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ONOE: An Idea In Question

INDIA FIRST

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भारत 2023 INDIA

THE SUMMIT OF SUCCESS

How India's G20 feat in New Delhi bore the unmistakable stamp of Prime Minister Modi's legendary leadership



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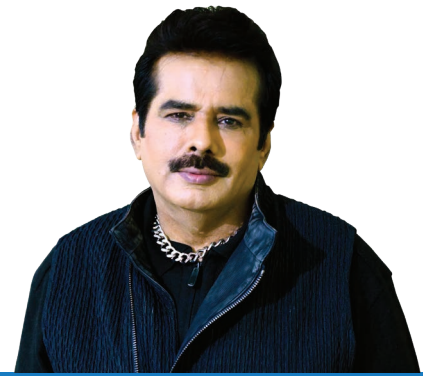
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Sunjoy Hans | Editor-In-Chief

THE WHEEL TRUTH

I

India's G20 Summit was an unqualified success with 100 percent consensus on the Delhi Declaration, and there's no two ways about it.

It was a matter of great joy for all Indians to see so many world leaders hail India's G20 presidency and the international media recognise New Delhi's rising global stature as the voice of the Global South under the able and inspirational leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the conclusion of the Summit.

In a similar way, Odisha swelled with pride seeing an image of the magnificent Konark Sun Temple chakra (wheel) serve as the backdrop of Prime Minister Modi's welcome handshake with world leaders at the Bharat Mandapam convention centre in New Delhi ahead of the first session of the Summit.

As was rightly noted by the national media, not only did this iconic architectural masterpiece from the 13th century perfectly symbolise India's deep-rooted cultural heritage, inherent diversity, ancient spiritual wisdom, rich knowledge traditions and unparalleled architectural excellence, but it also highlighted the importance of appreciating and preserving this great land's historical treasures so that they continue to educate and inspire future generations.

While it was pleasantly overwhelming to see photos of the majestically intricate Konark wheel go viral on social media that day, the ones of Prime Minister Modi explaining its significance to US President Joe Biden will remain one of the most enduring visual memories from the historic Summit.

It must have crossed the mind of many (even if nobody seems to have said so in as many words since the G20 Summit) that all this is a reflection or symbol of another reality. Just as India now has an elevated status on the international stage like never before, Odisha also enjoys a far more prominent position on the national map than ever before.

Under the leadership of five-time Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the state has seen an impressive turnaround over the past 23 years.

Back in the year 2000 when Patnaik first became the Chief Minister of Odisha, the state was known either for its abject poverty and heartbreaking starvation deaths or as a hapless victim of the 1999 super cyclone, maladministration and corruption.

With Patnaik's balanced focus on industry and agriculture, his persistent emphasis on food security, health security, shelter security and social security over the past two decades and his zero-tolerance policy against corruption, Odisha has not only become food-surplus and revenue-surplus, but also an internationally recognised model state in disaster management.

Thanks to his Mo Sarkar initiative and 5T model of governance, the state also became an exemplar for the rest of India during the Covid-19 pandemic. When hospitals in many states of the country ran out of medical oxygen, it was Odisha that came to the rescue by sending the life-saving gas in an organised and timely manner.

His government's consistent support and patronage for sports saw Odisha turn from a virtual non-entity in the field into a global sports hub that regularly hosts big-ticket national and international sporting events these days. When the men's and women's national hockey teams were desperately looking for a sponsor in 2018, it was Patnaik who came forward to sponsor both the teams. When they later brought glory to India at the Tokyo Olympics, they thanked him for it. Most recently, Patnaik announced financial support of Rs 10 Lakh each for all the 13 athletes from Odisha leaving for the Asian Games in China later this month.

Just like Prime Minister Modi has successfully instilled into Indians a sense of pride in their nationality, Chief Minister Patnaik has made his people proud of their state and identity. The special spotlight on the Konark wheel at the G20 Summit is a consequence of these two facts, and there's no two ways about it. ■

Odisha swelled with pride seeing an image of the magnificent Konark Sun Temple chakra (wheel) serve as the backdrop of Prime Minister Modi's welcome handshake with world leaders

INDIA FIRST

SPEAKS YOUR MIND

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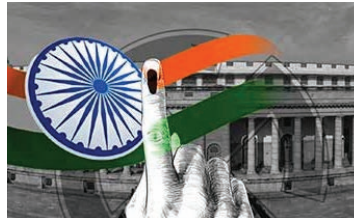
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From royal ironsmiths to homeless nomads, Gadia Lohars have lost almost everything - except pride in their Rajput heritage - over time

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING



The narrative about the United States' decline as a global power is grossly exaggerated

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HANGING IN THE AIR

A rising number of MGNREGA workers in Odisha's Rayagada are being left high and dry between job card deletions and Aadhaar seeding

The roots of Brahminism are very deep and the reason behind all the disparity is also Brahminism. There is no religion called Hindu, Hinduism is just a hoax. There is a conspiracy to trap Dalits, tribals and backward people of this nation by calling the same Brahmin religion as Hindu religion. If there was a Hindu religion then tribals, Dalits, and backward people would have been respected but what an irony

– Samajwadi Party general secretary Swami Prasad Maurya



What's wrong? The ministers have to travel long distances and their safety also has to be considered. In other states, services of chartered flights and helicopters are available. I am using regular commercial flights for commuting

– Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar after the government decided to buy 33 high-end SUVs for Cabinet ministers despite the state reeling under a financial crunch



A FORTNIGHTLY UPDATE ON THE FAUX PAS OF THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS OF INDIAN POLITICS

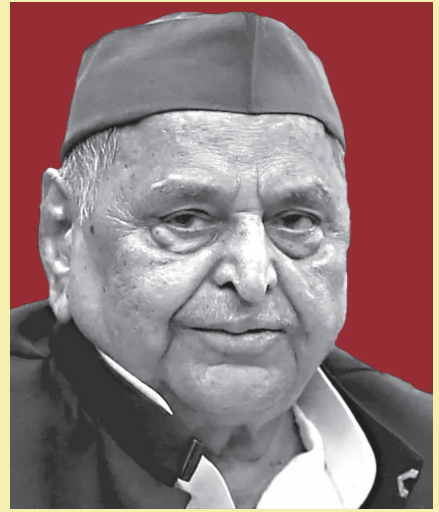
There are few who have died due to drinking liquor. There are those who died due to heart attacks. We have started to provide Rs 5 lakh compensation from 2015 for the farmers who committed suicide. Since then, the numbers have been rising. The media should also take note of this development ... In 2020, more than 500 farmers had ended their lives. In 2021, more than 600 had committed suicide. But, if you consider FIRs, it is your mistake. The farmers are committing suicides for various reasons. Even deaths due to love cases is also considered as farmers' suicides

– Karnataka Minister for Sugarcane Development and Agricultural Produce Market Committees Shivananada Patil on farmer suicides in the state



SAME OLD, SAME OLD

Late Samajwadi Party (SP) founder Mulayam Singh Yadav was among the first political leaders to take a firm stand against reservation for women. His tough stand taken against the women's quota bill in 2010 had kicked up a political storm and led to a major controversy. The Samajwadi stand remains unchanged even a decade later though the party's opinion is now comparatively muted. Akhilesh Yadav, who is now leading his party and belongs to the new generation, tends to avoid addressing the issue and carefully changes the direction of conversation when asked to define his party's stand on women's reservation. His wife Dimple Yadav is a MP from Mainpuri but the SP, as such, does not believe in pushing women to the forefront of party politics. The number of active women in the party can be counted on fingertips. The party's stand remains the same as that of Mulayam Singh though no one speaks about it. The SP is pushing for OBC caste census but does not talk about quota for women. The SP still does not have much room for women leaders and tickets to women are kept in limited numbers. The women candidates are mostly wives and widows of popular leaders and those that are given tickets on basis of merit are few and far in between. ■



MENACING WORDS

Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai has recently shared a purported video in which DMK leader and former Union minister A. Raja could be heard saying that Hindu religion is not only a menace to India, but to the entire world. Annamalai shared the video in which Raja, who is the MP from Nilgiris, could be seen speaking in a webinar. Raja is heard saying in the video, "Hindu religion is a menace not only to India, but to the entire world." He added, "India is the reason for global disease in the name of caste ... dividing people on caste lines, and dividing people on economic lines in the name of caste. "Indians living in other countries also propagate caste in the name of Hindu religion. So Hindu religion is the biggest menace, not only in India but to the entire world." Annamalai, who shared the video on X (formerly Twitter), said that DMK is the principal reason for creating caste divide and hatred in Tamil Nadu. Raja had recently spoken against Sanatan Dharma, equating it with leprosy and HIV, at a public function. ■

INDIA VS BHARAT

Continuing the war of words between the BJP and the Congress over India versus Bharat row, senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi recently said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar should chant "India Mata Ki Jai" and Rahul Gandhi should do 'India Jodo Yatra'. The war of words erupted after the Rashtrapati Bhawan sent out invites for the G20 dinner in the name of 'President of Bharat' instead of the usual 'President of India'. "It is a part of a deep conspiracy of opposition bloc INDIA to finish Sanatan Dharma and Hindu culture in the country. They have taken the contract to finish Sanatan Dharma and hence are roaming from Patna to Mumbai in desperation," Modi said. "We chant Bharat Mata Ki Jai. If the opposition party leaders want to chant India Mata Ki Jai, then no one is stopping them," Modi said. "We have no objection over the name of the opposition alliance. You should take the name India and your leaders should chant India Mata Ki Jai. Where is the problem? The reality is they do not want to say India or Bharat, they have only objection to what Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing. They are opposing him," Modi said. ■



SAMBALPURI BEATS

Upon her arrival in India for the G20 Summit, International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Kristalina Georgieva could not resist herself from attempting a few dance steps on a Sambalpuri song. On her arrival at the Delhi airport, Georgieva received a warm welcome and was greeted by a cultural dance performance. Even as the cultural team showcased a traditional folk dance on the Sambalpuri song to welcome her, Georgieva could not resist herself and attempted a few dance steps herself. She also applauded the performers. The video of her dance moves while being welcomed was shared by Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. In a post on X, attaching the video, Pradhan wrote, "Difficult to resist Sambalpuri beats. MD International Monetary Fund K Georgieva arrives in India for G20 summit to a Sambalpuri song and dance welcome." ■



FAILURE TO LAUNCH

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during his recent visit to Rajasthan took a jibe at the opposition and said that Chandrayaan's launch and landing has been successful, but Rahulyaan has neither been launched nor landed for 20 years. He quoted the report of Transparency International and said that Rajasthan ranks number one in corruption for which the credit goes to its Congress government; Examination papers are getting leaked in the state. While the chief minister is sitting in the driving seat, someone else is pressing the clutch and the accelerator, he added. Rajnath was addressing a gathering before flagging off the BJP's third Parivartan Sankalp Yatra at Ramdevra on September 11. This yatra will cover 51 assembly constituencies in Jodhpur division in 20 days. He showered praises on the scientists of India and said that they have done excellent work on a budget that is significantly lower than most Hollywood films. ■

CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNIQUES

Mystery prevails in West Bengal over the contents of two confidential communiques sent to the state and Union government by Governor CV Ananda Bose in the wee hours of September 9. After intimating the mediapersons about the midnight communiques, Raj Bhavan maintained total silence in the matter. Equally silent had been the functionaries of the state secretariat. The mystery has deepened for various reasons. Firstly, the communiques were forwarded at a time when Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was in New Delhi to attend the G20 Summit dinner. Secondly, although Raj Bhavan has confirmed that one of two communiques have been forwarded to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, they remained vague on the exact department under the Union government where the Governor's second communique has been forwarded. Earlier in the day when Bose was questioned about his recent tussle with the Secretariat on the state university issues, the Governor responded: "Wait for the stroke of the midnight hour today." ■





THE SUMMIT OF SUCCESS

How India's G20 feat in New Delhi bore the unmistakable stamp of Prime Minister Modi's legendary leadership

Sunjoy Hans

To succeed as per expectations or when the environment is somewhat favourable is still laudable, but to do so against all expectations and despite all the odds is the stuff of legend.

In the days leading up to the G20

Summit in New Delhi, the world was speculating about the success prospects of the high-profile event's 18th edition with less anticipation and more apprehension.

Make no mistake, the anticipation was huge.

Political pundits across the world were virtually unanimous in their view that this annual leaders' summit presented a unique opportunity for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to not only bolster India's position on the world

stage as the voice of the Global South (less developed and developing economies), but also boost his own diplomatic credentials and domestic image as he prepares to run for a third term in next year's general elections.

However, as the D-Day drew closer, a rising number of international relations experts and geopolitical analysts pointed to the deep fractures within the group over the Ukraine war, along with the confirmed absence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Presi-

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ONE FAMILY • ONE FUTURE



dent Xi Jinping from the Delhi summit, and said India would most likely fail to secure a joint declaration from the attending G20 leaders – making it an embarrassing first in the 15-year history of the geopolitical summit – at the September 9-10 gathering in the national capital.

They could not have been more mistaken.

By noon of the first day of the summit, during its second session, Prime Minister Modi announced that G20 leaders had reached a consensus on the Delhi Declaration and adopted it.

"There is good news, with everyone's cooperation consensus has been reached on New Delhi G20 Leadership Declaration," he said before applauding the efforts of the Sherpas (personal representatives of the leaders of member nations) and officials for making it possible to forge a consensus on the final outcome document.

According to official sources, India's G20 Presidency has been the most ambitious in the history of G20, with 73 outcomes (lines of effort) and 39 annexed documents (presidency documents, not including Working Group

As the D-Day drew closer, a rising number of international relations experts and geopolitical analysts pointed to the deep fractures within the group over the Ukraine war ... and said India would most likely fail to secure a joint declaration from the attending G20 leaders

outcome documents).

"With 112 outcomes and presidency documents, we have more than doubled the substantive work from previous presidencies," they said.

This development came as a big surprise to the rest of the world because nobody had expected even a semblance of a joint communique until the second and final day of the summit. Soon it dawned on all that a compromise or consensus of some kind must have been first achieved between the Russia-China combine and other Western members of the G20 bloc on the lan-

guage relating to the Ukraine war.

