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Touching All The Bases

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is leaving no stone unturned to ensure balanced cross-sectoral development across Odisha

INDIA FIRST

S P E A K S Y O U R



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What makes
Pramod Kumar Mishra
the most trusted
lieutenant of
Prime Minister Modi

AN ASSET TO THE NATION





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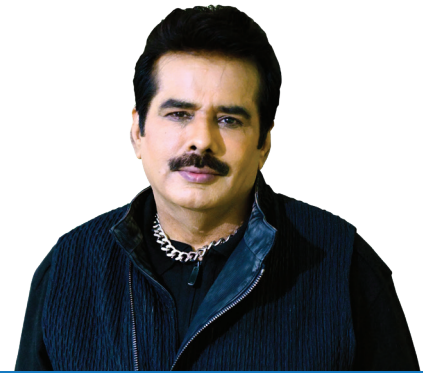
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Sunjoy Hans | Editor-In-Chief

PERFECT EXAMPLE

A

Prime Minister Modi has been able to achieve for India what was seemingly impossible a decade ago also because of the kind of people that he has been able to keep around him since coming to power

bird's eye view of the world at large today would reveal that violence is in the air at disturbingly high levels. In fact, in social media parlance, it is trending big-time.

Even after costing the global economy trillions of dollars, the frustratingly protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict has no end in sight.

Yet the toll it continues to extract from the world will perhaps be much less compared to what the Israel-Hamas war, which started a few days ago, will if it is allowed to escalate into a multi-country war in the Middle East. As of now, unfortunately, it is showing all signs of becoming one.

Apart from the havoc such an eventuality will wreak on global oil prices, the Israel-Hamas war is already precipitating a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions.

After the war practically began on October 7 with Hamas's coordinated attacks from the Gaza Strip on bordering areas of Israel, more than 1300 Israeli people have died, with 3400 more injured and 200-plus abducted. After Israel fiercely retaliated by officially declaring war on Hamas with airstrikes and bombing on Gaza Strip, more than 1537 Palestinians have been killed, 6612 wounded and a staggering 4,23,000 displaced.

As Israel's ground invasion of Gaza looks imminent, more than a million Palestinian people will need to be evacuated. They are running out of time and options. With Hamas authorities virtually ordering them to stay at home, even when they have no electricity, food, water or fuel, their fate seems all but sealed at this

moment.

Amidst all this, it was heartening to see at least 212 Indians from Israel arrive in New Delhi on October 13 from the first flight under 'Operation Ajay', which the Modi government had announced earlier to evacuate all Indians from the war-torn country. It was also nice to see Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar welcoming them at the airport.

The more one sees such strife around the world, the more one appreciates how life is in India. There is no doubt our country has its fair share of problems, not least with a neighbourhood that is no less unfriendly and potentially dangerous than Israel's, but there is no denying that India is by and large peaceful and is progressing at a fast pace on all fronts under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Thanks to his strong and iconic leadership, along with his government's brilliant policies and their meticulous implementation, India is not only enjoying an elevated position on the global stage, but it is also able to take a firm and independent stand on issues that concern its interests and that of the world at large.

Speaking of another undeniable truth: Prime Minister Modi has been able to achieve for India what was seemingly impossible a decade ago also because of the kind of people, both political and administrative, that he has been able to keep around him since coming to power. As Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Modi, ace bureaucrat Pramod Kumar Mishra – profiled in this issue's cover story – makes for the perfect example. ■

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1 4 TOUCHING ALL THE BASES



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is leaving no stone unturned to ensure balanced cross-sectoral development across Odisha

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1 6 MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

The highly controversial caste census in Bihar is unlikely to have a negative impact on the BJP's electoral prospects in 2024

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1 8 HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH MODI



Why Congress Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot may be pleased about the BJP projecting no CM face in poll-bound Rajasthan

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2 0 DRAWING THE LINE

Why the Law Commission has strongly advised against fiddling with the legal age of consent

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2 4 HEARTLAND CONNECTION



The caste census in Bihar may bring back the Mandal-Kamandal era from the 1990s in Uttar Pradesh

2 5

2 5 WATER SAVES

Thanks to the Jal Jeevan Mission, women in rural Bundelkhand are earning a better livelihood and enjoying a self-reliant life

2 6

2 6 LOSING STEAM



Amidst a painfully protracted and debilitating war, support for Ukraine within the European Union seems to be slowly but surely waning

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2 8 ON FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Russia's experience of effectively fighting long wars goes all the way back to the Tsarist times

3 0

3 0 SIMILAR HORROR

The Hamas attacks on Israel are reminiscent of the Pakistani tribal invasion of Kashmir way back in October 1947

Women who do not wear hijab are
of questionable character
– Samastha Kerala Jamiyathul
Ulama leader Mukkam Umar Faizi



The Congress
government has created an
atmosphere in which the state is not
safe for Hindus. The tragedy is a senior
minister giving a statement that Hindus came
in disguise to create violence
– Former Karnataka BJP minister
Kota Srinivas Poojary



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



Look at the education system
in Malappuram. Was it created
by some religious organisation?
Malappuram district was formed
by CPI(M). As part of changes
taking place in Malappuram,
look at the new women of
Malappuram. We believe that
there are girls in Malappuram
now who will say no to wearing
thattam [hijab] on their heads
as part of the communist party
existing in Kerala and as part of
the education system
– Communist Party of India
(Marxist) leader K Anil Kumar

TREADING CAUTIOUSLY

Following the Bihar government making its caste census report public, Karnataka's Congress government is under pressure to accept the state's caste census report pending for years. However, the government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is treading cautiously over the issue as it may lead to a controversy in the state. According to reliable sources, Lingayats and Vokkaligas, the two influential caste groups are shortly holding a meeting to discuss the caste census issue. Their leaders may take a decision to pressure the Congress government not to accept the report. In Karnataka, though regarded as one of the most progressive states in the country, the politics is caste-driven. The leaked report has stirred a hornet's nest in the state as the report claimed that as per the findings, Muslims form the largest group after the Scheduled Castes. The influential Congress leaders from the Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities pressurized Chief Minister Siddaramaiah not to accept the report. As per the report, the Lingayats now considered to be the largest caste with 17 per cent of the population, were shown in third place. The Vokkaligas who are at second place with 14 per cent population are shown at the fourth place. The Congress, BJP and the JD (S) are issuing diplomatic statements on the issue as any stand would antagonize either the upper castes or the oppressed classes and the minorities. ■



WORK FROM HOME

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee convened a meeting of the state cabinet at her residence at Kalighat in South Kolkata recently. Almost a month has passed since the chief minister returned from her overseas trip in Spain and Dubai, and she had been operating from her residence instead of going to the state secretary of Nabanna at Mandirtala in Howrah district of West Bengal. The chief minister has reportedly received limb injuries during her overseas trip and since the doctors have advised her to rest, she decided to operate from her home. However, her decision to convene the meeting of the state cabinet at her residence has surprised political veterans who do not recall any such incident where a meeting of the state cabinet was convened at the personal residence of any chief minister of the state in the past. The small house at Kalighat where the chief minister has been residing for years is her "personal" residence and not her "official" residence. Despite repeated requests from her security team to shift to any "official" residence on security grounds, the chief minister never agreed to that. ■

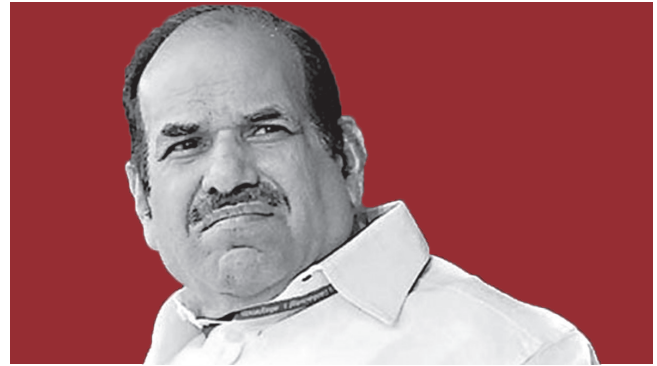
MUM'S THE WORD

Launching a relentless political attack on Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant over his silence on sensitive issues like ministers getting involved in gold smuggling, sex scandal, medicine purchase scam and Pernem Zoning plan (conversion of land), Congress leader Girish Chodankar recently mocked Sawant by calling him a 'Maun Mukhyamantri'. "Pramod Sawant should be aware that the Chief Minister has to respond when there are protests against the government. But it is strange that he is not responding to issues, against which people are raising their voice, and looted by this BJP government continues. Seems he has become 'Maun Mukhyamantri' or there are parallel Chief Ministers in his cabinet," Chodankar said. "I urge Chief Minister Pramod Sawant not to turn our 'paradise' Goa into a 'parasite', wherein people will suffer. People want to know whether he is involved in these scams as a partner in crime or if he is afraid to speak," Chodankar said. ■



