Alexandre Padilha announced.

The land rights legislation, backed by the powerful agribusiness sector, is seen by some critics as an effort to counteract Mr. Lula's efforts to bolster environmental and Indigenous land protections, after his campaign pledge to demarcate new tribal territories.

Mr. Padilha said that the president's veto would be partial and not total as Indigenous movements had requested, with the rest of the bill signed into law.

"Everything that attacked the rights of Indigenous peoples, and which contradicted the constitution, and the recent decisions of the court, were vetoed," Mr. Padilha said.

BALANCING ACT

Poland's right-wing Law and Justice party, in power since 2015, was punished by voters in the October 15 parliamentary election, termed one of the most consequential since the fall of communism in 1989. The party, known by its Polish acronym, PiS, ran a campaign that it could protect Poland's traditional values and its independence from the European oligarchy, while the Donald Tusk-led centrist opposition Civic Coalition said the election was the last opportunity to arrest the slide into autocracy. In the past eight years, PiS has shifted Poland's polity towards the right and often clashed with the European Union (EU). Its government was also accused of squeezing liberal democracy, stifling the free press, undermining gay rights and seizing control of institutions, mainly the judiciary. It emerged as the single largest party with 35.38% of the votes (200 seats), but fell short of a governing majority in the 460-strong lower House of Parliament. The Civic Coalition won 30.70% of the vote, but with potential coalition partners (the Third Way and Left party), the centre-left alliance, which has the support of 248 legislators, has a way forward to government formation.

The result is an opportunity for the centrist coalition to right the wrongs of the PiS government. Mr. Tusk has already promised to make amends with the EU, strengthen democracy and institutions, roll back the near-total ban of abortion and restore gay rights. An area where there



would be continuity is Ukraine. PiS had offered staunch support for Ukraine against Russia's invasion, though there were quarrels over economic issues between Warsaw and Kyiv. Mr. Tusk, a former EU bureaucrat, has promised to continue support for Kyiv and to coordinate better with NATO and the EU in this regard. But Mr. Tusk faces many challenges that begin with the formation of the government itself. There is no certainty that Polish President Andrzej Duda, who is from PiS, would invite Mr. Tusk to form the government first. If the PiS is invited first, it could lead to horse trading. Even if Mr. Tusk manages to form the government, he will have to reach a consensus with President Duda, who wields a legislative veto, to initiate critical reforms. There is a consensus on social issues within Mr. Tusk's coalition, but members have different views on economic and climate policies. Tackling Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, which has raised Poland's strategic profile in Europe, without a spillover is another challenge. What is awaiting Mr. Tusk is a tough balancing act straddling the spheres of economy, politics and foreign policy.

WOMEN'S STRIKE IN ICELAND: A REMINDER OF THE ARDUOUS JOURNEY FOR GENDER PARITY

What do you do when a so-called equality paradise is still far from equal? The answer, according to the women of Iceland, is to go on strike — and keep on striking — until the yawning gap between the dream of paradise and its dispiriting reality is closed, or almost. On Tuesday, tens of thousands of women and non-binary folk stopped work, both paid and non-paid, bringing the nation to a standstill for 24 hours — the first of its kind since the historic strike of 1975.

Fishing industry workers, teachers, hospital staff, government workers, librarians and Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir were among those who were protesting the gender pay gap and gender-based violence in a country that is widely held up as an exemplar of social equality.

There are two ways of looking at the women's strike in Iceland. The more cynical might wonder what hope there is for women in the rest of the world, if women in Iceland feel undervalued and unsafe. After all, the gender imbalance in terms of economic power, social status and political representation remains both acute and stubborn in many other countries compared to Iceland, which has topped the World Economic Forum's Gender Report rankings 14 years in a row.

But it's the other perspective, which speaks of hope and aspiration, that is worth holding on to.

The struggle for equality was never going to be easy — not in Iceland, nor in the US, India or anywhere else. For every success story, like the decriminalisation of abortion in Mexico and the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in India last month, there are heartbreaking reverses, such as the abortion ban in the US last year and harsher penalties for women who refuse to wear the hijab in Iran. The lesson from Iceland is not that the "equality paradise" is still faraway — it's that the dream for it will never die.

AS ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT GETS DEADLIER, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INDIA-EUROPE ECONOMIC CORRIDOR?

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), positioned as a modern-day Spice Route and as a weighty ideological alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, was a challenging project to start off with, given the inherent logistical complexities of the multi-modal project and the prospect of navigating through the complex geopolitics of the West Asian region — a vital middle link.



But the eruption of fighting in Israel and the renewed tensions it has stoked in the region makes any progress on the project, which to leverage cross-country railway lines and shipping corridors to physically link up a vast stretch of the Eurasian subcontinent, an even more uphill task than when the initial announcement was made just over a month ago, officials in multiple government ministries indicated.

When PM Modi had made the announcement flanked by US President Joe Biden and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman during the annual Group of 20 leaders summit in New Delhi last month, there was a tacit acknowledgement of the logistical complexities, including the prospect of multi-modal shipment transfers and the possibility of consignments being subjected to multiple national customs checks and clearance. But the geopolitical challenge of wading through the complex geopolitics of the West Asia region was always the bigger, unsaid concern.

Increasing complexities

The design of the corridor envisaged as a “cost-effective” cross-border, ship-to-rail transit network enabling goods and services to transit between India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe, seeks to traverse multiple, diverse nations with different political dynamics, strategic interests, and historical tensions.

The US backing was seen as the catalyst, especially given that the signatories included countries such as Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. But there was an expectation that the progressive initiatives mounted by Washington over the better part of the last decade to co-opt countries in the West Asian region to normalise ties with Israel would be a key factor in getting this project off the ground.

The eruption of fighting between Hamas and Israel earlier this month threatens to upend all those efforts. The Saudi-Israel peace initiative could be the first casualty, as mounting anger in the Arab world about the scale of Israel's offensive in northern Gaza begins to override the initial outrage over the atrocities committed by Hamas in southern Israel in its surprise attack on October 7.

US President Joe Biden's planned stop in Jordan earlier this week, which was to take place after his visit to Israel, had to be cancelled after an attack on a Gaza hospital while a scheduled meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas also had to be put off. A rocket attack near Baghdad International Airport added to a rising number of attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East, as Washington tried to stave off a progressive escalation of the conflict in the region. President Biden has suggested that Hamas's attack, the trigger for the conflict, was aimed at disrupting stronger ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

“One of the reasons Hamas moved on Israel.... they knew that I was about to sit down with the Saudis,” Biden was quoted as saying by the Reuters news agency Friday.

Early announcement

In New Delhi, across some key infrastructure ministries, there is an acknowledgement that the project – spearheaded by the US – was perhaps announced prematurely, well before any implementation details were finalised, or communicated at a country level. Official timelines for the project's completion or details on how it would be funded are not clearly spelt out yet. Clarity on the final alignment of the project is also awaited.



What is being said, though, is that the use of the land route in the Arabian peninsula could mean bypassing the congested Suez Canal that cargo ships currently take, and thereby offer some logistical advantages. A senior official in India's union shipping ministry indicated that the details are still to be discussed at a country level but that India will "follow a whole-of-government approach" as and when the fineprint emerges.

Already, because of the feeling of being bypassed, the Turkish government has announced its own project as a counter to the IMEC, with one of the ostensible triggers being that the sea route for the proposed corridor between Haifa in Israel and Piraeus in Greece – two key seaports that the IMEC could pass through – traverses waters described as "disputed" by Ankara. Turkey is in "intensive negotiations" with regional partners over its alternative to the IMEC, as the country seeks to bolster its historic role as a transport route for goods moving from Asia to Europe, the Financial Times reported on September 17.

PRESIDENT BIDEN'S ISRAEL VISIT: DIPLOMACY IN CRISIS

US President Joe Biden deserves credit for taking great personal risk in travelling to Israel last week to defuse the crisis triggered by the deadly attack by Hamas on October 7. The Israeli military response has led to an even larger number of Palestinian deaths, and its demand for evacuation from Northern Gaza has created a massive humanitarian problem.

Wading boldly into a crisis with little apparent room for compromise between the Israeli demand for retribution and the plight of the Palestinian civilians caught in the crossfire, Biden sought to create room for diplomacy. But the bombing of a hospital in Gaza cast a dark shadow over the US President's visit and led to the cancellation of a planned summit in Jordan with the moderate Arab neighbours of Israel. Biden's effort, however, is being reinforced by the western allies, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

The western effort involves several dimensions. One, it's an expression of solidarity with Israel, which has seen one of the worst massacres in its history as a nation.

For the US and Europe, the commitment to Israeli security is absolute and is unlikely to change despite growing criticism of Tel Aviv's policies across the western world. Second, even as he expressed unflinching solidarity with Israel, Biden urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to let the justified Israeli rage overwhelm a prudent assessment of the consequences of a campaign to occupy Gaza in order to eliminate Hamas. Biden publicly cautioned Netanyahu against repeating the US mistakes after the terror attack on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

The US had lost considerable global sympathy by overreacting to the attack. Third, Biden was also focused on getting humanitarian aid through to Gaza by working with Israel and Egypt. Fourth, the West is actively working with Qatar, which is a major supporter of Hamas and hosts its leaders in Doha, to secure the release of nearly 200 hostages held in Gaza. Finally, the US and its allies are encouraging Israel and the Arab states to think about the day after in Gaza. The hope is to construct a moderate post-Hamas regime with the support of Arab states and begin the long overdue economic and social reconstruction of Gaza.

Biden's Gaza diplomacy reveals a paradox — for all the talk of US decline, Washington remains the only major power with the will and capacity to push for moderation in the region. But the deck is stacked against Biden's diplomacy. Netanyahu might have been persuaded to delay the invasion



of Gaza but not end the plans for it. The moderate Arabs are struggling to cope with the massive anti-Israeli sentiment within their populace and will find it hard to nuance their positions. Two silver linings from Biden's diplomacy have come into view in the last few days — a couple of hostages have been released, and aid is beginning to trickle into Gaza. But they might not last once Israel's Gaza invasion begins.

BETWEEN OCCUPATION AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

When the state of Israel was declared in May 1948 in Palestine, five Arab countries attacked the newly created state, launching the first Arab-Israeli war. In the subsequent months, some 7,00,000 Arabs from Palestine, mostly from areas that became part of the Jewish state, were uprooted from their homes. Most of them took refuge in Gaza, a tiny Mediterranean strip of land, and the West Bank, the land on the western bank of the Jordan River. As refugees started flowing into Gaza, the 356 sq. km territory saw its population swelling to over 2,00,000 within months. In the war, Israel captured more Palestinian territories than what the UN partition plan had envisaged for a Jewish state. Jordan seized the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip fell into the hands of Egypt.

The people of Gaza, who lived under Ottoman rule for centuries and British occupation for decades subsequently, would continue to see their fate being determined by colonisers. Israel would capture the enclave in 1967 and keep it under its control, either through direct military occupation or blockades. Gaza has remained a flashpoint ever since, with occasional bouts of violence. The latest in this episode was the October 7 Sabbath attack by Hamas, the Islamist militants who control Gaza today, that killed at least 1,400 Israelis, mostly civilians. In retaliation, Israel has launched a massive bombing campaign, already killing some 4,000 people, and is now preparing for a ground invasion.

History of Gaza

When Palestine was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, it was divided into six administrative districts. Gaza Sanjak (District of Gaza) was one of them, stretching from Jaffa in the north (now part of Israel) to Rafah (now, the border crossing with Egypt) in the south. For over four centuries, it remained an Ottoman district of Palestine.

From the early 19th century, Jews, fleeing discrimination in Europe, had started migrating to Palestine. In 1917, during the last leg of the First World War, the British captured Palestine, including Gaza, from a crumbling Ottoman Empire. In the same year, the British had promised to support the creation of "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. After the war, Palestine, comprising today's Israel, West Bank and Gaza, became a British colony. Jewish migration to British-ruled Palestine would pick up pace during the interwar period. This would lead to Arab-Jewish violent riots in the 1930s.

By the time the Second World War was over, Jews had become a sizeable community in Palestine with a parallel administration, the Jewish Agency, and their own militia groups — Haganah and Irgun. Britain approached the UN, declaring its intent to vacate the mandate. The UN partition plan — divide Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state and an international city of Jerusalem—was rejected outright by the Arabs. In 1948, just before the British mandate ended, Zionists unilaterally declared the state of Israel, which triggered the 1948 war.



Under the Israeli occupation, there were two different streams of Palestinian movements—the secular nationalism championed by Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), and the Islamist awakening promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood. In Gaza, the Brothers had established deep roots. In both Palestinian territories (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem) and Gaza, public anger was building up against Israel's occupation. And Gaza played a major part in the outbreak of the first intifada (uprising) against the occupation. On December 8, 1987, several Palestinians were killed in a traffic incident in Gaza, involving an Israeli driver, which immediately led to a wave of protests, which spread to the West Bank. The PLO called for a mass uprising. A year later, Hamas was established.

The intifada would eventually lead to the Oslo Accords of 1993 which saw a provisional authority (the Palestinian Authority) being formed with limited powers in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. But the real promise of the Oslo process was Palestinian statehood. That would collapse in the mid-1990s as Israel would accuse the Palestinians of reneging on the security promises they made and walk back from its own promises. Hamas, which opposed the Oslo Accords, would continue to carry out attacks against the Israelis during this period. Oslo Accord's failure led to the second intifada in 2000. Both Gaza and the West Bank erupted in violence, and this time, Hamas was in the driving seat.

From the 1970s, Israel promoted Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In 2005, faced with Hamas's violent resistance, Israel unilaterally decided to pull back troops and settlers from Gaza. For the first time in centuries, Palestinians got a chance to establish their own rule in the enclave, even though Israel's direct occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem continued. In the first elections held in the Palestinian territories, in 2006, Hamas came to power, defeating Fatah. The Islamists and the secularists initially formed a unity government. But it would fall apart quickly, particularly after Western countries refused to sanction funds to the Palestinian Authority led by Hamas, which they see as a terrorist outfit. A brief Fatah-Hamas civil war would break out. Fatah ousted Hamas from the West Bank and the latter captured Gaza in 2007. Ever since, Hamas has been the government in Gaza.

But for Israel, Hamas, which it has designated as a terrorist outfit, taking over Gaza was a security challenge. Hamas did not see Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, which is only a part of Palestine, as an end of its conflict with Israel. It said it retained the right to resist as long as Israel continued the occupation of Palestinian territories. On the other side, Israel imposed a land, air and naval blockade on Gaza from 2007 onwards, to control what and who go in and out of the enclave. Constant tensions led to occasional wars.

Largest open prison

Gaza is often described as the world's largest open prison. Its population has ballooned to 2.3 million, making it one of the most densely populated regions. Israel has built barriers along the border — both overland and underground — with limited checkpoints. The unemployment rate in Gaza is roughly 47% (it is 70% among the young). Electricity is scarce — eight-hour power cuts are common. Israel has destroyed Gaza's only airport and restrained access for the Gazans to the Mediterranean Sea.

Over the years, Israel has built a security model based on keeping Palestine's organised resistance under check using force, money, checkpoints, barriers and blockades. In the past, Israel had seen Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, another Islamist group operating from Gaza, launching rockets into Israel in protest against its highhandedness in the West Bank, including raids at the al Aqsa



compound in East Jerusalem. But on October 7, Hamas launched an unexpected ground invasion into Israel — something which hasn't happened since 1948. The attack from Gaza shattered Israel's security model and brought the Palestine question, which has been sidelined by both Israel and Arab powers, back to the fore of West Asia. To rebuild its deterrence, Israel is now showering fire and fury on the whole of Gaza.

FIVE WARS IN 15 YEARS HAVE STIFLED GAZA'S GROWTH

Since the beginning of Israeli strikes following Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on October 7, over 4,700 people have died in the Gaza Strip, according to reports from the territory's leaders. Of these, close to 1,800 were children, says the Palestinian health ministry. Israeli strikes on Gaza have also left about 16,000 people injured.

The Gaza Strip, a financially strained Palestinian territory, has been under Israeli blockade since 2007. It is been under the governance of Hamas, which has engaged in war with Israel five times in the last 15 years. The Gaza Strip was occupied by Israel during the 1967 war and returned to Palestine fully in 2005. As Gaza shares its border with Israel in the north and east, Egypt in the south, and the Mediterranean Sea in the west, its entries and exits are heavily controlled. In 2007, Israel imposed an air, land, and sea blockade on Gaza. This means that except the Rafah entrance on the Egyptian border, every other point is controlled by Israel.

Due to such intense scrutiny on the movement of men and goods combined with years of bombardment, Gaza has not seen meaningful development in recent decades. The latest war with Israel is the fifth in the last 15 years, with the other four recorded in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021. Each time, air strikes from Israel have flattened buildings and killed civilians. This has led to an increase in poverty levels.

The GDP per capita of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022 was \$5,722. This was less than that of India (\$7,096) and just above the GDP per capita of Pakistan (\$5,452). Israel's GDP per capita was seven times higher at \$44,272.

The death toll in Gaza has already reached record levels. With over 4,700 casualties and counting, Hamas' fifth war with Israel has become the deadliest so far. The seven-week conflict in July-August 2014 killed about 2,250 Palestinians. While many children have died in the conflict, fertility levels in the region were among the highest in 2021 with 3.5 total births per woman. For comparison, India's fertility rate was 2.08.

The population density of the Gaza Strip is 6,019, making it one of the densest places in the world. Only four other places are more densely populated than Gaza — Macao, Monaco, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

With a huge population, most of them children, the burden on adults to provide for them is very high. However, due to the poor presence of industry, Gaza suffers from chronic unemployment. More worryingly, only a small share of the population is even looking for jobs. The labour force participation rate (percentage of total population aged 15+ who were employed or looking for work) in the West Bank and Gaza in 2021 was 43%. If only the Gaza Strip is considered, it was even lower at 35%. These figures were among the lowest in the world. And of them only a small fraction was employed. In the West Bank and Gaza, the unemployment rate was 26% in 2021. In Gaza, it was 45%.



While over 16,000 people are injured in Gaza, the region only has 13 hospital beds per 10,000 population, among the lowest in the world. It hints at the possibility of the death toll increasing much further given that the wounded may not get adequate treatment.

WHY THE IDF WILL STRUGGLE TO 'NEUTRALISE' GAZA'S TUNNELS

An Israeli ground invasion of Gaza will have to reckon with what lies underground: a labyrinth of tunnels, controlled and operated by Hamas, will be a key battlefield.

The network of approximately 1,300 tunnels is thought to be around 500 km in length, with the deepest lying 70 m underground, DW reported. Most are about 2 m in width and height. According to John Spencer of the US Military Academy West Point, the sheer scale of the tunnel system underneath Gaza poses a "wicked problem" for which "no perfect solution exists", and overcoming which, "will require a lot of time."

We look at when and why these tunnels came into existence, what they are used for, and why they pose such a challenge to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

A lifeline for a besieged people

The earliest tunnels underneath Gaza were probably dug as far back as the 1980s. But their scale and sophistication went up after Israel tightened its blockade of Gaza in 2007.

For besieged Gazans, tunnels are a lifeline which provides them all kinds of essential items, from food and medicine, to hygiene products and electronics. Many lie on Gaza's border with Egypt, from where goods are smuggled into the enclave through the city of Rafah in the Sinai peninsula.

Prior to 2013, when Egypt cracked down on cross-border smuggling, the 12 km long Egypt-Gaza border had as many as 2,500 tunnels and moved as much as 500 tons of steel and 3,000 tons of cement daily. For Hamas, which has poured millions of dollars into the construction and upkeep of these tunnels, they are of "existential" importance for Gazans — keeping the enclave's battered economy afloat.

'A great equaliser'

These tunnels are also of existential importance to Hamas, smuggling weaponry and military equipment into Gaza as well. Moreover, beyond tunnels used for smuggling in the southern border, Hamas has also built ones explicitly for military purposes.

Underneath Gaza, there are series of 'defensive tunnels', used as military command centres and for weapons storage. According to western military experts, these are the tunnels through which Hamas orchestrates its military operations against Israel, as well as where it is likely hiding hostages.

Attached to these, are 'offensive tunnels' on the border with Israel, used for cross-border attacks and other operations. It was these tunnels that were Israel's casus belli during the 2014 escalation.

"The tunnels allow fighters to move between a series of fighting positions safely and freely," Spencer, an expert in urban warfare, explained. "In short, the tunnels are a great equaliser, neutralising Israel's advantages in weaponry, tactics, technology and organisation."

Tackling the tunnels



Given how important tunnels are for Hamas, they will be a top priority for the IDF during a ground invasion. But eliminating them altogether will not be easy.

First and foremost is the problem of locating these tunnels, which experts say is akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Even with the availability of modern surveillance technology including radar, thermal imaging, and magnetic signatures, most tunnels are found by human detective work. This is why it is impossible to accurately say just how big the tunnel system underneath Gaza is.

Second, even upon establishing their location, eliminating them is not a simple task. Sending in soldiers is fraught with risk as tunnels can easily be booby trapped. Fighting inside tunnels will also most certainly favour Hamas militants, with detailed knowledge of the terrain.

Bunker-buster bombs, which can penetrate deep underground before exploding, risk extensive collateral damage, given how densely Gaza is populated. Although chemical agents have been used in the past, notably by the US in Vietnam, these would be regarded as “illegal” in the eyes of International Humanitarian Law.

The IDF is highly trained for tunnel warfare, more than any other military force in the world according to Spencer. But the “depth and scale” of Gazan tunnels will take a long time to neutralise, and come at unthinkable human cost.

Moreover, as Daphne Richemond-Barak, author of *Underground Warfare* (2017), noted in an article in *Financial Times*, even with Israel’s concerted efforts “it is unlikely that the entirety of Gaza’s tunnel network would be destroyed.”

WHO ARE THE BEDOUIN ARABS IN THE ISRAELI ARMY?

Among the casualties on the Israeli side since the October 7 Hamas assault plunged Israel and Gaza into a vortex of violence, are at least four Bedouin soldiers. A popular video on social media shows local Israelis expressing their gratitude to a Bedouin commander named Ashraf for putting up an effective defence against Hamas fighters.

The Bedouins are a nomadic Muslim Arab people who live mainly in the Negev desert of southern Israel. They have traditionally been pastoralists with no powerful or exclusive national affiliation, who would, until about a century and a half ago, wander the area between Saudi Arabia and the Sinai with their livestock.

How did the Bedouins come to join the Israel Defence Forces (IDF)?

During the last several decades of Ottoman rule, the Bedouin began to settle into a largely sedentary life. Before the formation of Israel, groups of Bedouin were employed by early Jewish settlers to guard clusters of their communities in Palestine. During the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49, many Bedouin provided valuable intelligence to the Jewish militias and the newly formed IDF, and some of them also fought against the Arab armies alongside the Jews.

In the 1950s, Israel recognised a large number of Bedouin as its citizens, and subsequently helped build settlements for them in the Negev. Many Bedouin continued to serve in the IDF, primarily in scouting or tracking units. In 1970, a Bedouin scouting unit was established in the IDF’s Southern Command, and similar units have since been established in other areas. In 1986, a desert-scouting unit was formed, and stationed near the Gaza Strip.



In 2003, the IDF created several specialised search and rescue units of mainly Bedouin to serve in the border areas.

In 1993, Israel inaugurated a memorial to Bedouin warriors on a hilltop in Galilee, bearing the names of 154 Bedouin soldiers who lost their lives in the service of the country. The Garden of the Broken Heart is dedicated to Bedouin soldiers whose burial places remain unknown.

Is it compulsory for the Bedouin to train with the IDF?

No. Army training is compulsory only for the Jewish population of Israel. However, many Bedouin youth also volunteer. Many of the IDF's Bedouin soldiers come from families with a tradition of joining the defence forces.

In 2021, a record number of around 600 Bedouins voluntarily enlisted in the Israeli military. In a post from 2014, the IDF claimed on its Facebook page that “about 450 Bedouin men volunteer to serve in the IDF each year”.

To what extent are the Bedouin integrated in Israeli society?

Many of the Bedouin serving in desert reconnaissance units hail from the north of Israel. In communities like Shibli in the north, Bedouin have coexisted with Jewish and Arab communities since the 1950s.

One individual who underwent army conscription and now works with the Israeli civil services, told this reporter in an interview last year that training with the Israeli army helped him appreciate aspects of Jewish culture, even though he did struggle with the Hebrew language initially.

The Bedouin population in Israel currently numbers 210,000 individuals residing in various regions of the state, with a significant presence in the Negev desert in the South.

In 2020, the Israeli foreign ministry appointed Ishmael Khaldi as Israel's first Bedouin ambassador. The first Bedouin high-tech company in Israel, Sadel Technologies, was co-founded by Ibrahim Sana, a Bedouin, and his two partners.