As the day progressed, it became clear that a lot more than that had indeed been achieved.

First and foremost, India's status as the voice of the Global South was firmly established as the Delhi Declaration confirmed the inclusion of African Union – a continental body of 55 member states – as a permanent member of the G20 under New Delhi's presidency.

In the Delhi Declaration document, the G20 leaders said: "We welcome the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 and strongly believe that inclusion of the African Union into the G20 will significantly contribute to addressing the global challenges of our time."

Affirming that Africa plays an important role in the global economy, it said: "We commit to strengthen our ties with and support the African Union realise the aspirations under Agenda 2063. We also reiterate strong support to Africa, including through the G20 Compact with Africa and G20 Initiative on supporting industrialization in Africa and LDCs.

"We are supportive of further dis-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders during the closing session on 'One Future' at G20 Summit 2023 at the Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi

Discussing the deepening of cooperation between the G20 and other regional partners," it said.

In the joint commitment, the G20 leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to support migrants, including migrant workers and refugees, as part of efforts towards having a more inclusive world while in keeping with national policies, legislations and circumstances as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms.

"We will continue to integrate the perspectives of the developing countries into the G20 agendas and appreciate the G20 members' initiatives in this regard," it added.

This development came as a big surprise to the rest of the world because nobody had expected even a semblance of a joint communique until the second and final day of the summit

In the opening session of the summit, Prime Minister Modi had already welcomed the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 grouping amid thunderous applause.

Arguably the next most important

outcome of the summit, something that will also serve the Global South to a great extent, was the announcement about an imminent launch of the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor. This first-of-its-kind project – part of an initiative called the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII) – on cooperation, connectivity and infrastructure will involve India, UAE, US, Saudi Arabia, EU, France, Italy and Germany.

While talking about the PGII and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor programme at Bharat Mandapam, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said: "We launched the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows a mural of Konark Sun temple wheel from Odisha state to US President Joe Biden

India's status as the voice of the Global South was firmly established as the Delhi Declaration confirmed the inclusion of African Union as a permanent member of the G20 under New Delhi's presidency

the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor promises to be a beacon of cooperation, innovation, and shared progress. As history unfolds, may this corridor be a testament to human endeavour and unity across continents."

Many geopolitical observers have noted that this economic corridor, which will be connected by railways as well as ports, will serve to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative that has been a matter of great concern for many countries worldwide, including India.

Notably, the Delhi Declaration welcomed India's initiative to build and maintain a Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository (GDPIR), a virtual repository of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), voluntarily shared by G20 members and beyond, all aimed at bridging the digital divide between the Global North and Global South and facilitating inclusive and sustainable development.

Equally importantly, on the sidelines of the G20 summit, Prime Minister Modi also announced the launch of

PGII, a joint vision by the world leaders, leading economies, to invest in the infrastructure that low- and middle-income countries need. And two years on, more large-scale projects are seeing the light.

"The India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor ... is nothing but historic. This will be the most direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf and Europe with a rail link that will make trade between India and Europe 40 per cent faster."

She noted how an electricity cable and clean hydrogen pipeline will foster clean energy trade between Asia, Middle East and Europe.

"The high-speed data cable will link some of the most innovative digital eco-

systems in the world and create business opportunities all along the way. These are state-of-the-art connections for the world of tomorrow faster, shorter, cleaner. This corridor is much more than just a railway or cable. It is a green and digital reach across continents and civilisations," she concluded.

US President Joe Biden hailed the project as "a real big deal".

"I want to thank the Prime Minister. One Earth, One Family, One Future that's the focus of this G20 Summit. And in many ways, it's also the focus of this partnership that we are talking about today."

PM Modi summed it up perfectly on X (formerly Twitter): "Charting a journey of shared aspirations and dreams,



From left, World Bank President Ajay Banga, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and U.S. President Joe Biden pose for the group photo during G20 Summit, in New Delhi, India

the Global Biofuels Alliance. While India, Brazil and the US are its founding members, a total of 19 countries and 12 international organisations have so far agreed to join the alliance, including both G20 members and non-member countries.

“Today, the need of the hour is that all countries should work together in the field of fuel blending. Our proposal is to take an initiative at a global-level to take ethanol blending in petrol up to 20 percent. Or alternatively, we could work on developing another blending mix for the greater global good, one that ensures a stable energy supply while also contributing to climate security,” the Prime Minister said while addressing the first session of the G20 Summit in New Delhi.

He later posted on X that the launch of the alliance “marks a watershed moment in our quest towards sustainability and clean energy”.

The new alliance is being positioned as a global forum to help boost demand and technology transfer for the production of biofuels and enhancing trade, and also as an alternative to the

All said and done, the Delhi Declaration would not have come into being had that elusive consensus not been reached on the all-important language pertaining to the Ukraine war in the final document

OPEC grouping. India is also looking at ramping up its biofuel production through varied sources in order to reduce its import dependence for fuel at a time when the OPEC+ grouping has enforced successive production cuts.

In addition to this, the Delhi Declaration saw G20 members make headway together on multiple other fronts.

They reaffirmed their commitment to jointly work towards a globally fair, sustainable, and modern international tax system that would be in tune with requirements of the 21st century.

They resolved to strengthen cooperation on global health and build

“more resilient, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive health systems to achieve Universal Health Coverage, implement one-health approach, enhance pandemic preparedness and strengthen existing infectious diseases surveillance systems”.

They pledged to facilitate inclusive, equitable and high-quality education and skills training for people worldwide, especially for vulnerable communities.

“To this end, we recognise the importance of foundational learning (literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills) as the primary building block for education and employment ... reaffirm our commitment to promote open, equitable and secure scientific collaboration and encourage mobility of students, scholars, researchers, and scientists across research and higher education institutions,” the Delhi Declaration read.

They also promised to boost cooperation in combating terrorism, narcotics trafficking, illegal arms trade and corruption, among other things, while strengthening the global law enforce-

ment network and supporting victims of terrorism and human rights violations.

However, all said and done, the Delhi Declaration would not have come into being had that elusive consensus not been reached on the all-important language pertaining to the Ukraine war in the final document.

In an interview to a TV channel, India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant revealed that this became possible after almost 200 hours of non-stop negotiations. He stated that the joint efforts of the Sherpas and the emerging markets – led by India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey and Saudi Arabia – put enough pressure on the G7 nations to bring them to the table.

Without making any mention of Russia, the Delhi Declaration read: "In line with the UN Charter, all states must refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state. The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible."

However, Kant pointed out that it

Interestingly, the world was divided in the way it interpreted the Delhi Declaration. On one side were expert analysts that saw it as a win for Russia, and on the other side were those who deemed it as an achievement for the West

was the weight of Modi's name that ultimately clinched the consensus over the language of the final declaration.

Prime Minister Modi's influence was easy to see from the part of the declaration that called for the promotion of peaceful, friendly, and good neighbourly relations among nations in the spirit of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' – something that he had first evoked at the United Nations yoga event on International Yoga Day in New York during his June 20-23 visit to the US this year, which later became the theme of G20 Summit in Delhi.

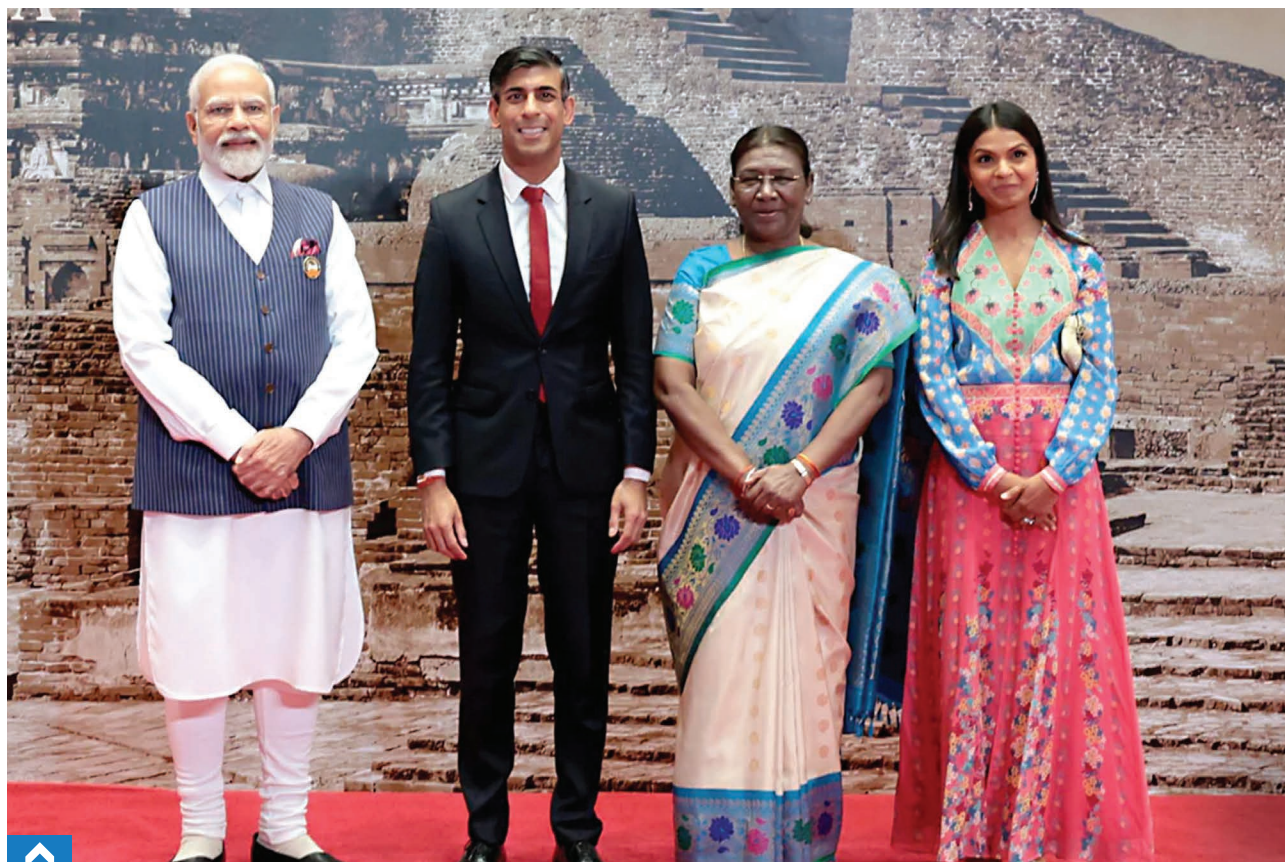
And then, of course, there was the line that was a slight variation of something that Prime Minister Modi had famously first told President Putin and then later reiterated on various other occasions since the start of the Ukraine war: "Today's era must not be of war."

Interestingly, the world was divided in the way it interpreted the Delhi Declaration. On one side were expert analysts that saw it as a win for Russia, and on the other side were those who deemed it as an achievement for the West. However, quite amazingly, all of them seemed to agree that it was a foreign policy triumph for Prime Minister Modi.

The US lauded Prime Minister Modi's diplomatic skills and the Delhi Declaration in equal measure.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called the statement a "significant milestone for India's chairmanship and a vote of confidence that the G20 can come together to address a pressing range of issues."

President Biden himself expressed approval of the final wording of the Delhi Declaration and pushed his case for



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak arrived to the G20 dinner with his wife Akshata Murty



PM Modi along with world leaders on September 10, day 2 of the G20 Summit in Delhi lay a wreath at the Rajghat and paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi

American investment in the developing world.

The *TIME* magazine said in its latest issue that although many political experts thought that President Xi's decision to stay away from the G20 New Delhi summit may have been aimed at denying Modi his finest moment, the Indian Prime Minister cleverly figured out with US and European leaders how to counter China effectively on the global stage.

Yet, a day after the conclusion of the summit, China – whose delegation at the G20 summit was led by Premier Li Qiang – hailed the Delhi Declaration as a “positive signal” sent to the world.

Similarly, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov – who represented President Putin at the summit and had earlier clearly stated that his country would block the final declaration of G20 unless it reflected Moscow's position on Ukraine and other crises – told reporters that although the G20 was going through a crisis, India achieved “absolute success” with the joint declaration.

Lauding New Delhi for playing a leading role in activating G20 members from the Global South and taking into account their interests, he said: “I think that a healthy solution has been found in the declaration regarding the need to strive for a clear and equitable balance of interest. It is one of the decent purposes and we are already on track.”

India's G20 success garnered praise even from people in Pakistan. One of them was quoted by news agency ANI as saying: “When such a big conference takes place, people see that the country



Several Opposition leaders, many part of the INDIA bloc, attended the dinner

is moving forward.” Another Pakistani resident added that it was a matter of honour for India to host leaders from the top 20 countries and that its economy would get “many benefits” from having hosted the summit.

Michael Schuman, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, noted that Prime Minister Modi emerged as “probably the summit's big winner” and was becoming an increasingly important player in international affairs.

He remarked that Modi was offering an alternative vision of Global North-Global South relations, which was focused on enhancing the voice of developing countries in global governance while at the same time cooperating – instead of confronting – the West.

Ahead of the summit, Modi had repeatedly argued that the develop-

ing countries should have more say on problems facing the world because they were disproportionately impacted by such crises as climate change, food shortages and rising energy prices.

Many experts aver that India has laid the groundwork for Brazil and South Africa – both influential members of the Global South – to continue along the same path when they take the G20 presidency in the coming two years.

India's G20 effort received applause from almost all quarters because it was all-encompassing.

The Delhi Declaration also got a thumbs-up from the Indian startup ecosystem stakeholders for including start-ups – thanks to India's initiative to launch the Startup20 engagement group during its G20 Presidency – for the first time in the history of G20.



"We are glad that Brazil has picked up the mandate to continue the Startup20 engagement group into their presidency next year. We look forward to working on implementing the Startup20 recommendations over the next couple of years," said Rajan Anandan, Managing Director of leading venture capital Peak XV (formerly Sequoia Capital India and SEA).