BACK IN ACTION

Veteran Congress leader A.K. Antony, who had reportedly withdrawn from active politics, made a surprising appearance at the party's executive meet in Kerala recently only to haul up the leadership over intensifying factional feuds. After the veteran packed his bags and arrived in the state capital last year, many thought he would just serve as a father figure to the party -- a belief which strengthened when his elder son Anil Antony quit Congress and switched over to the BJP. But recently at the state party headquarters, he slammed the leadership, especially state party president K.Sudhakaran and Leader of Opposition V.D. Satheesan for their open bickering which came to the fore soon after Chandy Oommen won a massive victory at the Puthuppally by-election early last month. Coming down heavily on them, he asked the two leaders to show some restraint and poise as the country is gearing up for the Lok Sabha polls next year. Only time will tell the impact Antony's dressing down has had as Congress leaders in Kerala are used only to wrangling amongst themselves. ■



QUOTE, UNQUOTE

The controversy over “denial” of a befitting adieu to CPI(M) politburo member Kodyeri Balakrishnan has intensified with the journalist who quoted the late leader's wife calling it a “verbatim” report, while their son accused the reporter of “misquoting” his mother. On the first death anniversary of the leader in Kannur recently, journalist Sujith Nair had interviewed Vinodhini Balakrishnan which appeared in a leading vernacular daily Malayala Manorama. As per the report, Vinodhini Balakrishnan claimed that her two children had requested CPI(M) state secretary M.V.Govindan to take the mortal remains of their father to Thiruvananthapuram and then to their hometown in Kannur, but that could not happen. When Congress state president K.Sudhakaran made this an issue and started serious discussion, Bineesh Kodyeri -- the younger son of Kodyeri Balakrishnan -- took to social media saying even after his death, his father is being haunted. He accused the right-wing media of attempting to distort his mother's statement calling it a strategy to lower the stock of the CPI(M) and its leaders. He requested the people to ignore the report as it is “baseless”. The issue would have passed off without a whimper had not Sudhakaran -- the arch rival of the CPI(M) -- raked it up by saying that Vinodhini's remark proves that the party's statement that the doctor's advice of taking the body straight to Kannur was a “bluff”. ■

GUESSING GAME

Keeping the future of the party in mind, the BJP is determined to form a government in Rajasthan, and given the recent debacle in Karnataka, it is not prepared to take any risk in the desert state. This is the reason why the party is doing its best to placate former chief minister Vasundhara Raje, who is miffed by the fact that her role in the forthcoming Assembly elections is yet to be defined. Raje has made her displeasure known by being conspicuously absent from several state-level programmes and campaigns of the BJP and she has been drawing huge crowds at the events that she is holding. So, in a bid to appease a powerful leader like her, the party gives Raje a prominent place on the dais whenever it holds meetings, rallies or public events in Delhi or Rajasthan. She even shares the stage with the top leadership of the BJP at major events. However, the party is not prepared to give Raje any clarity on her role because the BJP wants to replicate the Madhya Pradesh model in Rajasthan by fielding Union Ministers and MPs as candidates in the Assembly elections. So, despite continuous demands by Raje to clarify her role in Rajasthan, the party has decided to contest the elections in the state under collective leadership and with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its face. It remains to be seen how the BJP's strategy for Rajasthan pays off in the end. ■



COVER STORY

AN ASSET TO THE NATION

What makes Pramod Kumar Mishra the most trusted lieutenant of Prime Minister Modi

Sunjoy Hans



T



There is little doubt among the vast majority of Indians these days that their country has progressed by leaps and bounds on all fronts over the past nine years under the strong, decisive and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

After all, India which is now the world's fifth largest economy is becoming increasingly self-reliant across many critically important sectors, and has evidently also been moving at a steady pace to establish itself as a developed nation within the next 24 years.

A decade ago, few could have fathomed the elevated position that New Delhi now enjoys on the global stage as a rising superpower that is serving as the proverbial bridge not only between the East and the West but also between the Global North and Global South.

Prime Minister Modi made it a reality.

Yet the iconic leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has a certain quality that still remains somewhat under the radar, if not under-appreciated: His inherent, almost preternatural ability to surround himself with the right kind of people – those who can ensure the best possible implementation of his plans and vision on the ground.

Arguably the most outstanding and unarguably the

most longstanding non-political example of that is Pramod Kumar Mishra, a 1972-batch retired IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, who is currently serving as Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Modi.

Although the Sambalpur-born bureaucrat always keeps an extremely low profile, keen political observers note just how much Prime Minister Modi counts on him on matters that matter

Although the Sambalpur-born bureaucrat always keeps an extremely low profile, keen political observers note just how much Prime Minister Modi counts on him on matters that matter most

most.

The most recent instance of that was evident late last month in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, during Mishra's official visit to the holy city. Accompanied by a few government officials, he was seen meticulously inspecting the Namo Ghat, the Kashi ropeway project, the Rudraksh Convention Center, the different units of Banaras Locomotive Works, as well as the command control centre and upcoming sports stadium in the Sigra locality. He also discussed the expansion plans for the Varanasi airport with its director.

It is no secret that Varanasi is Prime Minister Modi's home constituency, the

one from where he has been elected to the Lok Sabha twice. Hence, the progress and performance of developmental projects in the ancient city will naturally be in the spotlight – and under the opposition's microscope – during the buildup to 2024 general elections. And thus, it will also be a prestige issue for him and his party.

However, Mishra's role in his current position covers a much wider remit – including matters of national pride.

When India assumed the G20 presidency on December 1 last year, the top bureaucrat of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had made some memorable statements that greatly inspired not only the teams of government officials involved in G20 matters but also the entire nation.

While delivering a keynote address at the 'University Connect: Engaging Young Minds' programme to mark the beginning of India's G20 presidency, Mishra had said that the presidency period was a great opportunity for all Indians to represent their motherland in a way that would be befitting of her greatness. Highlighting the range of areas, such as digitisation and clean energy, where India was emerging as a global powerhouse, he said: "If a country such as ours shows the way, then the world will have to follow."

Working behind the scenes in typical fashion, Mishra is widely



P.K. Mishra at his office.

believed to have played a significant role in ensuring the historic success of the G20 Summit in New Delhi held last month. A lot more was visible at the high-level meeting he chaired on September 27 to review the follow-up on G20 Summit outcome.

At the meeting, which was attended by G20 sherpa Amitabh Kant, foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra and Department of Economic Affairs secretary Ajay Seth, among others, Mishra stated that the G20 Summit was not a one-off affair even as he hailed the solid outcomes that India has delivered, including its diligent follow-up and monitoring efforts, throughout the period of its Presidency so far.

Calling on officials to prepare for next month's G20 virtual summit that had been announced earlier by the Prime Minister, Mishra also instructed all ministries to focus on the deliverables, including those from the Declaration and earlier ministerial and working group meetings. The senior bureaucrat also asked them to hold webinars with stakeholders and involve state governments and think-tanks in the process.

Directing all government departments to work in line with India's support for the Global South in general and the African Union in particular (an issue that is known to be one of Prime

Minister Modi's top priorities), Mishra called for putting in place an action plan for outreach to the Africa Union.

Similarly, when reports about newer variants of coronavirus were making rounds, Mishra held a high-level meeting in August this year to assess the Covid situation at the national and global level.

Even though he noted that the

Working behind the scenes in typical fashion, Mishra is widely believed to have played a significant role in ensuring the historic success of the G20 Summit in New Delhi held last month

Covid situation in India was stable and the public health system was ready to handle any kind of emergency, Mishra urged all states to monitor trends of ILI (Influenza Like Illness) and SARI (Severe Acute Respiratory Illness).

At the meeting, which was attended by Cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba, Advisor PMO Amit Khare, Union health secretary Sudhash Pant and ICMR DG

Rajiv Bahl, Mishra also emphasised the importance of sending sufficient samples for COVID testing while ramping up whole genome sequencing and keeping a close watch on the latest global variants of the virus.

When Mishra talks about matters relating to public health emergencies or natural disasters, sources in the government confirm, everyone listens attentively. That is because the senior bureaucrat has a long-standing and well-deserved reputation – not just in India, but globally – as an authority in crisis and disaster management.