In November 2022, the Israeli government launched Operation Negev Shield, one of the goals of which is to help Bedouin communities integrate into society through educational programmes aimed at steering young men away from criminal activity. Each week, IDF officers visit schools in various Bedouin communities to educate children.

A WAKE-UP CALL

As tension between Moscow and Washington mounts, Russia on Wednesday passed the second and third readings of a Bill to revoke its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Russian President Vladimir Putin had on October 5 urged the Duma, the Lower House of the country's Parliament, to make the change to “mirror” the position of the U.S., Reuters reported.

The CTBT seeks to ban all nuclear explosions, for both military and peaceful purposes. So far, 187 countries have signed the treaty and 178 have ratified it. The treaty, however, has not legally come into force; it can only do so when it has been signed and ratified by the 44 countries which are part of the treaty's Annex 2 and had formally participated in the 1996 session of the Conference on Disarmament. These countries possessed nuclear power or research reactors at the time.



Of these, North Korea, India and Pakistan have not signed the CTBT. Five of the 44 countries — China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, and the U.S. — have signed but are yet to ratify the treaty; nine countries have nuclear weapons, while the remaining 35 possess nuclear power and research reactors.

First steps

The U.S. conducted the first nuclear test on July 16, 1945, at Alamogordo in New Mexico. Barely a month later, it dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The devastation caused by the bombings drew attention to the nuclear armament race.

The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 (also called the Partial Test Ban Treaty) was the first international step in that direction and prohibited nuclear testing in the atmosphere, underwater, and in outer space. The treaty was signed by the U.S., the erstwhile Soviet Union, and the U.K. It, however, did not extend to underground testing. Subsequently, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 followed as concerns about nuclear stockpiling continued, fuelled by the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

As the Cold War ended, the impetus for the CTBT was bolstered by the global anti-nuclear movement and the newfound international climate of cooperation. Negotiations began in 1994 and concluded in 1996 with the adoption of the treaty text by the United Nations General Assembly.

The CTBT also establishes a comprehensive verification regime to monitor and detect nuclear test explosions. This regime consists of three main components: the International Monitoring System (IMS) which has more than 300 global facilities and can detect seismic (shockwaves through the ground), hydroacoustic (sound waves in oceans), infrasound (ultra-low-frequency sound waves inaudible to the human ear), and radionuclide (radioactive particles and gases from a nuclear explosion in the atmosphere) signals; the International Data Centre which receives data from the IMS network and shares it with member states; and On-Site Inspections which will be possible once the treaty is enforced.

Although the CTBT is stuck in an ongoing ratification impasse, it has had positive implications for global nuclear non-proliferation. Ever since the treaty was opened for signatures in 1996, ten nuclear tests have been conducted — two each by India and Pakistan, and six by North Korea. This is drastically less than the more than 2,000 nuclear tests conducted globally between 1945 and 1996.

Russian impact

Russia's latest actions can embolden other countries to revoke their ratification, renewing the nuclear arms race. The timing of the move is crucial as well, as Russia's conventional efforts in the Ukraine war appear to be stagnating. Western powers like the U.S. and the European Union have interpreted Mr. Putin's threats of escalation in Ukraine to be nuclear. While Ukraine views the Russian move as stepping up its "nuclear blackmail", Moscow has maintained that a change in status quo does not define an intent to carry out a nuclear test and that it won't do so unless the U.S. does it first.

PIONEER OF MICROFINANCE

Muhammad Yunus and his grassroots Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for lending a social conscience to capitalism and "their efforts to create economic and social



development from below” in Bangladesh. At 83, the “banker to the poor” does not appear to be slowing down. He strives, he asserts, for a world of three zeros: zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions.

Instead of shunning capitalism, Mr. Yunus’s approach has been to humanise it. “The capitalist system is a machine which sucks up wealth from the bottom to send it to the top. It is not the fault of individuals at the top. They follow what the system asks them to do: chase money,” Mr. Yunus said in an interview with The New York Times in 2017. “But in the process, wealth at the top grows like a giant mushroom owned by fewer and fewer people — for the simple reason that the more they have, the more they get. Wealth is a magnet.”

Small loans

Mr. Yunus modified this system by allowing humans to express selflessness through what is known as social business. The concept, although deemed unrealistic by many, caught the Western imagination. It evolved from his practice of granting poor people small loans on easy terms — the cornerstone of the Grameen Bank since its establishment in 1983.

After completing his studies in Bangladesh and the U.S., Mr. Yunus was appointed professor of economics at the University of Chittagong in 1972. When Bangladesh suffered a famine in 1974, he ventured beyond the realm of teaching. He decided to give loans to people who wanted to start their own small enterprises. That initiative was expanded through the Grameen Bank on a large scale. Under his tutelage, the Grameen Bank played a pivotal role in eradicating poverty through microlending. More than 100 nations have sought to replicate this model.

However, his ‘banking for the poor’ venture has come under attack from some quarters. Microcredit is said to carry unusually high interest rates due to a lack of collateral and the overheads associated with administering small loans. Mr. Yunus himself admitted that some organisations may have abused the microcredit system for profit. As microcredit expanded all over the world, it became less likely that borrowers would be monitored and protected from falling deep into debt like before. Critics cite modest benefits associated with microcredit, overindebtedness, and a trend toward commercialisation that is less focused on serving the poor.

Disputes at home

At home, Mr. Yunus became embroiled in a barrage of legal cases. In 2011, he was removed by Bangladesh’s central bank from the post of managing director at the world’s best-known microlender, for holding on to the post past his retirement age. Mr. Yunus lost the court battle stemming from regulatory steps. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, on many occasions, accused him of influencing the World Bank’s exit from the nation’s largest bridge project, an allegation he has consistently denied.

More than a decade later, a criminal case against Mr. Yunus alleges three breaches under the country’s Labour Act and may lead to a jail sentence. This is just one of more than 150 cases filed against him after the ruling Awami League party came to power in 2008, according to Amnesty International. On October 5, the nation’s anti-graft agency interrogated Mr. Yunus for more than an hour on money laundering charges. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Despite all these unsavoury sideshows, Mr. Yunus will be remembered for his role in expanding microfinance around the world. Almost 40 years ago, when the concept of microfinance as a poverty reduction tool was in its infancy, he fuelled hope that microcredit would transform



economic and social structures with its focus on reaching the previously unbanked. By one estimate, the global microfinance market was valued at \$178.8 billion in 2020 and is projected to reach \$496.9 billion by 2030.

ANOTHER HONEYMOON

Six years ago, Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader and three-time Prime Minister, was ousted from power after he fell out with the powerful military establishment. In the subsequent election, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of Imran Khan, then a “darling” of the establishment, was voted to power. Mr. Sharif was disqualified and jailed while his party accused the military of rigging the election in favour of the PTI. In 2019, he went into exile in London. Four years later, the situation has changed dramatically. Mr. Khan, who was ousted from power last year, is now in jail and a critic of the military, and Mr. Sharif, once a foe of the generals, returned last week amid fanfare, with thousands of his supporters chanting at a rally, ‘Take charge again, save Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif.’ Pakistan is no stranger to such political somersaults, where politicians join hands with the generals to tackle their opponents and make their path to power smoother, only to be laid down by the military. Mr. Sharif himself has done this thrice. So, Pakistan is back to the past when Mr. Sharif returns to the country, probably in an understanding with the generals, ahead of the general elections. He wants power and the generals want to sideline their new foe, Mr. Khan, and dismantle his party. It is a marriage of convenience.

After his ouster, Mr. Khan launched a frontal attack on the PML-N and the military. The establishment, along with the post-Khan coalition government that was headed by Mr. Sharif’s younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, responded with a massive crackdown on the PTI. But the military’s witch-hunt has only made Mr. Khan more popular. On the other side, the PML-N, Mr. Khan’s main political rival, was grappling with internal divisions and external challenges. The party now hopes that the charismatic elder Sharif, who is popular among its conservative base and influential among Punjab’s wealthy business establishment, revives the PML-N ahead of the elections. For Mr. Sharif, the support of the generals is necessary to vacate the cases he faces and have his disqualification lifted. But the road ahead is tough. There is a groundswell of anger against the PML-N under whose watch the economic situation has deteriorated, with hyperinflation, joblessness, a tanking rupee and a looming balance of payment crisis. To overcome these challenges and defeat Imran Khan, Mr. Sharif would need the blessings of, if not active support from, the generals, which in turn would weaken the civilian institutions and strengthen the hands of the military. And his own record suggests that Mr. Sharif does not get along with the generals after the honeymoon period. This is the cyclical tragedy Pakistan finds itself within.

WHAT IS THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENT, THAT LED TO FORMER PAK PM IMRAN KHAN’S INDICTMENT IN THE CYPHER CASE?

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and ex-Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Monday (October 23) were indicted by a special court in the cypher case that pertains to the disclosure of a classified cable sent to Islamabad by Pakistan’s ambassador in Washington early last year. Both Imran and Shah Mahmood have been accused of making the document public.

Although Imran has claimed that the cable is proof of a US conspiracy to push the Pakistani military to oust him in a parliamentary vote in 2022, he has denied revealing its content publicly — the former PM has said news outlets got the document from other sources. What is the cypher case? What did the document contain? We take a look.



What was the classified cable?

The document at the centre of the controversy contained an account of a meeting that took place on March 7, 2022, between US State Department officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu, and then Pakistani ambassador to US Asad Majeed Khan.

The complete text of the purported cable hasn't been disclosed yet as it is protected under Section 5 of the Official Secrets Act 1923 of Pakistan. However, in August 2023, American news organisation The Intercept reproduced a section of the document — the outlet said that it received the document from a source in Pakistan's military.

In the meeting, the US officials expressed their displeasure regarding Imran's neutrality on the Russian invasion of Ukraine — the then PM was in Moscow on February 24, 2022, when President Valmadir Putin announced the invasion of Ukraine, according to The Intercept report.

Lu went on to say: "I think if the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington because the Russia visit is being looked at as a decision by the Prime Minister". "Otherwise," he continued, "I think it will be tough going ahead."

Asad Majeed sent the details of the gathering to Islamabad through a cable, labelled "Secret". Notably, just a day after the meeting, on March 8, Imran's political rivals in Parliament moved forward with a key procedural step toward the no-confidence vote. More than a month later, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chief was ousted from office after the vote succeeded.

The US State Department on multiple occasions has denied that its officials encouraged their Pakistani counterparts to oust Imran.

What is the cypher case?

Imran talked about the secret document for the first time on March 27, 2022, at a huge gathering in Islamabad, where he pulled out a 'letter' from his pocket, claiming it to be proof of an international conspiracy to remove him from the top job. Ten days later, he revealed more details about the cable and said, "The US had sent a threatening message through Pakistan's envoy," according to a report by Dawn.

Since then, especially after his ouster, Imran has repeatedly brought up the classified cable and its content to claim that the US was behind the no-confidence vote against him. In response, in July this year, the Pakistan Muslim League (N)-led government accused the former PM of "exposing an official secret document". The then Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah told reporters in Islamabad that Imran's abuse of an official secret document had harmed Pakistan's foreign relations.

The next month, just days after The Intercept published its report, Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) registered an FIR against Imran under Section 5 of the Official Secrets Act 1923 for making the contents of the classified cable public. Offences under Section 5, if proved in a court of law, involve punishment of imprisonment from two to 14 years, and in some cases even a death sentence, a report by Geo News said.

In August, Imran was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison in the Toshakhana graft case. While that sentence was later suspended, he has remained behind bars pending the court ruling on the cypher case. He is also barred from running in the upcoming elections in January 2024.



MANILA, BEIJING TRADE BLAME OVER COLLISIONS IN DISPUTED SEA

Beijing and Manila traded blame on Sunday for two collisions between Chinese vessels and Philippine boats on a resupply mission to Filipino troops on a remote outpost in the disputed South China Sea.

The incidents happened near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, a hotly contested region where Beijing deploys ships to assert its claims over almost the entire sea.

A Philippine government task force said the “dangerous blocking manoeuvres of China Coast Guard vessel 5203 caused it to collide with the Armed Forces of the Philippines-contracted indigenous resupply boat” about 25 km from Second Thomas Shoal.

China said the “slight collision” happened after the resupply boat ignored “multiple warnings and deliberately passed through law enforcement in an unprofessional and dangerous manner”, state broadcaster CCTV reported, citing the Foreign Ministry.

In another incident, a Philippine Coast Guard vessel escorting the routine resupply mission was “bumped” by what the Philippine task force described as a “Chinese Maritime Militia vessel”.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes annually, and has ignored an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Second Thomas Shoal is about 200 km from the western Philippine island of Palawan, and more than 1,000 km from China’s nearest major landmass, Hainan island.

China said “responsibility lies entirely with the Philippines” for Sunday’s incidents.

WHY ARE THE CHINA-BHUTAN BOUNDARY TALKS SIGNIFICANT?

The story so far:

China and Bhutan held their 25th round of boundary talks in Beijing and signed a Cooperation Agreement on the “Responsibilities and Functions of the Joint Technical Team (JTT) on the Delimitation and Demarcation of the Bhutan-China Boundary.” This advances their 3-Step Roadmap initiated in 2021 for border resolution, building on the positive momentum since their last talks in 2016.

Why are the talks this week significant?

The Boundary talks between Bhutan and China were held after a gap of seven years and indicate significant progress has been made. Bhutan and the Tibetan Autonomous Region share a contiguous border to Bhutan’s north and west. Since 1984, Bhutan and China had held 24 rounds of talks to resolve the disputes until 2016, but the 25th round appeared to have been held up after the Doklam Standoff between Indian and Chinese armies in 2017, and then the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2021. However, the two sides used the pause to hold talks at other levels in rapid succession, especially after China threatened to open a new front for a border dispute to Bhutan’s east. Since then, the Expert Group of diplomats on both sides met in 2021 to agree on a 3-step roadmap, and the first boundary delimitation technical talks were held in August 2023. In an interview with The Hindu this month, Bhutan’s Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering said that the two sides were “inching towards” completing the roadmap even before his government demits



office ahead of Bhutanese elections in 2024, and FM Tandi Dorji's visit to Beijing indicates that further progress has indeed been made.

What is the 3-Step Roadmap?

The 3-Step roadmap MoU signed by the Bhutanese Foreign Minister and Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister in 2021, and the JTT established to implement the roadmap by the Expert Group in August are hoping to draw a line clearly delineating Bhutanese and Chinese territory for the first time. Bhutan and China don't have diplomatic ties, as Bhutan has traditionally avoided diplomatic relations with all the United Nations Security Council permanent members. The 3-Step Roadmap involves first, agreeing to the border "on the table"; then visiting the sites on the ground; and then formally demarcating the boundary.

Why is India watching closely?

For India, given the breakdown in its ties with China over the standoff at the Line of Actual Control from 2020, any hint of closer ties between China and one of its closest neighbours is a cause for worry. More specifically, New Delhi is watching the demarcation discussions over Doklam, as amongst the proposals China has placed on the table is an agreement to "swap" areas in Doklam under Bhutanese control with areas in Jakarlung and Pasamlung which China claims. The Doklam trijunction cuts very close to India's Siliguri corridor a narrow area that connects the North Eastern States to the rest of India and India would not like to see China gain access to any area closer to it. Since the Doklam standoff in 2017, China has doubled down on its control of the Doklam plateau, and according to a recent Pentagon report, has continued to build "underground storage facilities [], new roads [], and new villages in disputed areas in neighbouring Bhutan," erasing many of the strategic gains that New Delhi had hoped for after China agreed to step back from the standoff point in 2017. Finally, India's worry is over China's demand for full diplomatic relations with Bhutan, and opening an Embassy in Thimphu. Given India's challenges with Chinese projects and funding in other neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, any Chinese presence in a small country like Bhutan would be problematic. However, Bhutan's leadership has thus far said that all decisions would consider India's interests and that it has always consulted India on issues of concern.

CHINESE NAVY GETS NEW NUCLEAR SUBMARINE

China has added a new nuclear-powered submarine to its fast expanding fleet but experts believe that it is not the most advanced version as speculated earlier, official media reported on Thursday. The new submarine is stated to be 69th conventional and nuclear submarines, according to unofficial estimates by global defence think-tanks. A new nuclear submarine has been turned over to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), state-run Global Times on Thursday quoted an official with the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) as saying. However, experts believe that this submarine is not the most advanced Type 096, which is China's next-generation strategic nuclear submarine, the report said.

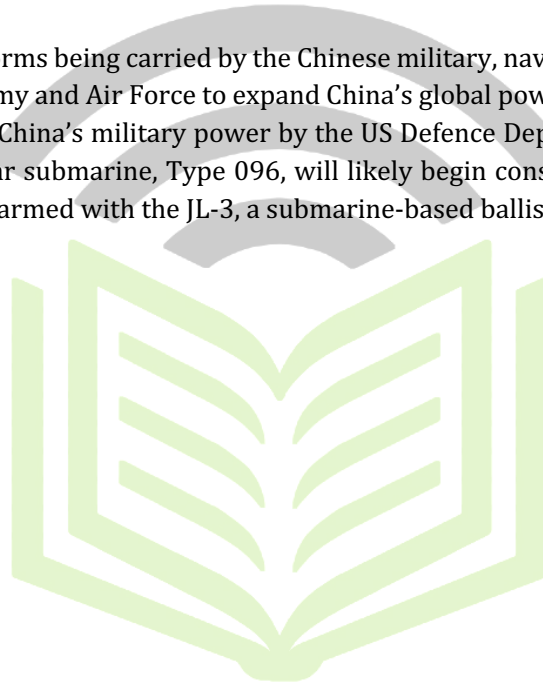
The submarine was built at the Dalian shipyard which also made China's second aircraft carrier, currently under trials. However, the shipyard did not reveal the submarine's name and type, it said. But some Internet users and military enthusiasts speculated the submarine is Type 096, China's most advanced nuclear submarine and the successor of the current Type 094, which first appeared on China Central Television in 2013, the report said.



The submarine could be Type 094 or Type 093, but not the next generation nuclear-powered ballistic submarine Type 096 since Type 096 is too advanced and not to be completed soon, Song Zhongping, a military expert who served in the PLA Rocket Force, told the Times. The strategic nuclear submarine also called a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, is capable of launching nuclear warheads from the sea and can provide “a second strike” to a country in nuclear warfare.

The nuclear submarines provide the nuclear triad, which means when the enemy has completely destroyed land-based launch positions, the submarines stationed at different far off locations take over. Last year, India has achieved nuclear triad capability after the launch of first indigenously built nuclear submarine INS Arihant which provides the “second strike” capability for India’s military.

Under the massive reforms being carried by the Chinese military, navy is being given a prominent role over above the Army and Air Force to expand China’s global power. The 2017 Annual Report to the US Congress on China’s military power by the US Defence Department claims that China’s next-generation nuclear submarine, Type 096, will likely begin construction in the early 2020s, and will reportedly be armed with the JL-3, a submarine-based ballistic missile.



DreamIAS



NATION

CANADA RECALLS 41 DIPLOMATS FROM INDIA: WHAT IS THE 1961 VIENNA CONVENTION, WHY IT WAS INVOKED

Amid the ongoing standoff between India and Canada, the Canadian government announced it has recalled 41 diplomats posted in India, and their family members, on Friday (October 20). Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said this was because they were "in danger of having immunity stripped on an arbitrary date" and that would have "put their personal safety at risk".

Joly had said in a recent press conference, "I can confirm that India has formally conveyed its plan to unilaterally remove diplomatic immunities for all but 21 Canadian diplomats and dependents in Delhi by tomorrow, October 20."

Earlier this month, India had sought 'parity' with Canada, asking it to downsize its diplomatic staff here. India has about 20 diplomats in Canada and said there should be a similar number of Canadian diplomats in India as well.

The move followed a row over Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's remarks in Canadian Parliament in September 2023. He had then claimed a potential Indian government link to the killing of pro-Khalistan separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada earlier this year — which India rejected, terming the claims to be "absurd" and "motivated".

Now, the US and UK have backed Canadian diplomats' presence. Further, they spoke of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which has also been mentioned by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S Jaishankar.

What have the US and the UK governments said?

On Saturday, the US and UK backed Canada, stating that diplomats are required to be on the ground to resolve differences. Notably, the two countries are also part of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance with Canada, which also includes Australia and New Zealand.

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, "Resolving differences requires diplomats on the ground... We expect India to uphold its obligations under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, including with respect to privileges and immunities enjoyed by accredited members of Canada's diplomatic mission." The UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office said, "We expect all states to uphold their obligations under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."

What has India said?

India rejected Joly's contention, where she said that the "unilateral revocation of the diplomatic privilege and immunity is contrary to international law" and a violation of the Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

In a press release, the MEA said, "The state of our bilateral relations, the much higher number of Canadian diplomats in India, and their continued interference in our internal affairs warrant a parity in mutual diplomatic presence in New Delhi and Ottawa." It added, "Our actions in implementing this parity are fully consistent with Article 11.1 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."



And what is the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations?

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) is a United Nations treaty that set some common principles and terms on how countries must treat each other's diplomatic representatives, in order to ensure friendly relations and maintain proper communication channels between countries.

One prominent example of such principles is that of diplomatic immunity. It's the privilege of exemption from certain laws and taxes granted to diplomats by the country in which they are posted. It was framed so that diplomats can function without fear, threat or intimidation from the host country. Diplomatic immunity flows from two conventions, popularly called the Vienna Conventions — the 1961 Convention and the Convention on Consular Relations, 1963.

The 1961 Convention says, "Article 29: The person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving State shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on his person, freedom or dignity."

Today, 113 countries have ratified the convention, meaning they agree it should be legally binding on them. Ratification means that a country should seek approval for the treaty on the domestic level and enact a law in their country to give effect to it. India ratified it through the Diplomatic Relations (Vienna Convention) Act of 1972.

What does the 1961 Vienna Convention say about recalling diplomats?

Article 9 of the convention states that the receiving State may, at any time and without having to explain its decision, notify the sending State that the head of the mission or any member of the diplomatic staff of the mission is *persona non grata* or unwelcome.

"In any such case, the sending State shall, as appropriate, either recall the person concerned or terminate his functions with the mission," it says. Further, if the sending State refuses or fails within a reasonable period to carry out its obligations here, that is if they refuse to recall their diplomats, the receiving State may refuse to recognise the person concerned as a member of the mission.

Article 11, cited by the MEA in its press release, says, "In the absence of specific agreement as to the size of the mission, the receiving State may require that the size of a mission be kept within limits considered by it to be reasonable and normal, having regard to circumstances and conditions in the receiving State and to the needs of the particular mission."

On Canadian diplomatic presence in India, EAM Jaishankar said on Sunday, "Parity is very much provided for by the Vienna Convention, which is the relevant international rule on this. But in our case, we invoked parity because we had concerns about continuous interference in our affairs by Canadian personnel. We haven't made much of that public. My sense is over a period of time more stuff will come out and people will understand why we had the kind of discomfort with many of them which we did."

Around 2017, Russia and the United States also asked for each other's diplomats to be recalled over the principle of parity and reduced the presence of their missions, following a low in their relations.



MYSTERY TRIAL

The death sentence handed down by a Qatari court on Thursday to eight Indians reportedly accused of espionage is indeed “deeply shocking”, as the Ministry of External Affairs described in a statement, and the situation is now a major test of the Narendra Modi government’s diplomatic skills. The trial was shrouded in secrecy, with scant information on the charges and evidence against the former Indian Navy servicemen, arrested in August 2022. Despite pleas from their families and Indian diplomats in Doha, Qatar has not explained why it has not divulged details of the case. Even the judgment has yet to be shared with New Delhi. Leaked reports suggest that the men have been accused of sharing secret information pertaining to the stealth submarine programme they worked on, with a third country, a charge their families have denied. Visits by Indian officials to Qatar to plead for leniency and transparency have been of no avail. While this case has some parallels to the case of former Naval Commander Jadhav, who is on death row too in Pakistan, the difference is that India’s ties with Qatar have been relatively better. Apart from strategic and defence cooperation agreements, India sources 40% of its LNG needs from Qatar. India is also Qatar’s third biggest source of imports, particularly raw materials for construction and fresh food items. Pertinently, these supplies continued despite the Gulf blockade against Qatar in 2017, which should have counted for some goodwill towards India. In addition, 7,00,000 Indian expatriates are an integral part of Qatar’s institutions, industry and workforce. A rift in ties, which a sentence like this is bound to engender, will be to the detriment of both countries, and India must make this clear to Qatar.