One of the most significant recommendations was that every G20 nation should invest 1 per cent of their GDP into startups by 2030. "This will add up to \$1 trillion per year of startup funding across the G20 nations," said Anandan, who is also Co-Chair of the Finance Taskforce of the Startup20 engagement group.

The Startup20 engagement group would create a global movement for supporting startups and enabling synergies between startups, corporates, investors, innovation agencies and other key ecosystem stakeholders.

"Startups are driving innovation on a global scale, and these emerging entrepreneurs necessitate a specialised platform to facilitate regulatory ease, cross-border partnerships, technology policy, and the cultivation of global synergies among key stakeholders within the ecosystem," said Dr Ritesh Malik, Director, Alliance for Digital India Foundation (ADIF), a think tank for India's digital startups.

"Innovation will play a pivotal role in addressing the world's pressing global challenges, such as climate change, unemployment, cybersecurity, poverty, pollution, and the like," he added.



PM Modi handing over the gavel of the G20 presidency to the Brazilian President

Many political observers from across the globe also attributed the success of the Delhi summit to Prime Minister Modi's effective year-long promotion of India's G20 presidency. Instead of treating the rotating presidency as a routine affair, Prime Minister Modi and the ruling BJP successfully projected the position as a symbol or reflection of India's enhanced global status under his leadership. More than 200 meetings were held in 56 cities; posters advertising the G20 event alongside giant portraits of the Prime Minister's face were distributed across the country; and

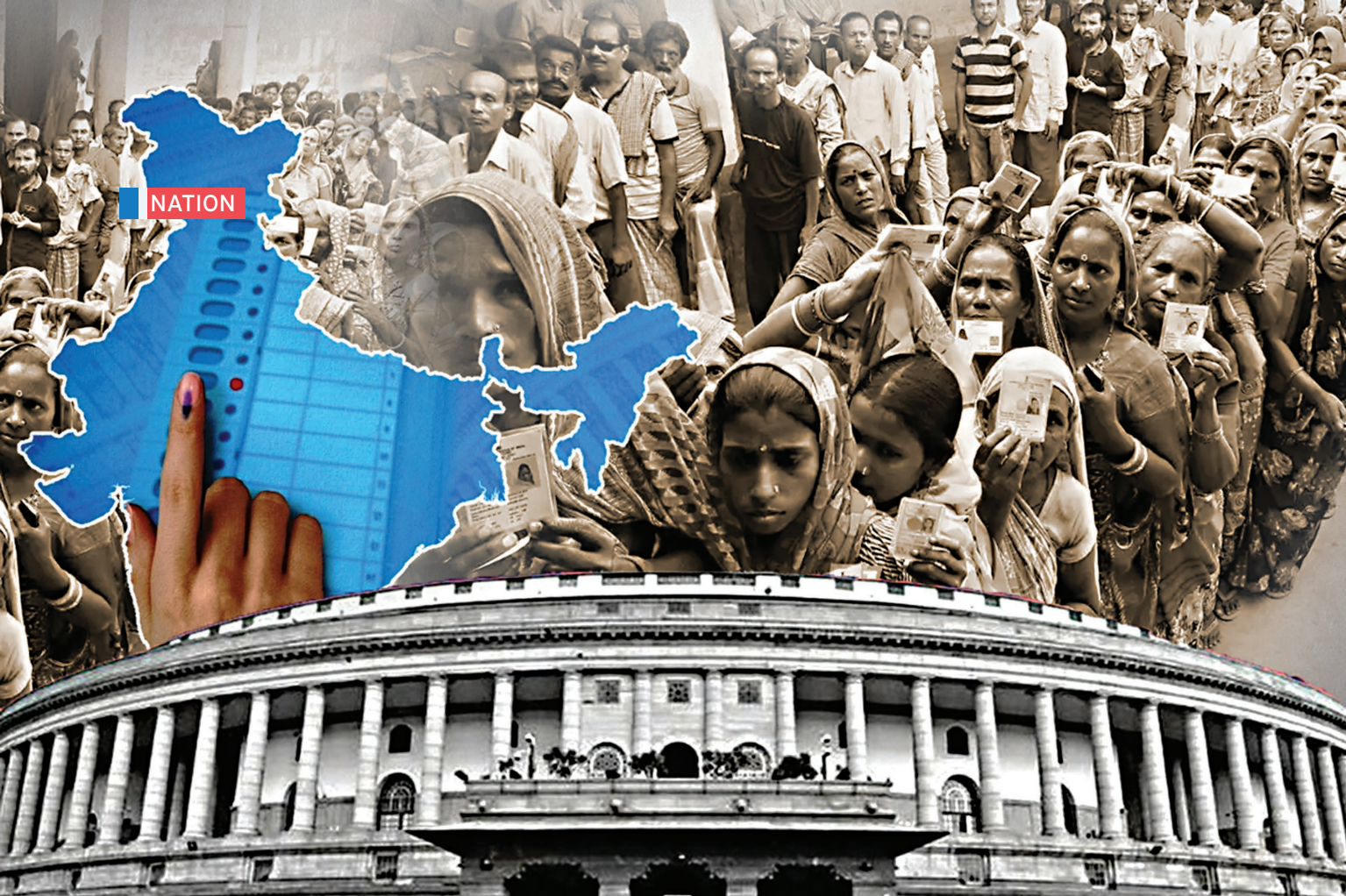
Instead of treating the rotating presidency as a routine affair, Prime Minister Modi and the ruling BJP successfully projected the position as a symbol or reflection of India's enhanced global status under his leadership

mass education campaigns on India's presidency were run in schools countrywide.

The Prime Minister's stamp was also evident in the extraordinary security arrangements – involving extensive month-long training and meticulous planning by law enforcement authorities, code-naming of hotels accommodating foreign heads of state and managing unforeseen requests from international dignitaries, among other things – in the national capital that ensured a seamless execution of the Summit.

After the conclusion of the event, Modi not only personally met officers and staff from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to commend them for a job well done, he also announced a special dinner for 450 Delhi Police personnel in appreciation of their outstanding performance during their duty at the Summit.

These were just the finishing touches to the stuff of legend. ■



Ashutosh Mishra

ONOE: AN IDEA IN QUESTION

Is the Modi government right to push for 'One Nation, One Election'?

The political temperature in the country has shot up with the Narendra Modi-led NDA government calling a special session of Parliament between September 18 and September 22. Some political observers feel that a special session has been called to prepare the ground for early elections. While the agenda for the session is still not clear, it seems almost certain that the focus of the special meeting would be on discussing the idea of "one nation, one election", or ONOE, as it is popularly being referred to in political circles.

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi has written to the Prime Minister seeking discussion on several issues, including Manipur violence and the prevailing economic situation in the country during the special session. Her letter comes amidst speculation that during the session a bill may be tabled by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) proposing the 'One Nation One Election' policy and also a proposal to change the name of the country from India to Bharat.

Sonia Gandhi's letter said that the

ONOE, however, is seen by many as one of the most crucial reforms on the BJP's agenda

Opposition is keen to participate in the special session as it will give it an opportunity to raise matters of public concern and importance. She wants the opposition to take part despite the fact that the session was called without consulting it. "None of us have any idea of its agenda," Sonia Gandhi wrote in her letter.

By all indications the most important business during the session would

be ONOE, a concept which has been raised by the ruling coalition in the past as well, though not with the same kind of seriousness as being exhibited now. Some people think the idea is nothing but a ploy to distract the attention of the electorate from the more serious issues facing the nation ahead of the general elections. However, irrespective of how good or bad this idea is, it cannot be implemented unless a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament votes for the amendments that will be necessary to turn it into a reality. Besides, the state assemblies whose tenure will be affected due to this also have to fall in line.

Some wonder whether the idea is being mooted because the BJP is worried about its electoral prospects in

some states. It has already faced some setbacks, the most important being Karnataka. The fact is that in more than a dozen states now constituents of the freshly minted INDIA or parties not aligned with the BJP are in power.

The BJP top brass also appear worried about the fact that with the exception of Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma, they do not have any leaders who could ensure a clear majority for the party in their states on their own strength. The party is not very happy with Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh and Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan, though it has been tolerating them.

The BJP certainly remains concerned about its prospects in some states. Winning the Lok Sabha elections for the party is just as important as winning assembly polls because it still lacks a majority in the Rajya Sabha and cannot afford a further slide in its numbers in the Upper House. So, things are not as easy for the party as they were in 2019. Under the circumstances holding simultaneous elections suits the party because Modi's popularity can help in both Lok Sabha and assembly elections. The Lok Sabha mood will hold good for the assemblies also except in a few states like Odisha where in 2019 the phenomenon of split voting was on display with people opting for Modi at many places by voting for BJP in the Lok Sabha, but they remained loyal to Naveen Patnaik and his Biju Janata Dal (BJD) as far as state elections were concerned.

ONOE, however, is seen by many as one of the most crucial reforms on the BJP's agenda. Former President Ram Nath Kovind, under whom a committee has been constituted to study this, in his address to Parliament on January 29, 2018, as the President had mentioned this as one of the reforms proposed by the government. He had said that citizens were concerned about frequent elections in one part of the country or another, which adversely impacted the economy and set back development. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also spoken about the desirability of having such an arrangement. So, the idea is not entirely new.

It has many advantages. First and foremost, it enables the government to concentrate fully on governance once the elections are over. The government and the ruling party do not have to worry about and work towards finalizing



It has many advantages. First and foremost, it enables the government to concentrate fully on governance once the elections are over

strategies for assembly elections being held in some state or the other. Elections, thus, cease to be an obsession and do not divert attention from governance. Another problem with elections is that no major decisions can be taken during elections because of the code of conduct. This affects governance and very important decisions get delayed. Implementation of ongoing projects also gets derailed during election periods as not only the political executive but also government officials get engaged in elections in some capacity or the other.

Frequent elections also spawn corruption because an enormous amount of money is involved in the exercise.

Political parties and candidates spend heavily and they do it frequently by violating the norms. There are several instances of seizure of massive amounts of cash during elections. If elections are held simultaneously there would even be no duplication of fundraising and the business community in particular will be saved from donating money to parties multiple times.

Equally importantly, there will be no need for massive deployment of police personnel and para-military forces multiple times in different parts of the country to maintain law and order during elections. These forces can be deployed to deal with serious issues wherever needed. It will also result in massive savings for the exchequer. ONOE, thus, seems to be a bright idea and there is nothing wrong in calling a special session of Parliament to discuss it. All that the people of the country need to be assured about is the intent of the government at the Centre. If the intent is good this is, no doubt, an excellent move. ■

Politics At Play

Yogi Adityanath's push for the premature release of convicted former minister Amarmani Tripathi stems from more than a sense of gratitude



The 2003 murder of young poet Madhumita Shukla, who was allegedly having an affair with powerful former UP minister Amarmani Tripathi and was pregnant at the time, made headlines in every national newspaper back then. So did the conviction of Tripathi in the case in 2007.

Tripathi is in news again following UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath's special gesture of ordering his and his wife, Madhumani's premature release from prison. There are several theories about Yogi's extraordinary kindness towards the Tripathi couple. One of these underscores their personal bond, a friendship that began over 15 years ago in Gorakhpur jail.

Yogi, a rising star in UP's political firmament, had landed in Gorakhpur jail in connection with an alleged com-

This is election time and Yogi-Tripathi combine can firm up a powerful Thakur-Brahmin vote bank in favour of BJP in the heartland state

munally charged speech delivered in January 2007. He was there for 11 days. During this period Tripathi, who was already there and controlled things in jail because of his influence, took good care of the future chief minister. He ensured that Adityanath was well looked after and not troubled by other inmates in any way. That help, especially with a Samajwadi Party government in power in the state, was invaluable for Yogi.

Yogi is now repaying Tripathi's debt. But it is not just that. The move

is pregnant with political possibilities. This is election time and Yogi-Tripathi combine can firm up a powerful Thakur-Brahmin vote bank in favour of BJP in the heartland state. Brahmins make up about 9-10 percent of UP's population while Thakurs account for 7-8 percent. What is more important is the kind of influence they wield on voters belonging to other castes. They have the power and ability to swing things in favour of any party in an election.

It is common knowledge that the fate of any political party aspiring to form a government in Delhi depends on its performance in UP. Politics in the state is heating up already with Congress appointing a new president in UP and the likelihood of Rahul Gandhi contesting from Amethi and his sister Priyanka from Phulpur near Allahabad.

So, the BJP is working hard to solid-



Tripathi's release follows a tried-and-tested political manoeuvre which was recently on display in Bihar, where Rajput strongman Anand Mohan Singh was released in April this year by the Nitish Kumar government in an alleged attempt at courting the Rajput vote bank in the state



ify its own vote-bank. No wonder there was a sense of triumph when the UP government on August 24 announced the release of Amarmani (66) and Madhumani (61) from prison after serving 16 years of their life sentence, awarded in October 2007 for the murder of 24-year-old Madhumita. However, given their influence, the Tripathis have spent the better part of their prison sentence in a private ward at the BRD Medical College, Gorakhpur.

Sources said that Amarmani, a former minister and four-time MLA from Nautanwa in Maharajganj district, has been running his empire from the hospital ward. Madhumita's sister, Nidhi Shukla, alleges that the Tripathi couple served 62 per cent of their term out of jail. Even Tripathi's son, former MLA Aman Mani Tripathi, who will soon be facing trial in the 2015 murder of his

wife Sara Singh, has been talking up about familial connections with Adityanath.

In Tripathi's constituency of Nautanwa, preparations are underway for his return. Local residents are all excited and refuse to believe that their leader had anything to do with the murder. Madhumita Shukla was shot dead by two gunmen who knocked on the door of her house in Paper Mill Colony, Nishatganj, Lucknow, on 9 May 2003. Amarmani was rumoured to be having an affair with the poet who was six months pregnant at the time.