After the devastating earthquake in Bhuj in 2001, when Mishra was serving as principal secretary to Modi (who was then the new Chief Minister of Gujarat), he proved himself to be one of the finest IAS officers in the country by leading some exceptional relief and rehabilitation initiatives for the victims after setting up a disaster management system, which later became the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority. Since then, the high-performing bureaucrat has remained results-oriented Modi's most trusted aide.

Mishra never stopped building on his expertise in disaster management. Three years after Bhuj, he authored a book, titled 'The Kutch Earthquake 2001: Recollection Lessons and In-

sights', which was published by National Institute of Disaster Management in New Delhi. Over the years he wrote critically acclaimed articles and research papers on the subject. In 2019, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) conferred on him the Sasakawa Award – the most prestigious international award in disaster management – for his invaluable contribution to the field.

Mishra's administrative career is distinguished by various important positions he had held in his cadre and at the Centre, as much as it is by his critically acclaimed research work, national and international publications, path-breaking policymaking and management of programmes and projects relating to agriculture, power sector, regulatory issues, infrastructure financing and, of course, disaster management.

Mishra's most recent literary effort – a book titled 'Recalibrate: Changing Paradigms', which he coauthored with Nand Kishore Singh (another

distinguished retired IAS officer, who is currently chairman of the Finance Commission) – won rave reviews for its invaluable insights on issues relating to governance and development in India, as well as on reforms that the nation needs on these fronts.

When Mishra talks about matters relating to public health emergencies or natural disasters, sources in the government confirm, everyone listens attentively

Interestingly, one of his most notable achievements came during his stint as Union Agriculture Secretary in the Manmohan Singh government, when he received much praise for his contribution to the National Food Security

Mission. His crop insurance scheme under the ministership of Sharad Pawar was adopted both by the United Progressive Alliance and the National Democratic Alliance governments. In fact, the PM crop insurance scheme that was launched in 2016 was actually an updated version of Mishra's scheme.

No matter where Mishra was posted, Modi had been watching over him. So, when Mishra retired from the IAS on August 31, 2008, Modi – by then Gujarat CM for seven straight years – promptly appointed him as chairman of the Gujarat Electricity Regulatory Commission (GERC). And within a year of Mishra completing his term reaching 65 years of age in 2013, Modi – raring to bring about much-needed and much-promised change as the freshly elected Prime Minister of India – called upon his most trusted lieutenant to join him at the PMO as his Additional Principal Secretary.

There were challenges galore as Prime Minister Modi wanted to bring



While addressing the valedictory programme of the third session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) on March 12 this year, Prime Minister Modi's principal secretary Pramod Kumar Mishra called for professionalising the disaster risk management setup at the state and district levels.



Prime Minister's principal secretary P K Mishra, with NITI Aayog's then vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar (centre) and a Japanese vice-minister for policy coordination in Cabinet Office, Mamoru Maekawa (left).

about some sweeping systemic changes to the way things had been at the Centre over the past many decades. In his new post, Mishra was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that appointments to senior positions at the Centre were made on the basis of capability and suitability rather than through cronyism and lobbying.

He did not disappoint one bit. He put in place a 360-degree assessment system to ensure a perfect fit between bureaucrats and the posts they were appointed to. In addition to that, all files for the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet reportedly passed through him. Thanks to this system, the notion that he cherry-picked all the key officials of the Modi administration gained currency. Mishra was also widely believed to have a big say in Cabinet shuffles and Padma award decisions. Either way, the mission was a success. Throughout the duration of his five-year tenure, government appointments remained strictly confidential until an official announcement came through. This was something that was unprecedented in the history of independent India.

It is not difficult to draw a parallel between Mishra's prowess as a disaster management expert and his role as the ultimate troubleshooter for Prime Minister Modi. To cite another instance, it was Mishra who had helped resolve a big disagreement between the Modi government and the Reserve Bank of India – over interest rates – back in 2017.

Only after Mishra met then RBI governor Urjit Patel over lunch at the central bank's headquarters, sources say, the tension was successfully defused.

Mishra's appointment as Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Modi in 2019 came as no surprise. However, it was celebrated as a proud moment for Odisha because he became the first Odia person to hold the elite post. Sambalpur residents were probably thrilled

It is not difficult to draw a parallel between Mishra's prowess as a disaster management expert and his role as the ultimate troubleshooter for Prime Minister Modi

the most to learn that someone who was born and brought up in their city had become the top bureaucrat of the nation as Prime Minister Modi's right-hand man.

Some of Mishra's old friends and colleagues are known to hold the view that his remarkable bureaucratic career was built on the strong foundation of his academic accomplishments, which started from GM College (Sambalpur University) where he graduated with an unprecedented first-class distinction in Eco-

nomics. He followed it up with an MA in Economics (again with a first class) from the Delhi School of Economics before going on to earn a PhD in Economics and Development Studies as well as a master's degree in Development Economics, both from the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

Owing to his comprehensive research work – spread over four years – at the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom, his successful execution of ADB and World Bank projects, and his membership at Governing Board of the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), among other things, Mishra is informally referred to as “The Scholar” in the PMO. The Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology in Bhubaneswar also conferred an honorary doctorate on him at its 38th convocation ceremony in 2019.

Mishra's success and his current position at the PMO is celebrated all the more because of the kind of person that he is known to be. People who have interacted with him closely or for a long time vouch for his humility. Despite holding a position as high and as busy as he does, Mishra has maintained his long-time reputation for returning calls, responding to messages, and being polite to a fault.

No wonder Prime Minister Modi has placed Mishra exactly where he needs to be – as a highly valuable and indispensable national asset. ■

Police Cover

DC Jain, a 1991-batch IPS officer of Rajasthan cadre, currently serving as Additional Director, CBI, has been appointed as Special Director in the CBI by temporary elevation of the post of Additional Director as Special Director up to his superannuation on 31.10.2023.

Bijay Kumar Singh, a 1996-batch IPS officer of Karnataka cadre, currently serving as Executive Director (Pers) (JS level), Food Corporation of India, Department of Food and Public Distribution, has been prematurely repatriated to his parent cadre on the grounds of availing promotion in the cadre.

Vineet Vinayak, a 1995-batch IPS officer of Sikkim cadre, currently serving as Joint Director, CBI, has had his tenure extended/regularised up to 30.09.2023 in relaxation of IPS tenure policy 2010.

Amit Kumar, a 1998-batch IPS officer of Chandigarh cadre, currently serving as Joint Director, has had his tenure extended/regularised up to 30.09.2023 in relaxation of IPS tenure policy 2010.

Balaji Srivastava, a 1988-batch IPS officer of AGMUT cadre, currently serving as Director General, Bureau of Police Research & Development, has been granted Apex Pay scale (Level-17 in pay matrix).

Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo, a 1999-batch IPS officer of Manipur cadre, has had his deputation tenure extended for a period of one year beyond 31.08.2023.

Ram Prasad Meena, a 1993-batch IPS officer of Assam cadre, has been appointed as Joint Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment for



DC Jain

a tenure of five years.

Saurabh Tripathi, a 1997-batch IPS officer of Tripura cadre, has been appointed to the post of Scientist 'G' in National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) for a period of four years.

Deepak M Damor, a 2001-batch IPS officer of Tamil Nadu cadre, has been inducted to the post of Joint Director in CBI on lateral shift basis from BSF for a combined tenure of five years i.e. up to 28.06.2027.



Vineet Vinayak

Pradip Kumar, a 2003-batch IPS officer of Tamil Nadu cadre, has been inducted to the post of Joint Director in CBI on lateral shift basis from BSF for a combined tenure of five years i.e. up to 28.06.2027.

Imtiaz Ismail Parray, a 2009-batch IPS officer of AGMUT cadre, has been appointed as Deputy Inspector General in Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) for a period of five years.

MIXED POSTINGS

Pankaj Kumar, a 2007-batch IRTS officer currently serving as CVO, Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL), has been given additional charge of CVO, Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL) for a period of six months.

Kranti K Khobragade, a 2011-batch IRS IT officer, has been appointed as Deputy Secretary in the Department of Public Enterprises for a period of four years.

Bharatula Vishwanath, a 1996-batch IRSS officer currently serving as CVO, National Mineral Development Corporation Ltd (NMDC) has been given additional charge of CVO, MECON Ltd for a one-year period w.e.f. 17.10.2023.

Shweta Kumar, a 2008-batch IES officer, has been appointed as Director in the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change for a period of five years. ■



Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo

TOUCHING All The Bases

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is leaving no stone unturned to ensure balanced cross-sectoral development across Odisha

Ashutosh Mishra

Upsided development can not only impair growth but also trigger resentment among people. A glaring example is the feeling of alienation created among the people of western Odisha following years of neglect by successive governments. Quick to realize that regional imbalance could lead to serious problems, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has sought to ensure balanced growth of all areas of the state right from the beginning. He has never discriminated against the people of any particular region for the sake of political gains.