The government must waste no time in charting the next steps to ensure the Indians are given the best possible support in an appeal. Apart from the legal appeals process and diplomatic legwork, channels to the Qatari leadership should be activated at the highest levels, including the Prime Minister if necessary. A case must be made for clemency and commuting the sentences to jail terms that could even be served out in India if the men are indeed found guilty in the appeals process. Notwithstanding reports that seek to tie the verdict to more geopolitical considerations, including perceived Qatari differences with India over its policy on Israel and Palestine in the current conflict, the government must demonstrate that the lives of the men are indeed a priority for their country and for a government that claims a policy of “no Indian left behind”.

SC TO HEAR JUDGE’S PLEA FOR EXPUNCTION OF ‘DISPARAGING OBSERVATIONS’ AGAINST HIM

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the plea of a Gauhati High Court judge seeking expunction of “certain disparaging remarks” against him by a bench of the HC while reversing his May 2017 order as Special NIA Court Judge, convicting some persons facing terror charges.

Issuing notice to the NIA, a bench of justices A S Bopanna and P S Narasimha by its October 20 order allowed the request to list the case “without disclosing the identity of the petitioner”.

The petition filed through advocate Somiran Sharma sought expunction of the remarks “such as... attributing deep rooted bias in favour of the prosecution...acting in a sheerly partisan bent of mind that by any means, the accused/ appellant...had to be convicted...virtually predetermined conclusion and...of committing an act of rank judicial impropriety while delivering the judgment...”

He contended that “the said observations/remarks were not necessary for deciding the appeal and rendering the impugned judgment and therefore ought to have been avoided”.

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



“The remarks have deeply hurt the petitioner’s reputation before his colleagues, lawyers and litigants and is disturbing his peace of mind besides affecting him in discharging his judicial duties with calm and confidence. The remarks can also adversely affect the petitioner’s career in future,” said the plea.

The plea said the SC had in a 2001 ruling said that while ‘the existence of power in higher echelons of judiciary to make observations even extending to criticism incorporated in judicial orders cannot be denied, however, the High Courts have to remember that criticisms and observations touching a subordinate judicial officer incorporated in judicial pronouncements have their own mischievous infirmities. Firstly, the judicial officer is condemned unheard which is violative of principles of natural justice...Secondly, the harm caused by such criticism or observation may be incapable of being undone. Thirdly, human nature being what it is, such criticism of a judicial officer contained in the judgment of a higher court gives the litigating party a sense of victory not only over his opponent but also over the Judge who had decided the case against him...”

The judge said the HC had failed to adhere to the well-settled principles as discussed by the apex court in many judgments.

“There is always a thin line of difference between ‘criticising a Judge’ and ‘criticising a ruling’. It is often said that a Judge, who has not committed an error, is yet to be born. This dictum applies to all the learned judges at all levels from the lowest to the highest,” the judge said.

By his May 22, 2017 order as Special Judge, NIA Court, Guwahati, the appellant had convicted 13 persons for offences under the IPC and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the Arms Act, 1959, and also sentenced them.

On appeal, the HC set aside the conviction and sentencing order. The SC will now hear the matter on November 10.

BOMBAY HC IS RIGHT – BANNING PAKISTANI ARTISTS IS NOT THE RIGHT STEP

The Bombay High Court did well last week to dismiss a petition seeking a total ban on Pakistani artistes working in India. Calling the petition “a retrograde step in promoting cultural harmony, unity and peace” that has “no merit in it”, Justice Sunil B Shukre and Justice Firdosh P Pooniwalla schooled the petitioner, a cine worker, on the joys of cross-border cultural cooperation: “Arts, music, sports, culture, dance and so on are the activities which rise above nationalities, cultures and nations and truly bring about peace, tranquility, unity and harmony in nation and between nations.”

The petitioner had sought directives from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs prohibiting the employment of Pakistani actors, technicians, singers, musicians and lyricists in India.

Over the last decade, the casualties of the political chill between India and Pakistan have, sadly, been arts, culture and sports. In the early 2010s, the success of Pakistani serials such as Humsafar (2011) and Zindagi Gulzar Hai (2012) had made room for Indian television channels such as Zindagi to stream syndicated shows from across the border and for Pakistani stars like Fawad Khan and Mahira Khan to sign up projects in Bollywood.

In music, the popularity of Atif Aslam or Rahat Fateh Ali Khan made their nationality irrelevant. The September 2016 Uri attack put an end to these cross-border exchanges with resolutions from



the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association and the Federation of Western India Cine Employees barring Pakistani artistes from working in the Indian film industry.

In 2019, the Pulwama strikes brought forth a resolution by the All-Indian Cine Workers Association, upholding the 2016 ban. Yet, there's no denying the ameliorative effect that sports and cultural exchanges can have on relationships weighed down by shared trauma and shrill narratives of parochial nationalism.

The sight of a Pakistani fan rooting for both her team's victory and Virat Kohli's success at the recent Asia Cup or the massive fan following that actor Fawad Khan has in India or that Dilip Kumar enjoyed in Pakistan show what entrenched political positions often miss:

That when it comes down to the people, reconciliation — and hope — can come in many forms. In a song by your favourite musician or a century from the cricketer you adore, or even, in the form of your favourite star from across the border, lighting up the big screen with his dimples and twinkling eyes.

WHY DID SC NOT ALLOW SAME-SEX MARRIAGE?

The story so far:

On October 17, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, declined to legalise same-sex marriage, leaving it to Parliament to legislate on the subject. The Bench ruled that there is no fundamental right to marry, and the court cannot intervene. Though all five judges accepted that it was time to end discrimination against same-sex couples, they failed to reach a consensus on giving queer couples the status of a legally recognised “civil union,” with a majority of three judges holding that any legal status to such a union can only be through enacted law.

What did the petitioners want?

The petitioners had sought a ruling by which the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954, which provides for a civil marriage for couples who cannot marry under their personal law, should be interpreted as gender-neutral, thus allowing same-sex couples to marry under it. The SMA, they argued violated Articles 14, 15, 19, 21 and 25 by not allowing marriage between same-sex, gender non-conforming, LGBTQIA+ couples, and sought the words “husband” and “wife” as well as any other gender-specific term to be substituted by the word “party” or “spouse”.

They also sought joint adoption rights, nominee rights with respect to healthcare decisions, “preventative, remedial, protective and punitive measures” by all State governments to guarantee their safety and security, and directions to the Union and State governments, district and police authorities to provide protection to adult, consenting LGBTQIA+ couples from their families.

How did the top Court rule?

The Supreme Court said it could not issue a mandamus to Parliament; it determined the scope and effect of certain fundamental rights, and then ruled that the Constitution does not recognise marriage as a fundamental right. “The Constitution does not expressly recognise a fundamental right to marry. An institution cannot be elevated to the realm of a fundamental right based on the content accorded to it by law. However, several facets of the marital relationship are reflections of constitutional values including the right to human dignity and the right to life and personal liberty,” it said. The majority opinion, of Justices Ravindra Bhat, Hima Kohli, and backed by a



separate concurring judgment by P.S. Narasimha, said that “an entitlement to legal recognition of the right to union — akin to marriage or civil union, or conferring legal status upon the parties to the relationship — can be only through enacted law.” The minority opinion, of Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, said the LGBTQIA+ community had a fundamental right to form relationships and that the state was obligated to recognise and grant legal status to such unions, so that same-sex couples could avail the material benefits provided under the law.

Queerness is a natural phenomenon, the CJI pointed out, which the Navtej Singh Johar case had clarified. The judgment in NALSA also explored the presence of the transgender identity and other forms of queerness. The Court said the consequence of the judgments on NALSA and Navtej Johar is that the members of the queer community are no longer second-class citizens. But having said that, it stopped short of legalising same-sex marriage.

Why did SC refuse to read down the SMA?

The Court felt that if the SMA was held void for excluding same-sex couples, it would mean going back to a time when two persons of different castes and religions could not marry. Second, it said that if it were to read down — or up — provisions of the SMA, meaning add or delete words, this would be venturing into the realm of the legislature. “Whether a change should be brought into the legislative regime of the SMA is for Parliament to determine,” the CJI said. “This Court cannot either strike down the constitutional validity of SMA or read words into the SMA because of its institutional limitations... [this] would amount to judicial legislation. The Court in the exercise of the power of judicial review must steer clear of matters, particularly those impinging on policy, which fall in the legislative domain,” he said.

Will the legislature be open to the idea?

Throughout the hearings, the government held that it was against same-sex marriage. It had also pointed out that judicial intervention would cause “complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws.” Activists and rights lawyers are not convinced whether the judiciary lobbying the issue back to the legislature will lead to any change. The Court has said the state must take “remedial action” because if it regulates marriage only for heterosexual couples, it “adversely impacts” the LGBTQIA+ community, resulting in their exclusion, and “denial of entitlements/benefits,” and that “this injustice and inequity results in discrimination.” It has set down a set of guidelines, from setting up a committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for the purpose of defining the scope of entitlements of queer couples who are in unions, to directing police stations to not harass the community.

The Court said the state may choose from a number of policy outcomes: they may make all marriage and family related laws gender-neutral, or they may create a separate SMA-like statute in gender-neutral terms. They may pass an Act creating civil unions, or a domestic partnership legislation, among many other alternatives. “Another consequence may be that rather than the Union Government, the State legislatures take action and enact law or frameworks, in the absence of a central law. What is certain, however, is that in questions of such polycentric nature — whether social, or political — the court must exercise restraint and defer to the wisdom of the other branches of the state, which can undertake wide scale public consultation, consensus building and reflect the will of the people, and be in their best interest,” Judge Ravindra Bhat said.



What has been the response to the verdict?

The lead petitioner in the case, Supriyo Chakraborty, told The Hindu the community had been left “empty-handed.” The Supreme Court “admitted there’s discrimination, sugar-coated our problems, but in the end gave us nothing,” he said. “Marriage is not even a fundamental right in its eyes. If there is a law like the Special Marriage Act, then being a citizen, how can you not have access to that?” he asked. Nadika, a trans and queer writer, researcher and teacher, is disappointed, saying that in the case of NALSA, the Supreme Court did raise the issue of transgender rights and asked the government to pass certain laws for the community. “It felt that the court was engaging with the cause fruitfully, unlike now when it has passed the buck to the legislature — and it’s a known fact that the BJP government doesn’t care for queer rights,” Nadika pointed out.

SC ALLOWS SURROGACY, STRIKES DOWN RULE BANNING USE OF DONOR GAMETES

Two-judge Bench comes to the rescue of a woman suffering from the rare medical condition of Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser syndrome by staying the operation of a law which threatened to wreck her hopes of becoming a mother

The Supreme Court has protected the right of parenthood of a woman, suffering from a rare medical condition, by staying the operation of a law which threatened to wreck her hopes to become a mother through surrogacy.

The woman has the Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser syndrome. Medical board records showed she has “absent ovaries and absent uterus, hence she cannot produce her own eggs/oocytes”. The couple had begun the process of gestational surrogacy on December 7 last year.

However, a government notification on March 14 this year amended the law, banning the use of donor gametes. It said “intending couples” must use their own gametes for surrogacy. The petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging the amendment as a violation of a woman’s right to parenthood.

“The amendment which is now coming in the way of the intending couple and preventing them from achieving parenthood through surrogacy, we find, is, prima facie contrary to what is intended under the main provisions of the Surrogacy Act both in form as well as in substance,” a Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan held in a recent order.

Senior advocate Sanjay Jain, the petitioner’s lawyer, argued that the amended Paragraph 1(d) of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022, by ruling out the use of donor eggs, had made it impossible for his client and her husband to continue with the process of surrogacy to achieve parenthood.

He argued that the 2023 amendment contradicted Sections 2(r) and 4 of the Surrogacy Act, 2021, which recognised the situation when a medical condition would require a couple to opt for gestational surrogacy in order to become parents.

Mr. Jain referred to Rule 14(a) of the Surrogacy Rules which listed the medical or congenital conditions owing to which a woman could choose to become a mother through gestational surrogacy. They included “having no uterus or missing uterus or abnormal uterus (like hypoplastic uterus or intrauterine adhesions or thin endometrium or small unicornuate uterus,



T-shaped uterus) or if the uterus is surgically removed due to any medical condition such as gynaecological cancer”.

‘Woman’s choice’

The lawyer said the Rule made it clear that the choice was solely that of the woman. He said his client had begun the surrogacy process months before the amendment, which cannot be implemented retrospectively.

The government, through Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, countered that the process of surrogacy cannot be availed under the law unless the child was “genetically related” to the intending couple. This exempted the use of donor eggs. In an 11-page order, the court agreed with Mr. Jain’s argument that the law permitting gestational surrogacy was “woman-centric”. The decision to have a surrogate child was entirely based on the woman’s inability to become a mother owing to her medical or congenital condition. Such a condition included the “absence of a uterus or repeatedly failed pregnancies, multiple pregnancies or an illness which makes it impossible for her to carry a pregnancy to term or would make the pregnancy life-threatening”.

The amendment cannot contradict Rule 14(a) which specifically recognises the absence of a uterus or any allied condition as a medical indication necessitating gestational surrogacy, the court held.

Addressing the government’s contention that the surrogate child should be “genetically related” to the couple, the court said the child would be related to the husband. “In this regard, it may be noted that the expression ‘genetically’ related to the intending couple has to be read as being related to the husband when Rule 14(a) applies,” the court said.

CROSSING A LINE

The Centre has asked all departments to deploy officers to showcase its achievements across the country down to the village level, through a roadshow titled Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, which will run from November 20 to January 25, 2024. To be sure, the outreach is only about achievements of the last nine years that corresponds to the two terms of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that began in 2014. The campaign is conveniently timed for the Lok Sabha election which is expected in April-May 2024. Joint Secretaries, Directors, and Deputy Secretaries will be appointed Rath Prabharis (chariots in-charge) for the roadshow. Separately, the Ministry of Defence is setting up 822 ‘selfie points’ where citizens can click themselves with a picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Guidelines issued by the Ministry go into great details on how to promote the work of the last nine years. It has been directed that these selfie points “should be set up at prominent locations, which have maximum footfall and the potential of attracting public attention”. War memorials, defence museums, railway and metro stations, bus stations, airports, malls and market places, schools and colleges, tourist destinations and festival gatherings are places where these points are coming up. Opposition parties led by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge have called out the government for this brazen politicisation of the bureaucracy and the military.

India’s constitutional scheme of governance envisages the separation of power among the three arms of the state — the executive, the judiciary and the legislature — and also a line of separation between the bureaucracy and the military from the political executive. While both the bureaucracy and the military are strictly under the control of the political executive, they are



insulated from partisan politics. In fact, the extensive election process in India has largely retained its credibility because of the bureaucratic impartiality demanded by the system. The military's involvement in any kind of domestic politics is considered anathema. Civil and military officials are expected to remain loyal to the government elected by the citizens, regardless of their personal ideological inclination. Instant directives force them into partisan roles in furtherance of the interests of the ruling party. The BJP's strategy of disregarding norms in pursuit of electoral gains has been successful, but the trail of damage it leaves behind will fester. If institutions are undermined, the damage may well be irreversible. It is time the ruling party kept the interests of the nation before itself, and practised what it preaches.

ON 'RATH PRABHARIS', EC DOES THE RIGHT THING — CENTRE SHOULD TAKE NOTES

The Election Commission has done well to apply the check and maintain the balance. On Thursday, the poll monitor directed the cabinet secretary to ensure that the "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra" does not make any stops in the five poll-bound states. Only days earlier, ministries' plans to nominate senior bureaucrats as "rath prabharis" for the yatra, to be flagged off from Jharkhand by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November, to "showcase" and "celebrate" the government's "achievements", had stirred up a controversy.

The Opposition had alleged a bid to politicise the bureaucracy, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge writing a letter to the PM. Now, the EC has cited the Model Code of Conduct, which came into force from the date of announcement of elections, and which will remain in operation till December 5. And in the face of the blowback, government has also backpedalled on nomenclature — those in charge of the information, education and communication vans, which are not likely to be referred to as "rath", will be called "nodal officers", not "rath prabharis".

All is well, that ends in a more level playing field. But as crucial elections in five states draw nearer, it is also apparent that the work of checking and balancing is not yet done.

On Thursday, even as the EC made the government step back on the yatra, the Enforcement Directorate knocked on doors linked to Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Dotasra, and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot shared on social media that the ED had also issued summons to his son, Vaibhav. The case against Gehlot's son involves an alleged FEMA violation; the raid on Dotasra is in connection with the 2021 Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers paper leaks.

Both cases must stand, or fall, on merit, through due process of law. But it is difficult not to notice a clear and recurring pattern. Ahead of elections, the ED has swung into action that seems to target only members of the Opposition. In the past few months, the ED has raided/arrested/summoned leaders or those related to them, of non-BJP parties in Chhattisgarh, MP, Rajasthan and Telangana – from Chandrashekar Rao's daughter K Kavitha in Telangana, in connection with the Delhi liquor scam case, to Congress leader Kamal Nath's nephew Ratul Puri in a bank fraud case, to Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel's political advisor Vinod Verma in the Mahadev app case.

The impression is unmistakable — the central probe agency is kicking up dust only against the Opposition in the run-up to elections. While the EC has done well to restrain the government, the Centre also needs to be reminded that the lop-sided zeal of its agencies skews the playing field with fear and favour.



NCERT PANEL SUGGESTS REPLACING 'INDIA' WITH 'BHARAT' IN TEXTBOOKS

A high-level committee set up by the National Council of Educational Research and Training to revise the social sciences curriculum has recommended that the name of the country be changed from "India" to "Bharat" in school textbooks. With Opposition parties protesting, the NCERT on Wednesday clarified that the proposal had not been approved yet, and it was "too premature" to comment on the issue.

C.I. Issac, panel chair, told presspersons that the panel had proposed the name change in textbooks from the primary to the high school level.

The Opposition parties, including the Congress, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), criticised the recommendation. The BJP leaders welcomed it.

Mr. Issac, a member of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), is a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) sympathiser and was a faculty member in the Department of History of the Kottayam-based CMS College.

He had been with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for a long time and is currently president of the Bharatheeya Vichara Kendram, a right-wing think tank.

The committee included senior academics such as ICHR chairperson Raguvendra Tanwar, Vandana Mishra, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Vasant Shinde, an archaeologist and former Vice-Chancellor of Deccan College Deemed University.

Talking to The Hindu, Mr. Shinde confirmed that the committee had submitted its proposal to the NCERT four months ago.

Citing an example from the Vishnu Purana, a Hindu text, he maintained that "Bharat" was any day a better name for the country. "All the members on the panel have agreed to replacing India with Bharat," Mr. Shinde said.

He said that it was also proposed that the textbooks should give equal space to all dynasties that ruled India and not to just one or two.

'Panicked reaction'

The India-Bharat row gained momentum when the Rashtrapati Bhavan sent out invitations for a G-20 dinner on September 9 on behalf of the "President of Bharat". Political parties across India had criticised it. The RSS, since its formation, has been using Bharat as the name of the country.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, in his address in September, said, "Our country has been known as 'Bharat' for ages. Whatever may be the language, the name remains the same. We don't have to think about whether anyone outside will understand this or not. If they want to, they will, but that is not our problem."

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar called the NCERT panel's recommendation "wrong", and alleged that the NDA government forced the NCERT to take the "decision".

"They are suggesting so many things. You can see how they are distorting the history of India through the textbook, syllabus, and everything... I didn't know about the India-Bharat thing... For



us, India and Bharat are equal... This is not coming from your heart,” senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal said.

RJD MP Manoj Jha said the name change suggestion was a panicked and hysterical reaction to the Opposition parties naming their grouping INDIA.

LOK SABHA’S ETHICS COMMITTEE: ITS HISTORY, CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERS

The Lok Sabha Ethics Committee, which will take up Nishikant Dubey’s complaint against Mahua Moitra, last met on July 27, 2021, according to information on the Parliament website. Since being established as an ad hoc entity more than two decades ago, the panel has heard several complaints, most of which have been for relatively light offences.

The members of the Ethics Committee are appointed by the Speaker for a period of one year. The Committee is currently headed by the BJP’s Kaushambi MP Vinod Kumar Sonkar, and includes Vishnu Datt Sharma, Sumedhanand Saraswati, Aparajita Sarangi, Dr Rajdeep Roy, Sunita Duggal, and Dr Subhash Bhamre of the BJP; Ve Vaithilingam, N Uttam Kumar Reddy, and Preneet Kaur (Congress); Balashowry Vallabbhaneni (YSR Congress); Hemant Godse (Shiv Sena); Giridhari Yadav (JD-U); P R Natarajan (CPI-M); and Kunwar Danish Ali (BSP).

History of Ethics Committees

A Presiding Officers’ Conference held in Delhi in 1996 first mooted the idea of ethics panels for the two Houses.

Then Vice President (and Rajya Sabha Chairman) K R Narayanan constituted the Ethics Committee of the Upper House on March 4, 1997, and it was inaugurated that May to oversee the moral and ethical conduct of members and examine cases of misconduct referred to it. The Rules applicable to the Committee of Privileges also apply to the ethics panel.

In the case of Lok Sabha, a study group of the House Committee of Privileges, after visiting Australia, the UK, and the US in 1997 to look into practices pertaining to the conduct and ethics of legislators, recommended the constitution of an Ethics Committee, but it could not be taken up by Lok Sabha. The Committee of Privileges finally recommended the constitution of an Ethics Committee during the 13th Lok Sabha. The late Speaker, G M C Balayogi, constituted an ad hoc Ethics Committee in 2000, which became a permanent part of the House only in 2015.

2005 cash-for-query case

In 2005, the two Houses adopted motions to expel 10 Lok Sabha MPs and one Rajya Sabha MP who were accused of agreeing to ask questions in Parliament for money. The motion in Lok Sabha was based on the report of a special committee set up by the Speaker under Chandigarh MP P K Bansal to examine the issue. In Rajya Sabha, the complaint was examined by the House Ethics Committee.

The BJP, which lost six MPs, demanded that the Bansal Committee’s report be sent to the Privileges Committee, so that the parliamentarians could defend themselves.

Former Lok Sabha Secretary General P D T Achary said there was “a lot of evidence” in the 2005 case — it was based on a sting operation — the challenge in the Mahua Moitra case will be to link the questions asked by the TMC MP to a money trail.



Procedure for complaints

Any person can complain against a Member through another Lok Sabha MP, along with evidence of the alleged misconduct, and an affidavit stating that the complaint is not “false, frivolous, or vexatious”. If the Member himself complains, the affidavit is not needed.

The Speaker can refer to the Committee any complaint against an MP.

The Committee does not entertain complaints based only on media reports or on matters that are sub judice. The Committee makes a prima facie inquiry before deciding to examine a complaint. It makes its recommendations after evaluating the complaint.

The Committee presents its report to the Speaker, who asks the House if the report should be taken up for consideration. There is also a provision for a half-hour discussion on the report.

Privileges Committee

The work of the Ethics Committee and the Privileges Committee often overlap. An allegation of corruption against an MP can be sent to either body, but usually more serious accusations go to the Privileges Committee.

The mandate of the Privileges Committee is to safeguard the “freedom, authority, and dignity of Parliament”. These privileges are enjoyed by individual Members as well as the House as a whole. An MP can be examined for breach of privilege; a non-MP too can be accused of breach of privilege for actions that attack the authority and dignity of the House.

The Ethics Committee can take up only cases of misconduct that involve MPs.

DAY AFTER QUITTING IAS, ODISHA CM’S AIDE TAKES UP KEY ROLES

The Odisha government on Tuesday appointed V.K. Pandian, long-time private secretary of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Chairman of the 5T (Transparency, Technology, Teamwork, Time, and Transformation) Initiative and Nabin Odisha.

The appointment comes a day after his voluntary retirement as an IAS officer. Mr. Pandian, who has been given the rank of Cabinet Minister, will directly work under Mr. Patnaik.

The Department of Personnel and Training approved Mr. Pandian’s voluntary retirement with waiver of the notice period as recommended by the State government. With a few months left for the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, his formal entry into the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) may be fast-forwarded, political observers say.

Mr. Pandian has served as the private secretary to Mr. Patnaik for 12 years, which is more than half his service period as an IAS officer.

The Tamil Nadu-born former Odisha-cadre IAS officer is widely believed to be the one-stop contact for politicians, officers, industrialists, and visitors seeking appointments with Mr. Patnaik. He has also served as 5T Secretary.



TELANGANA'S LAW UNDER SCANNER: HOW PREVENTIVE DETENTION WORKS

As Telangana gears up for Assembly polls next month, its stringent preventive detention law is under the spotlight. In at least three separate instances, the Supreme Court has red-flagged the Telangana government's use of the law. The latest was in a ruling on September 4, where a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Dipankar Dutta underlined that the "pernicious trend prevalent in the state of Telangana" has not escaped the Court's attention.