Tripathi's political clout has never been in doubt. He was elected four times to the UP assembly, including in 2007 from jail, and served as a minister in the BJP government in 2001 and in the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) government in 2002. While the release order is

being hailed by Tripathi's supporters, Madhumita Shukla's sister Nidhi says she has acquired government documents through RTI and they show Amarmani never went to the prison between 2012 and 2023. So, the question of his fulfilling the condition for remission doesn't arise. She has appealed to the governor and the chief minister to stay Amarmani's release.

Nautanwa, just a few kilometres away from the Indo-Nepal border, has been the focal point of Tripathi's politics. Since his release, the town has become politically charged. Speculation is rife about his return to politics, but the family is not addressing questions on whether they will align with the BJP openly. "We are a political family. But right now, all the attention is on the health of the parents. No decision has been made regarding politics yet," said his son Aman Mani.

Tripathi's release follows a tried-and-tested political manoeuvre which was recently on display in Bihar, where Rajput strongman Anand Mohan Singh was released in April this year by the Nitish Kumar government in an alleged attempt at courting the Rajput vote bank in the state. According to senior political observers the same pattern is evident in Tripathi's release, though here, effort is aimed at wooing the Brahmins. Tripathi is being hailed as the Brahmin lion of Poorvanchal, politically the most significant region of UP.

In Gorakhpur, which was once referred to as the Sicily of the East because of its crime-ridden history, Brahmins and Thakurs were at loggerheads for a long time as both tried to dominate the politics of Poorvanchal. In those days, the Brahmins were led by bahubali Hari Shankar Tiwari and Rajputs by gangster-turned-politician Virendra Pratap Shah. Their rivalry often spilled onto the streets.

Brahmin vs Thakur politics made Amarmani a prominent leader in Purvanchal who was patronised by Hari Shankar Tiwari. In 1989, he was elected to the UP assembly on a Congress ticket after several failed attempts. After that he did not look back. His fearlessness and readiness to accept challenges endeared him to the public. The bond with Yogi Adityanath, a Rajput, has made Tripathi stronger and now this Brahmin-Rajput combine is expected to turn things in favour of the BJP in UP which the saffron party must win if it has to retain power in Delhi. ■

BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

How Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is ensuring his enduring popularity

Ashutosh Mishra

Political observers are not ruling out the possibility of early elections to the Lok Sabha. If that happens, there is a distinct possibility that assembly elections in the state will be held simultaneously. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has time and again expressed himself in favour of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the assembly because it saves a lot of unnecessary expense.

However, irrespective of when the elections are held, there is no denying the fact that every party in the state has switched into election mode. Plans are being made, strategies are being read-

The seasoned politician that Patnaik is now, he knows better than anyone else that in the era of coalition politics regional parties have come into their own. No one can afford to ignore them

ied and in some cases even the process of candidate selection has begun. This is because of the realization that the coming election will be no ordinary election. It will not only decide the fate of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but it will also prove historic for Chief Minister Patnaik.

A straight sixth win for Patnaik will

be a new national record and make him the longest serving chief minister of the country. As it is, Patnaik has already broken so many records. The most important of his achievements is making Biju Janata Dal (BJD) the most successful regional party in the history of Odisha. His father Biju Patnaik had also formed a regional party which played an important role in the politics of the state, but it did not achieve the kind of success the BJD has.

The fact is that BJD today is not only the most dominant political force in Odisha, it is also a force to reckon with at the national level. The seasoned politician that Patnaik is now, he knows better than anyone else that in the era of coalition politics regional parties have come into their own. No one can afford

to ignore them. The political situation at the Centre is such that the ruling coalition in Delhi cannot do without the support of parties like BJD which has 12 Lok Sabha MPs and nine MPs in the Rajya Sabha.

The way things are shaping up at the national level, regional parties of all shapes and sizes are coming into prominence. While down south parties like DMK, AIADMK and BRS are calling the shots in West Bengal Mamata Banerjee's TMC is ruling the roost. It is strong enough to throw a challenge to the rulers in Delhi.

Under the circumstances, Prime Minister Modi values the support of parties like BJD, which has bailed him out on several occasions in the parliament. Modi, too, has reciprocated the friendly gestures of the BJD boss. Both Modi and Patnaik have been conducting their politics in an extremely decent

His deft political moves have always kept him ahead of his opponents. At the same time, he has taken care to strengthen the BJD organization and turned the party into a well-oiled machine which keeps winning elections with ease

manner without indulging in any kind of mudslinging.

But the BJD finds itself in this advantageous position vis-à-vis national politics only because it happens to be a regional party which can take its own decisions without bothering about what Delhi thinks. This is an advantage that a regional party enjoys and should make the most of it.

The best thing about Patnaik is that, for a rank rookie that he was in politics 25 years ago, he learnt the ropes rather quickly. With the experience of last 26 years behind him, he can now read any situation with relative ease and come up with the right response. It is this experience which has helped him get the better of his rivals, of which there have been many over the years. Some of his rivals made the mistake of underestimating him and paid the price.

His deft political moves have always kept him ahead of his opponents.



At the same time, he has taken care to strengthen the BJD organization and turned the party into a well-oiled machine which keeps winning elections with ease. The BJD leaders are in election mode throughout the year as they have clear-cut instructions to remain in touch with people through mass contact programmes. They also ensure that the benefits of government programmes actually reach the target groups.

This has enhanced the image of the government and people's trust in the chief minister continues to grow. Patnaik has taken care to launch a raft of welfare programmes meant for almost every segment of the population with focus, of course, on the poor and the downtrodden. While his pro-poor schemes like rice for Rs. 1 per kg and meals to the poor in urban areas for just Rs.5 have been a hit with the people, he has won over the state's women by launching Mission Shakti and making them economically empowered by organizing them into self-help groups (SHGs). Now Mission Shakti is a full-fledged department being led by its dynamic commissioner-cum-secretary Sujata Karthikeyan who keeps finding new ways of making the lives of poor women better.

On the health front, the government's Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) has been a major hit. The benefits of the scheme have now been extended to children and adolescents in

the age group of five to 18 years in families covered under the scheme which provides annual health coverage of Rs 5 lakh per family and an additional Rs 5 lakh for the women members after exhaustion of the initial limit. While children below five years were already covered on the basis of self-declaration by BSKY card-holders, those in the age group of five to 18 years and not in the database of National Food Security Act (NFSA) or State Food Security Scheme (SFSS) had been left out.

The state government took the decision to extend the health coverage to the children and adolescents of BSKY beneficiaries after the State Health Assurance Society (SHAS), which empanels private hospitals under the scheme, came to know that some child members were left out as their names were not in the NFSA/SFSS database. They can now avail benefits under the health scheme on production of documentary evidence by parents to support the claim that the individual being treated is their child.

The Health and Family Welfare department has informed all BSKY-empanelled hospitals to extend health coverage to the beneficiaries, aged five to 18 years as per the documentary evidence submitted by their parents. This is a great pro-people step which will benefit lakhs of families. Such moves have ensured that the popularity of five-time Chief Minister Patnaik keeps rising. ■

Trial And Error

The Supreme Court's move to prevent biased reporting and media trials will go a long way in safeguarding due process and ensuring fair trials

IF Bureau

To tackle the challenge of biased reporting and media trials in criminal cases, the Supreme Court on September 13 directed the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to put together a comprehensive manual on “media briefings” that can guide police officials so that that press notes released by probe agencies are not based on subjective opinions that place guilt on the accused.

“We direct that all the Director General of Police shall within one month communicate their suggestions for preparation of appropriate guidelines. Thereafter, the MHA shall proceed to prepare the guidelines,” ordered a bench consisting of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices Manoj Misra and PS Narasimha.

The bench noted that news reports implicating the accused in a case are unfair since they prompt public suspicion that the accused has committed a crime before proper investigation can take place, even though the presumption of innocence is a legal principle that means an accused must be presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The top court said there is an urgent requirement for a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) about how mediapersons should be briefed given



The top court said there is an urgent requirement for a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) about how mediapersons should be briefed given the dramatic rise in reporting on criminal cases in print, electronic and social media

the dramatic rise in reporting on criminal cases in print, electronic and social media. Guidelines on this subject were last issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2010.

The bench said a delicate balance must be maintained between the media's fundamental right to free speech and expression, the privacy of the victim, and the right of the accused to fair investigation.

The top court was hearing a public interest plea by NGO People's Union for Civil Liberties seeking framing of guidelines for the reporting of criminal cases and encounter killings. In response to the same PIL, the SC had in 2014 outlined a set of procedures to be followed in the investigation of deaths following police encounters. These guidelines included preserving a piece of evidence, independent investigation, videographing the post mortem, prompt registration of an FIR,



“

Thus, while a disclosure by the media of relevant details involves public interest associated with the fundamental right under article 19(1)(a) [freedom of speech and expression], equally, rights of the accused and of the victims or as the case maybe survivors of the crime have a direct bearing on the fundamental right to life and personal liberty which is protected by Article 21 [freedom to live with dignity] – The Supreme Court of India

officials to mediapersons.

He said, “We cannot restrain the media from reporting, but the sources can be restrained because the source is the state. Even in the Aarushi case, so many versions were given to the media.” Aarushi Talwar, 13, and Hemraj, an elderly male domestic help, were found murdered in a Noida home, and media accounts placed the needle of suspicion on the girl's parents.

Media coverage of the Arushi Talwar case was criticised for spreading canards as well as defamatory stories by pushing narratives of an honour killing and extra-marital affairs, among others. In 2010, the SC warned media channels against irresponsible reporting that adversely impacted the victim's honour.

The top court reiterated that any disclosure by police officials must not lead to unfair prejudice and media trials that predetermine the guilt of the defendant. The court has given a three-month deadline to the MHA to frame a comprehensive manual on media briefings.

The move of the top court has been welcomed by legal experts as it will go a long way in protecting the dignity and privacy of the accused as well as the victim. According to LiveLaw, the next hearing of the case is scheduled for the second week of January. ■

conducting a magisterial investigation and ensuring a speedy trial.

In 2017, the SC had ordered fresh Memorandum of Police Guidelines on “media briefings” to protect the rights of the accused and make sure that their defence is not prejudiced over the course of trial.

“Media reporting in matters involving commission of crimes involves several aspects of public interest. At a basic level, the fundamental right to free speech and expression is directly both in terms of rights of media to portray and disseminate news, views and information and the right of the viewing public and readers to receive a diversity of opinions.

“There can be no gainsaying in the

fact that the media in terms of its right to speech and expression and consumers have a right to receive fair and unbiased information. Criminal offences and investigation by law enforcement machinery involves significant elements of public interest bearing upon the right to inform as well as the right to know,” the bench said.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who was appointed amicus curiae by the top court, submitted his recommendations in the form of draft guidelines after collating effective police-media relations practices in jurisdictions such as the CBI. Sankaranarayanan cited the 2008 Aarushi Talwar murder case where multiple versions of the incident were reported by police

What Goes Around Comes Around

Caretaker prime minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar's government is standing helpless while Islamabad faces heat from Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan for past mistakes

Pakistan has come a full circle from August 2021 when the then Prime Minister Imran Khan welcomed the Taliban in Kabul by saying that it has “broken the chains of slavery”. His comments raised eyebrows across the world after photographs of heavily armed Taliban fighters swarming and inspecting the presidential palace went viral.

Exactly two years later, Imran Khan's successor and Pakistan's interim prime minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar is dealing with those very groups who took over Kabul. The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), with close ties to the Taliban regime in Kabul, has unleashed relentless attacks in Pakistan's north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa almost on a daily basis.

Geopolitical analyst Mark Kinra said: “The main task of the interim government is to ensure that elections are held in 90 days. The interim prime minister is close to the army, a known fact, therefore, we know that he will abide by whatever the army says. Considering the political structure of Pakistan, where the army takes decisions on most of the important issues including internal security, under the current arrangement, the Pakistani Army will take full responsibility for security issues in the country”.

Kinra adds that both the current hotspots on the border – TTP attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral and the skirmish at the Tokhram border – are the responsibility of the army.

That Pakistan's interim government is mostly a helpless bystander to what is happening on the hot Af-Pak border is a sentiment echoed by other experts

“

Pakistan and Taliban are on the same page but have different issues and priorities. The TTP is doing to Pakistan – spread radicalism and dismantle the democratic state – what Pakistan did to Afghanistan – A Pakistani activist, who did not wish to be named

as well.

Kakar's hands are bound because he heads a government with a narrow mandate – a supervisory role that Pakistan goes to the polls in 90 days. A Pakistani activist said: “Kakar and Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti along with the entire cabinet are toothless. The decisions are taken by the Pakistani Army in conjunction with the intelligence agencies in GHQ”.

The Pakistani expert, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that the TTP has learnt fast from its erstwhile mentors – the Pakistani Army, which is believed to have taken nearly \$33 billion in aid from the US under the pretext of fighting the war on terror and used the aid to help fund Taliban insurgents on the sly.

“Pakistan and Taliban are on the same page but have different issues and priorities. The TTP is doing to Pakistan – spread radicalism and dismantle the democratic state – what Pakistan did to Afghanistan”.

In the latest attack, a soldier was killed and six others including civilians were injured after an improvised explosive device (IED) blew up on a military vehicle in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on September 10.

The incident took place just days after four soldiers were killed in clashes with TTP militants reportedly infiltrating from across the Afghan border. Some reports have said that the TTP has taken control of several villages inside Pakistan.

Hundreds of TTP militants are believed to have crossed over into Pakistan in Chitral, a sensitive region that borders the Wakhan Corridor and China's controversial western region of Xinjiang.

To the south of Chitral, the Pakistani border personnel had a firing incident against the Afghan border guards at the Torkham border crossing on September 6. The provocation was the construction of a building on the Afghan side of the border which Pakistan claims runs contrary to the agreements between the two sides. Diplomacy and meetings between Pakistani and Afghan border officials have failed to resolve the issue.

Amid an intensifying diplomatic spat, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch even slammed Kabul by saying: “These [terrorist] elements are enjoying sanctuaries inside Afghanistan as confirmed by the UN Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in its latest report”.