To ensure balanced growth in the state, his focus has primarily been on agriculture and creation of irrigation potential for cultivable land available in different areas. According to available statistics, his government has so far created irrigation potential for over 78 per cent of the cultivable land in the state.

It is worth noting that Chief Minister Patnaik has been paying special attention to the development of backward areas, most of them having substantial tribal population

As it is, more than 61.80 lakh hectares of land in Odisha is suitable for growing crops and the government has created potential to bring more than 48.29 lakh hectares of total arable land under irrigation.

While the highest irrigation potential of 97 per cent has been created in the Bargarh district, parts of which have been drought-prone for generations, the figure for Dhenkanal district, another district in dire need of development, is 93 per cent.

Efforts are on to increase irrigation potential in Kandhamal and Nayagarh districts, which are far behind many other districts as far as irrigation facilities are concerned. With a total cultivable area of 12.77 lakh hectares and 13.36 lakh hectares, irrigation potential has been created for only 4.99 lakh hectares and 6.21 lakh hectares in these two districts, respec-



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik Inaugurates Subarnarekha, Deo Irrigation Projects In Mayurbhanj.

tively. The government is trying its best to improve things by laying emphasis on different kinds of lift irrigation projects. There is a growing realization that there is a need to look beyond traditional major, medium and minor irrigation projects and come up with new ideas to ensure irrigation for arable land in different parts of the state.

It is worth noting that Chief Minister Patnaik has been paying special attention to the development of backward areas, most of them having substantial tribal population. With this objective in mind, he had inaugurated the Subarnarekha and Deo irrigation projects in tribal-dominated Mayurbhanj which happens to be the home district of President Draupadi Murmu. The Chief Minister took the step as the massive tribal population of the district (around 53 percent of Mayurbhanj's total population) badly needed these projects for the development of agriculture in the region. Subarnarekha and Deo projects benefit not only the farmers of both Mayurbhanj but also neighbouring Balasore. The projects will irrigate around 27,000 hectares of agricultural land in the two districts.

A few years ago, the Chief Minister had sought to change the economic profile of drought-prone Kalahandi district, a part of the backward KBK region which is home to a sizable population of tribals, through similar initiatives. As a result, the district that was once known for hunger, starvation deaths and stories of child sale by impoverished parents has now turned into a model of prosperity. This was made possible with the launch of a slew of projects by the Chief Minister in this belt. These included the Rs 986 crore Indravati lift irrigation project, which has facilitated

irrigation in 25,275 hectares of land in three blocks of Kalahandi.

The district has also taken big strides in other areas, including industries. Once a zero-industry district, it now boasts one of the largest alumina refineries in the state in the private sector. The development of the area has received a major fillip following the initiatives taken by Western Odisha

With districts like Nuapada and Kalahandi witnessing all-round development the economy of entire western Odisha is set to grow at a fast pace

Development Council (WODC), a special body constituted to accelerate the development of western Odisha. Led by former chief secretary Asit Tripathy, who is also advisor to the chief minister and one of the most dynamic bureaucrats of the state with years of administrative experience behind him, the council has chalked out plans for the development of not only Kalahandi but many other areas in western Odisha which remained neglected for a long time. The entire belt is home to tribes of different kinds.

Development of agriculture in this region by using modern farming techniques has been one of the priorities of the government led by Patnaik. While schemes like KALIA have been benefiting the farmers in the area, they have also been taking advantage of the latest cultivation techniques and knowledge about cash crops being imparted to them. For example, coffee cultivation

is being promoted in a big way in tribal-dominated districts such as Koraput and Rayagada as the soil and topography of the region is favourable for such cultivation.

The districts of Kalahandi and Nuapada have always been in dire need of development with special attention to agriculture. Not long ago, the Chief Minister dedicated projects worth Rs.2337.15 crore to the people of Nuapada. These included the all-important Lower Indra mega irrigation project which will benefit 1.80 lakh people in 200 villages under Komna and Khariar blocks of Nuapada district and Bangomunda, Muribahal, and Titlagarh blocks of Balangir, another district that badly needed irrigation facilities. While inaugurating the irrigation project, Patnaik had expressed hope that it will not just meet the water needs of farmers but also help bring about a green revolution in the drought-prone Nuapada district.

The government has been working on the development of this arid region for quite some time. Under Patnaik's watch, the irrigation potential of the district has been enhanced to 54 per cent in the last 10 years with 1.5 lakh acres of agricultural land receiving irrigation benefits. This has promoted multi-cropping and increased the yield of crops like paddy, cotton, and maize.

With districts like Nuapada and Kalahandi witnessing all-round development, the economy of western Odisha is set to grow at a. This will bring prosperity to the people of this vast belt and put an end to the allegations of regional imbalance which has engendered bitterness between the people of western and coastal Odisha. ■



Much Ado About Something

The highly controversial caste census in Bihar is unlikely to have a negative impact on the BJP's electoral prospects in 2024

Results of the caste census in Bihar, one of the first states in the country to carry out this kind of headcount, are out with analysts speculating about its political ramifications. Chief minister Nitish Kumar, who parted ways with the BJP to form a government in alliance with the Mahagathbandhan (Grand alliance) parties, released findings of the survey on Gandhi Jayanti (October 2).

The survey that brought Nitish – who has been positioning himself as the Opposition's prime ministerial candidate in 2024 ever since walking out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) – face to face with the BJP has

The question agitating many minds in the wake of the survey is how it would affect the implementation of the Women Reservation Act

revealed that Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) constitute 63 per cent of the total population of Bihar, which sends 40 Lok Sabha members to the Parliament. The EBCs (36 per cent) are the largest social segment in Bihar followed by the OBC's 27.13 per cent.

Significantly, Nitish, a Kurmi by caste, is one of the tallest OBC leaders in the state. He is also trying to win the support of OBCs in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, which has 80 Lok Sabha seats. Nitish's party tried its luck in the last assembly elections in UP but failed to win even a single seat. However, speculation is rife that the Kurmi leader may contest the next Lok Sabha election from one of the OBC-dominated seats in eastern UP. While his supporters are hopeful about OBCs in UP supporting him generously, his candidature from India's most populous and politically important state will help send across a message that he is serious about challenging Modi for the top post in the country.

Nitish went ahead with the caste census despite opposition from the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) which leads the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre. The results of the census have been announced at a crucial juncture ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This may trigger demands for similar caste-based census in other parts of the country. This also happens to be part of the opposition INDIA bloc's agenda.

The caste-based census by the Nitish government shows that Bihar's total

population stands at a little over 13.07 crore of which Extremely Backward Classes (36 per cent) are the largest social segment. The Other Backward Classes come second at 27.13 per cent. Yadavs, the OBC group to which deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav belongs, were the largest in terms of the population, accounting for 14.27 per cent. Dalits, better known as Scheduled Castes, account for 19.65 per cent of Bihar's population. The state is also home to nearly 22 lakh (1.68 per cent) people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes.

People belonging to the "Unreserved" category, often referred to as the "upper castes" comprise 15.52 per cent of the total population of the state which, in religious terms, is predominantly Hindu. The majority community accounts for 81.99 per cent of the total population, followed by Muslims who comprise 17.70% of the total headcount.

Caste census in Bihar has been controversial right from the beginning with BJP opposing it but some of its NDA partners appearing to be in two minds about it. The Bihar cabinet, chaired by chief minister Nitish Kumar gave its nod to hold a caste survey on 2 June 2022. The state government also allocated Rs. 500 crore for the massive exercise.

The first phase of the caste-based survey started from January 7, 2023, and ended on January 21. This phase saw the counting of all households in Bihar. The Second Phase that stretched from April 15 and May 15 was dedicated to the collection of data on people living in the households, their castes, sub-castes and socio-economic condition. Enumerators were given a set of 17 questions which were to be mandatorily answered by respondents. However, filling Aadhaar number, caste certificate number and ration card number of the head of the family, were made optional.

For the purpose of the survey, the Bihar government set different codes for 215 different castes of the state. The sub-categories of castes were merged into one single social entity, and they had numerical caste code for use during the month-long second phase of the caste-based headcount. On August 16, 2023, the data entry work for caste-based census was completed.

The question agitating many minds in the wake of the survey is how it would affect the implementation of the Women Reservation Act. Its implementation



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the BJP headquarters in Delhi

This may trigger demands for similar caste-based census in other parts of the country. This also happens to be part of the opposition INDIA bloc's agenda

is subject to the next delimitation exercise. The Act would ensure "as nearly as may be," one-third of all seats in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, for women. This will also apply to the seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and state legislatures.