What is preventive detention?

Preventive detention means detention of a person by the state without trial and conviction by court, but merely on suspicion. The detention could be up to a year unless extended.

A pre-trial detention is not the same as preventive detention. While the former is an undertrial accused of a crime, a detainee can be taken into custody just as a preventive measure even if he has not committed a crime.

In countries such as Britain, United States and Canada, preventive detention is a wartime measure. In India, the Constitution itself makes space for preventive detention. Part III of the Constitution, which deals with fundamental rights, also gives the state the power to suspend these rights for preventive detention. Despite its emphasis on individual liberty, Part III, which forms the basic structure of the Constitution that cannot be amended, also contains provisions for preventive detention under Article 22.

Under what laws can the state order preventive detention?

Among central legislations, the National Security Act, the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974 (COFEPOSA) are examples of laws under which preventive detention can be ordered.

As many as 25 states also have preventive detention legislations, like the Telangana law, which is called The Telangana Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Dacoits, Drug-Offenders, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Land-Grabbers, Spurious Seed Offenders, Insecticide Offenders, Fertiliser Offenders, Food Adulteration Offenders, Fake Document Offenders, Scheduled Commodities Offenders, Forest Offenders, Gaming Offenders, Sexual Offenders, Explosive Substances Offenders, Arms Offenders, Cyber Crime Offenders and White Collar or Financial Offenders Act, (PD Act), 1986.

These are expansive laws specifically addressed to local law and order issues. Other examples are the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug Offenders, Forest Offenders, Goondas, Immoral Trafficking Offenders and Slum Grabbers Act, 1982; the Gujarat Prevention of Antisocial Activities Act, 1985; the Bihar Control of Crimes Act, 1981, etc.

What are the powers of the state?

Article 22 prescribes protection against arrest and detention but has a major exception. It says in Article 22 (3) (b) that none of those safeguards apply "to any person who is arrested or detained under any law providing for preventive detention." The remaining clauses — Article 22(4)-(7) — deal with how preventive detention operationalises.



First, the state, which would be the district magistrate, would issue an order to detain a person when it is necessary to maintain “public order.” The state can delegate this power to the police as well.

If the detention ordered is for more than three months, under Article 22(4), such a detention requires the approval of an Advisory Board. These Boards are set up by states and normally consist of retired judges and bureaucrats. A detainee is generally not allowed legal representation before the Board. If the Board confirms the detention, the detainee can move Court challenging the detention order.

Article 22(5) of the Constitution mandates that the state is required “as soon as maybe,” to communicate to the detainee the grounds of detention and “shall afford him the earliest opportunity of making a representation against the order.”

A basic set of facts that are the grounds for detention are required to be communicated in one instalment, and the state cannot then add fresh, new or additional grounds to strengthen its original detention order. The grounds have to be read in a language that the detainee understands.

However, even this safeguard is diluted to a certain extent by Article 22(6), which says that nothing in clause 5 shall require the state to “disclose facts that the state considers to be “ against the public interest to disclose.”

How do courts assess the detention orders?

For preventive detention, there are very narrow grounds of judicial review because the Constitution emphasises the state’s “subjective satisfaction” when ordering a detention. The touchstone on which the order is examined is this subjective opinion of the state rather than the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. When the Court cannot substitute the subjective satisfaction of the state with its own satisfaction, it essentially means that it cannot check the veracity of the facts mentioned in the grounds of detention.

A judicial review is limited to whether the Advisory Board applied its mind, considered all material facts and whether the state showed obvious malafide in ordering detention. Because judicial review is limited, courts often strike down detention orders on technical grounds, such as delay in the decision of the advisory board, communication of grounds in a timely fashion and in a language that the detainee understands, etc.

WHAT IS WEST BENGAL’S ALLEGED PDS SCAM, IN WHICH ED HAS ARRESTED TMC MINISTER JYOTIPRIYA MALLICK?

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested West Bengal Forest Minister Jyotipriya Mallick early on Friday (October 27), after interrogating him for nearly 22 hours, over his alleged involvement in the state’s alleged Public Distribution System (PDS) scam.

Mallick, the first TMC Minister to be arrested by the ED, was the Food and Supplies Minister in the TMC government’s previous term (2016-2021). He was replaced by Rathin Ghosh in the term beginning in 2021 after the government faced backlash over allegations of a scam in Mallick’s tenure.

What is the PDS scam in West Bengal?



The scam relates to the allegedly illegal distribution of rice and wheat, in which Mallick, businessman Bakibur Rahman, and a few others are said to be involved.

According to ED officials, Rahman had close links with Mallick. Rahman would supply rice and wheat in lesser-than-mandated quantities to distributors, who were supposed to sell the grains through fair-price shops – to the poor, at lower prices. But by selling lesser quantities to distributors, the balance could then be sold in the open market later for profit.

On October 14, the ED arrested Rahman from his home in Kaikhali, on the eastern outskirts of Kolkata. ED earlier carried out search operations for three days at around a dozen locations connected with Rahman in the Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts. These included rice and flour mills, a three-star hotel and a bar that he owns. The central agency officials also found a fleet of luxury cars, such as Porsche and BMW, during the raids.

The ‘PDS scam’ comes amid other recent probes by central agencies into various alleged scams involving the TMC. These include cases related to the recruitment of school teachers and municipal employees as well as smuggling of cattle and coal.

In April, on the directions of the Calcutta High Court, CBI registered a case in connection with an alleged scam in recruitment in various municipalities, district primary school councils, etc. According to the CBI, all contracts for the recruitment of Group C and D employees in these bodies were allegedly given to a single company.

Also this year, TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee termed the central agencies’ summoning of party MP and nephew Abhishek Banerjee for questioning in the school jobs scam case as “political vendetta” by the BJP. ED is investigating the alleged irregularities in the appointment of school staff in government schools.

THE ASCENT BEGINS

At 10 a.m. on October 21, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) commenced the first uncrewed developmental flight of its ‘Gaganyaan’ human spaceflight mission from Sriharikota, designated TV-D1. The launch vehicle, a single-stage rocket, carried a crew module fit with a crew-escape system (CES) to an altitude of 12 km. There, the CES detached itself with the crew module from the rocket and climbed up to 17 km. In response to a command, the CES separated from the crew module, leaving the module to reorient itself before dropping over the Bay of Bengal. Its descent was slowed first by drogue parachutes and then by the main parachutes. Finally, the module splashed into the Bay a short distance from Sriharikota, where the Indian Navy hauled it out. The CES also splashed down farther down range. The flight tested the CES’s ability to protect the crew in case the rocket malfunctioned, and collected data via sensors to inform future tests. The test’s value will be based on this data. According to ISRO chairman S. Somanath, ISRO has many tests planned to develop confidence that the organisation can safely launch humans to orbit. Even the parachutes used for TV-D1 underwent 16 tests. Such fastidiousness is non-negotiable. TV-D1 was supposed to have been conducted at 8 a.m., when unfavourable weather pushed it to 8.45 a.m. Then, however, the automatic launch sequence held back the launch with a few seconds on the clock. Mr. Somanath subsequently announced that TV-D1 would be postponed. But ISRO personnel were able to quickly identify and resolve the problem, and the launch was rescheduled for 10 a.m.



These checks and balances are expensive, but are in place to prevent greater costs later. Plans for the programme were first readied in 2009 at an estimated ₹12,400 crore. The Union Cabinet granted its approval in December 2018 at ₹9,023 crore assuming first flight by 2022. But the COVID-19 pandemic and other commitments have caused delays such that the earliest the first crewed flight can happen is currently 2025. Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on ISRO to launch humans to the moon by 2040. Even with the requisite financial support, this would be a very tight deadline, but as with fastidiousness, contemporary geopolitics has also rendered returning to the moon non-negotiable. Fortunately, with ‘Gaganyaan’, ISRO has indicated how a balance can be struck: plan ahead, boost local manufacturing, test exhaustively, launch when ready. The deadline may be missed, but the mission can be undertaken with confidence while also improving local capabilities.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPONENTS OF A SIM CARD, ITS FUNCTIONS AND WORKING

In 2021, there were more than 14 billion cellular devices in the world even though there were only seven billion people. The ubiquity of these devices — but especially smartphones — has come to define the contemporary era together with climate change, antimicrobial resistance, and war. But for smartphones’ outside mark on history, one essential component of theirs has flown somewhat under the radar: the SIM card.

What is a SIM card?

‘SIM’ stands for ‘subscriber identification module’. Specifically, it is an integrated circuit, or a microchip, that identifies the subscriber on a given network.

Imagine each cellular network is a city whose residents are identified by a number, called the international mobile subscriber identity (IMSI). The SIM card is a subscriber’s ID card in this city. When someone wishes to contact a subscriber in this city, the network uses the subscriber’s SIM card to find them and confirm their identity.

In order for a mobile phone to connect to any cellular network that follows the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) standard, a SIM card is mandatory. This relationship is established using a unique authentication key — a piece of data that a user needs to ‘unlock’ access to the network. Every SIM card stores this data and it is designed such that the user can’t access it through their phone. Instead, signals sent by the phone into the network are ‘signed’ by the key, and the network uses the signature to understand whether the phone’s connection is legitimate. It is possible to duplicate a SIM card by accessing its key and storing it in multiple cards.

SIM cards also store information about its own ID number (the integrated circuit card identifier), the IMSI, the subscriber’s location area identity (their current location), a list of preferred networks (to whom the subscriber can connect when roaming), emergency numbers, and — depending on the space available — the subscriber’s contacts and SMS messages.

How does a SIM card work?

SIM cards are designed according to the ISO/IEC 7816 international standard maintained by — as its name indicates — the International Organisation for Standardisation and the International Electrotechnical Commission. It applies to electronic identification cards, including smart cards.

In this standard, the card itself consists of the integrated circuit, which is glued to a silicon substrate on the top side. On the other side of the substrate are metal contacts, which form the



gold-coloured side of the SIM card. Wires connect the integrated circuit from its bottom side to the metal contacts on the top side, and the contacts interface with the phone's data connectors.

The metal contacts have a segmented appearance. Each segment is called a pin and has a specific purpose. For example, pin 1 collects the operating voltage that gives it the power to operate. Pin 3 is to access the SIM's clock and pin 5 is the grounding. Pin 7 transmits data in and out of the SIM. These pin-wise roles are specified by the ISO/IEC 7816-2 standard; others, numbered 1 through 15, specify various functions of a SIM card and how they are to be implemented, from their "transmission protocols" to "cryptographic information applications". This is the hardware side (minus the phone's inner workings).

On the network side, the SIM helps a phone establish its place within a cellular network. When a subscriber dials a recipient's number, the phone sends data via the network — signed by the key on the SIM card — to a telephone exchange. If the recipient is connected to the same exchange, the network establishes their identity and the call is routed to them. If the recipient is 'located' elsewhere, a computer connected to the network routes the call there according to the most optimum route.

How have SIM cards changed?

SIM cards are a type of smart card, and the history of smart cards begin in the late 1960s, when West German engineer Helmut Gröttrup first had the idea to stick an integrated circuit in a plastic panel the size of a credit card. The size and architecture of this microchip evolved in leaps and bounds in the subsequent decades, following Moore's law.

The SIM card itself evolved according to the standards that defined the networks to which its users wished to connect.

The European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) prepared the GSM Technical Specification 11.11 regarding the SIM card. The July 1996 edition says it "defines the interface between the SIM and the Mobile Equipment (ME) for use during the network operation phase of GSM as well as those aspects of the internal organisation of the SIM which are related to the network operation phase, within the digital cellular telecommunications system." This is everything from its physical features — including operating temperature and "contact pressure" — to authentication and data access characteristics.

GSM concerns the second generation of cellular networks. After developing the 11.11 standard, ETSI transferred some of its responsibilities to an international consortium of seven organisations called 3GPP (the Telecommunications Standards Development Society in India is one). 3GPP subsequently developed the standards for the third (3G), fourth (4G), and fifth generation (5G) of networks.

Until 2G networks, the term 'SIM card' denoted both the hardware and the corresponding software. This changed with the advent of the Universal Mobile Telecommunications System with 3G networks, when 'SIM' became only the software; the hardware was called the Universal Integrated Circuit Card (UICC). The software was also upgraded to an application called Universal SIM, or USIM, which could be modified to be compatible with the identification and security requirements of 3G, 4G, and 5G networks. As a result, a UICC loaded with both SIM and USIM applications can work with networks of all generations.



What is an eSIM?

Over the years, the SIM card has shrunk from the SIM to the mini SIM to the micro SIM to the nano SIM. The latest on this path is the eSIM, with specifications defined by the GSM Association. In the eSIM paradigm, the SIM software is loaded on to a UICC that is permanently installed in the mobile equipment in the factory itself, that it can't be removed. (This is called the eUICC.)

Users using mobile equipment with this capability — such as the Google Pixels 2, 3, and 4 or the iPhone 14 series — don't have to bother with physically replacing their SIM cards when they join or switch networks. Instead, the network operator simply has to reprogram the eSIM, which can also be done remotely.

An eSIM has two immediate advantages. First, it is considered to be environmentally friendlier than a physical SIM: its reprogrammability means no need for more plastic and metal for a new SIM. Second, if a malicious person gains access to your phone, they won't be able to separately access the SIM application nor be able to duplicate it.

There are also at least two disadvantages. First, in some countries, including the U.S., eSIMs can be programmed by subscribers themselves. But this process might be difficult for those with low digital literacy, such as the elderly. Second, an eSIM can in theory allow network operators to track subscribers' data, including inside apps on the device, especially in the absence of data privacy laws.

WHAT IS THE 'ONE NATION, ONE STUDENT ID' INITIATIVE OF THE UNION GOVT?

Last week, several state governments requested schools to seek parental consent for the creation of a new student identity card known as the Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR). This is part of the 'One nation, One Student ID' initiative of the Union government, stemming from the new National Education Policy of 2020.

What is the purpose of APAAR, the ID for students?

APAAR, which stands for Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry, is envisioned as a special ID system for all students in India, starting from childhood. Under the initiative, each student would get a lifelong APAAR ID, making it easy for the learners, schools, and governments to track academic progress from pre-primary education to higher education.

APAAR would also serve as a gateway to Digilocker, a digital system where students can store their important documents and achievements, such as exam results and report cards, digitally, making it easier to access and use them in the future for, say, pursuing higher education or finding a job.

But why introduce it?

The goal behind introducing APAAR is to make education hassle-free and reduce the need for students to carry physical documents. This initiative was launched as part of the National Education Policy 2020 by the Education Ministry.

APAAR also aims to reduce fraud and duplicate educational certificates by providing a single, trusted reference for educational institutions. Only first party sources that issue certificates will be allowed to deposit credits into the system, ensuring authenticity.



How does the government envision APAAR ID to work?

Every individual will have a unique APAAR ID, which will be linked to the Academic Bank Credit (ABC), which is a digital storehouse that contains information of the credits earned by students throughout their learning journey. With the APAAR ID, students would be able to store all their certificates and credits, whether they come from formal education or informal learning. When a student completes a course or achieves something, it's digitally certified and securely stored in her account by authorised institutions.

If the student changes schools, whether within the state or to another state, all her data in the ABC gets transferred to her new school just by sharing the APAAR ID. She won't need to provide physical documents or transfer certificates.

What do students have to do to get their single ID created?

To sign up for APAAR, students will have to provide basic information such as name, age, date of birth, gender, and a photograph. This information will be verified using their Aadhar number.

"It's important to know that the Aadhar number is only used for verification to match the name and date of birth. APAAR won't use or share these details with anyone else during registration," said Sahasrabudhe. Students will need to sign a consent form, and they can choose to either accept or decline sharing their Aadhar number and demographic information with the Ministry of Education for creating the APAAR ID.

For minors, parents will have to sign the consent form, allowing the Ministry to use the student's Aadhar number for authentication with UIDAI. Registration for creating APAAR ID is voluntary, not mandatory.

What are the concerns surrounding APAAR?

Parents and students have concerns about sharing their Aadhar details because they worry that their personal information could be leaked to outside parties.

The government, however, says that the information shared by students will be kept confidential and will not be shared with any third party except for entities engaged in educational activities, such as the Unified District Information System for Education Plus or the UDISE+ database (the government's catalogue that contains data related to schools, teachers and students), scholarships, maintenance academic records, educational institutions and recruitment agencies.

At any given time, students have the option to stop sharing their information with the mentioned parties, and their data processing will be halted. However, any personal data already processed will remain unaffected if consent is withdrawn.

CONCERNED OVER POOR NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS COLLEGES, BIHAR WILL CONDUCT ITS OWN RANKING

Concerned by the poor performance of the state's colleges in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) grading process, the Bihar government has set up a committee to assess the colleges.

The state has also decided to rank the colleges by its own parameters, and these rankings could later be used to decide the government grants given to the colleges, officials said.

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



According to education department officials, the three-member committee, which will include Education Secretary Baidya Nath Yadav as a member, will assess the performance of all 270 constituent colleges of state universities.

Only 35 colleges coming under state universities have managed to get NAAC accreditation this year. In 2021, this figure was 95. NAAC accreditation is decided on the basis of an assessment of the student-teacher ratio, quality of teachers, availability of labs, quality of education, research, and overall infrastructure of colleges.

“From November 10 onwards, each of the 270 constituent colleges will have to make a PowerPoint presentation on its academic activities and performance,” an Education Department official told The Indian Express.

The idea is to prepare a database to rank colleges, the official said, adding, “We are adopting almost similar criteria as NAAC has for its ranking. It is very important to know where the government money is being spent. We also want to know how constituent colleges have been faring and why most of them have not yet received NAAC accreditation.”

On whether the state’s move to assess the colleges would put the government in conflict with the Governor, the chancellor of state universities, the official said, “As the state government gives the grant, it has the right to seek an account for it.”

The government and the Governor have clashed recently on a number of issues, including the salaries of officials and the advertising of posts.

However, on the issue of the new committee and rankings, Raj Bhavan sources said that there would not be any problem as long as it leads to improvement in the quality of education. “But if it ends up as a method to curtail annual grants for colleges, it will not be good for higher education,” a Raj Bhavan source said.

HEALTH MINISTRY REBUTS REPORT OF GOING SOFT ON OTT SMOKING RULES

“A reputed news publication has recently made a claim that the Union Government has reached ‘an uneasy compromise’ with OTT (over-the-top) streaming services on adding smoking warnings to their content,” the Ministry said in a statement. “The report further claims that some platforms have chosen less intrusive warnings as a result of such an agreement. The news report is misinformed and [its] claims are false, misleading and based on misrepresented facts.”

The report was based on interviews with an industry participant at a recent meeting between the government and streaming firms, official minutes of the meeting provided to The Hindu by the Health Ministry, and a review of content across streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, including series and films that were released after September 1, when the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Amendment Rules, 2023, came into force.

The Health Ministry now says it will not dilute the Rules, whose requirements have not been put on hold officially. “There is no compromise with the rules and action will be initiated by the government for any non-compliance with the OTT Rules 2023,” the statement read.

CENTRE TO INTRODUCE DNA, FACE MATCHING SYSTEMS AT POLICE STATIONS ACROSS COUNTRY



More than a year after the Criminal Procedure Identification Act was passed by Parliament, the Centre is all set to roll out “DNA and face-matching” systems at 1,300 police stations across the country.

The provisions of the Act are yet to be implemented entirely on the ground. There are logistic and connectivity issues too, officials said.

The law enables the police and the Central investigating agencies to collect, store, and analyse physical and biological samples, including retina and iris scans of arrested persons.

The law was passed by Parliament in April 2022 and the rules were notified in September last year.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a Central organisation tasked with rolling out the Act, was assigned the task of finalising the standard operating procedures (SOP) to be followed by police officials.

Though the Act and rules do not explicitly mention the collection of DNA samples and face-matching procedure, the NCRB, in meetings with State police officials, informed them that the said measures would be rolled out in around 1,300 locations spread across police districts, commissionerates, and special investigation units at State headquarters.

The Union Home Ministry has constituted a Domain Committee for the successful implementation of the Act with representatives from the State Police, Central law enforcement agencies, and other key stakeholders. A technical sub-committee for preparing the SOPs for capturing DNA as a measurement has also been constituted.

The States have been asked to identify the locations and prepare the sites where the measurement collection unit (MCU) may be established as suggested by the NCRB. The Central body under the Home Ministry will be the repository of the database at the national level.

A Delhi Police official said they were recording measurements such as thumb and finger impressions and photographs of accused persons according to the old format and were also using the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS).

Under the NAFIS, another project maintained and managed by NCRB, workstations and scanners have been put up at around 1,300 police stations. It has fingerprint details, a unique 10-digit number of more than one crore people, accused and convicts, across the country. This database is also being integrated with the Criminal Procedure Identification Act.

The Act replaced the 100-year-old Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920 whose scope was limited to capturing finger impressions, footprints, and photographs of convicted prisoners and a specific category of arrested and non-convicted persons under the orders of a Magistrate.

An official said the NCRB has cautioned against the misuse of databases by ensuring identification and deployment of appropriate safeguards, adding that only designated officials must have access in real time.

A police official from a northeastern State said training and resources were the teething problems. “The police are often short on funds, though the Home Ministry will bear the cost of hardware and others and the cost of a secure Internet line and other operating costs will have to be borne by the State,” the official said.



The NCRB has said the tools and systems used by the police should be technologically, legally, and forensically sound and accredited.

When the Act was introduced in Parliament in March 2022, the Opposition opposed the Bill, terming it “unconstitutional” and an attack on privacy.

TOO MANY MEDICAL COLLEGE SEATS IN SOME STATES, TOO FEW IN OTHERS: WHY THE CENTRAL REGULATOR WANTS THIS CORRECTED

Nagaland got its first medical college earlier this month — the Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (NIMSR) at Phriebagei in Kohima will have 100 MBBS seats for the coming academic session next year.

The government has been emphasising on an equal distribution of medical colleges across the country, and a new regulation issued by the medical education regulator National Medical Commission (NMC) in August put a hold on new medical colleges and expansion of existing colleges in states with more than 100 medical education seats per million population.

The notification has angered the southern states, none of which are now eligible for any more medical education seats. The NMC has argued that the guidelines will bring down regional disparities in the availability of doctors, and ensure effective quality education for all.

“With this ratio, there will be still potential for the addition of about 40,000 MBBS seats in the country if the medical colleges are evenly distributed,” the NMC said in a statement on October 9.

How are medical college seats currently distributed among states?

At least 13 states and UTs have more than 100 seats/ million population and are not eligible to increase capacity. Tamil Nadu — whose Chief Minister M K Stalin has said the NMC guidelines are a “direct encroachment” on the state’s rights and “legally untenable”, and asked the Prime Minister to intervene — has the most seats (11,225), followed by Karnataka (11,020) and Maharashtra (10,295). However, while TN and Karnataka have exceeded the NMC’s norm by 46% and 63% respectively, Maharashtra, with its estimated 12.6 crore population, is well below the threshold.

The deficiency of medical college seats in relation to population is the most acute in Meghalaya, Bihar, and Jharkhand, all of which are in deficits of more than 75% from the NMC’s recommended ratio. Meghalaya has only 50 seats for an estimated 33.5 lakh people; these numbers for Bihar and Jharkhand are 2,565 and 12.7 crore, and 980 and 3.9 crore respectively. Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state, has 9,253 seats, a deficiency of 61%.

The stark deficiencies in some states are in spite of a push from the government to increase the number of seats. Over the last nine years, the government has doubled the numbers of both undergraduate and postgraduate medical seats. (Critics say this has come at the cost of the quality of education.)

Will states with an excess of medical college seats have to start shutting colleges or cutting seats?

No. The notification by the undergraduate medical board says the ratio will be applicable only if new medical colleges are sought to be established or seats in existing colleges are sought to be increased from the 2024-25 batch onward.

So is there merit in the NMC’s argument?

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With the increasing numbers of private medical colleges, experts agree there is a need to rationalise. Prof Vivek Saoji, vice-chancellor of Bharati Vidyapeeth, Pune, and a former VC of KLE Academy of Higher Education and Research of which Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Belagavi, is a part, said: “This move was necessary to ensure a good distribution of medical colleges across the country. Places such as Puducherry, Mangalore, or Pune have several medical colleges but a state like Meghalaya has only one college.” Opening of more colleges in, say Bihar, could result in a reverse migration of staff from the southern states, he said.

Dr Nandini Sharma, a former dean of Delhi’s Maulana Azad Medical College, said the NMC’s ratio is based on the World Health Organisation’s recommended number of physicians per unit of population. “We have seen what happened with dentistry. With a very high number of dental students graduating, many don’t really practise. They get into some government programme or an allied field,” she said.