With hands tied, the interim government is biding its time as Pakistan's strategic policy of using terrorists as statecraft comes back to haunt it. ■

Babus On The Go

Vishal Chauhan, a 1998-batch IAS officer of Sikkim cadre, has been appointed as Member (Administration), National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for an overall tenure of five years ending 30.11.2025.

Puneet Yadav, a 1999-batch IAS officer of West Bengal cadre, has been appointed as Joint Secretary, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances for an overall tenure of five years ending 21.09.2025.

Vijay Nehra, a 2001-batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, has been appointed as Senior Directing Staff (CS), National Defence College (NDC) under the Ministry of Defence, for a tenure of five years vice Priyank Bharti, a 2001-batch IAS officer of Punjab cadre.

Brijesh Pandey, a 2004-batch IAS officer of Tripura cadre, has been appointed as Senior Joint Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region for a tenure of five years vice Saurabh Endley, a 1990-batch IRSME officer.

Manish Bhardwaj, a 1997-batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, has been appointed as Deputy Director General (DDG), Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology for a tenure of five years. He replaces Rupinder Singh, a 1996-batch IAS officer of Maharashtra cadre.

Anandrao Vishnu Patil, a 1998-batch IAS officer of Tamil Nadu cadre, has been appointed as Joint Secretary, Department of School Education & Litera-



Vishal Chauhan

cy for a tenure of five years.

Beena M, a 1999-batch IAS officer of Kerala cadre, has been appointed as Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms) for a combined tenure of seven years ending 03.10.2025.

Pradeep Kumar Agrawal, a 2006-batch IAS officer of Punjab cadre, has been appointed as Joint Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River

Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, for a tenure of five years vice T Rajeshwari, a 1985-batch ISS officer.

Alex V F Paul Menon V, a 2006-batch IAS officer of Chhattisgarh cadre, has been appointed as Development Commissioner (JS level), MEPZ, SEZ, Chennai for a combined tenure of five years up to 22.03.2027.

Anirudh Sravan Pulipaka, a 2011-batch IAS officer of Karnataka cadre, has been appointed as Private Secretary to the Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs (Nirmala Sitharaman) in the M/o Corporate Affairs at Deputy Secretary level for a period of five years.

Yashu Rustagi, a 2012-batch IAS officer of Uttar Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as Deputy Secretary in the Department of Personnel & Training for a period of four years.

OTHER MOVES

Gopal Baglay, a 1992-batch IFS officer, has been appointed as the next High Commissioner of India to Australia.

Santosh Jha, a 1993-batch IFS officer, has been appointed as the next High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka.

Gaurav Singh, a 2012-batch IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre, has been inducted to the post of Superintendent of Police (SP) in CBI for a period of five years. ■



Vijay Nehra



Out Of Place, Out Of Time

From royal ironsmiths to homeless nomads, Gadia Lohars have lost almost everything - except pride in their Rajput heritage - over time

As the sun's rays break through the foggy morning, Sarla (40), a mother of five, carries some iron utensils which she hopes to sell door-to-door. Made by her husband, she has chosen a kadai (a wide, round iron utensil) and two other large vessels. For 30 years now, this is the only life Sarla has ever known, save for when she has fallen ill or was asked by her husband to stay home.

Sarla resides with her family in a small, makeshift settlement of the Gadia Lohar community by the roadside in Saharanpur. Gadia Lohar women traditionally go door-to-door, selling metal goods crafted by their husbands. Hailing from Rajasthan, the ironsmiths lead a nomadic life, their bullock carts serving as mobile homes. Hence the name Gadia Lohar (Gadia means 'cart' in

The ambiguity in the status of their caste means they have no caste certificates, leaving them unable to avail the benefits of schemes designed for marginalised communities

Hindi). Present in many states of India, the Gadia Lohars are known by different names in each region. In Rajasthan, they are called Gadulia Lohar while in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, they are known as Gaddi Lohar, Bhuvariya or Gadia and Bhubalia Lohar, respectively. Although their mother tongue is Mevati, they are fluent in Hindi.

There are many such settlements across the states. The ambiguity in the status of their caste means they have no caste certificates, leaving them unable to avail the benefits of schemes designed for marginalised communities. Unlike many other nomadic tribes who are considered 'Scheduled Tribes' in most states, Gadia Lohars are categorised as 'Other Backward Class' (OBC).

In Rajasthan, the Gadia Lohars come under the category of 'Most Backward Class' (MBC) and are entitled to a reservation of one per cent for government jobs. In Delhi, though the Gadia Lohars are categorised as OBC, they have not benefited from this categorisation and are not able to avail any special schemes, despite their extreme marginalisation. No special schemes have been proposed or implemented for the

Gadia Lohars living in Uttar Pradesh.

Proud of their Rajput heritage, they are unwilling to compromise on their identity. Sarla points to a metal sign that reads 'Maharana Pratap Colony' and states, "We want this settlement to be converted into a colony where we can build our houses without interference."

A few metres away from her makeshift hut, Bundo Devi (60) sits on a cot while sewing a blanket. Community members seek Bundo's advice on matters such as marriage and other major life decisions. She proudly shares the origins of her Rajput community. "We won't compromise on our identity for caste certificates. Being Rajput is an honour for us," Bundo says determinedly.

At the edge of the settlement which accommodates around 40 families, Ramesh Kumar (44), a man with a handlebar moustache, sits, smoking a hookah. As 'pradhan' or chief of the Gadia Lohar settlement near Beri Bagh, Saharanpur for the past 12 years, Ramesh is a respected figure in the area. The pradhan is selected by mutual consent of the community.

Ramesh believes that the absence of a caste certificate is the reason the community remains unable to access basic services. "We are Rajputs," he too states like the others, "and the government does not have any criteria to help people without seeing their caste certificates." His ancestors left Rajasthan years ago. He has no certificates to prove his citizenship. Already struggling to acquire a permanent area to live in, he opines that the recently introduced Citizenship Amendment Act will impact the community negatively.

Sarla tells that the Gadia Lohars served as blacksmiths in Maharana Pratap's army in Mewar. The 13th king of Mewar, he was revered for putting up a strong fight against the onslaught by the Mughals in the northwestern region of Rajasthan. When Mewar fell to the Mughals, the Gadia Lohar community vowed to the king that they would never return or settle elsewhere until his reign was restored. They then took to travelling across India by bullock cart, crafting and repairing agricultural tools and kitchenware for villagers on the way.

The entrance to Chittorgarh Fort in Rajasthan bears an inscription stating that the Rajputs and Gadia Lohars took an oath before leaving the fort to follow a simple lifestyle until Chittor was liberated and the Mughals defeated. They



Gadia Lohar moulding a spade by the roadside

Over time, many of the community members settled in urban areas, setting up small huts on vacant land by railway tracks and roadsides while continuing their trade

promised to never enter the fort, live in houses, sleep on beds, use lamps or draw water from wells using ropes. The community members have adhered to these vows made by their ancestors for almost 400 years.

"Some rules break due to life's circumstances," Sarla adds. Over time, many of the community members settled in urban areas, setting up small huts on vacant land by railway tracks and roadsides while continuing their trade.

"It became our tradition to move from place to place. So, we could never have a house of our own. But we don't travel with our families in bullock carts anymore," Sarla says. The community members build houses themselves while the carts stand as remnants of their nomadic past, now used as a storage facility for the belongings of the families.

Sarla's small dwelling comprises a bed, a television and some iron utensils. "Even this hut is not ours," she remarks with a wry smile, hinting at the constant threat of eviction. As she steps out, her

4-year-old grandson pleads with Sarla to be taken along. Living by the roadside, Sarla fears for his safety. "There is heavy traffic here. What if he is hit? Pigs roam around. We are forced to live in unhygienic conditions." She persuades the little boy to stay, bribing him with a one rupee coin as part of the deal.

In September 2019, NGO Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) published a report 'Mapping the Marginalised: Delhi's Gadia Lohar Community.' The report revealed that almost 41 per cent of the settlements lacked access to clean drinking water, 22 per cent to electricity, 75 per cent to healthcare services, 61 per cent to ration shops and nearly half of the settlements surveyed could not use garbage disposal facilities.

Ramesh explains that obtaining permanent land remains their biggest concern. "We will never make any progress while living in these temporary settlements as every season takes its toll on us." Pointing towards a small cemented building, five toilets on one side of the settlement, Ramesh says they were constructed by the Nagar Nigam two years ago. At present, they are shared by the 40 families of the settlement where previously the only choice was open defecation near the stream on the opposite side of the road. "It always worried us and showed that the governing bodies had failed to provide us with basic amenities," he says.

Danish Khan, an assistant engi-



The Gadia Lohar community's cultural identity, which is built on their traditional blacksmithing work, is also being washed away as their profession now provides bare minimum sustenance

neer in the construction department of Nagar Nigam Saharanpur, responsible for addressing encroachment cases on roads, acknowledges the dilemma of the Gadia Lohars. "They can live temporarily but not settle permanently," he sums up.

Khan explains that although the Gadia Lohars' settlement is considered as an encroachment, plans to evict them fail as they tend to return to the area again. According to Nagar Nigam officials, until the Gadia Lohars have their own land, they will continue to live on the roadsides. This poses a challenge for both the community and the local authorities in various cities where the Gadia Lohars have settled.

Danish cites an instance from 2018 in Delhi where 22 Gadia Lohar families were forcefully evicted after their houses were demolished. This is only one of many such instances. In March 2019, even a stay order from the High Court of Delhi did not save a settlement in Khyala from the threat of demolition till the public intervened and a temporary consensus was reached.

The community is tightly knit. As the men mostly stay back to make utensils, they also look after the children while the women are out from early morning till noon to sell the wares. The elderly who are around also watch the children. Sitting beside a chulha (mud stove), Sunny Thakur (22), an ironsmith wearing a silver kara (bangle) with tattoos adorning his arms, hammers away at white-hot pieces of iron from dawn to dusk. This time, he forges the metal into a spade. Never having had the

Most of the girls in the community are married off at an early age, dropping out of government school after puberty and eventually marrying within their own community. They then assist their husbands in ironwork

opportunity to attend school, Sunny began crafting such tools from the age of 12. He laments the waning demand for their handmade wares as mass-produced iron tools and utensils dominate the market. Some community members have resorted to selling plastic tubs alongside their iron goods. Sunny says, "We don't want to lose our customers but the respect and demand for traditional items has diminished with time." He justifies the current trend, asking why anyone would choose iron over plastic when the latter comes at a cheaper price.

As the times change, the community recognises the importance of an education. The pradhan Ramesh and his brother's children are the only ones among the 40 families who have received a senior secondary education. His brother's son Pradeep and daughter Ravina are in the 11th standard, both aspiring to secure good jobs as adults. Exhaling dense smoke from his hookah, Ramesh says, "Our children will either have good jobs or work as ironsmiths. They will not work as labourers or in

shops."

Ramesh is also financially stable. He purchases iron at wholesale price, distributing it to fellow community members who then forge the metal into various utensils. Unlike him, the others cannot afford to send their family members to school as they need more hands at the workshop or to sell the tools. No matter how much a person studies, supporting the family with their work takes precedence.

Most of the girls in the community are married off at an early age, dropping out of government school after puberty and eventually marrying within their own community. They then assist their husbands in ironwork. "The new generation is open to studying to an extent if they want. But I was married as soon as I turned 18," says a young woman, on condition of anonymity. "Ironwork isn't something we need to learn. We've grown up watching it."

Sunny prefers that the new generation focus on academics. He refers to his friend Shahrugh Kumar, "He got married at 21. Now he has a one-year-old daughter." Deprived of an education himself, Shahrugh is determined to provide his daughter with that chance. Every winter, he makes Himachal Pradesh his home for six months, renting a room and selling iron tools and utensils there during the season. Shahrugh believes that education is the only way out from the deteriorating condition of their community. He dreams of the day when he will have a house to call his own and a secure environment for his daughter.

"Life is harsh, but we are still creative," Shahrugh says. The dreariness of life does little to dampen the Lohar spirit as is evident from the colourful old sarees spread tautly across the roofs of their houses. It is a matter of pride for the community. Shahrugh's wife sits at a sewing machine, stitching the ends of more old sarees together while other family members spread them over the roofs or as curtains to cover their windows.

Noting that their community has a zero percent crime rate, Ramesh says, "We believe in peace though our lives are fraught with difficulties. All we wish for is a permanent area of land that will provide our future generations with a home." But not at the cost of their ancestry. "We want to change our situation, but we will not compromise on our caste. We are Rajputs and we seek help as Rajputs," he states categorically. ■

“As world and Asian leaders gather this month in ... for the G20, in ... for APEC meetings, and in ... for the East Asia Summit, a phenomenon coloring some observers’ perceptions of global politics and economics is the alleged decline of the US.”

This passage about “alleged American decline” is from a commentary that ran on the website of Brookings, a major US think tank, in 2011 under the headline “Is America Declining?”

The same question has been asked every year since, with the insinuation that it is the incumbent president of the time who is responsible for it. And it was asked again as US President Joe Biden joined G20 leaders — barring two glaring absentees Russia’s Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi Jinping — in New Delhi for an annual meet.

Is the US declining under President Biden?

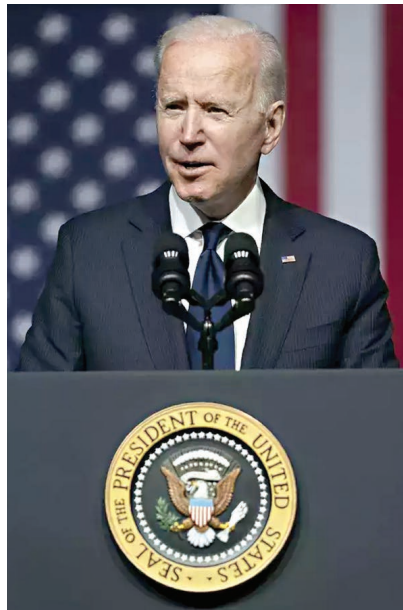
The US dollar remains the dominant international currency of trade and exchange on Biden’s watch with no serious threat despite the wishful rhetoric from China and Russia. The economy continues to be the largest in the world with \$26.65 trillion GDP (China is second at \$19.27), according to the International Monetary Fund. The US-led NATO has grown, acquiring a new member, Finland, with another one waiting in the wings, Sweden. A US-led alliance of Western countries has foiled Putin’s takeover of Ukraine. Biden’s America has rapidly escalated the Quad’s engagement to summit-level and founded AUKUS to counter rising Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific. And, finally, Biden pulled the US out of Afghanistan, ending its longest war after the previous two presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, had failed.