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, while introducing the Bill in Lok Sabha, had said: "This constitutional amendment is both horizontal and vertical. There is reservation for SC and ST women also, because a census is necessary and delimitation is necessary." He said that the Delimitation Commission will decide which seat will go to the women after the delimitation exercise.

In a delimitation exercise, a Commission demarcates fresh Lok Sabha constituencies on the basis of the Census data. Constituencies are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes according to the Census figures. However, Bihar's caste census shows

a majority presence of OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes but women of this category are likely to be overlooked by the delimitation category, as reservations have only been made for SCs and STs in the parliament. Hence, both census and delimitation become imperative for the Women's reservation Bill in order to avoid an 'overlap' with the SC/ST reservation in the Parliament.

But the issue of caste survey remains controversial and has brought Bihar government into conflict with the BJP, which also faces a dilemma as some of its NDA partners appear to be in favour of a caste-based census because of their own political compulsions. The NDA constituents with a base among OBCs and Dalits cannot oppose a caste survey as this may dent their own vote bank. The bigger problem for the BJP is that the successful completion of the exercise in Bihar may trigger demand for its replication in other states of the country. Some state governments, in fact, are already pushing for it.

However, the conclusion of the census exercise in Bihar is unlikely to damage BJP's winning prospects in the 2024 general elections in any significant manner. The party, whose popularity cuts across class and caste divide, thanks to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remains confident about making a hat-trick of Lok Sabha victories. ■

Why Congress Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot may be pleased about the BJP projecting no CM face in poll-bound Rajasthan

HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH Modi

A direct narrative of a contest between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has been created in Rajasthan, which is making it different from the earlier Assembly elections of 2013 and 2018. In those elections, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi led from the front, but this time, Gehlot himself is playing on the front foot.

The other differentiating factor is that the elections of 2013 and 2018 were projected as a Vasundhara Raje-versus-Gehlot contest, however, this time Raje is not in the picture. So it is clearly evident that this time, it shall be Modi versus Gehlot.

Modi has come to the state eight times and meetings of the BJP's National President JP Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah are also held at regular intervals. Further, the BJP has fielded central ministers along with local leaders in the desert state.

Nadda, Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and more than 10 Union Ministers have visited Rajasthan to participate in the BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra'.

On the Congress' side, Rahul has had three meetings and the Congress' National President Mallikarjun Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi have had one meeting each. Further, Sachin Pilot has



The BJP faces more risk in choosing a PM-vs-CM narrative. If the results are not in favour of the BJP in the elections, then the prestige of the Prime Minister is at stake

held some meetings at his level.

But Gehlot has held 100 meetings till now. In fact, he had come into election mode soon after presenting the state budget and started touring the districts.

With many populist announcements, including free mobile phones in the budget, an attempt was made to change the political narrative by announcing new districts on the day the budget was passed.

Now here is how the narrative of Modi versus Gehlot was created.

The BJP contested polls from 2003 till the last elections by declaring its chief ministerial face. In such a situation, it was seen as a Raje versus Gehlot or Raje versus Congress fight. This time, the BJP is going to contest elections on a collective leadership.

Modi has declared that the BJP's

symbol 'lotus' will be the face of the party during elections. It is clear from this that no single leader from Rajasthan will be the face in these polls. The PM will be the face while other leaders will have side roles. With the BJP not declaring any leader of Rajasthan as its chief ministerial face, the Modi-versus-Gehlot narrative is now visible in the elections.

Also, Modi in his eight meetings in Rajasthan so far, has fiercely attacked the Gehlot government by taking the CM's name. He has also made political attacks on Gehlot in every meeting, raising issues like the Gehlot-Pilot feud, paper leak, corruption and the Lal Diary.

After Modi's blitz, the BJP also started carrying out political attacks with the same force. After the PM targeted Gehlot, the political narrative was seen as PM versus CM.

On September 27, in the public dialogue programme of 'Mission 2030' in Jaipur, Gehlot said, "Next time the Prime Minister comes to Rajasthan

The BJP contested polls from 2003 till the last elections by declaring its chief ministerial face. In such a situation, it was seen as a Raje-versus-Gehlot or Raje-versus-Congress fight. This time, the BJP is going to contest elections on a collective leadership

(he must) give a guarantee that if your (BJP) government comes, none of our schemes will be stopped."

"He should guarantee that the Old Pension Scheme will be there. The insurance of Rs 25 lakh that we gave will remain. We have made laws, they will remain in place, if the Modi government comes back," said Gehlot.

Meanwhile, Modi took a swipe at Gehlot in the meeting in Chittorgarh and said, "Some people sitting in Delhi do not believe it, but I am saying that Gehlot knows that this government is going.

"Gehlot himself is saying that as soon as the BJP government comes to power, the schemes of the Congress government will be stopped. I assure



The collective leadership under Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be the main attraction of the BJP's campaign in poll-bound Rajasthan

the public that we will not stop any scheme. Instead, we will make those plans better. Action will definitely be taken against those who have looted the money of the poor."

On October 3, Gehlot hit back at Modi and said, "We will keep the welfare schemes implemented. What is your definition of welfare schemes?"

"Who can trust that what you are saying will be implemented? First apply it at the Centre."

"I had told the Prime Minister that he should guarantee that if the (BJP) government is formed, he will keep our plans intact, but the Prime Minister gave an evasive answer," Gehlot said.

Rajasthan is not the only state where there is a PM vs CM poll battle. In West Bengal, Bihar, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh polls, too, a local face was not put forward by the BJP.

However, the BJP faces more risk in choosing a PM-vs-CM narrative. If the results are not in favour of the BJP in the elections, then the prestige of the Prime Minister is at stake.

This has happened in Karnataka,

Bengal and Himachal. Although the BJP turned the issue in a different direction and put the responsibility of the defeat on other leaders, the risk factor cannot be denied.

A PM-vs-CM poll battle in Rajasthan will be a big challenge for Gehlot no doubt. The aggressive manner in which Modi is creating a narrative by raising issues of failures of the Congress government in the state is a big challenge for the CM.

However, the seasoned politician that he is, Gehlot is also making a sharp counterattack on the issues raised by Modi. In an election with a PM-vs-CM narrative, there is an opportunity for Gehlot to increase his stature while the political risk is lesser.

If the election results are in his favour, then Gehlot's stature will increase and he will get a chance to say that he defeated the PM on the strategy front.

If the election results are not in Gehlot's favour then it will be said that his fight was with the Prime Minister of the country and the big machinery. So what if he lost. ■

DRAWING THE LINE

Why the Law Commission has strongly advised against fiddling with the legal age of consent

The Law Commission of India has cautioned against any attempt at tinkering with the existing age of consent, which is 18, under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 by citing the dangers of child abuse, trafficking or prostitution.

The Commission in its 283rd report, titled "Age of Consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012" said: "After a careful review of existing child protection laws, various judgments and considering the maladies of child abuse, child trafficking and child prostitution that plague our society, the Commission is of the measured view that it is not advisable to tinker with the existing age of consent under the POCSO Act."

The report of the law commission headed by Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi was released on October 6. It has been submitted to Union Minister for Law

Last December, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud had said that the Parliament must address concerns regarding the age of consent under the POCSO Act, which criminalises consensual sexual activities for those under the age of 18

and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal. The report has also recommended to the law ministry the need for making certain amendments in the POCSO Act and introducing judicial discretion "to remedy the situation in cases wherein there is tacit approval in fact though not consent in law on part of the child aged between 16 to 18 years".

"This is so because in our consid-

ered opinion, such cases do not merit to be dealt with the same severity as the cases that were ideally imagined to fall under the POCSO Act. The Commission, therefore, deems it fit to introduce guided judicial discretion in the matter of sentencing in such cases. This will ensure that the law is balanced, thus safeguarding the best interests of the child," the report said.

The commission received a reference from the Karnataka High Court (Dharwad bench) to look at the age criteria for consent, taking into consideration the rising number of cases wherein minor girls above the age of 16 years fell in love, eloped and had sexual intercourse. Such cases subsequently attracted the provisions of the POCSO and/or the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

The commission was also asked by the Gwalior bench of the Madhya Pradesh high court to look into how the enforcement of the POCSO Act, in its present form, causes "gross injustice in cases of statutory rape where de facto consent is present from the girl child or where such a relationship has subse-



be manufactured. It also pointed out that if the issue of consent or absence of it was left to the police or investigating agencies to decide, a lot of genuine cases under POCSO may not see trial. The agencies may declare them to be cases of consensual romantic sexual relationship.