Dr Sharma pointed out that despite the number of medical colleges and seats having increased in the last few years, there is a shortage of faculty even at hospitals like MAMC and AIIMS in the capital.

NMC has said it has been cautioned by courts earlier to ensure colleges are not bunched together. “With an objective of providing the right teaching environment...and improving the overall quality of education, the provision of limiting UG seats in each state to 100 per million populations has been included. It is expected that this will reduce regional disparities in the availability of healthcare professionals and will go a long way in ensuring effective quality of education,” it has argued.

DELHI GOVT TO USE DUST SUPPRESSANTS TO COMBAT POOR AQI: WHAT ARE THEY AND DO THEY WORK?

Dust suppressants will be used in Delhi to mitigate pollution from dust. This, however, is not the first time it has been used in the Capital and parts of NCR.

Dust suppressants may be salts of calcium or magnesium that can absorb moisture. Environment Minister Gopal Rai said the “dust suppressant powder” would be mixed along with water and sprayed on roads to keep the dust down for longer.

In 2019, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) told the NCR states that they may consider using dust suppressants on excavated earth surfaces, piles of construction and demolition waste, and access roads in construction areas.

The CPCB wrote to states that a study was awarded by it on the use of dust suppressants, and its effectiveness was studied for the control of dust generation at certain roads and sites.

“Findings of the study indicate that use of dust suppressant along with water is relatively more effective in control of pollution than conventional methods of dust control i.e. water spraying. About 30% reduction in dust concentration (PM10, PM2.5, and PM1) was observed up to six hours for construction sites as well as roads with the use of dust suppressant,” the CPCB said. The effectiveness of the suppressant was evaluated at three sites in Delhi — construction of the Sarai Kale Khan Road, a building construction site at Narela, and a Dilshad Garden flyover construction site.



An advisory issued by the Delhi PWD in 2019 also noted that the “use of dust suppressants in water can be more effective than plain water sprinkling as it shows more efficiency to reduce particulate matter emission”. The advisory, which mentioned “magnesium chloride hexahydrate flakes,” added that the dust suppressant with bio-additives helps to reduce dust for five to six hours as compared to plain water which lasts for 15 to 30 minutes. Magnesium chloride absorbs moisture.

In 2019, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee had also issued directions that all construction agencies will use dust suppressants to control dust emissions and road-owning agencies will use it on dusty patches.

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, research and advocacy, Centre for Science and Environment, said, “We don’t have any information about its efficacy. They claim that if you mix the suppressant, the effect stays for longer, but we are not sure how much longer, and what effect this has in the long term. We haven’t really looked into this.”

WHY MUMBAI IS WITNESSING MORE POOR AIR QUALITY DAYS

The winter deterioration in air quality in Mumbai is fast becoming an annual talking point, just like it has been in Delhi for the past decade. For long, Mumbai was considered largely immune to the issue of air pollution, and the associated problems of haze and smog, thanks to its coastal location. Strong sea breezes would blow dust and other suspended particles away, keeping the city’s air relatively clean.

But the last two years have shown that this geographical advantage no longer offers reliable protection. Last year saw the longest spell of poor air quality in the city, extending from November to January. On some days, Mumbai’s air was more polluted than Delhi.

It happened again last week, as the air quality index (AQI) went beyond 300 in some parts of the city. An AQI of 200 or above is considered ‘poor’ air quality, while 300 and above signifies ‘very poor’ air.

These particularly bad spells have been triggered by several adverse meteorological conditions coming together at the same time, but as scientists point out, Mumbai’s air quality has, even otherwise, been seeing a consistent and steady decline.

Wind patterns

The direction and strength of winds are often the key factor in determining Mumbai’s air quality. The city does not generate a lesser amount of pollutants than Delhi. The emissions from vehicles, industries and other sources are just as bad as in Delhi and in other major urban centres in the country. But strong winds, characteristic of any coastal location, turn out to be quite beneficial here.

Winds usually alternate between moving from the sea towards the land, and moving from the land towards the sea. This cycle repeats every three to four days during this time of the year. When the wind is directed towards the sea, the dust particles get swept away. This acts as a natural cleansing mechanism. Sometimes, when the cycle gets temporarily disrupted for some reason, it has an impact on the city’s air quality.



Last year's unusually bad air quality was attributed to frequent and prolonged disruptions in this normal cycle of wind patterns. Instead of alternating every 3-4 days, the winds were sometimes changing directions after eight or ten days. It was not immediately evident at the time, but the prevailing La Nina conditions in the eastern Pacific Ocean could have had a role to play in that, according to Gufran Beig, a scientist who has closely monitored air pollution in Mumbai and other parts of the country.

La Nina is a condition in which the sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean become cooler than normal. This large-scale phenomenon influences weather events across the world, and has a wide variety of impacts. Last year was part of the longest and strongest La Nina events on record.

Beig, former project director of SAFAR, or System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research, a government-backed initiative to monitor and forecast air quality in select metropolitan cities, is in the process of publishing a paper on the role of La Nina on last year's winter air quality in Mumbai.

"There were two aberrations last year. The frequency of the cleansing mechanism was disrupted, and the relatively calm wind conditions that Mumbai sees for about a week after the withdrawal of the monsoon prevailed for almost two months. That meant that even when the wind was moving towards the sea, it was not strong enough to blow away the pollutants effectively. Both of these could have been influenced by La Nina," Beig said.

Different trigger this time

But La Nina is over, and has been replaced by its opposite phenomenon, El Nino. It is not as strong as La Nina was, and its effect is not yet known. Last week's dip in air quality in Mumbai was triggered by a completely different reason, Beig said.

Last week, winds in Mumbai were relatively calmer as the monsoon retreated from the city. Also, the city's temperature soared to a four-year high for October. That created a big temperature gradient between the city and the nearby hilly regions in the Sahyadri ranges. As a result, winds from these areas began moving towards Mumbai, picking up dust from the major construction projects being carried out in Navi Mumbai and surrounding areas.

"Such meteorological conditions are not unusual, and keep happening once in a while. These would have gone unnoticed had there been no dust sources in the way. The problem is the increasing number of sources of pollutants, and not the meteorological conditions that make the situation worse. But I think the worst is already over for Mumbai, for the time being. The conditions have changed, and the immediate impact could be an improvement in air quality. This does not ensure that the rest of the season would be clean, but what we saw last week, might be already over," Beig said.

Overall deterioration

Unfavourable local weather conditions are certainly not the cause of bad air quality in Mumbai. The baseload generation of pollutants is very high and steadily getting over the city's carrying capacity.

"There is no ambiguity. Long-term trends show a clear decline in Mumbai's air quality, particularly in the last one decade. The reasons are quite obvious. There is a lot more economic activity, more vehicles, more construction, more consumption and more emissions. And there is no matching



effort to mitigate the impacts,” said S N Tripathi, a professor at IIT Kanpur and one of India’s leading experts on air pollution.

“Mumbai is now even experiencing haze-like conditions on some days. This would never happen earlier,” Tripathi said.

Beig pointed out that even last week, visibility in some parts of Mumbai was extremely low, very similar to what happens frequently in Delhi during the winter months.

AIR POLLUTION CHOKING YOUR BREATH? ARE THESE UNSEEN AIR PARTICLES SLOWLY AFFECTING YOUR LUNGS?

Much has been talked about the impact of air pollution on our health across cities. But while we talk about PM 2.5 (particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres) and PM 10 (particulate matter with a diameter of 10 micrometers), it is nanoparticles that have emerged as a silent but potent threat. These minuscule particles, measuring approximately 600 times smaller than the width of a human hair, possess the ability to infiltrate the body, reaching not only the lungs but even the brain.

Due to their ultra-fine size, they can be suspended in the atmosphere for a long time and can travel longer distances, causing several health issues after exposure.

The nano invasion of the lungs

Nanoparticles have dimensions typically ranging from 1 to 100 nanometers, making them vastly smaller. Their small size allows them to bypass many of the body’s natural defence mechanisms, such as the filtering action of the nose and the mucus lining of the respiratory tract. Consequently, nanoparticles can penetrate deep into the lungs, posing serious health risks.

One of the most significant concerns surrounding nanoparticles is their ability to reach the lower respiratory tract, including the alveoli – tiny air sacs where oxygen is exchanged with carbon dioxide. The small size of nanoparticles allows them to travel deep into the lungs, where they can trigger inflammation, oxidative stress and even cell damage. This damage can be especially harmful to individuals with preexisting respiratory conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), as well as children and the elderly.

Some human studies have shown that breathing in diesel soot causes a general inflammatory response and alters the system that regulates involuntary functions in the cardiovascular system, such as control of heart rate.

How nanoparticles affect the brain

In addition to their lung-related threats, nanoparticles have shown the ability to breach the blood-brain barrier, a protective barrier separating the bloodstream from the brain. This barrier is designed to keep harmful substances out of the brain and protect this vital organ. However, certain nanoparticles, due to their small size and unique properties, have been shown to cross this barrier, potentially causing neurological damage.

While the mechanisms behind nanoparticle transport to the brain are not fully understood, it is clear that these particles can pose risks to brain health. Research has linked exposure to nanoparticles to cognitive impairment, neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.



How do we prevent diseases

Now that we understand the hazards posed by nanoparticles, it's essential to explore practical strategies for dealing with this microscopic menace.

While Governments and environmental agencies set regulatory codes for emissions, there are things you can do at the individual level. Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if you are exposed to nanoparticles at your workplace. This may include masks, gloves, and full-body suits designed to prevent inhalation or contact with nanoparticles.

At home, utilising high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in air purifiers and maintaining good ventilation can help reduce indoor nanoparticle exposure. These measures can be especially beneficial for individuals living in urban areas or near industrial facilities. Avoid areas with high levels of air pollution, particularly during peak traffic hours, as much as possible to reduce inhalation risks. Moreover, opting for natural and organic products, when possible, can lower the potential for exposure to nanoparticles in consumer goods. By adopting these strategies and working together, we can better protect ourselves and future generations from the hidden dangers posed by nanoparticles, ensuring a healthier and safer world.

DOES INDIA NEED TO RELOOK THE DAM SAFETY ACT?

The story so far:

India has almost 6,000 large dams and about 80% of them are more than 25 years old and carry safety risks. A new Dam Safety Act (DSA) was passed in late 2021. On October 4 this year, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in North Sikkim's South Lhonak Lake washed away one of the biggest hydropower projects in India, the Teesta III dam at Chungthang. Reports have since revealed there were no early warning systems, no risk assessment or preventive measures in place as required under the Act.

What are the provisions of the Act?

The Dam Safety Act was tabled in the Rajya Sabha in December 2021, as a response to deficient surveillance and maintenance causing dam failure-related disasters. The Act listed key responsibilities and mandated that national and State-level bodies be established for implementation. It said a National Committee on Dam Safety would oversee dam safety policies and regulations; a National Dam Safety Authority would be charged with implementation and resolving State-level disputes; the Chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC) would head dam safety protocols at the national level; a State Committee on Dam Safety (SCDS) and State Dam Safety Organisation (SDSO) would be set up. Sikkim formed an SCDS on August 17 with nine members and experts in hydrology and dam design.

What do the States need to do?

Provisions require States to classify dams based on hazard risk, conduct regular inspections, create emergency action plans, institute emergency flood warning systems, and undertake safety reviews and period risk assessment studies.

Importantly, States were asked to report and record incidents of dam failures. Until now, no statutory provision required systemic reporting of failures and no single agency was tasked with



tracking this data. The CWC keeps a record but the list is not updated regularly, Devendra Damle argued in a 2021 working paper for the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.

Is any action taken for failing to comply?

Failure to comply with any provision of the Act is punishable with imprisonment and/or fines, and “if such obstruction or refusal to comply with directions results in loss of lives or imminent danger thereof, [entity] shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years.” For example, in February this year, the Sikkim High Court ordered the Gati Hydropower Project company to pay ₹70 lakh to two widowed mothers, for non-compliance with the Dam Safety Act.

What are the challenges?

Experts say the Sikkim incident exemplifies blind spots in both legislation and implementation. The DSA does not promote risk-based decision-making and fails to incentivise transparency. Himanshu Thakkar, an environmental activist and coordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, says that the frequency and scale of such disasters reveal a pattern of neglect: “It keeps happening regularly, people face disastrous consequences and we call these ‘natural disasters’. But there’s nothing natural about them.”

How is dam safety undertaken?

Dam safety is a function of many parts: designing and constructing dams that adhere to safety margins, maintaining and operating them per guidelines, recording data in real-time in an accessible format, forecasting hazardous events and instituting emergency plans, to name a few. The Sikkim GLOF reveals poor compliance at all levels, from the dam’s design to the spillway capacity (which controls the release of water from a reservoir). Hazard profiling and regular assessment are also mandated by the Act. Hazard risk fluctuates at the slightest touch, responding to climate change, urbanisation, and the way people/companies use water or where they are located. Periodic reviews are expected to bring forth fresh inundation maps and new rule curves (which determine the capacity of dam reservoirs), all of which contribute towards the safety of the downstream areas. Spillway capacity and other metrics should be reviewed every five years or so, but Mr. Thakkar says periodic reviews are often not conducted or if they are, their findings are not easily available in the public domain. The Act requires dam builders to conduct comprehensive dam safety evaluations, but “there is no standardisation of how the failure is analysed and reported,” Mr. Damle stated. The Himachal Pradesh government recently served notices to 21 hydroelectric projects, finding them guilty of non-compliance with the DSA during the July-August floods.

BUTTERFLY MAKES A RARE CALL IN HIMACHAL

A butterfly that is rare in the western Himalayas, the paintbrush swift has been photographed and documented for the first time in Himachal Pradesh’s Chamba district. The State is home to about 25% of the total number of butterfly species found in India.

The paintbrush swift (Baoris farri), a butterfly species of the HesperIIDae family, was sighted and photographed in the second week of October during a field survey conducted under the Wild Bhattiyat Project initiated by the Bhattiyat Forest Range of the Dalhousie Forest Division of the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department in 2022.



“The species has never been photographed in Himachal Pradesh since its discovery in 1878. This is the first time that we have photographed and documented it. It was first described by lepidopterist Frederic Moore, more than 145 years ago, from the eastern Himalayas,” Sanjeev Kumar, Range Forest Officer at the Bhattiyat Forest Range, who is leading the project, told The Hindu.

Since the launch of the project, the department has so far documented 120 butterfly species.

Till now, there is only one record of the paintbrush swift mentioned from the Shivalik mountain range in the State, but that record is doubtful as no photographic or specimen pieces of evidence were provided in the study.

This is the first time the paintbrush swift has been spotted and photographed in Himachal Pradesh.

It’s an encouraging indication of flourishing biodiversity.

ROW OVER JAGANNATH TEMPLE’S TREASURE ROOM: WHY HAS IT NOT BEEN UNLOCKED IN 38 YEARS, WHY DEMANDS TO OPEN NOW

As Assembly and General elections draw closer in Odisha, the demand to open the Ratna Bhandar (treasure room) of the Puri Jagannath Temple is growing louder again. The treasure room at the temple has not been unlocked for three decades.

On Wednesday (October 18), a BJP delegation led by former Odisha unit president Samir Mohanty met Puri royal scion and chairperson of Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee (SJTMC), Gajapati Dibyasingha Deb, demanding its opening.

This came two days after the Congress staged a show of strength in Puri and raised the issue of the Ratna Bhandar, among other matters.

What is the Ratna Bhandar of the temple, why has it not been opened for years, and why is the demand to unlock it being raised now?

What is Puri temple Ratna Bhandar?

The precious ornaments of sibling deities — Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra — given by devotees and erstwhile kings over centuries, are stored in the Ratna Bhandar of the 12th century shrine. It is located within the temple and has two chambers—Bhitar Bhandar (inner chamber) and Bahara Bhandar (outer chamber).

The outer chamber is opened regularly to fetch ornaments for the deities during the Suna Besha (golden attire), a key ritual during the annual Rath Yatra, and also during major festivals throughout the year. The inner chamber has not opened in the past 38 years.

Who wants the Ratna Bhandar opened, and why?

Demands to open the Ratna Bhandar gained strength after the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the custodian of the 12th-century shrine, gave a requisition for repair/conservation of the chamber. There are apprehensions that cracks have emerged in its walls that could endanger the precious ornaments stored there.



Servitors, devotees, and temple managing committee members have asked for the reopening to ascertain the safety of the structure and its contents, and to make an inventory. The Puri royal scion is also in favour of opening the Ratna Bhandar.

When was the Ratna Bhandar last opened?

According to official sources, the last inventory of the Ratna Bhandar was made between May 13 and July 23, 1978. Though it was opened again on July 14, 1985, the inventory was not updated.

According to a reply made by former law minister Pratap Jena in the state Assembly in April 2018, in 1978, the Ratna Bhandar had 12,831 bhari (one bhari equals to 11.66gm) of gold ornaments fitted with precious stones and 22,153 bhari of silver utensils, among others.

There were certain other ornaments which could not be weighed during the inventory process.

What is the process to open the treasure house?

Permission of the Odisha government is required. Following a direction from the Orissa High Court based on ASI reports, the state government had attempted to open the chamber for physical inspection on April 4, 2018. This attempt was unsuccessful because the keys of the chamber could not be found. The ASI team, thus, carried out the inspection from outside.

Have the missing keys been found?

On April 5, 2018, the then Puri collector Arvind Agarwal stated in a temple committee meeting that there was no information on the keys, which led to state-wide outrage. The Puri collector is the custodian of the key of the inner treasure.

Two months later, on June 4, 2018, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik ordered a judicial inquiry headed by Justice Raghur Das, a retired judge of the Orissa HC, to probe the loss of the keys.

On June 13, days after the judicial inquiry was ordered, Agarwal said an envelope with “duplicate keys of inner Ratna Bhandar” written on it had been found in the record room of the collectorate.

Meanwhile, the commission submitted a 324-page report to the Odisha government on November 29, 2018. The details of the findings are yet to be made public.

Why has the issue resurfaced?

In August 2022, the ASI once again wrote to the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration, seeking its permission to inspect the inner chamber of the Ratna Bhandar. It is yet to get the permission.

Amid demand from various quarters, including eminent sand artist and SJTMC member Sudarsan Pattnaik, to reopen the treasure house, Opposition parties have been targeting the Odisha government’s “delaying tactics”.

In face of the growing demand, the temple managing committee in August recommended to the government that the Ratna Bhandar be opened during the annual Rath Yatra of 2024.

What has the Orissa HC said?

In July, former BJP president Samir Mohanty filed a PIL in the Orissa HC over the Ratna Bhandar issue.



In its verdict pronounced last month, the HC directed the government to form a high-level committee within two months, if the SJTMC approaches it, to supervise the inventory-making of the valuables. The court, however, declined to interfere with the plan of work regarding inventory and repairs of the inner walls of the treasure house.

HOW RAMLEELA REACHED TRINIDAD AND BECAME A REPRESENTATION OF 'INDIANNESS'

As far as traditions of folk theatre go, Ramleela is one of India's most famous, performed across north India during the autumnal Navratri celebrations.

Variations aside, it basically is a dramatic re-enactment of Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, telling the story of Lord Ram. Major incidents in the epic are covered in an episodic way, with an interplay between dialogue and musical verses. Performances last days, and culminate on Dussehra with the burning of the effigy of Ravan, representing the victory of good over evil.

In this broad form, Ramleela has travelled to distant corners of the world with the Indian diaspora. Here we look at one such instance — that of Trinidad, an island in the Caribbean with a significant Indian population.

A sweet sour story

In early 19th century Britain, calls to abolish slavery intensified. Slave trade was banned in 1807, and finally abolished in 1834 in the British Empire. This, however, created a massive problem in many British colonies whose economy depended on slave labour. The island of Trinidad, where sugar formed the backbone of the economy, was one such colony.

In 1838, the enactment of the emancipation legislation in Trinidad was followed by a large-scale emigration of emancipated slaves from the sugar estates. Plantation owners, desperate to keep their economy afloat, turned to indentured labour from India. On May 30, 1845 the very first boatload of indentured Indians came to Trinidad.

While seen as more human than slavery, indentured servitude was nonetheless brutal for labourers. 'Agents' back in India would lure unsuspecting Indians to it with the promise of riches and opportunity. A part of their wages would be withheld till the end of the contract. This way, labourers would effectively be under bondage while working in back breaking conditions on the plantations.

Today, Indians — mostly descendents of these labourers who continued to enter Trinidad as late as 1917 — form the largest ethnic group in Trinidad, at around 35 per cent of the total population. Most came from the present day eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Carrying Ram to a foreign land

When travelling to these distant lands, indentured individuals were unable to carry many material possessions. What they did bring, though, was their culture.

"Although Indian Hindus carried only a few belongings to Trinidad, they are said to have brought the Manas [Ramcharitmanas], either in memory or book form," Paula Richman wrote in 'Ramlila in Trinidad' (2010). Most, she wrote, grew up hearing the text recited and watching it enacted.

This is how Ramleela arrived in Trinidad. In villages in the countryside, now thronged by Indians speaking Bhojpuri and eating chapatis, Ramleela saw widespread participation of the community.



“Elders who used to play particular roles coach new players. Experts supervise ritual preparation of the grounds. Someone with a large work shed or garage lets the stage crew use it to construct the effigy ... Teams of women cook mouth-watering culinary specialties roasted over open fires and served hot each night of the performance,” Richman wrote.

A gradual decline

By the later half of the 19th century, however, their popularity was waning. As formal education spread, Bhojpuri was slowly replaced by English among the Indian population. As a result, younger generations were simply not as familiar with the Manas as their predecessors.

“As young people found Hindi chanting increasingly unintelligible, many spent less time watching the play and more time frequenting food stalls, smoking with friends, or hanging around nearby amusement park rides,” Richman wrote, adding that “earlier, the mela [fair] was Ramlila’s sideshow; now, at some sites, the play was sidelined”.

This decline was made worse by a steady migration of Indians into urban spaces, leaving behind their former social life that revolved almost completely around Hindu festivals. Now, youth encountered other cultural influences like the Carnival, an annual cultural high point for Trinidadians. As Richman wrote, “In comparison to Carnival, some Hindu youths saw Ramlila as amateurish in its look, unexciting in staging, and ponderous in pace.”

Innovation and rejuvenation

But these factors also made Ramleela ripe for innovation — as audiences dwindled, troupes got ever-more experimental. Today, gender and caste restrictions on participation have been loosened, new dramatic techniques embraced, and dialogue simplified to appeal to younger audiences.

Most importantly, increased financial backing has meant that production values have skyrocketed. As Indian-origin Trinidadians have become ever so powerful in the country’s politics, Ramleela has parallely enjoyed renewed attention, financial and otherwise. However, the basic essence of the story and performance remain the same. “The fundamental anchor of Ramlilas in Trinidad remains the Ramcharitmanas. A Hindi verse from it begins each scene even though the rest of the scene is in English,” Richman wrote. “Audiences continue to absorb the teachings of the Manas at Ramlila, whether they realise it or not, and whether they understand Hindi or not,” she wrote.

And in Trinidad, it remains the foremost representation of one’s Indianness. For a population which traces its roots to a faraway land, Ramleela has been an anchor to those roots, although it has evolved over the years to become ever more Trinidadian as well.

A MUGHAL-ERA TOMB THAT WAS CONVERTED INTO A HONEYMOONERS’ PARADISE TWO CENTURIES LATER

From a Mughal-era mausoleum to the summer retreat of a British Governor of India, the tomb of Muhammad Quli Khan, popularly known as Dilkusha, is, among other things, an example of reuse of built heritage. According to the Department of Archaeology, in the early 17th century, the tomb was constructed for Quli Khan, son of Maham Anga — the wet nurse of Mughal emperor Akbar.

Two centuries later, somewhere between 1835 and 1853, Sir Thomas Theophilus Metcalfe, the Governor General, turned it into a residence and converted the enclosure around the structure



into a garden with terraces, watercourses and pavilions — which was at that time called “Dilkhusha”, loosely translated to something that gladdens the heart.

Situated inside what is now the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, the tomb stood on a high platform, which is octagonal in plan from outside. The interior of the mausoleum is painted with plaster work while the exterior bears designs of stucco plaster.

Last week, Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena unveiled six renovations nestled inside the park — one among these was the tomb of Muhammad Quli Khan. The tomb, which was in a state of disrepair, has undergone detailed restoration.