Biden has also focused his administration on countering China’s rising global influence as a competitor. Instead of launching a messy trade war like his predecessor Trump, he has used narrowly focused authorities to choke China, denying it sensitive technology under the overall strategy of derisking and diversifying.

He has scaled up pressure on China, whose economy is undergoing its worst downturn yet, to concede more market access and fair and equal treatment of US companies. His commerce secretary, Gina Raimondo, read the riot

Much Ado About Nothing

The narrative about the United States’ decline as a global power is grossly exaggerated



act to the Chinese leadership during a recent visit telling them their country is becoming “uninvestable”.

Biden’s own personal image was seen largely positively globally, as demonstrated in a poll by Pew earlier in the year.

A median of 54 per cent of the respondents in 23 countries said they have confidence in the American president. In the same poll, a median of 58 per cent of the respondents said they had a positive view of the US — although many of them also said the US interferes in the affairs of other countries.

A Pew poll in 2020, which was Trump’s presidency, reported an all-time low in the world’s perception of the US — a median of only 34 per cent of the respondents held a favourable

view of the US and the incumbent president at the time was down to 16 per cent favourability.

Biden himself and the Biden-led American fare considerably better, with double-digit leads in percentage points.

President Biden scores low popularity ratings at home in the US, however.

In a poll released just ahead of his departure for New Delhi, his popularity stood at 39 per cent, and most Republicans vying for the party’s nomination to take on the president in 2024 were in close head-to-head matches with him, with one exception, former Ambassador to UN Nikki Haley who had a clear lead over Biden.

The narrative of American decline draws some sustenance from how American themselves view America’s global standing.

Opinions about America’s global standing dipped slightly in 2023 as 21 per cent said the US “stands above all other countries in the world”, compared to 24 per cent in 2019; 52 per cent said

The US dollar remains the dominant international currency of trade and exchange on Biden’s watch with no serious threat despite the wishful rhetoric from China and Russia. The economy continues to be the largest in the world

the US is “one of the greatest countries, along with some others”, compared to 55 per cent in 2019; and 27 per cent said “there are other countries that are better than the US” compared to 21 per cent in 2019.

And it had to do with the domestic politics of the US.

“Much of this recent change in attitudes has come from Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. Four years ago, 40 per cent of Republicans said the US stands above all other nations, compared with 31 per cent today. And the share of Republicans saying other countries are better has nearly doubled, from 9 per cent to 17 per cent,” Pew said in an August report.

Allegations of American decline remain what they were in 2011, allegations. ■

A rising number of MGNREGA workers in Odisha's Rayagada are being left high and dry between job card deletions and Aadhaar seeding

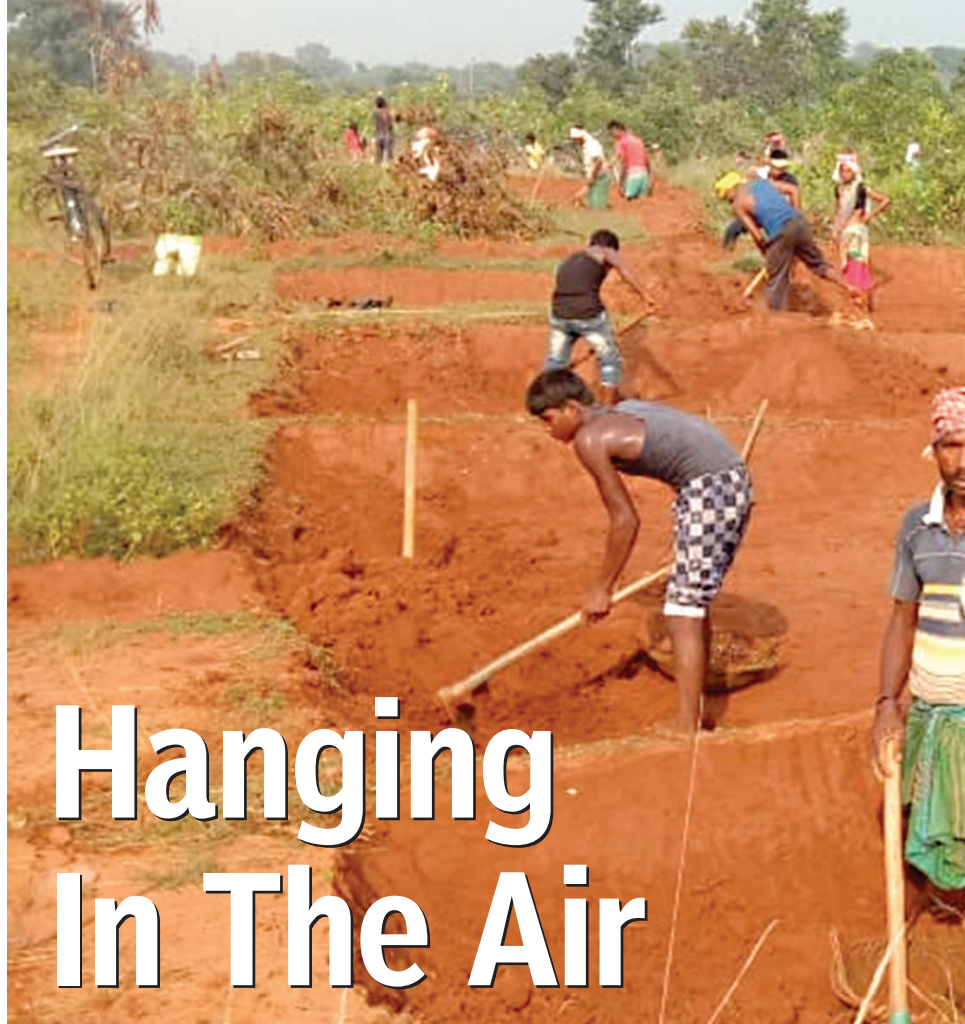
When Dhananjay Sahu (29) from Akhusingi village in Rayagada district started living separately after marriage, he decided to apply for a new job card under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.

He wanted his wife also to benefit from the health insurance provided under the Nirman Shramik Kalyan Yojana, for which an MGNREGA job card is used as a primary identification tool. He also hoped to ensure 100 days of work for the new household by accessing the new card.

No new card was issued to him, despite applying at Akhusingi gram panchayat last December. Much to his dismay, he later learnt that he had lost his MGNREGA identity. "Once I applied for the new card, my name was deleted from the job card of my parents. When I approached the officials concerned, they said re-entering a name along with the linked Aadhaar number was not possible once it was deleted from the website. In short, I lost my right to work under the MGNREGA," said Sahu, a plumber.

Sahu's case is no exception. Job cards are flagged as duplicates in the MGNREGA website when family members apply for a new card. Once Aadhaar numbers and account details are linked to a family job card, the website does not allow access to a new card to any member of that family.

The problem stems from the Ministry of Rural Development's announcement in January, making the Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) mandatory for all payments to the MGNREGA beneficiaries. Workers should link their Aadhaar numbers with their job cards and bank accounts



Hanging In The Air

The problem stems from the Ministry of Rural Development's announcement in January, making the Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) mandatory for all payments to the MGNREGA beneficiaries

to get payments through ABPS. The previous instruction was to link Aadhaar with active job card holders, but the new directive made it mandatory to link Aadhaar numbers of all job card holders.

The deadline for implementing ABPS has been extended a fifth time — to December 31 from the last set time limit of August 31. In a bid to meet the deadline, the names of workers found in more than one database are being removed without much thought, leading to a sharp spike in such deletions.

Responding to questions raised by Congress MPs Gaurav Gogoi and VK Sreekandan about the 244.3% hike in deletion of MGNREGA job cards in 2022-23 fiscal against the previous two financial years, Rural Development

Minister Giriraj Singh informed the Lok Sabha in a written reply on July 25 that over five crore job cards have been deleted in the last fiscal.

The reasons mentioned for deletions were fake (incorrect) job card, duplicate card, unwillingness to work, permanent relocation of a family from a gram panchayat or cases where the only person listed in the card has passed away.

For instance, in Rayagada district, there were 2,26,151 job card households in 2021. Over the last three years, 68,864 job cards have been nixed, reflecting a deletion rate of more than 30%. Similarly, in Padmapur block of Rayagada district, the number of job cards has come down to 8,230 at present from the 15,515 in 2021-22 fiscal.

When Upendra Mandangi from Perupango village tried Aadhaar-job card-bank account linking, he got the message of successful linking. However, after a few days, his job card number was no longer visible on the website. When he attempted to register for manual work, his name was missing from the muster roll.

"When I complained to the panchayat officials, they told me about an automated process on the website that caused the problem. They said it



was beyond their control and they had no idea what was the reason for it," he added.

Ananda Dandasena from Akhusingi shared his bitter experience. "I applied for work, but did not get a notification. When I enquired with the supervisor (mate) on why my name was missing from the muster roll, he informed that my Aadhaar number had been automatically deleted (unfreeze) from the website."

Without any doubt, one can say that mass deletion has had an impact on many genuine workers as well. The MGNREGA job card serves as a key document of identification in rural areas. They are used for completing Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures at banks and post offices, while opening accounts. They also serve as the primary document for registering construction workers in labour offices, thereby providing them with insurance coverage.

Akhusingi gram panchayat sarpanch Purnabasi Sabar said that when a family shifted to another panchayat, their data should ideally be transferred to their new panchayat. "This process involves deletion of job card data, including Aadhaar and bank account numbers, from the old panchayat. Al-

Without any doubt, one can say that mass deletion has had an impact on many genuine workers as well. The MGNREGA job card serves as a key document of identification in rural areas

though the MGNREGA website permits entry of new household names, errors are shown when attempting to link Aadhaar and account numbers to the new job cards in the new panchayat. So, the new panchayat where the beneficiaries shifted are unable to issue new job cards," he said.

Once an Aadhaar card data is deleted from the MGNREGA website, it cannot be re-entered. According to the official sources at the Panchayati Raj Department in Rayagada district, it was earlier possible to unfreeze Aadhaar and account numbers of the deleted job card holders through the district programme coordinator's login. However, the Ministry of Rural Development removed this option last year.

Utkal Sabar, a social worker from Sandhikhola village, said the Central

government should provide gram panchayats the power to delete job cards, and the related Aadhaar numbers and account details. Such an approach would prove beneficial when people shift to another panchayat.

Noting that job cards are issued on the basis of Below Poverty Line survey data, 2002, Prabhakar Padhy, a youth leader from Akhusingi, said "it is high time we stopped issuing job cards based on such outdated data."

Anil Kumar Parida, a social worker from Bahupadar, said the Central government should issue job cards based on Aadhaar data and not BPL 2002 data. "This would ensure seamless card generation, where account numbers are already linked. Such an approach would enhance rural job security and livelihood," he said.

Social activist Saroj Kumar Dash of Gudiabandha alleged that the clear intention behind job card deletions and technical errors was to curtail MGNREGA work at the grassroots level.

"During the scheme's initial days, the focus was on maintaining a 60:40 ratio between labour and material components. Now with the deployment of technology and resulting glitches, job seekers are unable to secure even a single day of work," Dash said. ■



Communist Connection

Russia's strong ties with North Korea go all the way back to Stalin

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has given a go-by to personal attendance at high-profile global summits including of the BRICS and G20, may soon travel to his country's east to meet his counterpart from a secretive neighbour and discuss a mutually beneficial exchange of defence equipment and technology, as per growing media speculation.

The meeting between President Putin and North Korean supremo Kim

There are also talks of trilateral military exercises between Russia, China and North Korea (for which it will be a first) adding to growing concerns in Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington

Jong Un – who has not been out of his country since he ordered its borders

closed in wake of the 2020 Covid outbreak – is being deemed as between leaders of two "pariah nations" – both at the receiving end of widespread sanctions.

However, it must be noted that these sanctions are overwhelmingly from Western powers – and their Asian allies. For Russia, a wide swathe of the world across Asia – especially India and China, Africa, and South America, it is business as usual – more or less.

And North Korea is not entirely



and North Korea (for which it will be a first) adding to growing concerns in Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington.

But are Russia and North Korea just fortuitous partners thrown together by the vicissitudes of diplomatic realignments and their choices?

Not really, for Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union, not only helped create – and then safeguard – North Korea and though Soviet Russian/Russian-North Korean relations have had their ups and downs, they persisted. Now, if the part of arms supplies is true, they only might be reversed a bit.

For good measure, the Soviets also selected its first leader – and his family is still in power.

Soviet-North Korean relationships were not always smooth. The invasion of South Korea was Kim Il-Sung's idea and Soviets only agreed after they got an atom bomb of their own and China's Mao Zedong agreed to support

Kim's Jing Un's grandfather Kim Il-Sung was handpicked by Stalin after vetting by his spy chief Lavrenty Beria and officials of the NKVD (predecessor of the KGB) to become leader of North Korea after the Japanese were driven out at the end of the Second World War. His son and successor Kim Jong-Il was born Yuri Irsenovich Kim in Soviet Russia in 1941 or 1942.

The Korean peninsula was occupied and colonised by Japan in 1910 and their harsh policies of suppressing the Korean culture led to resentment among the local people, and many of them fled to Manchuria. Among them was the family of Kim Song Ju (1912-94), who would plunge into guerrilla warfare against the expanding Japanese in China too and take the name of Kim Il-Sung.

Kim Il-Sung, who studied in China, also joined the Chinese Communist Party as he turned 19 and creditably fought against the Japanese who had invaded Manchuria too in the 1930s for nearly a decade before the growing pressure forced him and the remaining members of his battalion to cross the Amur into Soviet Russia in 1940.