“Moreover, it cannot be ignored that reducing the age of consent will have a direct and negative bearing on the fight against child marriage and child trafficking, the battles against which



Thus, any reduction in the age of consent will inevitably provide a safe harbour provision to coerce minor girls into subjugation, marital rape and other forms of abuse, including trafficking”
– The Law Commission’s 283rd report, titled “Age of Consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012”

quently resulted in a marriage, with or without children.”

Last December, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud had said that the Parliament must address concerns regarding the age of consent under the POCSO Act, which criminalises consensual sexual activities for those under the age of 18. Sometime ago, replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani said that government was not considering any proposal to reduce the age of consent from 18 to 16 years.

The law commission report considered available judgments, and consultations with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), former judges, lawyers, child rights activists, NGOs and academicians. It also took into account responses from all the high courts and data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Arguing against the automatic de-criminalisation of consensual sexual acts by persons above 16 years, the commission said that consent can

have been hard-fought and are still ongoing,” the commission said while arguing against carving out a limited exception for sexual relations with a child above 16 years as it could be misused easily. The law panel said that the consent of a child was no consent and reading the same would be “deeply problematic”.



Chief Justice of India,
(CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud

“All children deserve the protection of the special law enacted for this very purpose and diluting the age of consent will deprive a signif-

icant portion of the child population, especially young girls aged 16 to 18 years, of the protection and expose them to unchecked exploitation. The increasing incidents of grooming and cyber-crimes such as sextortion are classic examples of how children in this vulnerable age group can be trapped and exploited,” it said.

The panel made a very important observation while highlighting a submission that cited the example of some parents in Assam arranging marriages between minors or a minor and an adult by signing notarised agreements stating that the minors or the minor and the adult have fallen in love. “Thus, any reduction in the age of consent will inevitably provide a safe harbour provision to coerce minor girls into subjugation, marital rape and other forms of abuse, including trafficking,” the report said.

Stating that while the age of consent and age of marriage should not be conflated in theory, in practice, given India’s social realities the two were intrinsically linked.

“In many cases before the High Courts, one of the grounds for allowing bail or quashing the proceedings is that the victim and accused have got married and, in a number of cases, have a child as well. Thus, marriage and age of consent cannot be considered mutually exclusive,” said the commission adding that if the age of consent and age of marriage are to be disassociated, then “consent can always be pleaded to exist where the accused marries the victim, even if the said ‘consent’ arises after the occurrence of the alleged offence.” Commenting on such kinds of situations the commission observed: “Thus, introducing the element of consent can provide an opportunity for child-abusers to escape the rigours of law and enjoy impunity by using loopholes.”

The panel also highlighted an unpublished report on the prevalence and nature of child sexual abuse in India to state that victims themselves identify friends and boyfriend/girlfriend as the most common perpetrators of sexual abuse. “The very real possibility of young girls being easily seduced in love traps and then sold off in trafficking cannot and should not be ignored. Any element of consent can be misused and may lead to children being at the mercy of adult abusers, thereby enabling prostitution and exploitation of children,” it said. ■



ରୂପାନ୍ତରଣ ପଥେ ଓଡ଼ିଶା

- ସାମାଜିକ ସୁରକ୍ଷା କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ରାଜ୍ୟ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ପ୍ରତିବଦ୍ଧତା ସ୍ୱରୂପ ୧୫ ଅଗଷ୍ଟ ୨୦୨୩ରୁ ୪.୧୩ ଲକ୍ଷ ନୂତନ ହିତାଧିକାରୀ ପାଉଛନ୍ତି ମଧୁବାବୁ ପେନସନ । ରାଜ୍ୟର ସମୁଦାୟ ୩୨.୫୫ ଲକ୍ଷ ବୟସ୍କ, ବିଧବା, ଭିନ୍ନକ୍ଷମତା ଓ ଅସହାୟ ଉପକୃତ ହେଉଛନ୍ତି ।
- ମିଶନ ଶକ୍ତି ଜରିଆରେ ରାଜ୍ୟର ୭୦ ଲକ୍ଷରୁ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ ମହିଳା ସଶକ୍ତ । ସେମାନଙ୍କୁ ଉଦ୍ୟୋଗୀ ଭାବେ ପ୍ରତିଷ୍ଠିତ କରିବା ପାଇଁ ୫ ଲକ୍ଷ ଟଙ୍କା ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ବିନା ସୁଧରେ ରଣ ସହାୟତା । ସ୍କୁଟି ଯୋଜନାରେ ୧ ଲକ୍ଷ ଟଙ୍କା ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ସୁଧବିହୀନ ରଣ ।
- ବିଜୁ ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ କଲ୍ୟାଣ ଯୋଜନାରେ ରାଜ୍ୟ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ନିଜସ୍ୱ ପାଣ୍ଠିରୁ ମାସିକ ଖର୍ଚ୍ଚ ହେଉଛି ପ୍ରାୟ ୨୫୦ କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କା । ଆର୍ଥିକ ଦୁର୍ବଳ ପରିବାରକୁ ବାର୍ଷିକ ୫ ଲକ୍ଷ ଟଙ୍କା ଓ ପରିବାରର ମହିଳା ସଦସ୍ୟାଙ୍କ ପାଇଁ ୧୦ ଲକ୍ଷ ଟଙ୍କା ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଚିକିତ୍ସା ସହାୟତା ଉପଲବ୍ଧ । ରାଜ୍ୟ ତଥା ରାଜ୍ୟ ବାହାରର ୭୦୦ଟି ପ୍ରମୁଖ ଘରୋଇ ଚିକିତ୍ସାଳୟରେ ମିଳିପାରୁଛି ଅତ୍ୟାଧୁନିକ ଚିକିତ୍ସା ସୁବିଧା ।
- ଆମ ହସ୍ତିଚାଳ ଯୋଜନା ଅଧୀନରେ '5T' ଉପକ୍ରମରେ ରୂପାନ୍ତରିତ ହେବ ରାଜ୍ୟର ୧୪୯ଟି ହସ୍ତିଚାଳ । ସମ୍ପୃକ୍ତ ଅଞ୍ଚଳବାସୀ ପାଇବେ ଅଧିକ ଉନ୍ନତ ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ସେବା ।
- ଗତ ୬ ବର୍ଷ ମଧ୍ୟରେ ପ୍ରତିଷ୍ଠା ହୋଇଛି ୮ଟି ନୂଆ ମେଡ଼ିକାଲ କଲେଜ । ଆସନ୍ତା ୩ ବର୍ଷରେ ପ୍ରତିଷ୍ଠା ହେବ ୨୦ଟି ସୁପର ସ୍ପେସିଆଲିଟି ହସ୍ପିଟାଲ । ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟସେବାରେ ଆସିଛି ଅତୁଳନୀୟ ପରିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ।
- '5T' ଉପକ୍ରମରେ ୩ଟି ପର୍ଯ୍ୟାୟରେ ରାଜ୍ୟର ୬୮୮୦ଟି ହାଇସ୍କୁଲ ରୂପାନ୍ତରଣ ହୋଇଥିବାବେଳେ ୪ର୍ଥ ପର୍ଯ୍ୟାୟରେ ଅବଶିଷ୍ଟ ବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟର ରୂପାନ୍ତରଣ ହେବ । ଶିକ୍ଷା ଭିତ୍ତିଭୂମିକୁ ଆହୁରି ସୁଦୃଢ଼ କରିବାକୁ ରାଜ୍ୟର ପ୍ରାଥମିକ ବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ ଓ କଲେଜଗୁଡ଼ିକର ରୂପାନ୍ତରଣ ପ୍ରକ୍ରିୟା ଆରମ୍ଭ ହୋଇଛି ।
- ଗୁଣାତ୍ମକ ଶିକ୍ଷା ବଳରେ 'ଶିକ୍ଷିତ ଓଡ଼ିଶା : ସଶକ୍ତ ଓଡ଼ିଶା' ପାଇଁ ରାଜ୍ୟର ପ୍ରତି ବ୍ଲକ୍ରେ ପ୍ରତିଷ୍ଠା ହୋଇଛି ଓଡ଼ିଶା ଆଦର୍ଶ ବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ ।
- ଗ୍ରାମାଞ୍ଚଳ ଲୋକଙ୍କ ପକ୍ୱାଘର ପାଇଁ ମୋ ଘର ଯୋଜନାରେ ଅଳ୍ପ ସୁଧରେ ମିଳୁଛି ରଣ ।