NEW RESEARCH BACKS OLD PROOF: AJNALA SKELETONS ARE OF INDIAN SOLDIERS KILLED IN 1857 REVOLT

The nearly-250 human skeletons found dumped in an abandoned well in the Ajnala town of Punjab’s Amritsar in 2014 were of Indian soldiers killed during the uprising of 1857 and not of those murdered during the Partition in 1947, fresh scientific evidence has suggested. The strontium isotope analysis, endorsing the previous DNA-based genetic evidence, also suggested that the remains were of people who were from Gangetic plains — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal — and coastal Odisha and not of those living in and around Ajnala. Niraj Rai said that scientific research done by this team helps look at the historical events from evidence-based scientific perspective.

The fresh scientific evidence is part of research that has been published in the International Journal of Legal Medicine. The research was jointly carried out by Chandigarh-based Panjab University, Lucknow’s Birbal Sahnii Institute of Palaeosciences, and Canada’s Memorial University.

Quoting the historical records, Dr JS Sehrawat, a forensic anthropologist from Panjab University, said as many as 282 Indian soldiers were killed and thrown in the well in 1857 and a small religious structure was later constructed there. In 2014, during a non scientific excavation, skeletal remains of 246 individuals were recovered from the well. The same year, the government tasked a group led by Sehrawat to scientifically investigate the matter.

Sehrawat says the historical records suggested that the slain victims belonged to 26th Native Bengal Infantry Battalion in which people from eastern UP, West Bengal, Bihar and coastal Odisha used to be recruited. But some historians, according to the researchers, believe that the skeletons are of locals who were killed during the communal clashes during the Partition. To determine the genetic origin of the remains, 50 samples were subjected to mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis. In addition, 85 several samples were subjected to oxygen isotope analysis — the latter sheds light on food habits.

“When we eat or drink something, it leaves chemical signatures in our teeth and in bones. These chemical signatures, based on food habits, can tell us about the place where a person lived. The samples from the recovered skeletons were matched with the samples of water, food grains and rocks from the areas concerned,” said Sehrawat.

The samples were examined at the laboratory of Canada’s Memorial University. “The results from the new research are consistent with the genetic evidence of DNA study that the slain victims of 26th Native Bengal Infantry Battalion came from the Gangetic plains and endorse the molecular forensic results published in the journal *Frontiers in Genetics* in 2022,” he added.



Niraj Rai, an expert on ancient DNA and a co-author from Lucknow's Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences, said: "The published results are based on first time ever use of stable isotopes in mass scale forensic identification in the country and are expected to provide baseline data for future forensic provenance studies that will contribute to the global efforts of mapping Sr isotope variations".

The researchers used strontium isotope ratios obtained from 27 teeth samples and the findings supported that the human skeletons found in the well were not of people living in and around Ajnala. Rather, strontium isotope abundances matched with the water sources, cereals and rock samples from Gangetic plains. "Strontium isotope analysis results revealed that the individuals, whose skeletons were found in the well, did not live in the Amritsar region during their childhood and that they came from the Gangetic plain regions," Sehrawat added.

As per the historical records, Sehrawat said, soldiers from 26th Native Bengal Infantry Battalion posted at Mian-Meer cantonment (nowadays in Pakistan), killed British officers in a revolt. "They were captured by the British army near Ajnala on banks of river Ravi and executed," he said. He added: "The present study findings would prove a landmark/reference for future provenance studies aimed at estimating geolocation of unknown human remains based on strontium isotope analysis in Indian context. It will add a significant chapter in the history of the unsung heroes of India's first freedom struggle". Niraj Rai said that scientific research done by this team helps look at the historical events from evidence-based scientific perspective.

HOW OLYMPIC CITIES ARE SELECTED

The story so far:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi publicly declared India's intention to host the Olympic Games, preferably in 2036, during the opening ceremony of the 141st International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Mumbai on October 14. He also mentioned India's ambition to host the Youth Olympics in 2029 although the quadrennial event is currently scheduled for 2030. Only three Asian countries have ever hosted the Olympics — China, South Korea and Japan, with Japan hosting the games twice in 1964 and 2020. With India throwing its hat into the ring, there are at least five confirmed countries interested in hosting the 2036 Games and nine others reportedly in various stages of preparations and discussions internally and with the IOC. If India does manage to outbid the competition, it will be the first big-ticket multi-discipline sporting event in the country since the controversy-marred Commonwealth Games (CWG) in 2010.

How was a host country initially selected?

In the older system of electing an Olympic host, cities, through their respective national Olympic committees, would submit a letter of interest to the IOC to start a multi-year, multi-step evaluation process. The bidding cities would complete a series of questionnaires, evaluated by the IOC. The second step of the process involved scrutiny from the IOC Evaluation Commission and a series of inspections of all venues before the final bids are put to vote at an IOC session, ending in a host being decided seven years in advance as per the Olympic Charter. It often led to excessive spending among the bidders, to secure rights, often ending in huge debts, corruptions and scandals.

However, after Thomas Bach took over as the IOC president in 2013, he put in place the Olympic Agenda 2020, as a roadmap for the future of the Olympic Movement, approved by the 2014 IOC



session. One part of the agenda dealt with a new process for host city selection, called the 'new norm', that was officially adopted during the 2019 IOC session in Lausanne.

What was the new approach?

The new process placed emphasis on three main aspects — flexibility, sustainability and cost-effectiveness — with the motto being 'The Games adapt to the region, the region does not adapt to the Games'.

How has the process become more flexible?

With respect to flexibility, the seven-year rule was done away with and there has been greater flexibility in deciding the hosts — the IOC has said that the 2036 edition could be decided even as late as after 2030. In contrast, Paris and Los Angeles were selected through a tripartite agreement in 2017 that assured both countries hosting rights in 2024 and 2028 respectively, giving Los Angeles 11 years to prepare. Brisbane too was named host for the 2032 edition in 2021, 11 years ahead. There is now a two-stage process — a continuous dialogue and a targeted dialogue — without any fixed deadlines, to assess, discuss and guide potential hosts.

The continuous dialogue is a non-committal stage not specific to any particular edition. It is basically a discussion between the IOC's Future Hosts Commission (FHC) and interested parties about the hosts' vision for the Games, its purpose and long-term legacy. This is followed by putting together a master plan and working out logistical details, with every potential host free to work out their own template. Also, unlike the past, the Games can be planned to be held across cities or even in conjunction with another country. The FHC includes athletes, international federations, national Olympic committees and the international paralympic committee. Once there is seriousness in a bid to progress to the next level, it will enter the 'targeted dialogue' phase with the interested parties termed 'preferred host'. However, unlike in the past when a party, once rejected, would be discouraged from bidding again, now the other interested parties can continue continuous dialogue for future events.

In a targeted dialogue, the bids become more determined. While there is again no time-frame for a targeted dialogue, it is anticipated to not exceed 12 months. It explores the proposals to host a specific edition of the Olympic Games and brings the IOC's executive board into the picture for detailed discussions. This is where each of the 'preferred hosts' answer the FHC's questions and provides guarantees on infrastructure, accommodation, security and public services among others and makes the final submission. The FHC then prepares an advisory report for the executive board which has the power to either recommend a single host or shortlist more than one for elections by the IOC members.

What about sustainability and cost-effectiveness?

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the infrastructure and to avoid any public backlash, hosts are encouraged as far as possible to use existing and temporary venues. Any new venues built must be in line with existing developmental plans and have a long-term justification irrespective of the Games. All editions of the summer/winter/youth Olympic Games from 2030 onwards must also adhere to the IOC's climate positive commitment.

As per the IOC's claims, the focus on using existing and temporary venues has led to an 80% decrease in the bid budgets for the 2026 Winter Games compared to the 2018 and 2022 editions. Los Angeles has claimed to not build any new infrastructure for the 2028 Games while Paris has



declared using 95% existing or temporary venues for 2024. The IOC also provides technical support and expertise to 'preferred host(s)' on marketing, venue development and sustainability to reduce costs.

Who are the other potential bidders apart from India for the 2036 Games?

Besides India, the other confirmed nations interested are Mexico (spread across the four cities of Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Tijuana), Indonesia (at the new capital of Nusantara which is still under construction), Turkey (Istanbul) and Poland (Warsaw). India is yet to decide the city/cities where the Games will be organised.

Of these, Mexico is the only one to have previously hosted the Games in 1968. Other potential bidders include Egypt, Seoul, China, Qatar, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Canada and Germany. While Qatar has been on a hosting spree for large-scale events in recent times, with the football World Cup in 2022, and is scheduled to host the 2030 Asian Games, Egypt will become the first African nation to host if it wins, as will Indonesia in South-East Asia. Although India has hosted several single-sport competitions including World Cups and World Championships over the years, the regional South Asian Games in 2016 was the last multi-discipline international event held here. Before the 2010 CWG, India had hosted the 2003 Afro-Asian Games, the Asian Games (1951 and 1982) and the 2007 World Military Games. However, the largest gathering of athletes here has been around the 5,000 mark while the recent Asian Games in Hangzhou saw 11,970 athletes participating and the Tokyo Olympics also had 11,420 athletes.

BISHAN SINGH BEDI AND THE RISE OF MODERN INDIAN CRICKET

Indian cricket lost its eternal romantic on Monday. Bishan Singh Bedi was not only one of the greatest spinners the country has produced, but also one of its greatest personalities. There was no more artful a practitioner of left-arm orthodox spin than Bedi in his prime. His run-up comprised slow, measured strides; the action was smooth and fluent. It was part of the larger scheme of deception as he deliberately slowed things down and made the batsman wait. He would then tease him with flight and drift, before he foxed him with drop and turn. The trickery was multilayered, and it fetched him 266 wickets at 28.71 in Tests, besides 1,560 scalps at 21 in first-class cricket. He purchased wickets in every corner of the cricketing globe and was instrumental in conceptualising India's first Test victories in England and West Indies, in 1970-71.

But Bedi was more than just a cricketing great. Jovial and amiable, he made friends for a lifetime and left a lasting impression on the shores he set foot on. His captaincy was largely unsuccessful, but he drilled into his team a sense of identity, and led from the front as he showed the way. The rise of modern Indian cricket began during his time. He sowed the seeds of fight and bravado and always stood up for his men.

He was also a man of strong opinions, a reason he had his share of critics too. Often, he was outspoken, famously dismissing Muttiah Muralitharan as a "shot-putter, whose wickets are all run out in my eyes". He would deride his own under-performing team after a defeat in the Rothmans Cup to Australia at Christchurch in 1990 when he was the manager: "The entire team should be dumped into the Pacific." Later, he wanted his name to be removed from the stands after Arun Jaitley's statue was installed at the Feroz Shah Kotla, later renamed after the politician. He had zero tolerance for chucking and looked upon the doosra-bowling off-spinners with scepticism. But to those he loved, he gave his heart, life and soul — just as he did to Indian cricket.

**BUSINESS & ECONOMICS****TO CURB EVASION, EU REPORT CALLS FOR 2% GLOBAL WEALTH TAX ON BILLIONAIRES**

Pointing out that tax evasion is enabling billionaires to enjoy effective tax rates equivalent to 0% to 0.5% of their wealth, the European Union Tax Observatory in its 'Global Tax Evasion Report 2024' has called for a global minimum tax on billionaires equal to 2% of their wealth. This would both address evasion and "generate nearly \$250 billion from less than 3,000 individuals", the report stated.

The report justified the proposal by noting that while the number of taxpayers affected by it would be miniscule, the tax rate for them (2%) "would still be very modest" given that the wealth of billionaires has grown at 7% a year annually on average since 1995 (net of inflation).

Assessing the impact of international efforts made so far to curb tax evasion, the report highlighted the success of one measure — the automatic exchange of bank information — in reducing offshore tax evasion by a factor of three over the past 10 years. The report observed that before this measure came into effect, "households owned the equivalent of 10% of world GDP in financial wealth in tax havens globally, the bulk of which was undeclared to tax authorities and belonged to high net worth individuals".

Two reasons

But today, there is still the equivalent of 10% of world GDP in offshore household financial wealth, but only 25% of it evades taxation. "This reduction in non-compliance is a major success that shows that rapid progress can be made against tax evasion if there is the political will to do so," the report stated. Despite this progress, offshore tax evasion continues, and the report identifies two reasons for it.

First, it is still possible to own financial assets that escape being reported on because not all offshore financial institutions comply with the requirement of automatic exchange of bank information — for fear of losing their customer base while facing no real threat or penalty from foreign tax authorities for non-compliance.

Second, wealthy individuals who used to hide financial assets in offshore banks have started shifting their holdings to asset classes not covered under this agreement, especially real estate.

The report, therefore, calls for expanding the range of assets brought under the system of automatic exchange of information.

Several loopholes

The other major measure — the global minimum tax of 15% on MNCs, adopted in 2012 by 140 countries and territories — has been a disappointment. While it was expected to increase global tax revenues by 10%, a growing list of loopholes has reduced expected revenues by a factor of two. The report red-flagged the trend of "greenwashing the global minimum tax" wherein MNCs can use 'green' tax credits for low carbon transition to reduce their tax rates way below the minimum of 15%.

"U.S. green-energy tax credits will amount to the equivalent of about 15% of U.S. corporate tax," the report noted.



The report also flags emerging forms of aggressive tax competition that are severely affecting government revenues.

It notes with concern the rise of preferential tax regimes targeting wealthy foreign individuals — their number having grown from five to 28 in the EU and the U.K.

Noting that “these regimes offer tax exemptions or reductions to incoming residents while preserving the general income tax schedule applied to domestic taxpayers”, the report detailed the harm they caused, pointing out that “they weaken overall tax collection, because the adopting governments voluntarily forego tax revenues and because they inflict negative spillover effects to other countries”.

INDIA’S US FOOD EXPORTS REFUSAL RATE 7 TIMES HIGHER THAN CHINA’S

A total of 3,925 human food export shipments from India were refused entry at US customs in the last four years, as per data available with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Of these, 953 shipments (24 per cent) were refused entry for being “filthy” and 786 shipments (20 per cent) were refused for containing salmonella, a bacteria that causes severe stomach infections. The most frequent product categories to face entry refusals were spices, vitamins, minerals and proteins, bakery products, and seafood products.

Food imports from India, Mexico, and China saw the highest number of refusals between October 2019 and September 2023, which corresponds to the latest four US federal fiscal years. A total of 5,374 food export shipments from Mexico were refused, followed by 3,925 shipments from India, and 2,340 shipments from China. India’s food exports refusal rate, which refers to the percentage of shipments refused out of all food export shipments sent, however, stood at 0.15 per cent during this period, seven times China’s rate of 0.022 per cent and six times Mexico’s rate of 0.025 per cent.

Incidentally, refusal of food export shipments from India has seen a downward trend in the last decade in absolute terms, from a peak of 1,591 refusals in 2015 to 1,033 refusals in 2023. A study by the US Department of Agriculture published in 2022, however, did attest to the fact that between 2002 and 2019, India had the most pathogen-related violations with 5,115 food import refusals out of over 22,000 pathogen and toxin violations that were identified, a share of 22.9 per cent. Mexico came in second with a 13.9 per cent share followed by Vietnam with an 8.6 per cent share.

“Even though Mexico had the most refusals in 2008 and 2011, shipments from India were denied more frequently than those from other countries over the entire study period (between 2002 and 2019). These violations were primarily from Salmonella contamination,” the study noted.

MDH Spices, which generated a revenue of Rs 1,759 crore in FY22, saw a refusal rate of 9.95 per cent for all human food shipments exported to the US between October 2019 and September 2023, which corresponds to the latest four US federal fiscal years. In other words, 62 out of 623 food export shipments sent by MDH to the US were refused entry.

Nestle India’s refusal rate in the latest four US federal fiscal years stood at 3.7 per cent, a total of 110 shipments out of 2965 shipments exported to the US. Majority of Nestle’s refused shipments were of noodles and related products. The most frequent charge levelled against Nestle’s refused shipments was of the products consisting “in whole or in part of a filthy, putrid, or decomposed substance or be otherwise unfit for food.” The second and third most frequent charges were



related to the misbranding of nutritional labels and ingredients information. There is no record of inspections conducted by the FDA at Nestle India's plants during the said time period. Nestle did not respond to a detailed questionnaire as it was observing a silent period prior to releasing its quarterly financial results.

Patanjali Ayurved's refusal rate stood at 2.37 per cent, with a total of 38 shipments refused. These shipments were of herbals & botanicals and vegetable oils. The charges against Patanjali included using an unapproved new drug, misbranding of nutritional labels, and using an unsafe food additive. In 2021, FDA inspected Patanjali's plants in Haridwar twice and made a total of twelve comments.

During the inspection, FDA noted that Patanjali's "documentation for laboratory tests and examinations did not include the results of the testing and examination" and that it "did not use effective measures to protect against the inclusion of metal or other foreign material in dietary supplements." FDA also highlighted that Patanjali was "not monitoring the sanitation conditions and practices with sufficient frequency" and that it "did not conduct operations under conditions and controls necessary to minimise the potential for growth of microorganisms." Patanjali did not respond to a detailed questionnaire despite multiple reminders.

In 2023 so far, FDA has carried out fifteen inspections in India, including at TATA Consumer Products' and Parle Products' plants. It found that TATA Consumer Products' "plant was not constructed and designed to facilitate maintenance and sanitary operations" and that Parle Products' "equipment and utensils were not designed and constructed to be adequately cleaned or maintained to protect against contamination." As per FDA's data, no TATA Consumer Products' export shipments have faced refusals in the latest four US federal fiscal years, while a total of 22 export shipments sent by Parle Products were refused, mostly for containing an unsafe colour additive. Both TATA and Parle did not respond when asked for comments.

Hindustan Unilever Limited's refusal rate stood at 0.9 per cent, mostly for products like mixed fruit, jam, jelly, preserves, and marmalade for containing unsafe colour additives. The company did not respond when asked for comments.

Ramdev Food Products, a food exports company based out of Gujarat, saw a refusal rate of 0.49 per cent primarily for spices and related products for containing salmonella. Kader Exports, based out of Andhra Pradesh, saw a refusal rate of 3 per cent for shrimps and prawns related products, again for salmonella contamination. Tulsi Foods, also a Gujarat-based company which began exporting two years ago, saw a refusal rate of 6.59 per cent due to issues related to FDA's foreign supplier verification program.

India's food exports to the US stood at \$1.45 billion in FY23, a 16 per cent increase from \$1.25 billion in FY22, as per APEDA data. India's top food export to the US in FY23 was basmati rice (\$239 million), followed by miscellaneous preparations (\$198 million), natural honey (\$173 million), guar gum (\$149 million), and cereal preparations (\$125 million). APEDA and FSSAI did not respond when asked for comments.

US BOND YIELD HITS 16-YEAR HIGH OF 5 PC: WHY IS IT RISING AND WHAT DOES IT SIGNAL?

On Monday (October 23), the yield on 10-year government bonds in the US, the benchmark for asset prices across the globe, rose to hit 5.02 per cent, its highest level since July 2007. Though the



yield came down to 4.85 per cent later in the day, the rise capped a multi-week rout in bond prices as investors bet that the US Federal Reserve would keep interest rates at their current high levels for longer amid concerns over inflation spiking again due to high energy prices. In India, the yield on 10-year government bonds is already at a high of 7.38 per cent, a rise on 24 basis points in the last one month.

Why yields are high

The US 10-year bond yield has now shot up by nearly 400 basis points from 1.01 per cent in 2020. Factors like rising crude oil prices, inflation risks and interest rate signals from the US Federal Reserve have contributed to the hardening of bond yields.

Further, robust US economic data has hardened expectations that the Federal Reserve is likely to keep rates higher for a longer period. Investors are also concerned about the US government's huge borrowing plans. Despite the historic rise (500 basis points) in interest rates delivered by the Fed over the past 18 months, stronger than expected US retail sales, labour market and inflation data in recent weeks have helped push yields higher.

According to IFA Global, concerns over inflation spiking again due to higher energy prices seem to be outweighing safe haven demand. The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict has added to the global uncertainties, especially on energy prices. If inflation is likely to rise, investors will demand higher yields on their bond investments.

Meanwhile, US Fed Chair Jerome Powell in his speech last week said that records suggest a period of below-trend growth and softening of labour market conditions are needed for inflation to reach the 2% target. Any evidence of persistently above-trend growth or of tightness in the labour market not easing could put further progress on inflation at risk and could warrant further tightening of monetary policy. This in turn will push up bond yields.

What does it mean?

Historically, it was observed the bond yields in other countries, including India, rose when US yields showed any uptrend and vice versa. However, the quantum of increase varies depending on domestic factors. India's 10-year yield rose by 162 basis points from 5.76 per cent (July 10, 2020) while US yields jumped by 400 bps to 5.02 per cent.

The rise indicates that the cost of funds in the financial system is rising and interest rates are on the upswing. The rising bond yield means the government will have to pay more as yield (or return to the investors), leading to a rise in cost of borrowings. This will have an overall impact on the financial system, putting upwards pressure on the general interest rates in the banking system.

Analysts say that rising yields hint at expectations of sticky and higher inflation coupled with possibilities of a rate hike or status quo on interest rates. US Fed has hiked interest rates by 500 basis points from 0.25-0.50 per cent to 5.25-5.50 per cent since May 2022. In short, rising yields put severe pressure on an upward movement in interest rates. Rising yields can also trigger a flight of capital from bank fixed deposits to sovereign guaranteed bonds as the differential in yields widens.

What's the impact on bond investors?

The rise in bond yield means that investors are expecting a rise in interest rates and are therefore selling the bond papers they are holding. Since a rise in interest rates would result in decline in



bond price of existing bonds (and thereby capital loss on sale before maturity), investors rush to sell those bonds so as to limit the capital loss. Debt investors are set to get impacted with this rise in yield. When yields rise and bond prices fall, net asset values of debt funds which hold a sizeable chunk of government securities in their portfolios will also decline, because of the decline in bond price. Further, it will also impact corporate bonds which are priced higher than government bonds.

What's bond yield?

A bond is a type of loan made by an investor to a borrower – a company or an institution – for a fixed period of time in return for regular interest payments. The yield on bond is the return an investor expects to receive each year over its term to maturity.

For the investor who has purchased the bond, the bond yield is a summary of the overall return that accounts for the remaining interest payments and principal they will receive, relative to the price of the bond. The prices at which investors buy and sell bonds in the secondary market move in the opposite direction to the yields. Rising bond yields could also have a cascading negative impact on equities.

RENEWED RISKS

On October 6, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stuck to its 6.5% GDP growth projection for the year, with risks from geopolitical tensions, economic fragmentation, volatile financial markets and an uneven monsoon, evenly balanced out by strengthening domestic demand. There was a belief that a period of heightened uncertainties was ebbing but as the central bank Governor signalled last Friday, new uncertainties have emerged over the fortnight since. The Israel-Hamas conflict that erupted a day after the monetary policy review has widened, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has flagged worries about implications on global food, fuel and fertilizer supplies. Given India's dependence on fuel and fertilizer imports, disruptions or price spikes could hurt the macro-economic framework, even if the government refrains from passing on higher prices to consumers and farmers in the election season. The RBI chief also pointed to rising U.S. bond yields, which hit a 16-year high of 5% this week, mixed data points and signals from central banks around the world, as the new unknowns — even as known unknowns such as financial market turmoil — have got more pronounced. A glimpse of this anxiety was visible this week, with the sharpest sell-off on Indian bourses since July.

There is no certainty that the RBI would still uphold its 'evenly balanced' outlook towards the risks to growth. However, the Finance Ministry, while acknowledging that global uncertainties have compounded, seems largely sanguine for now in its outlook for the economy. Its monthly economic review released on Monday asserts that growth "remains on track", inflation is easing after a "temporary" seasonal surge in July-August, consumption demand is strengthening and investment demand is "also firming up". On the "imminent fears" of rising crude oil prices, it noted that July-September quarter prices were still "way lower" than the \$109.5 and \$97.9 averages in the first and second quarter of 2022-23. The weak foreign trade picture is expected to recover and industrial job creation prospects are high for the next two quarters, while higher demand for housing and vehicle loans reflects bolstered confidence levels in households, it added. India's macro fundamentals may well hold up through the latest global storm, but the government would do well to drill a little deeper into consumption and hiring trends. The last quarter has seen a sharp slump in small car sales, consumer non-durables producers reporting weak rural demand



and IT firms scaling down growth and hiring hopes. There is still much to be done to correct an uneven recovery, which would eventually hamper a broader investment revival.

FOREX SWAP MATURITY: BANKS GET READY TO RETURN \$5 BILLION TO RBI

With \$5 billion forex swap between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and banks set to mature today, a majority of lenders have arranged for dollars to be delivered to the RBI.

In April last year, the RBI conducted a dollar/rupee (USD/INR) sell-buy swap auction for an amount of \$ 5 billion. Under the swap, the central bank sold dollars to banks with an agreement to buy back those dollars at maturity, which is October 23.