The Soviet authorities sent the Ko-

rean soldiers, headed by Kim, to a military base near Khabarovsk for training and they, for all purposes, became part of the Red Army and spent World War II there.

On August 8, 1945, the Soviets declared war on Japan and by the time it surrendered, were in Pyongyang. While North Korean accounts say Kim Il-Sung led the liberation, it was only in September 1945 that he and 60 members of his band landed in Wonsan port from the Soviet ship Pugachev, dressed in their Red Army uniforms.

As it had been decided that the country would be divided at the 38th Parallel for occupation purposes, Stalin needed a local face to run the Soviet part and Kim Il-Sung was chosen for two reasons – he spoke good Russian and having lived almost all his life outside his homeland, had no contact with the "nationalistic" Korean communists, whom Stalin disliked and distrusted.

However, on the flip side, since Kim Il Sung had studied in China and trained in Soviet Russia, his Korean was rusty and before he could address his people in October 1945, the Soviets had to help him brush up his mother tongue.

A Soviet army officer also saved him from an assassination attack in October 1946 by absorbing the blast of a grenade thrown at him with his own body, losing his arm. In September 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea came into existence with Kim Il-Sung its leader – he would go on to outlive the Soviet Union himself.

Soviet-North Korean relationships were not always smooth. The invasion of South Korea was Kim Il-Sung's idea and Soviets only agreed after they got an atom bomb of their own and China's Mao Zedong agreed to support. Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation was also not welcomed by North Korea, like China, but Kim Il-Sung did not become a Maoist.

Relations got better when Leonid Brezhnev came to power, and North Korea was recipient of considerable Soviet aid, termed as "loans". The end of the Soviet Union put paid to this and soon, North Korea had its devastating famine in the early 1990s.

However, under President Putin, good relations between Moscow and Pyongyang resumed – and it remains to be seen what the future trajectory will be. ■

alone too – both Russia and China have been old allies, and though they may have agreed to sanctions against it over its nuclear weapons programme and are unlikely to back it in any reckless adventure, they acknowledge its use in keeping the US, South Korea, and Japan on edge.

The prospects of conventional arms for Russia in exchange for technical know-how for North Korea, which has just announced the launch of a new tactical nuclear attack submarine but has recently witnessed the failure of two attempts to launch a satellite, was strengthened by the recent visit of Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu to Pyongyang – the first such visit since dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

There are also talks of trilateral military exercises between Russia, China

As the caste-based survey is "almost completed" in Bihar and will be made public soon, the parties in opposition bloc I.N.D.I.A have an edge over the BJP.

Many political parties, including JD(U) and RJD, said that after the survey, the state government will be in a better position to make policies for marginalised people of the society. However, on the whole, it will be used as a tool against the saffron party.

The saffron party's poll ploy of "polarising" Hindu electorate which have 80 per cent vote share has earned them dividends in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

In Bihar, RJD, JD(U), Congress and Left parties are viewing the survey as an effective method to take on the BJP's 80:20 math. As per the social structure of Bihar, the upper caste voters are considered as core voters of BJP and even

Earlier, the caste-based census occurred in 1931. At that time, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha were united. After the country gained Independence, Brahmins had the dominance in Bihar and it was reflected through four Chief Ministers namely Kedar Pandey, Bindeshwari Debey, Dr Jagannath Mishra and Bhagwat Jha Azad before 1990

opposition parties do not deny it.

In Bihar, OBC, EBC, Muslims are in large numbers compared to upper castes like Brahmins, Bhumihar and Rajput. Roughly, the state has 19 per cent upper caste, 16 per cent Dalits, 17 per cent Muslims, 16 per cent Yadavs and 38 per cent OBC and EBC voters.

The political leaders are claiming that the survey will be beneficial equally to RJD, JD(U), Left parties, and Congress compared to BJP which enjoys the support of upper caste and trader community.

In case the BJP gives tickets to OBC, EBC, Yadav candidates, there would be a factor of trust deficit in the mind of

Cut Out From The Same Cloth

Why the likes of RJD and JD(U) are seeing the caste survey as an effective counter to the BJP's 80:20 math



voters. They would trust candidates of RJD, JD(U), Left and Congress parties more than the BJP.

Earlier, the caste-based census occurred in 1931. At that time, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha were united. After the country gained Independence, Brahmins had the dominance in Bihar and it was reflected through four Chief Ministers namely Kedar Pandey, Bindeshwari Debey, Dr Jagannath Mishra and Bhagwat Jha Azad before 1990. Sri Krishna Singh was the Bhumi-har leader of the state who became the first chief minister of Bihar.

After them, RJD chief Lalu Prasad emerged as a leader in Bihar. At that time, there was huge social inequality

“

We keep our own fellow human beings behind the social system. We did not care for them, and this continued for almost 2000 years until we provide them equality, some social remedies have to be done. Reservation is one of them. Reservation should be continued till there is such discrimination. The Sangh gives complete support to the reservation provided in the Constitution"

– RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, during his recent address in Nagpur

in the state. Lalu Prasad, whose politics was based on backward class people, gave them a voice to fight for their rights in the state. Hence, Lalu Prasad is considered as the leader of social justice in the state.

Nitish Kumar also comes from backward caste and knows that the core voters of BJP are from upper caste.

Bihar has 243 seats in the assembly.

Yadavs are considered as core voters of RJD which has maximum 35 MLAs, Congress 1, CPM 1, CPI (ML) 2, BJP 7, JD-U 5 and VIP 1. Though, RJD lost seven Yadav MLAs as compared to 2015 assembly election in which 42 Yadav



MLAs were elected.

For the poll arithmetic, the BJP and RSS have played the reservation card.

Recently in Nagpur, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat supported reservation in the country.

"We keep our own fellow human beings behind the social system. We did not care for them, and this continued for almost 2000 years until we provide them equality, some social remedies have to be done. Reservation is one of them. Reservation should be continued till there is such discrimination. The Sangh gives complete support to the reservation provided in the Constitution," Bhagwat said.

Countering the statement of Mohan Bhagwat, RJD spokesperson Mritunjay Tiwari said: "Our leader Lalu Prasad has throughout his life advocated for reservation for the marginalised. Mohan Bhagwat was the one who made a public statement in 2015 that reconsideration was required in reservation. He is contradicting his own statement. He is making pro-reservation comments as he has realised BJP's defeat in the 2024

polls. No one would buy his words. His statement is politically motivated to counter the caste-based survey of Bihar."

"People of the country want to know why he is advocating for reservation at the time of election. If Mohan Bhagwat and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have guts, announce for the caste-based survey of the entire country," Tiwari said.

"When caste-based surveys started in the state, people of BJP created hurdles, including moving to courts. Still, the respective courts of law have given decisions in our favour. It is almost completed and will soon come in public domain," Tiwari said.

The caste-based survey was started in Bihar in January this year and the first phase was completed in April this year. The second phase started after that but due to Patna High Court decision for temporary ban, it was stopped. Now, Patna High Court has lifted the ban and survey will resume soon. The state government will soon put all the data of the survey in the public domain. ■

FIRST BLOOD

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren's star is on the ascent with the I.N.D.I.A alliance registering its maiden electoral victory from his state

In the first battle between the NDA and 'I.N.D.I.A' in Jharkhand, the opposition alliance has emerged victorious and along with it, the political scoreboard in the state has also seen the rising prominence of the state's Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

In the recent by-election held for the Dumri Assembly constituency in the state, I.N.D.I.A's candidate Bebi Devi of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) has given them new confidence.

Amid opposition attacks, ongoing court cases, confrontations with the Central government on several issues, and action by the ED, Hemant Soren, who has been repeatedly entangled in difficulties, is now full of renewed enthusiasm.

Although Soren is apprehensive that the increasing ED and CBI scrutiny around him might lead to his imprisonment, he wants to raise his profile on the political stage before that happens so that the opposition parties do not gain any advantage from it.

At the time when the results of the Dumri Assembly by-election were announced, Soren was addressing a public gathering in Gua, Chaibasa.

The Chief Minister said: "Ever since our government came to power, conspiracies are being hatched against us. Attempts are being made to send me to jail by misusing constitutional institutions. But until they send me to jail, I will make Jharkhand strong."

Soren knows that as long as the



Soren knows that as long as the public supports a politician, it doesn't matter whether he or she is in jail or out. This political lesson has been inherited by him, primarily from his father, Shibu Soren, who has been in jail several times on charges ranging from corruption to murder, but it has had no adverse impact on him or his party

public supports a politician, it doesn't matter whether he or she is in jail or out. This political lesson has been inherited by him, primarily from his father, Shibu Soren, who has been in jail several times on charges ranging from corruption to murder, but it has had no adverse impact on him or his party, JMM. Every time the BJP leaders attack him by saying that Hemant Soren is prepared to go to jail, he responds emphatically in public gatherings, "Is any

Jharkhandi afraid of going to jail?"

Soren is once again on the radar of the ED. Last year, the ED interrogated him for nearly 10 hours in connection with the mining scam.

In its charge sheet, the ED has identified him as a protector of those accused of money laundering through illegal mining. Now, as part of the ongoing investigation into land scams in the state, the ED wants to question him.

The ED has sent him summons three times since August, but instead of appearing before the ED, he has challenged its actions in the Supreme Court, suggesting that the actions are politically motivated.

The ED had sent him a summons to appear on September 9, but he chose to travel to Delhi by a chartered plane to attend the G-20 summit dinner hosted by the President, rather than comply.

Soren's supporters chant a slogan for him - "Hemant hai toh himmat hail" (If Hemant is here, there is courage!). It is safe to say that I.N.D.I.A's victory in the direct battle between I.N.D.I.A and NDA in Dumri has added to the "courage of Hemant."

The Dumri seat fell vacant following the death of Jagarnath Mahato, who



Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren with Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) candidate Bebi Devi and others during a public meeting ahead of Dumri bypolls, in Giridih district

was a minister in Hemant Soren's government. Even before the announcement of the by-election, Soren made a big move by inducting Bebi Devi, the widow of Jagarnath Mahato, into his cabinet without becoming an MLA and declared her as the party's candidate for the Dumri seat.

He had also started extensive development work and welfare schemes for the area. Getting Bebi Devi sworn in as a minister, even before the announcement of the election, was part of his political strategy.

During the election campaign, Soren organised several public meetings and roadshows in the area.

On the other hand, the NDA announced its candidate after the announcement of the by-election.

In the 2019 assembly elections, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's Yashoda Devi was the runner-up in this seat. At that time, the BJP also fielded its candidate, who was in the third position.

This time, the AJSU Party and the BJP contested under the NDA alliance's banner. The AJSU Party's Yashoda Devi was declared the NDA candidate.

In 2019, the combined votes of the

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AJSU Party and BJP candidates were close to 72,000, while the winning JMM candidate Jagarnath Mahato received nearly 71,000 votes. The NDA assumed that this time, the AJSU-BJP's unity would lead to a transfer of the BJP's votes to the AJSU candidate, ensuring her victory.

Soren foiled this strategy of the NDA. In fact, he systematically wooed

the minority i.e. Muslim voters to ensure the victory of his party's candidate Bebi Devi.

In 2019, the candidate of Asaduddin Owaisi's party had secured more than 24,000 votes. This time too, Owaisi fielded his candidate, but due to the strategy of Soren, 90 per cent votes of Muslims were transferred to his candidate. Owaisi's candidate got only 3,472 votes this time, which is about 20,000 less than the votes received in 2019.

However, after this victory, Soren's political aggression has intensified. Despite all the controversies, he has continued to score points against his opponents since becoming the Chief Minister after winning the 2019 elections.

After 2019, six assembly seats in the state – Dumka, Madhupur, Mandar, Ramgarh, Bermo, and Dumri – witnessed by-elections for various reasons, and the ruling alliance led by Hemant Soren won five of these seats.

It is clear that in the upcoming 2024 elections, whether it's for the Lok Sabha or the assembly, the NDA will face a tough challenge from Hemant Soren's I.N.D.I.A alliance in Jharkhand. ■

Malana's Burden

How the caste factor is deepening a Himachal Pradesh hamlet's garbage crisis



Nestled amid the picturesque landscape of the Himalayas, Malana village is well-known for many reasons, the primary one being the premium hashish that is produced here, nicknamed 'Malana Cream'.

It is also famous for its indigenous democratic system and rather infamous for how the natives perceive outsiders — as 'unclean' and untouchable. The hamlet in Himachal Pradesh draws around 15,000 to 20,000 tourists every year during the peak season in April-June and September-October.

This mountain village is now grappling with a mounting garbage crisis which is marring the natural beauty. Piles of garbage welcome you as you enter the village, and along the way, the shiny wrappers of chips and chocolates are littered until even the remotest

parts of the village.

Experts say that the surging influx of tourists coupled with the village's unique social and cultural practices have hindered effective waste management initiatives.

According to Pradeep Sangwan, founder of Healing Himalayas — which had conducted a clean-up drive in the village in 2019 — the social fabric of the village impeded their campaign since the locals of the area identify themselves as descendants of Aryans, upper caste and refused to participate.

The village is overwhelmingly homogenous with only 28 out of the 1,722 people in the village identifying as Schedule Caste, according to the 2011 Census.

Sangwan tells of his experience in other villages while conducting a cleanliness drive.

"In other areas like Kaza town and Chitkul village, we always received strong support from the local panchayat and the community — especially from the younger generation and educational institutions. In many villages, residents themselves also volunteered to collect the trash," he says. This is in stark contrast to how the population reacted to the drive in Malana.

"Residents were not willing to clean their surroundings. We even obtained permission from the temple committee but they refused to participate due to their high social status. Some even said that they were willing to pay as much as required but they would not participate in any cleanliness drive. This was very discouraging for the volunteers," Sangwan said, adding that the organisation



A few years ago, dustbins were installed along the tracks of the village by the officials from the Malana hydro project. However, soon after some of them were stolen and others broken" — Sharwan, a local cafe owner

has not organised any other cleanliness drives in the village since then.