- ରାଜ୍ୟର ୧୦୦୦୦୦ ହୋଇଛି । ଜାଗା ମିଳି ଜମି ଅଧିକାର ପ୍ରମାଣ
- 'ମୁକ୍ତା' ଯୋଜନାରେ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥିତ ହୋଇଛି ।
- ଚଳିତ ରବି ଫସଲ ପ୍ରଦାନ ହଜାର ଭୂମିହୀନ ଚା
- ରାଜ୍ୟର ଚାଷୀଭାଇ
- ରାଜ୍ୟର ୩୦ଟି ଜିଲ୍ଲା
- ରାଜ୍ୟର ୪୩୭୩ଟି ଉପକୃତ ହେବେ ସ୍ୱା
- ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀ ଯୋଜନାରେ ଆର୍ଥିକ ଅଭିବୃଦ୍ଧି ଓ ବସ୍ ନିୟୋଜିତ ହେ
- ଶ୍ରୀକ୍ଷେତ୍ର ପରିକ୍ରମା ରାଜ୍ୟର ପ୍ରମୁଖ ଧାର୍ମି
- 'ଆମ ଓଡ଼ିଶା, ନବ ପଦକ୍ଷେପ ପାଇଁ ସ୍ୱତ
- ଓଡ଼ିଆ ସଂସ୍କୃତି ଓ ଭାଗବତ ଗୁଜାର କ
- ରାଜ୍ୟରେ ବିକାଶର ୨୮ ହଜାର ୨୦୦



DADLS-41
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ସୂଚନା ଓ ଲୋକ ସମ୍ପର୍କ

ଓଡ଼ିଶା



ରୁ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ ବସ୍ତି 'ବିଜୁ ଆଦର୍ଶ କଲୋନୀ'ରେ ରୂପାନ୍ତରିତ
ଶନରେ ୧ଲକ୍ଷ ୭୨ ହଜାରରୁ ଅଧିକ ବସ୍ତିବାସିନ୍ଦାଙ୍କୁ ମିଳିଛି
ଶପତ୍ତ ।

ପ୍ରକୃତଗୁଡ଼ିକ ଦ୍ୱାରା ସହରାଞ୍ଚଳରେ ନାଗରିକ ସ୍ୱାଚ୍ଛନ୍ଦ୍ୟ
ଲୋକଙ୍କୁ ମିଳୁଛି ରୋଜଗାରର ସୁବିଧା ।

ପାଇଁ ୪୩.୮୮ ଲକ୍ଷ କ୍ଷୁଦ୍ର ଓ ନାମମାତ୍ର ଚାଷୀ ଏବଂ ୬୮.୭୫
କ୍ଷୀଙ୍କୁ ମିଳିଲା ୯୦୦ କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କାର କାଳିଆ ସହାୟତା ।

ମାନଙ୍କୁ ବିନା/ସ୍ୱଳ୍ପ ସୁଧ କୃଷି ରଣ ମିଳୁଛି ।

ପୁର ୧୭୭ଟି ବ୍ଲକ୍କୁ ମିଲେଟ ମିଶନ ସମ୍ପ୍ରସାରିତ ହୋଇଛି ।

ବ୍ୟାଙ୍କ ନଥିବା ଗ୍ରାମପଞ୍ଚାୟତରେ ବ୍ୟାଙ୍କ ସେବା ସୁବିଧା ।
ୟଂ ସହାୟକ ଗୋଷ୍ଠୀ, ଚାଷୀ, ଛାତ୍ରଛାତ୍ରୀ ଓ ଅନ୍ୟ ବର୍ଗର

ପଞ୍ଚାୟତରୁ ରାଜଧାନୀକୁ ବସ୍ ସେବା ହେବ ସୁନିଶ୍ଚିତ ।
ଲୋକଙ୍କ ଗମନାଗମନକୁ ଦୃଷ୍ଟିରେ ରଖି ୧୦୦୦ରୁ ଅଧିକ
ବ ।

ପ୍ରକୃତ, ଏକାଗ୍ର ପ୍ରକୃତ, ମା' ସମଲେଇ ପ୍ରକୃତ ସମେତ
କ ପୀଠର '5T' ଉପକ୍ରମରେ ରୂପାନ୍ତର ।

ବୀନ ଓଡ଼ିଶା' ଓ 'ମେଟ୍ରୋ ରେଳ ପ୍ରକଳ୍ପ' ପରି ନୂତନ
କ୍ଷ ବ୍ୟୟବରାଦ ।

ପରମ୍ପରାର ସଂରକ୍ଷଣକୁ ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱ ଦେଇ ଗାଁଗୁଡ଼ିକରେ ଥିବା
ଲେବରରେ ପରିବର୍ତ୍ତନ ।

ମାର୍ଗକୁ ଆହୁରି ପ୍ରଶସ୍ତ କରିବାକୁ ଚଳିତ ଆର୍ଥିକ ବର୍ଷରେ
କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କାର ଅତିରିକ୍ତ ବଜେଟ୍ ।



ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

The Bihar government's caste census, which reveals that the combined population of backward classes and Dalits exceeds 80 per cent, can see return of Mandal versus Kamandal politics.

The term 'Mandal-Kamandal' gained centrality in two Hindi heartlands – Uttar Pradesh and Bihar – in the 1990s and has been used by regional parties, which mainly stuck to caste-based politics, and the BJP, which strongly followed the Hindutva ideology.

Political experts suggest that as the census report has been revealed, it is inevitable to raise reservations demand based on these numbers.

Renowned sociologist and Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute director Badri Narayan said making the caste-based census figures public is an attempt to bring back the Mandal-Kamandal politics.

"However, a lot has changed since 1980. People now have new social realities and aspirations. I don't think it will have a significant political impact. There will be some impact, but not too much. It will be a topic of discussion," Narayan said.

"Other states will also face pressure to go for a caste census and then make it public. The opposition will try to make it a national issue. But the BJP can handle this issue quite effectively," he opined.

Bihar's caste census report mentions that there are over 1,000 castes that have not benefited from reservations even once. Around 1,500 castes that have benefited once, and 26 castes have a seven per cent representation in the assembly.

Narayan said that some Dalit castes have benefited from schemes and policies. The motive behind releasing these figures is purely political.

Political analyst Ratanmani Lal said, "the Mandal Commission report was made public in 1987-88. At that time, it was believed that the BJP's rally and movement was for construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The report was made public to divide the Hindus. The era of backward politics that started in 1989 has reached its peak."

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government was formed at the Centre only



Protest against the Mandal Commission report

Heartland Connection

The caste census in Bihar may bring back the Mandal-Kamandal era from the 1990s in Uttar Pradesh



The caste system has affected Indian society's structure. This is not limited to North India alone. There have been many caste-based movements in South Indian politics as well. The power of democracy has been used, and it has been successful"

– Prof. D.R. Sahu, the head of the Sociology Department at Lucknow University

once during that time. Then, the Congress was in power for 10 years. Now that the BJP has emerged strong both at the Centre and in the states, opposition bloc INDIA's focus is on backward and extremely backward classes.

By splitting Hindus into various castes – backward and extremely backward classes – INDIA bloc is trying to weaken BJP's support base.

Prof. D.R. Sahu, the head of the Sociology Department at Lucknow University, said, "the caste system has affected Indian society's structure. This is not limited to North India alone. There have been many caste-based movements in South Indian politics as well. The power of democracy has been used,

and it has been successful."

The 2021 census was supposed to take place but couldn't due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other reasons. The census provides people with a lot of information, including insights into social dynamics.

The Congress party used to talk about poverty and destitution. The focus in politics, from ticket distribution to expanding ministerial positions, often centres around the caste system.

Prof. D.R. Sahu said that if caste-based census figures are made available to the public, it would be better. However, using it as an electoral tool is not appropriate. Promoting caste-based factors is not healthy for society.

The Bihar government released caste-based survey figures on October 2. According to the caste-based survey, Bihar's total population is approximately 130 million.

According to the report, the largest group is the extremely backward classes (EBCs), which make up about 36 per cent. With roughly 27.13 per cent, the other backward classes (OBCs) come in second.

The scheduled castes (SCs), also known as Dalits, make up 19.65 per cent of the state's population, and scheduled tribes (STs) make up roughly 1.68 per cent of the population of Bihar.

About 15.52 per cent of the people in the state fall under the 'unreserved category', often known as the 'general' category. ■



"Since 2021, I have been working as a water tester and training other women to test drinking water in the Bundelkhand region," says Nitu Singh, a training leader.

"Till now, we have worked with a total of 50 gram panchayats from the region. The women make around Rs 20 per water test. The income generated through this has improved our individual livelihoods," she adds.