“The market is completely covered (arranged dollars to deliver to the RBI). I don’t see any issue,” said a forex market dealer.

The absorption of \$5 billion forex swap by the RBI will release Rs 40,000 crore of rupee liquidity into the banking system.

Higher demand for dollars created some temporary dollar liquidity shortage in the banking system. In order to meet their dollar demand, banks, in the last few days, bought dollars under USD/INR buy-sell swap either from the interbank market or from exporters or other forex market participants to deliver dollars to the RBI. These swaps are of shorter tenure with maturity of one to two days.

Forex dealers said it is the RBI which is supplying dollars to the market through select banks. Though banks are expecting the forex swap to mature today, they are not certain how the RBI is going to take the delivery of dollars.

Some market participants feel that the central bank may stagger the absorption of dollars over a few days so that banks do not have to supply the entire \$5 billion in one go. Spreading of the dollar delivery will not exert pressure on the rupee. This will also mean that the entire Rs 40,000 crore rupee liquidity will not come back to the system in one day.

The RBI has been maintaining that it does not want excessive liquidity in the system as it can pose risks to both price and financial stability. Bankers said that even if the Rs 40,000 of rupee liquidity comes back to the system today, the RBI can use instruments such as variable reverse repo rate auction or OMO-sales (open market operations sales) to manage liquidity.

The RBI had announced the forex swap last year to elongate the maturity profile of forward book and smoothen the receivables relating to forward assets. This also supported the rupee which came under pressure due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The announcement to conduct the said swap came at a time when the Russia-Ukraine caught policymakers and central banks worldwide caught off-guard. In the immediate aftermath of the war, global commodity prices increased led by oil, and global financial markets too saw heightened volatility.

“A flight to safety ensued which put pressure on EM currencies such as India. Hence, while the announcement for the auction was said to be to adjust the maturity profile of RBI’s forward book, it also had an impact on the exchange rate,” said a Bank of Baroda report. With the maturity of the swap approaching this week, it is almost ironical that the world has once again found itself in the midst of another unforeseen crisis in the form of the Israel-Hamas war, it said.



INFORM CUSTOMERS WHEN BANKS ASK FOR THEIR CREDIT SCORE: WHAT RBI HAS TOLD CREDIT BUREAUS

When you ask for a loan, the bank wants to check your credit score, which is based on your total debt and previous record on repayment. Going forward, whenever the bank tries to get this information, you will be informed.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed credit information companies (CICs) to alert customers through SMS or email when their Credit Information Report (CIR) is accessed by banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). Also, credit institutions (banks and NBFCs) will have to send an SMS or email alert to customers when they submit information to CICs on their default or Days Past Due (DPD) on existing credit.

The new rules will come into effect within six months.

What are Credit Information Companies?

CICs maintain and analyse the consumer and business credit information of individuals and companies across the country, as provided to them by banks and NBFCs. Based on this information, a CIC calculates and generates credit scores for individuals and credit ranks for companies as per their creditworthiness and past credit history.

A customer can get a loan at a relatively attractive rate if their credit score is high. If the credit score is low — perhaps due to defaults on earlier loans — they may not get a loan or a credit card. However a customer's credit score is not the only factor that determines whether she will get a loan.

TransUnion CIBIL Ltd, Equifax India, and CRIF High Mark are some prominent CICs in India. Where scores are awarded in the range of 300 and 850, and a score of 700 is generally considered good.

What if a customer wants to access her credit score at any time?

The credit score can be obtained from the CIC, usually against a payment. However, the RBI has addressed this issue directly in its circular of Thursday (October 26).

The RBI has said that CICs should provide easy access to a "Free Full Credit Report (FFCR)", including credit score, once in every calendar year (January-December) to all individuals whose credit history is available with the CIC. The link to the FFCR must be displayed prominently on the CIC's website, so that individuals are able to access their report conveniently, the central bank has said.

And what if a customer feels her data is not correct?

There is a process to apply for the correction of data in a customer's CIR. In its circular issued on Thursday, the RBI said banks and NBFCs should inform customers of the reason for the rejection of their request for data correction, if any, so that such customers are better able to understand the issues in the CIR.



AUTHORITIES MUST ADDRESS APPREHENSIONS AND CONCERNS ABOUT THE SPATE OF GST NOTICES

In recent weeks, the central and state GST authorities have issued demand notices to companies spanning a range of sectors — from consumer durables to smart phones, insurance, online gaming and service providers. As reported in this paper, LIC has received one notice for Rs 290.5 crore in September. HDFC life insurance has received a notice for non-payment of GST to the tune of Rs 942 crore. FMCG major Dabur has received a notice of tax shortfall amounting to Rs 320 crore. Gaming major Delta Corp has received several notices which run into thousands of crores. While it can be nobody's case that tax authorities should not pursue legitimate demands, some of the issues raised over the nature of these notices warrant closer examination.

The notices seem to largely pertain to the initial period after the shift to the GST regime — a time marked by considerable uncertainty and teething problems — and gathered momentum towards the end of the limitation period on September 30. Their scope was expanded to include “underpayment” of tax, “incorrect availment of input tax credit” and “reconciliation differences” between returns filed and financials. The concerns raised revolve around the multiplicity of notices, the absence of a uniform process and lack of coordination between the Centre and state tax authorities. In one particular case, state tax authorities have sought information about GST payments from a firm “based on media reports” of its merger with a company in a different state. Recently, GST notices have also been sent to several multinational companies on the levy of tax on expats and seconded employees working with them, following a court judgment on the issue.

Since its inception, the GST system has been marked by constant tweaking and significant leakages. The tax administration has over the years worked to address the gaps in the system. Between April 2020 and September 2023, more than 6,000 cases of fake input tax credit have been detected. These involved tax evasion of more than Rs 57,000 crore. In the ongoing financial year, so far, 1,040 such cases involving Rs 14,000 crore have been identified. While the tax system must ensure that firms pay their fair share of taxes, and leakages are minimised, it must also work towards simplifying the tax rules, reducing uncertainty and discretion in the system and easing the compliance burden. Not doing so will only lead to more litigation, with the amounts under dispute in the case of direct taxes, both corporate and personal income tax, already in lakhs of crores.

WHO IS NASIRUDDIN ANSARI OF BAAP OF CHART, AND WHY HAS SEBI BARRED HIM FROM THE MARKETS?

Continuing its efforts to rein in so-called ‘finfluencers’ — Internet influencers who provide financial advice and recommendations to ordinary investors — the markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Wednesday (October 25) barred Mohammad Nasiruddin Ansari, who owns a firm called ‘Baap of Chart’, from buying, selling, or dealing in the securities market.

On the pretext of providing educational training related to the securities market, Ansari was allegedly giving stock recommendations through social media platforms to investors, with a promise of guaranteed returns. SEBI also ordered Ansari to pay back Rs 17.2 crore which he had made by allegedly “misleading investors and influencing them to deal in securities”.



Who is Mohammad Nasiruddin Ansari?

Ansari is the sole proprietor of the firm Baap of Chart (BoC). He promoted himself as a stock market expert on various social media platforms, and invited investors/ clients to enrol for various “educational courses” offered by him. He allegedly promised gullible investors near-certain returns or profits if they followed his recommendation/ advice to invest in the securities market.

What is the lesson for investors?

Investors should be careful while taking advice from investment advisors online. They should only deal with advisors who have obtained a certificate of registration from SEBI. In order to safeguard investors’ interests, SEBI has laid down specific conditions for registration of investment advisors, their educational qualifications and code of conduct. Currently, there are 1,313 SEBI-registered investment advisers.

HOW BIG IS THE GENDER GAP IN EARNINGS?

The story so far:

The Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) have been monitoring the gender earnings gap across various forms of employment from April-June 2019 to 2023. This latest round has introduced a crucial focus on weekly hours worked, revealing that the inequality in total earnings might not capture the full picture. Women, on average, work fewer hours than men, attributed to a combination of social pressures and personal choices, highlighting the complex interplay between societal norms and individual decisions in shaping gender disparities in the workforce.

How does the gender earnings gap differ?

The Nobel prize-winning work of Claudia Goldin focused on the technological, social and institutional factors determining inequalities between men and women in America. Such work has resonance for India as well, where there exists a vast literature by Indian scholars examining the many disparities in work participation and wages affecting working women.

Earnings for all types of workers are converted to weekly figures.

Men earn more than women across all forms of work, the gap greatest for the self-employed. In 2023, male self-employed workers earned 2.8 times that of women. In contrast, male regular wage workers earned 24% more than women and male casual workers earned 48% more. The gender gap in earnings is still a persistent phenomenon.

However, there are differences in trends. The gender gap has increased for self-employed workers, while falling for regular wage workers. Male regular wage workers earned 34% more than women from 2019 to 2022, with the gap falling to 24% in 2023.

Are there any notable differences in the average weekly work hours?

These gaps do not fully indicate inequalities in earnings per work effort, for women work lesser hours per men during the week across all forms of work.

In 2023, the gap in work hours was largest for self-employed workers, where men worked 50% more hours than women, and lowest for regular wage workers (19%). Though the gap was the



smallest, men and women in regular wage workers worked the longest hours, at 51 and 43 hours per week respectively. While the ratio is roughly constant for regular wage workers, there is a huge increase for self-employed workers.

The rise in the gender gap in hours worked alongside rising self-employment for women requires explanation. Labour force participation rates (LFPRs) for rural women have increased, with a significant rise in the proportion of self-employed women. Simultaneously, the average hours worked per week for rural self-employed women has fallen from 37.1 in 2019 to 30.1 in 2023. This indicates that much of the increased employment for rural self-employed women has been part-time in nature, in contrast to men's full-time work. Meanwhile the ratio of hours worked for regular wage workers stayed roughly constant.

What is the percentage decrease in the gap in hourly earnings?

When considering hourly earnings, the gap reduces significantly for regular wage workers. In 2023, men in this form of employment earn 24% more than women over the week, but also work 19% longer. The gap in hourly earnings, therefore, is only around 4%, falling from 11% in 2019.

On an average, women in regular work earn lesser per week, but roughly the same when one considers earnings per hour. Of course, averages hide significant disparities, and greater research is required to see whether the gap in hourly earnings are the same for all workers, across all occupations and industries.

Inequality in hourly earnings is higher in other forms of work, though not as high as when considering total earnings. In 2023, male casual workers earned 23% per hour more than women, a reduction from 33% in 2019. The gap has increased slightly for the self-employed, from 84% in 2019 to 87% in 2023.

This allows us greater insight into the forces driving changes in inequality over this period. Consider regular wage workers. Falling inequality in weekly earnings was largely driven by rising hourly earnings for women, with the ratio of hours of work remaining roughly constant.

In contrast, rising inequality amongst the self-employed was driven by changes in hours worked. The influx of women into part-time work reduced their average hours of work. With men working relatively longer hours, and with the ratio of hourly earnings remaining constant, inequality in total earnings increased.

What influences hours of work?

Lower inequality in hourly earnings for regular wage workers does not imply that inequality is the outcome of women choosing to work lesser hours, for the option of greater working hours may not be available. Working hours are not always the outcome of a pure and unconstrained choice, and social norms that require women to attend to domestic and child-rearing duties might leave them little choice but to seek out jobs with fewer hours.

It is important not just to understand the factors driving differences in remuneration, but also those that determine differences in total hours of work. Policy must look to removing barriers that limit the hours of work available to women. This can take the form of interventions within the workspace – for instance, mandating creches and more generous maternity leaves – to more comprehensive transformations in social norms that do not place the entire burden of child care and domestic work on women.



EXPRESS INVESTIGATION: ON AVERAGE, AN ADANI PORT EVERY 500 KM OF COASTLINE; THESE HANDLE 24% OF ALL CARGO, GOVT SHARE DIPS

From just one big port, Mundra, in 2001, the Adani Group today has grown to be the largest private operator with as many as 14 ports and terminals handling a quarter of all cargo passing through the country's ports.

This phenomenal expansion, much of it through acquisitions — six in the last 10 years — is becoming a cause of concern in sections of the government with at least three top officials, including a former competition regulator, in conversations with The Indian Express, flagging risks of market concentration in such a key infrastructure sector.

Indeed, along India's 5,422-km coastline, Adani has a presence every 500 km on an average, from just a blip on the country's far western end 10 years ago.

Consider these:

In 10 years, the total cargo handled by Adani ports jumped nearly four-fold to 337 million tonnes in FY23; its volumes grew at a compounded annual growth rate of 14 per cent against the industry's 4 per cent. If Adani's share is removed, the latter figure falls to barely 2.7 per cent.

The group's market share in total cargo handled has nearly tripled from around 9 per cent in 2013 to about 24 per cent in 2023; that of Central govt-controlled ports dropped to around 54.5 per cent from 58.5 per cent in 2013.

Amongst ports that are not under the Central government, Adani's market share has crossed the 50 per cent mark.

All this gives Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ), the port operator and logistics company, a coastal network that rivals that of the Central government-controlled 12 ports.

In fact, part of the rise in Adani Group's market share in the ports sector — from 9 per cent to 24 per cent in 10 years — has come at the cost of the Central government-controlled ports (called 'major ports' in industry parlance) whose cargo share has fallen.

"This is a concern," a top economic ministry official told The Indian Express.

adani port rise in 10 years In 10 years, the total cargo handled by Adani ports jumped nearly four-fold to 337 million tonnes in FY23.

Adani's total cargo volumes have grown at a compounded annual growth rate of 14 per cent between FY13 and FY23. In FY23, it was 337 million tonnes. In contrast, the cargo volumes of all other ports put together grew at a CAGR of just 2.7 per cent during the period from 842.66 million tonnes in FY13 to 1,096.39 million tonnes in FY23.

What has also not gone unnoticed among a section of government officials and regulators is that this growth has been through the inorganic route.

Cargo handling data analysed by The Indian Express shows that the ports acquired over the last decade by the Adani Group account for more than a third of the total cargo volumes (123.7 million tonnes of 337 million tonnes, or 37 per cent) handled by the company.



“Such a growth model compounds the concerns about the growing concentration risk,” the same official said.

Mails to Adani Group spokesperson for comments on its expanding footprint and attendant concentration risks did not elicit a response.

On key indicators of port efficiency like turnaround time — the duration between entry and exit of a cargo ship — Adani’s ports outperform the government’s. In August, the company said that it had an average turnaround time for ships of just around 0.7 days, while the central government-controlled ports had an average turnaround time of around two days.

However, the increasing presence of one player across the coastline — west to east — does potentially mean a gradual erosion of bargaining power of shipping companies, especially in specific geographies.

A senior official with the shipping ministry said that Adani ports may be well-managed and profitable businesses but there were substantive risks of high market concentration — low competition, high entry barriers for newer and smaller players, high dependencies on dominant players, and higher chances of abuse of dominant position.

Another senior official from an economic ministry, who also did not wish to be named, said that what has deepened anxiety over this market concentration in a strategic sector like shipping, is the backdrop of allegations of accounting fraud and stock manipulation against the Adani Group first by US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research and, more recently, in reports based on documents obtained by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and shared with the Guardian and the Financial Times.

The Adani group has consistently denied these allegations and called them motivated.

The rise and rise

A decade ago, in FY13, Adani Group’s ports business had cargo volumes of around 91 million tonnes, accounting for just 10 per cent of the cumulative cargo volumes handled by all ports, and over 23 per cent of volumes handled by all minor ports (a port is a minor port if it is not government controlled; the nomenclature has nothing to do with the size of the port or cargo volumes handled). So, Adani-owned Mundra Port is also a minor port even though it handled the most cargo — 155 million tonnes in FY23, more than any of the 12 Central government-owned ports.

Amongst ports which are not under the control of the Central government, the Adani Group has a significantly higher footprint. In FY23, the minor ports — those not owned by the Central government — handled close to 650 million tonnes in cargo, while APSEZ, whose cargoes primarily came from its eight operational minor ports in India, handled around 337 million tonnes in volume.

Besides ports, APSEZ operates terminals at three major ports as well. One port, Vizhinjam in Kerala, is under construction, and so is a terminal at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (Haldia). The company also completed the acquisition of Karaikal Port in Puducherry in April, but since it was not part of the Adani Group in FY23, its volumes are not included in Adani’s total market share.



Over these 10 years, APSEZ's volumes registered higher growth than what was seen in volumes handled by major ports and minor ports in most years. Even in FY21, when India's overall port volumes, and volumes at major and minor ports contracted by over 4 per cent year-on-year due to the pandemic, APSEZ's volumes were up nearly 11 per cent over the previous year.

Fuelling the ASPEZ expansion was a series of acquisitions: Dhamra in Odisha; Kattupalli in Tamil Nadu; Krishnapatnam and Gangavaram in Andhra Pradesh; and Dighi in Maharashtra. In FY23, APSEZ's non-Mundra volumes accounted for 54 per cent of its overall port cargo, having grown at a CAGR of around 36 per cent since FY13.

The growing concern

According to a former chairperson of Competition Commission of India (CCI), while ports may be considered natural monopolies at a broad level, there are issues with this. "Its (APSEZ's) share has been continuously growing in a creeping fashion. It is definitely a concern if there is a creeping acquisition of capacity by one player while the others fall or languish. It may not be too glaring now but down the line, say in five to 10 years, it could be a problem. The government and the CCI should keep an eye," the former CCI head said on the condition of anonymity.

Another former CCI chairperson said for the regulator, the growth of a company in sectors that are "natural monopolies" such as ports and airports is not that much of a concern; their clear mandate is to address and prevent "abuse of monopoly". And until the time there is evidence of that, there is no case for intervention.

Incidentally, the Adani group's footprint has expanded rapidly in a few other sectors as well. It is now the largest private sector airport operator in India with eight airports under its belt. The group is also the largest cement manufacturer and private sector thermal power producer in the country.

As minor ports are under the state governments and state maritime boards, their tariffs were not governed by the Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP), allowing APSEZ to charge higher tariffs for providing better infrastructure, efficient operations, and most importantly, turnaround times significantly lower than the major ports.

Typically, port tariffs usually account for a small share of overall shipping costs, while ship hiring charges are significantly higher. This means that customers usually tend to use ports with lower turnaround times, even if it means paying higher tariffs.

E-mails sent to the CCI requesting the regulator's views on the matter did not elicit any response.

WHY WALL STREET FIRMS USING MESSAGING APPS ARE COMING UNDER REGULATORY PROBE

The story so far:

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is investigating Wall Street investment company employees' chat messages to confirm how widely they used personal messaging apps such as Meta's WhatsApp, privacy-focused Signal, or Apple's iMessage to discuss business. The regulator collected thousands of such messages from employees working at more than 10 investment companies, according to a Reuters report.



Why is the SEC collecting Wall Street firms' WhatsApp messages?

Like many regulators, the SEC expects U.S.-based finance companies to keep and preserve their employees' electronic communication. Legacy communication platform providers like Microsoft and Google offer enterprise products tailored to meet these very needs. But when employees from different parts of the company's hierarchy use personal or "off-channel" methods of communicating with each other or discuss work through these platforms, the integrity of the company's communication records is impacted, according to the SEC.

During the pandemic years, as employees worldwide adapted to work-from-home or hybrid work patterns, a number of them began using personal messaging apps and services for work-related reasons. While this may seem innocuous, employees in large investment companies — such as Wall Street firms — could end up losing or deleting vital business information that the SEC and other legal authorities might demand as evidence in potential legal cases or investigations in the future. "To date, the Commission has brought 30 enforcement actions and ordered over \$1.5 billion in penalties to drive this foundational message home," said Gurbir S. Grewal, Director of the SEC's Division of Enforcement, in an August 8 notice, urging firms to "self-report, cooperate and remediate."

In the latest case reported by Reuters, some of the targeted companies include Carlyle, Apollo, KKR, TPG, and Blackstone. In a sign that the SEC is hardening its stance, the regulator may review the thousands of collected employee messages rather than hitting the company with a fine and entrusting them to manage their employees' workplace communication hygiene through internal reviews or an independent consultant. The SEC has not commented on its actions yet or confirmed it charged more companies over record keeping failures.

Has the SEC fined companies over this issue before?

Since around 2021, the SEC has taken action against companies over their employees using personal messaging apps to discuss work, or them exchanging work messages through apps on personal devices.

On August 8 this year, the SEC charged 11 Wall Street firms for "widespread and longstanding failures by the firms and their employees to maintain and preserve electronic communications." The firms agreed to pay combined penalties of \$289 million and improve their communication processes to comply with the SEC's record keeping requirements. The SEC said that from 2019, the firms' employees used apps such as iMessage, WhatsApp, and Signal to discuss their employer's business.

"The firms did not maintain or preserve the substantial majority of these off-channel communications, in violation of the federal securities laws. By failing to maintain and preserve required records, certain of the firms [sic] likely deprived the Commission of these off-channel communications in various SEC investigations. The failures involved employees at multiple levels of authority, including supervisors and senior executives," said the regulator on its website.

On September 29, the SEC charged 10 firms that included broker-dealers and investment advisers for "widespread and longstanding failures to maintain and preserve electronic communications." These companies also agreed to pay combined penalties of \$79 million and improve their communication processes.



Some companies that were charged for record keeping failures through this year include Wells Fargo Securities, LLC., HSBC Securities (USA) Inc., Barclays Capital Inc., Goldman Sachs & Co. LLC., Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc., and Perella Weinberg Partners LP.

Could video meetings be next?

Senior executives at major finance companies are also concerned that the SEC will next demand records of work-related video meetings, which are usually treated quite casually by companies, reported Reuters on October 18.

Such meetings shot up in frequency as the COVID-19 virus raged through the world, with many interactions taking place on Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

Some companies have started recording and preserving these sessions for compliance purposes, as per the Reuters report.

Meanwhile, HSBC, which has been charged by the SEC in the past, is not letting certain employees send texts using their work phone, Bloomberg reported this week.

Why do end-to-end encrypted messages and apps worry regulators?

Record keeping requirements come under multiple parts of U.S. law. For example, the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 have record keeping provisions which the SEC needs to uphold. However, when dealing with work-related messages sent through apps like WhatsApp and Signal, which have end-to-end encryption, legal bodies may find it difficult to access these messages quickly, or even know that they exist. This will make it far more difficult for them to build airtight cases or submit evidence, in the event of a potential legal incident.

Additionally, seizing personal devices/apps to look at work-related messages can lead to the regulator being accused of overstepping limits or even violating people's privacy rights. These are some of the reasons why the SEC wants high-level finance company employees to keep work talk restricted to workplace apps and devices.

SALES OF AUTOMATIC CARS ZOOMING: IS THE OLD STICK SHIFT RUNNING OUT OF ROAD?

The country's biggest carmaker, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, said last week that it had logged sales of a million automatic vehicles. Maruti also said it had sold close to 1 lakh automatic cars in the current financial year.

The ease of driving an automatic in stop-start traffic in congested Indian cities and a narrowing of the mileage gap between manuals and automatics are among the reasons for the increasing adoption of non-manual gearboxes.

But the key factor is technological innovations and improvements that have allowed manufacturers to customise an array of automatic technologies across multiple price points. A decade ago, automatics were dependent largely on a technology called 'torque converter' — and were available only in top-end trims which cost a lot more than manual variants, and had poor mileage. Not any more.



Which cars, sold where

According to data from London-based JATO Dynamics, a global supplier of automotive business intelligence, automatic variants as a proportion of total passenger vehicle sales have risen from around 15% in 2018 to more than 28% now.

Types of automatics

In manual transmission vehicles, the driver presses the clutch and slots the stick through a set of gears; in automatics, the engaging of the clutch and upshifting/ downshifting of gears happens on its own, depending on the car's speed and rev range.

Broadly speaking, automatic transmissions available in India can be put under five broad heads: AMTs and iMTs, CVTs, DCTs, and torque converters. There is also the e-CVT option that is now increasingly being deployed in hybrids.

AMT: Automated Manual Transmission is the most common, especially at the lower end of the price bracket. It is similar in working to manual transmission, but sensors and actuators do the work of the clutch and shifting of gears. The actuator is operated by an Electronic Controller Unit; the system can assess dynamic driving conditions and adjust gear shifts to deliver optimal driving performance.

Given that the transmission is essentially a manual with add-ons, an AMT allows manufacturers to price models at a smaller premium. The AMT also does not compromise on mileage.

Downside: the shifts are less smooth compared to other automatics, even though AMTs have got better over the years.

Cars: Maruti Suzuki offers AMTs in the Celerio, S-Presso, Wagon-R, and Ignis. Renault uses AMT in the Kwid and Triber. Tata Motors offers AMTs in its Tiago hatchback; Hyundai offers this in i10 and the new Exter.

iMT: Intelligent Manual Transmission is a clutchless manual in which the driver has to still manually operate the gear lever to upshift or downshift. The gear lever in an iMT is mated to an intention sensor, an actuator, and an electronic control unit. As the driver slots the gear out of the gate, the sensor picks up the action and the actuator kicks in.