"The villagers consider themselves special and sacred, leading them to believe that they cannot fully integrate with the general population. The local customs dictate that outsiders cannot touch Malanis, their temple or sacred platform," explains Vijay Kumar (42), who plies his taxi between Jari to Malana village entry point.

"The people of Malana believe that participating in such communal efforts may potentially expose them to individuals from lower castes — and fear that this could incur the wrath of their deity Jamlu Devta. This fear, in turn, reinforces the practice of untouchability, further segregating them from others and isolating the village from participating in broader initiatives aimed at maintaining cleanliness and hygiene," Vijay says. Raju Thakur (55), the Malana sarpanch agrees that the "upper caste

status" of the residents makes them hesitant to pick up garbage.

"If outsiders are not allowed to touch us, how can we touch their garbage?" he wonders.

When asked about whether the panchayat has initiated any community-led cleanup drive in the past, he evaded the question citing lack of funds as an excuse.

Swaru Thakur (82), one of the oldest residents of the village, blames "outsiders" for dirtying their surroundings, saying that the tourists bring their trash and dump it in the village area.

Thakur's statement is not without merit. A spot near a water stream cutting across the village has a mound of plastic bottles, courtesy of the tourists.

According to Sharwan, a cafe owner, all of this is due to a misunderstanding.

"The locals have a belief that water flowing through this stream is sacred to Jamlu Devta. No outsider has to be allowed to cross the stream with 'outside' water, and therefore the tourists are asked to empty their water bottles before proceeding further. However, due to a language barrier, tourists often misinterpret the villagers' intention thinking that they should discard their bottles, which is leading to a significant buildup of plastic waste there," he explains.

"The villagers hold the belief that any negative energy or evil brought by tourists will be washed away when they drink from the stream," he adds.

No attempt has been made by the residents or panchayat to find an alternative to check the miscommunication.

According to the sarpanch, sometimes the locals get together to hire a ragpicker from the Jari hamlet who collects some of the plastic bottles in the area, while some are washed away in the river flow.

"A few years ago, dustbins were installed along the tracks of the village by the officials from the Malana hydro project. However, soon after some of them were stolen and others broken," he adds.

The villagers also say that their households don't generate as much waste. "Whatever little is generated is burnt in tandoors that are present in every house. Sometimes children litter the surroundings with chips, toffee wrappers," the sarpanch says.

It is important to note that the practice of open burning of waste is harmful to the environment and public health,



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as it releases toxic pollutants and contributes to air pollution.

Many Indian cities and states have regulations and guidelines in place that prohibit or restrict the burning of waste, including kitchen waste, says Khwaish Gupta of Waste Warriors, an organisation that helps set up waste management systems in the Himalayan Region.

Gupta explains that over the years as villages like these opened themselves little by little to outsiders, the residents' consumption patterns also changed.

"They are also consuming packaged goods which are disposed of carelessly. The problems are the same in other villages, which may be compounded by the unique social traditions of this vil-

lage. But it remains that there is a lack of awareness among the locals and long-term interventions at the local level," she adds.

Also, interestingly, the village has fines for several petty offences – like touching a person, their religious spaces and temples, their water bodies or homes. The fines range from Rs 500 to Rs 50,000, depending on the severity of the offence. However, there is no fine for littering.

The unsegregated solid waste is not only hampering the beauty of the village but also plaguing its only water source. Most of the garbage is dumped at the entrance of the village near Malana Nala.

"In certain areas, the river has completely changed its flow due to the garbage heaps," says the sole ASHA worker of the village Nirmal Devi.

No official study or testing has been done regarding the contamination of water in the area.

The deputy commissioner of Kullu Ashutosh Garg expressed concern over the garbage crisis in the Malana village.

"The administration has attempted numerous clean-up drives with NGOs and school children in the past but received no support from the village. No one came forward to participate."

The official adds that there is a glimmer of hope as some of the youth of the village have started leaving to pursue higher education, signalling a gradual shift in mindset and possible progress in future. ■

Stuck In A Time Warp

While tourists romanticise Kashmir's remote and breathtakingly beautiful Warwan valley, its residents are crying out for basic facilities and amenities

“Warwan Valley is exceptionally stunning, even for Kashmir. The valley's remoteness and isolation compound this beauty. This is a side of Kashmir that even most Kashmiris haven't seen.” This is how a trekking company describes Warwan Valley, nestled in the Pir Panjal mountains between Ladakh and Kashmir.

“Villagers on horses are common, almost like how people use scooters in the cities. After a while, it isn't surprising to find horsemen galloping towards a village raising a cloud of dust behind them! Almost like an incredulous scene from a movie,” it says.

The residents of Warwan, however, do not share tourists' romanticised notions of remoteness and isolation. “It feels like we are still living in the 90s. We are forced to walk miles as there is not a single bus service to our region,” said Azad Nabi Lone (37), the Sarpanch of Brayan village in Warwan Tehsil.

Warwan, a picturesque valley in Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, has a population of more than 60,000 people, which has almost doubled since the census in 2011 when 35,572 people were residing in 55 villages. In 2014, the valley – with its



“

People have to stock up grain and essentials for winters as there is no connectivity apart from helicopters then”

– Mohammad Hussain, a resident of Marwah block in J&K's Kishtwar district

three blocks of Marwah, Warwan and Dachhan – was made a Sub-Division with its headquarters at Marwah. In October 2022, the region garnered attention when Farooq Abdullah, president of the political party National Conference, rode a horse to visit Marwah.

The main occupation of Warwan Valley is farming. People grow wheat, paddy, maize and kidney beans besides collecting herbs from the forest to sell. Marwah Rajmah is famous for being grown at high altitudes and free of fertilizers. “We procure about 200 tonnes of rajmah from Marwa every year and sell it at the rate of Rs 160 per kg,” said Ghulam Mohammad Ganie, a merchant in Anantnag.

Few people are into government jobs. Many also travel to Chenab and Kashmir Valley for seasonal labour work and return home in winter. Located at an altitude of 2,134 metres, Warwan is cut off from the rest of the state due to heavy rainfall for seven months a year. “People have to stock up grain and essentials for winters as there is no connectivity apart from helicopters then,” said Mohammad Hussain (40), a resident of Marwah.

Marwah is 200 kms north of Kishtwar, the district headquarters but no direct road exists between the two places. The only road that connects the residents of Warwan to the rest of the state is from Marwah to Anantnag in the West, a distance of 120 kms. No state transport service plies on that.

For a Warwan resident to travel to his district headquarters is an uphill task. They board a shared private vehicle, usually a Tata Sumo at the rate of Rs 600 to Anantnag and then another vehicle for Rs 350 from there to Kishtwar, a circuitous route. “It gets evening by the time we reach Kishtwar and no work gets done as all offices start shutting down by then. The Sumo fares also depend on the weather. If the weather is bad, the driver will increase the fare.



Imagine, in this day and age we still haven't seen a bus in our village," said Rouf Lone (33) a resident of Marwah block.

Students and patients particularly face the brunt. Amir Bhatt (17), a standard 11 student from Gumri village has to walk 7 kms to the government high school in Aftee village every day. "Sometimes we leave home on an empty stomach as there is no time to eat. We have to leave early and reach home quite late. It is exhausting and even leads to disinterest in studies. When it snows, we have to stop going to school completely," said Bhatt.

Danish Ahmad Rather (25) also from Gumri, had to abandon further studies after standard 12 due to lack of transport and poverty. "There is only one degree college in Marwah, about 30 kms from our village. It functions out of a rented building, has only one permanent lecturer and only offers Arts courses. Students wanting to study further in other streams have to go either to Anantnag or Kishtwar. Not everybody can afford to stay away from home, so we are forced to drop out. If there was a proper bus, we would not have to give up our education," said Rather.

The Marwah Community Health Centre does not have adequate facil-



No specialised treatment is available here. We have to rush a person to Anantnag or Srinagar, the state capital, in case of serious issues, but only if there is a vehicle"

– Danish Ahmad Rather, a resident of Gumri village in Marwah block

ities, claim residents. "No specialised treatment is available here. We have to rush a person to Anantnag or Srinagar, the state capital, in case of serious issues, but only if there is a vehicle. Last year, Mohammad Amin (53) in our village complained of fever and chest pain in the evening. He was rushed to Anantnag but he died on the way. This is a routine affair here, thanks to the state of public transport and roads," said Rather.

To avoid last-minute exigencies, pregnant women are shifted to the cities a month before child delivery. "There, they stay with relatives or in

rented accommodation. Since there is no maternity and child care facility in the sub-division and no transport facility to reach there on time, this is a necessity," said Sarpanch Lone. Not just roads and transport, electricity, internet connectivity, health care and education are also the problems plaguing Warwan.

The condition of internal roads is also no good, claim residents. "Only a few roads have been macadamized since they were constructed but in Warwan and Dachhan blocks, most roads are still in a dilapidated condition," said Rouf Lone.

Frustrated with all this, people are choosing to migrate out of the valley. In Yourdu village, 30 out of 130 families have left the village, informed Lone. 10 years ago, Mehra Begam (60) with eight members of her family, made her permanent move to Anantnag. "Walking miles for every little thing was not easy. Once we shifted and my children started work, we bought a house in Wanihama village in Anantnag district only," Mehra said. In 2016, Margi, a village of Warwan tehsil was reduced to ashes in an accidental fire. "There was no fire brigade or emergency service at the Sub-division and nothing could reach from outside," recalled Mehra.

The roundabout way to reach Kishtwar could be avoided if a road from Marwah to Dachhen existed. That would reduce the distance between the sub-division and the district headquarters to 85 kms. Since the road has to be carved through a mountainous forest, work is currently underway along the stretch, informed Dr Devansh Yadav, the Deputy Commissioner of Kishtwar district. "We are in talks with the State Roads Transport Corporation and soon there should be a bus at least during summers. In winter, since the area is cut-off, we run a helicopter service at 80% subsidy for locals," Yadav said. A chopper trip costs Rs 1,500 from Kishtwar to Marwah (Rs 2,700 without the subsidy).

Dr Yadav said that under 'Mumkin' scheme of Mission Youth, an initiative of the J&K Government, they have also supported 100 unemployed youth in the district to buy vehicles for ferrying people. "Most of these vehicles have been running for a year now," said Yadav. People, however, have no idea about the scheme. "We have only seen a few commercial vehicles plying on interior roads, nothing else," said Rouf Lone. ■

How Trifles Affect Your Heart



Rajgopal Nidamboor

Don't sweat the small stuff is a common adage. The fact is — small, or little, things upset us greatly. They disturb our life's tempo and trigger stress. Studies show that your heart reacts strongly to small, unexpected trifles of daily life. When you don't listen to your heart, or pay attention to it, or teach it to slow down, unsavoury events are bound to happen — they may also disrupt your life. In other words, you may pay a big price for being unmindful — frenzied heart beats, or dangerous rhythm disturbances. It's believed that sudden cardiac events are often caused by small hassles — not major stresses, or anger.

Agreed that anger is a normal and healthy emotion — annoyance at something not fair; or, protecting yourself, or someone. Anger is an emotional response to anything you find threatening, or frustrating. This can be mild, or strong. This does not relate to hostility, which is a personality trait — it is often unfriendly. A combination of the two could be risky to your heart health. Picture this: trying to manage anger and hostility may not, of course, help you to get rid of them, especially when you 'lock them up inside' — also, they are either way not good for your heart. The best thing to do is to strike a balance — manage your anger and express it in a healthy way. This works, because it doesn't hurt your arteries and heart.



All of us go through 30-35 little heart 'hassles' each day — you may call them 'annoying, irksome, stressful' — the 'mini-chaos' of our existence. If you don't attend to such 'alarm' signals of your heart, as it were, you've asked for trouble. It's always best to sit down, relax, meditate, and listen to the 'warning' beats of your heart, as our philosophers suggest. When you unwind, and let go of your anxieties, also angst, at regular intervals, you'll avoid a latent storm waiting to wobble your heart and, perhaps, its overall health.

This isn't, of course, as easy as it sounds. Because, the nature of our emotions is sometimes warped — thanks to sudden emotional upsurges that surprise our brain's best prepared plans. Remember, such 'prompts' could quietly reside in your shirt pocket, provoking your heart to 'jump-start' with a fit of heightened, frenzied gusto.

You cannot outsmart such a latent 'trigger-switch' by using your judicious brain, or mind. If you plan your move, the slippery customer gets more adept and speedy than your intent. In other words, the smarter, or cleverer, you get, the 'pretender' is equal to the task. It pulls the wool over your eyes, as it were — and, you are now hapless and helpless at, and with, your own ingenuity.

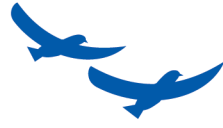
It's here that some of nature's most basic tools work best. They tell you to go along with the prankster — although you may have no clue as to what it is — by sharing a joke, or hearty laugh, even at your own expense. This will help you to slow down, or cop out of a situation

— and, say no. Remember, when you pause and ease your pace, you also become more alert — this is called 'life's uplift.' It could emerge in the form of life's simplest pleasures — a smiling kid, an exquisite flower, or water wending its way through the rocky crags, a lovely sunset, or soft, enchanting melodies of soulful music.

You'd do well to keep cool too — not be over-smart. Remember, it is always good to play the waiting game — because, the wily trickster has a liking to 'settling scores.' It's appropriate too to get the better of its crafty aims by being friendly to its memorandum — "Okay, I accept that the truth in me isn't always beautiful, or alluring."

Don't you misjudge the 'con artist' again — because it's often one better than the ragged philosopher. It may be partially stupid, partially logical, partly human and partly divine too. It'd visit you impromptu, anytime — during an important meeting too — when you spill sauce on your boss's suit. Likewise, it may remind you that life is not a feast, or spectacle — it's something that needs to be fully experienced rather than being just led, or dictated, by situations, or circumstances. Put simply, the prankster is like that street car named desire — it's meant to beep, or honk, for your attention, and help you slow down when you're going crazy. We all need such tricky messengers. They are life's small, big reminders — to holding aloft the great gift of being alive. ■

The writer is a wellness physician, independent researcher and author



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