In city traffic, the iMT is far more convenient than a manual variant, fuel efficiency is almost as good, and buyers don't pay a huge premium.

Cars: Hyundai's i20 and Venue, and the Kia Sonet have iMT transmission in their turbo-petrol variants.

TORQUE CONVERTER: The most common automatic transmission globally offers reasonably good performance and fuel efficiency, is reliable, and not very expensive to build. It has three main components: torque converter unit, planetary gear arrangement, and hydraulic controls. The torque converter functions as the hydraulic coupling that transfers power from the engine to the transmission, and the planetary gear system helps to modulate speeds to meet different driving requirements. For seamless shifts, the gear ratios have a dedicated wet clutch system operated by the hydraulic controls.

Cars: Maruti Suzuki offers this in the Grand Vitara, XL6, Fronx, Jimny, and Baleno.



CVT: This is essentially a single-speed auto gearbox with two cone shaped pulleys connected by a drive belt. One pulley is connected to the engine, the other to the wheel shaft. They move in tandem with engine revs, with the two cones moving independent of each other, and thereby imparting the mechanism infinite gear ratios (depending on the length of the drive belt).

A CVT is extremely fuel-efficient and smooth compared to conventional automatics, but involves the so-called 'rubber band effect' — a lag between when throttle input is received and when it kicks in. As a result, in normal driving conditions, especially when the driver accelerates hard, there is a perceptible disconnect between the soaring engine rev and the actual rate of acceleration.

Cars: Toyota, Honda, and Nissan use CVTs in the City and new Elevate SUV, Magnite, and the non-hybrid Innova Hycross.

DCT: There are two clutch packs controlled by a sophisticated network of electronics and hydraulics. The clutches operate independently — one controls the odd-numbered gears, the other the even gears. When the first gear is engaged, the 'odd' clutch is in use, but the 'even' clutch has already pre-selected the second gear and is ready for the upshift, thus allowing quick shifts without interrupting the flow of motive power to the transmission.

The downside: the mechanism is complex, and could involve major repair costs if things were to go wrong.

Cars: Hyundai and Kia offer DCT gearboxes in Creta and Seltos, as do Volkswagen and Skoda in the Virtus and Slavia sedans.

e-CVT: The gearbox is distinct from the CVT automatic, as there's no belt here. Instead, there are two electric motor-generators connected to a planetary gearbox, with the engine at one end and the driveshaft at the other. One of the motor-generators is deployed to start the engine, but can act as a generator to charge the hybrid battery at other times. The second motor-generator can deploy as a drive motor, on its own or with the engine, and also double up as a generator to perform a regenerative braking role when the vehicle is slowing down.

Cars: The mechanism enables electric-only drive by decoupling the engine (without the need for a clutch), and is deployed by Toyota in its hybrid Urban Cruiser Hyryder and Innova Hycross.



LIFE & SCIENCE

A BOT TO ATTEND ALL YOUR MEETINGS? YES, PLEASE

There are many reasons, experts say, to worry about artificial intelligence (AI): It can take over jobs and steal people's likenesses and voices to create potentially misleading video and sound clips. A recent report by a US think tank has found that AI can even be used to plan bioweapon attacks, and three European bodies have put out a statement asking the EU to regulate the technology before it is used to undermine democracy. For the ordinary office worker, however, plagued by unrealistic deadlines and an anxiety-inducing stack of unread emails, all of the above doomsday scenarios may be cancelled out by the news that AI can attend virtual meetings on their behalf.

In the nine-to-five, and more, office grind, few things are as unpopular as the mandatory meeting where much is said and little is achieved. Which is why the announcement by companies like Google and Microsoft, that their new AI assistants can take the place of humans in meetings, comes as a promise — not just for reluctant participants, but also for the organisers of these meetings. Unlike a human worker, AI will turn up on time, not derail discussions with segues and monologues; it will keep diligent notes and provide a summary at the end. AI can also be used to enforce meeting etiquette — as some companies are reportedly now doing in the US, “meeting bots” can be programmed to point out when some participants are dominating discussions or interrupting others.

Despite the rapid pace of development, though, humans will have to continue braving ennui and burnt coffee at physical meetings for a while yet. If there is any truth to what the Cassandras of technology have been predicting, the day is not far when AI will take over the planet. Before that, could it please take over all the meetings?

A RARE FORM OF LIGHTNING

Q: What is ball lightning?

A: One of the most rare and mysterious forms of lightning is ball lightning. It is a ball of luminosity that usually occurs near the impact point of a flash and moves horizontally at a speed of a few centimetres per second.

It can penetrate closed windows, is usually accompanied by a hissing sound, and has a lifetime of several seconds. The colour is quite variable and the ball often ends with an explosion. However, it is not usually destructive.

Also called globe lightning, it occurs at times of intense electrical activity in the atmosphere. These balls are said to be plasmas. Plasma is a completely ionised state of matter, at high temperature, in which positive and negative ions freely move about.

However, no theory has so far satisfactorily explained the behaviour of a ball as scientists have not been able to reproduce it in the laboratory.

A ball of lightning is a comparatively rare sight. So next time you see it, take a picture.



FLUORESCENCE: MAKING ANIMALS GLOW

WHAT IS IT?

Matter and radiation interact in a variety of ways. The sky is blue because air molecules scatter light, and they scatter light of shorter wavelengths more strongly. Since blue light has the shortest wavelength (in the visible spectrum), it is scattered the most and the sky appears blue. This is called Rayleigh scattering. But clouds are white because of Mie scattering, which is due to light scattered by larger particles like water droplets.

Another form of interaction is fluorescence – when an object absorbs some light of higher energy (like blue colour) and releases it at lower energy (like red colour). It usually happens when an electron absorbs a photon, or a particle of light, jumps to a higher energy level, before releasing that energy and jumping back down. In this process, the electron's spin must not change. If its spin changes, the process is called phosphorescence.

Fluorescence has many applications. The fluorescent lamp uses an electric discharge to bombard a material with UV light. The material absorbs it and re-emits it as visible light. More curiously, scientists have been finding that the bodies of many mammals also fluoresce. A recent study reported that the bodies of animals belonging to all the known mammalian orders fluoresced in some way. Some 107 species also had fur that fluoresced. The reason for this ability remains a mystery.

BATS CAN HELP US DEVISE BETTER GADGETS FOR PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Thanks to Nipah and Covid-19 (and rabies), which they have been accused of spreading, bats are not currently a favourite among most people. What we tend to overlook is their invaluable pollination and pest control services, the fact that they're the only mammals known to fly properly — and in hunting prey in pitch darkness, home in on their targets with more precision than a heat-seeking laser-guided missile.

Even the brains of the biggest bats (the fruit bats) cannot be very large, but their computing power is truly stupendous. We all know that most bats use echo-location to target their prey; emitting high-pitched, ultrasonic squeaks and waiting for their echoes in order to get a fix on their target (which is how we got our ideas for radar). But it's not all that simple and there are any number of hurdles the bat has to overcome to ensure it actually hits a target that is usually moving extremely fast indeed and (like a moth for example) all over the place.

First of all, its calls must be strong enough to hit the target and actually form an echo, which returns to base. But high-frequency sounds die out quickly and only work when the bat is within 10-12 m of its target — and this is for the larger bats (it's much less for the little ones). The calls spread out like the beam of a flashlight and some species emit two such beams — one straight ahead, scanning for targets and the other sweeping low (so it can get an idea of its altitude). But yes, the calls are loud — 138 decibels in the case of the big brown bat, as loud as a jet engine.

This can be deafening — for the bat itself — so it shuts its middle ear while emitting the call and opens it in time to catch the returning echo. Even as it gets closer to its target, it ensures that the returning echo remains at the same volume and doesn't get intolerably loud.

The calls are emitted in a stream of pulses, like stroboscopic lights, so the bat can keep track of its fast-moving and fleeing prey. The frequency of the pulses may be so high that (like the frames in



a film) they meld into a continuous stream. But to prevent outgoing and incoming calls from bungling into each other and causing confusion, the bat has to match every outgoing call with its incoming echo and it does this by emitting extremely short calls. And also by ensuring that an outgoing call is only emitted once it has received the echo of the previous call, so there is no overlapping.

The time it takes for an echo to return tells the bat how far the prey is: The quicker the returning echo, the closer the prey. But the bat must also know what the prey is likely to be. Its ears and brain are so finely tuned that they can figure this out by the (infinitesimal) difference in the time it takes the returning echoes bouncing off various parts of say a moth, thus painting a kind of 'sound picture' of the insect. A pulse hitting a wing may take a tiny fraction of a second less or more to return to the bat than one, say, bouncing off its body. To further hone the picture, pulses are emitted at different frequencies — the low-frequency ones bounce off the larger parts of the prey, while the higher-frequency ones fill in the details of the sound picture. So now it knows how far away its prey is and also what it looks like and how and in which direction it is moving.

All this is happening while both the bat and its prospective prey are flying at top speed and you can imagine the rate at which the bat has to update its information and react accordingly. But first, it has to find its target and it does this by emitting long loud pulses in a narrow-frequency band. If it receives an encouraging echo it switches to a broader frequency so that it can gauge the distance and discern the form of its victim, calling more frequently to receive updates on its position.

A small target against a large background can also cause problems because the echoes from the background are louder and snuff out those from the target. The common big-eared bat, from Canada, the US and Mexico, has cracked this problem ingeniously: it positions itself in front of its target and hovers up and down before it, gathering echoes and information from various angles — and kind of etching out its victim in bas relief as it were, from the background.

Bats often fly together in groups and this can cause confusion if they are all sending out echolocation beeps at the same time (like everyone blowing their horns). So, some, like the big brown bats, direct their calls away from one another or simply keep quiet when other bats call. But this can only work when there are a few bats flying around — not when there are millions streaming out of a cave. Scientists are still trying to figure out how echolocation works in such situations. Perhaps bats don't use it now and rely more on other senses and memories.

If bats can do it so can we: many blind people are learning to echo-locate much the way bats do, emitting clicks and picking up the echoes as they make their way unerringly through streets and marketplaces and even ride bicycles. Of course, bats are way ahead in the game, but then they had a head start.

HOW BAT GENOMES PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO IMMUNITY AND CANCER

Bats are extraordinary organisms in many ways. They are the only mammals on the earth that can maintain sustained flight. They also have relatively long life-spans and are relatively more protected from a variety of diseases, including cancer. They also have a unique ability in echolocation, whereby they use sound to navigate and locate objects, freeing them from being constrained by the availability of light like humans are.

By population, bats make up 20% of all mammals. There are more than 1,400 species of bats today around the world; more than 60 are endangered and 170-odd are classified as vulnerable. The



bumblebee bat weighs only 2 grams whereas the flying foxes, which have a wingspan of 1.5 metres, weigh up to 1.6 kg.

In all, bats play crucial roles in maintaining the ecological balance, and are essential for pollination, insect control, etc.

However, bats have grabbed the headlines of late for the wrong reasons. Their notoriety stems from the fact that many deadly viruses use bats as a reservoir host, including coronaviruses, Nipah, Ebola, Marburg virus, and Hendra virus, among others. The COVID-19 pandemic also cast a bright spotlight on the habits of bats.

Bats do host a wide variety of pathogens, including ones deadly to other mammals, but they themselves don't get infected. Scientists have been curious about the source of this protection.

The bat genomes

Scientists' first object of study is the bat genome. Over the years, researchers have unearthed significant insights by sequencing the genomes of many bat species. Bats are also unique because they have a relatively small genome, around 2 billion bases.

One watershed moment came in 2013. In a paper published in the journal *Science*, scientists compared the genomes of a fruit-eating and an insect-eating species and found that genes involved in metabolism and immune response had been positively selected. That is, these bats had evolved by improving these two biological domains.

In the following decade, scientists sequenced a large number of bat genomes. The ambitious Bat1K global genome consortium – to sequence all the 1,400 or so species' genomes – is also currently underway.

A number of studies have also shed insights into the peculiar biological features of bats. For example, by analysing bat genomes, scientists have found the natural selection of a protein called prestin, which is involved in echolocation (dolphins have the same protein).

Immune insights

Of course, immunity-related genes have been one of the more well-studied gene classes in bats. The fraction of these genes is also unique in bats: some 2.7-3.5% of the bat genome versus roughly 7% of the human genome. Emerging evidence also suggests that a set of immune-related genes have been undergoing positive selection in bats, adapting them to control the spread of viruses while mitigating the antiviral inflammatory response. As a result, the bats are shielded from the effects of the clinical response of their bodies to these viruses.

The heightened pro-inflammatory activity is what makes these viruses deadly in humans.

The researchers also reported that a number of genes involved in suppressing tumours and in repairing DNA contained signs of positive selection. According to them, this could contribute to the bats' longer life span and a significantly lower risk of developing cancer.

With rapid deforestation, ecological degradation, and more and more unfavourable human-animal interactions, we should expect significantly enhanced outbreaks of zoonotic diseases in future. The Nipah outbreaks in Kerala over the last few years is a good example, as are outbreaks of Marburg disease and the Ebola virus in some African countries. In this milieu, genome-



sequencing – especially its more advanced avatars – could help us cope without violating the balances of nature.

POSSIBLE PATHWAY FOR LONG COVID PATHOGENESIS UNCOVERED

Researchers have finally uncovered a multiorgan pathway with important implications for the pathogenesis of Long COVID. Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain the causes of Long COVID. These include the presence of a viral reservoir long after initial infection; chronic inflammation, development of antibodies that mistakenly target and damage a person's own tissues or organs; platelet dysfunction and increased tendency to form blood clots inside blood vessels; and finally autonomic nervous system dysfunction in which the nervous system cannot control processes like heart rate or blood pressure. In addition, people suffering from Long COVID also exhibit reduced levels of peripheral serotonin, which prevents the activity of the vagus nerve system, which transmits signals between the body and the brain, thus impairing hippocampal responses and memory.

A study published recently in the journal Cell, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, who led the study, have found reduced levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter, being associated with Long COVID. Memory problems, brain fog, and the inability to focus on tasks that people with Long COVID seem to suffer from might be due to reduced serotonin, the authors say. They followed a cohort of more than 1,500 individuals with Long COVID and characterised their spectrum of symptoms.

THE GINO DATA MANIPULATION ALLEGATIONS IN BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

Allegations of fraud hit the behavioural sciences recently when a team of independent investigators published a series of articles detailing apparent data manipulation in more than four prominent papers in the field. Ironically, the papers described studies of morality and honesty, and so far, the accusations have landed at the feet of one author common to all these papers, Harvard University professor Francesca Gino.

Since the allegations were levelled, the papers have been retracted, but not without disagreement and controversy. While the university floated its own investigation into the claims before it placed Dr. Gino on administrative leave, she filed cases against the university and the authors of the original articles – researchers Leif Nelson, Joe Simmons, and Uri Simonsohn. Since then, with help from its peers, the trio has crowd-funded money to pay for its legal defence.

The rise of this scandal has spawned many questions – from the simpler one of Dr. Gino's guilt to the more involved one of where it will leave the field of behavioural sciences itself. But underlying them all is an older, more familiar one: why does misconduct happen?

What are the effects of misconduct?

Outright fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, plus some of their more benign variations constitute a tale almost as old as scientific inquiry itself. Beginning with the Piltdown Man in 1912 – a fraudulent attempt to fill in the missing link between primate and man – to more recent cases like that of Diederik Stapel, scientific misconduct has always been and continues to be around, to different degrees in different fields.

Even if one instance of misconduct is small in scope, it can have dire consequences for scientists and for the field – especially if those committing it are the field's leaders. One way to identify

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



leaders is by the extent to which their work has laid the foundation for that of others; this is considerable in Dr. Gino's case.

Many other papers and findings free of misconduct that rely on the original but faulty work will also be brought into question, risking years of work.

Why does misconduct happen?

There is some consensus that the leading contributors to misconduct today are the existing incentive structures for researchers and shortcomings in peer-reviews and replication studies.

Researchers have many incentives – including from grant-providers, editors, and academic institutions – to pursue more groundbreaking findings and results that support alternative hypotheses. Flashier results can elevate the researchers who obtain them to higher standing, make them and their employers more famous, and allow their funders to claim sufficient bang for the buck. But on the flip side, the size of the incentives may have encouraged many researchers to do work that is sloppy at best and outright manufactured at worst.

Some experts have backed the idea that incentive structures, manifesting as pressure to publish, affect researcher's motivations. They also blame the low risk of detection by reviewers and research supervisors' mentoring styles as probable motivators of misconduct. Some others have blamed cultural norms around criticism and the absence, or incompleteness, of policies at the national or at the institutional levels to penalise misconduct.

Dealing with misconduct?

One novel response to the challenges of dealing with misconduct is the Open Science Framework (OSF) to ensure scientific integrity. It promotes practices such as pre-registration (i.e. fixing a study's hypotheses, methods, and analyses before it is conducted and agreeing to share the results, whatever they are) and making research data more accessible.

As such, OSF has tried to reduce the amount of misconduct by putting both researchers' original intentions and the eventual data up for scrutiny. The team behind OSF has also launched the more ambitious 'Systematizing Confidence in Open Research and Evidence' (SCORE) project, which tries to make research more credible by developing automated tools to generate "rapid, scalable, and accurate confidence scores for research claims".

This said, OSF still requires institutions and/or researchers to buy into abiding by it to be able to effectively eliminate misconduct. SCORE can work around this barrier but has its own drawbacks, such as a risk of uncritical use en masse to assess the 'credibility' of scientists – something that those developing SCORE have said isn't its use case.

In addition, while there are methods at both small and large scales to handle fraud, they can be inconsistent across institutions. The result is for researchers who are willing to cooperate to still face significant 'unofficial' forms of punishment – or, as with the three researchers who reported concerns with the papers co-authored by Dr. Gino, for independent investigators to be at risk of facing expensive litigation.



Systematic causes of misconduct?

Less-novel ways to combat the incidence of misconduct include adequate funding and less pressure on researchers, support for replication studies (i.e. studies that check the results of other studies), and 'detectives' incentivised to check for fraud.

For example, setting aside a part of a grant sanctioned for a study for quality-control activities would go a long way to counter misconduct. Investigators could use these resources to make probes more thorough and also faster, which could help increase younger scientists' confidence in the system. Similarly, providing financial aid for replication studies – such as in the form of cash rewards – could also help.

The ability of science to keep out misconduct and police itself partly comes down to the choices individual researchers make. Whether it's the temptation to be a bit less rigorous when double-checking a result or the values they impart to one's mentees, the willingness to stick to scientific norms regardless of the impact it has on one's prospects ultimately decides how far misconduct spreads.

What is the role of publishing?

This said, beyond research facilities and academia, the structure of scientific publishing is also implicated in the persistence of research misconduct. In particular, many journals – like grantors – prefer to publish sensational results and have been less than forthcoming to investigate or rectify signs of misconduct in published papers.

Recently, for example, Nature retracted a paper it had published last year after independent researchers reported that its data didn't add up. But the journal hasn't explained how it cleared the paper for publication in the first place.

What can, and must, scientists do?

Some scientists are doing the right thing. In the absence of similar institutional efforts, many of Dr. Gino's co-authors have decided to examine work on which Dr. Gino had collaborated and provided the data, in order to separate 'good' papers from 'bad' instead of allowing all of them to be tarred with the same brush.

This said, scientists are aware of a much-needed rethink, especially by those who have power, regarding the methods and norms around science. The popular imagination of science is that it will always be rigorous and self-correcting, but this is naïve and unrealistic.

The contemporary scientific process needs to be enhanced with technology and incentives to make inquiries about scientific inquiry itself – and they should become standard practice, rather than requiring 'special' circumstances to kick in.

UNMASKING THE INDIAN OSTEOPOROSIS CARE CRISIS

The unpleasant reality is that only a small percentage of people in India receive care for their osteoporosis - a condition characterised by weakening of bones.

We have all seen people begin to stoop as they grow older. That is because of osteoporosis. The weakening of the bone not only causes long-term pain but also changes in posture and increases chances of fractures and nerve injury if the bone affected is the spine. All of these problems



negatively impact the quality of life and increase disability and financial burden on the family, and yet osteoporosis is not receiving the attention it deserves in medical practice.

Though there are no large-scale studies on osteoporosis in India, projected data shows that at least 46 million women in India currently live with post-menopausal osteoporosis, which is only one type of osteoporosis. If you include women who had surgeries to remove their uterus, people who used steroid medication for a long time and, men who developed osteoporosis because of old age, the number may be over double. A 2019 study also revealed that India was the highest contributor to osteoporosis fracture-related deaths/disabilities worldwide.

“Considering that Indian women have many micronutrient deficiencies and do not set aside time for exercise, there needs to be a high index of suspicion for osteoporosis in every patient,” says Manisha Deka, a consultant physician working in Central Railway Hospital, Guwahati.

Also of interest is that most of the Indian population does not have access to DEXA or the bone mineral density scan - the gold standard test for osteoporosis.

This osteoporosis day's (20th October) the theme was 'Build better bones'. To do so, we must realise that our nation is grappling with this silent epidemic. Millions suffer in silence as their pain goes unnoticed and their quality of life is compromised. To bridge the osteoporosis care gap in India we must promote awareness and aim for early intervention. It's time to empower healthcare providers everywhere with context-specific knowledge to diagnose, treat, and prevent this debilitating condition, ensuring a healthier and pain-free future for all.

IS DIABETES AT AN EARLY AGE CUTTING YOUR LIFE SHORT? LANCET STUDY TRACKS RISK THROUGH DECADES OF A LIFETIME

A diagnosis of diabetes at a younger age can literally cut your life short, according to a recent paper in the journal *Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology*. Every decade of early diagnosis was associated with a loss of three to four years of life. So people diagnosed at the age of 30 years died 14 years earlier as compared to those without diabetes. Those diagnosed at the age of 40 died 10 years earlier and those diagnosed at 50 years died six years earlier, according to an analysis of data from 19 high income countries.

Why does an early diagnosis lead to loss of years of life?

Dr Anoop Misra, chairman of Fortis C-Doc Hospital for Diabetes and Allied Sciences, finds two key reasons. “One, early diagnosis means early onset of complications. Diabetes takes 20 years to affect the organ systems. The organs of a person diagnosed in their 30s will then get affected when they are 50, but for someone who is diagnosed at 50, it will happen at the age of 70 years when they have already lived most of their life. Two, the diabetes detected earlier in life is likely to be more severe resulting in more damage,” he explains.

The study further links an early diabetes diagnosis with deaths due to conditions like heart attack, stroke, neurological conditions and even infectious diseases. “I do not want to discourage my patients by saying that they will die younger if they are diagnosed with the condition. If a person strictly controls their blood glucose levels, they are likely to live as long as their counterparts without diabetes,” says Dr Misra. He says how diabetes is managed is a more important factor that the study does not take into consideration.



Are Indians more at risk of early onset diabetes?

Dr Misra adds that Indians are at an even higher risk of developing diabetes early on in life than Caucasian populations. “The Indian genetic makeup and body type is such that we are more prone to central obesity that increases the risk of diabetes at an earlier age. The disease is also known to progress faster among Indians,” says Dr Misra. Another reason is that most people aren’t able to keep their blood glucose levels in check. “Nearly 60 per cent of people living with diabetes in our country do not have it under control,” he reveals.

Is it more difficult to manage young age diabetes?

There is a need to aggressively control the diabetes that has been detected earlier in life as it is not likely to be mild. “Those days are gone where you would prescribe a low dose medicine, wait for a year and then increase it as needed. We now know that we have to effectively treat diabetes from Day 1 so that it does not get the opportunity to cause complications,” advises Dr Misra.

For young patients, more than one — two or sometimes three — diabetes medicines have to be used in combination to ensure that the levels remain under control.

How do the newer drugs help?

Several new classes of diabetes medicines such as SGLT-2 inhibitors and GLP-1 receptor analogues — the famous drugs Ozempic and Mounjaro that are also being used for curbing appetite and weight loss — are powerful. They tackle multiple pathways of diabetes and help in better controlling the condition. “The analysis probably does not look at data after treatment with the newer class of drugs. They help in controlling blood sugar levels better and are likely to further reduce any life years lost due to diabetes and its complications,” Dr Misra says.

What should a person do to minimise this loss of years?

Dr Misra says it is important for anyone diagnosed with diabetes to control three parameters — blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. “Persons diagnosed with diabetes will have to be very disciplined — they have to eat right, work out regularly, keep checking their parameters regularly and have regular follow-up with doctors. And this has to be throughout life,” he says.

DreamIAS