Jal Jeevan Mission is a Central scheme which aims to provide each household with potable drinking water, with over 2.5 crore families targeted in Uttar Pradesh.

So far, 4,87,955 rural women have been trained in water testing in the state.

The scheme is proving to be a saviour for the people of Bundelkhand not only in terms of providing clean drinking water, but also introducing employment generating opportunities for rural women towards achieving a self-reliant livelihood.

Contaminated water is a breeding ground for diseases, and a source of suffering for many families in the villages of Bundelkhand.

"Diseases and infections had become a frequent part of our livelihoods. We had to spend a lot of money on getting treated for these diseases which were spreading through impure water," says Rani Chadhar (18) while expressing how families were only a couple medical bills away from going bankrupt.

However, things have taken a turn for the better, with the likes of Rani and

WATER SAVES

Thanks to the Jal Jeevan Mission, women in rural Bundelkhand are earning a better livelihood and enjoying a self-reliant life

“

Once I started earning through the water testing program, I could save that money and hand it over to my mother. The water testing worked successfully and the spread of diseases stopped. Families had to no longer spend on these kinds of medical expenses" – Rani Chadhar, an 18-year-old resident of a village in Bundelkhand

her family benefiting on two fronts – water and income security.

"Once I started earning through the water testing program, I could save that money and hand it over to my mother. The water testing worked successfully and the spread of diseases stopped. Families had to no longer spend on these kinds of medical expenses," states

Rani. "She gives me the money she earns from water testing assignments and we use it for household expenses for the family, and paying school fees for my children," says Rani's mother who used to travel 2 km every day to provide drinking water for their house.

Walking on foot while carrying heavy vessels filled with water was a tedious task for her and used to take up most of her day.

"Now my mother focuses on the children and the family. I have four sisters and one brother," Rani added.

Speaking about the water testing process, Nitu says these water samples undergo eleven odd tests before determining whether they are safe for consumption or not.

The group travels from one village to another, and collects water samples. The quality of water coming from different sources like taps, pipes, tube wells, and wells are tested thoroughly.

According to her, many of the women are well educated. Some even have a master's degree, yet they are out of jobs.

"This program has given us a chance to earn a self-reliant, sustainable livelihood," says Nitu Singh. ■

LOSING STEAM

Amidst a painfully protracted and debilitating war, support for Ukraine within the European Union seems to be slowly but surely waning

Wars are costly, both economically and socially, with the impact not only on the belligerents but, as the fighting drags on, also on their overt and covert supporters. Outside bank-rolling soon shrinks as fatigue and financial constraints kick in. The Ukraine conflict is a prime example.

Now, in its 20th month, and no indications of any side gaining an edge, leave alone winning decisively, and no negotiated end on the horizon, the stalemate is causing a blowback in one key bastion of Ukrainian supporters – the European Union.

While most of the European Union was united in enforcing package after package of harsh sanctions on Russia – slashing trade and imports, especially of fuels (despite some concerns in some members over the economic impact), supplying aid and arms to Ukraine, and welcoming new members to NATO – there was a major outlier or two.

While Serbia, which is not in the EU or NATO yet, remained neutral given its traditional ties to Russia, even as its other Slav brethren in the Balkans came out against Moscow, there were other EU/NATO members that did not fully toe the EU line.

Turkey, which is a key member of NATO but smarting over its EU accession bid being stalled, is still playing its own independent hand with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan trying to mediate a negotiated solution in March 2022, and then, presiding over the Black Sea grain deal – since discontinued. He is still the only major European leader still in contact with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Meanwhile, as Sweden and Finland sought to join NATO raising the "Russian threat", the former did not find the process easy. With the process requiring unanimity, Hungary and Turkey refused to ratify Stockholm's membership and

though the latter did soften its stand somewhat, Budapest is still not amenable.

Hungary also steadfastly refused to ship arms – or even allow their transit over its territory – and stood up firmly against any attempts to sanction sectors like Russian nuclear technology which would affect it.

It also vocally raised the suppression of rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, particularly against the backdrop of the law axing languages of minority elements of the populace.

Now, it has been joined by neighbouring Slovakia, which was a diligent provider of arms to Ukraine, but a

As the war continues, and upends the political spectrum of Europe – the left-liberals like Germany's Greens being the most in support of supporting Kiev and the conservative/populists trying to place national interests ahead, the possibility of other dissenters cropping up cannot be forestalled

change of regime has led it has led it to suspend shipments, in line with the poll winner's stated policy.

Former Prime Minister Robert Fico, whose SMER-SD defeated the ruling Centre-left in the recently held elections and is poised to gain power once it stitches up a coalition, has told journalists that "Slovakia and the people of Slovakia have bigger problems than Ukraine" and if his party successfully forms a government, it would still be open to helping Ukraine, but only in a humanitarian way.



On the other hand, Poland, which was a staunch supporter of Ukraine, has now become a bitter critic over a spat on the issue of Ukrainian grain and other agricultural produce imports. As the issue snowballed, a furious Poland said it will not send any more weapons to Ukraine but later clarified that it would not send "modern weapons".

Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, who skipped a meeting of his EU counterparts in Kiev earlier this week and sent his deputy instead, noted that it will take a "titanic effort" to mend the rift between Warsaw and Kiev.

Relations between the two neighbours are "entering a period of downturn and my absence is partly an expression of this", he had said.

Rau, in an interview to a Polish



newspaper, said that bilateral ties depend on "three dimensions" – geopolitics, national interests, and domestic support, and while the first element was well in place, the other two cannot be ignored.

As the war continues, and upends the political spectrum of Europe – the left-liberals like Germany's Greens being the most in support of supporting Kiev and the conservative/populists trying to place national interests ahead, the possibility of other dissenters cropping up cannot be forestalled.

The foremost and incisive critique of the EU stand was made by Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, who contended that many Asian, Latin American, and African countries cannot comprehend why the conflict con-

Now, in its 20th month, and no indications of any side gaining an edge, leave alone winning decisively, and no negotiated end on the horizon, the stalemate is causing a blowback in one key bastion of Ukrainian supporters

tinues and are bemused by EU's double standards. "They don't understand, for example, how every time there's a war outside Europe, the EU looks down from a moral high ground and calls for peace, negotiations and an immediate

end to the violence. But when the war is in Europe, the EU fuels the conflict and supplies weapons," he said in an interview to a Hungarian newspaper.

Szijjarto added that anyone who refuses to supply arms to Kiev or share the EU's approach to the crisis "is immediately labelled a spy for Moscow, a friend of Putin, and a propagandist for the Russians".

The rest of the world also "doesn't understand why Europe has globalised this conflict. They don't understand why there is a war in Europe, but it is Asians, Latin Americans, and Africans that have to pay the price for it with skyrocketing inflation, high energy prices, or food insecurity", he said.

If such sentiment spreads, Kiev may be in for tough times. ■



Russia's
experience
of effectively
fighting long
wars goes all
the way back
to the Tzarist
times

On Familiar Territory

What can be the outcome of the Ukraine conflict? Will Russia manage to keep its territorial gains as a buffer area to keep Ukraine down and NATO away from its territory proper, or conversely, have to return bloodied to within its own borders with a vengeful enemy remaining across the frontier?

The answer depends on the resiliency, but not only of the two sides to the conflict.

In Ukraine's case, it hinges much on the willingness, ability, and appetite of its European and American backers to last the course with weapons and funding.

But the internecine political warfare in the US over government spending – which saw funds for Ukraine axed in the stop-gap spending agreement passed by Congress – and incipient but discernible discontent in Europe as costs rise and dissenters like Hungary get emboldened with the victory

One yardstick to gauge the situation may be the universal Russian sentiment ... of a markedly strong disinclination to have hostile powers or alliances near their country's borders, a demonstrated capability to go to extreme extents to deter enemies and invaders and endure whatever privations this objective may entail

of like-minded colleagues, like Robert Fico in Slovakia, shows the support situation is not as determinate as Kiev would like.

As per CNN, of all aid flowing to Ukraine, 47 per cent is from the US, 39 per cent from the EU, and the remaining from others including the UK and

Canada.

And then, the moot question is whether the Americans and the Europeans will continue to remain committed to Ukraine, and have a credible strategic end in their sight.

Afghanistan and Iraq are some recent examples where their huge investment in men and money failed to leave either place better off once the initial – and fleeting – period of euphoric victory ended. It may be argued that unlike these two, the collective West does not have boots on the ground, or very minimal and well-concealed ones – if it does, in Ukraine, but the principle is largely the same.

On the other hand, will Russia manage to keep up its end in the battle, or will slowly succumb to what is perceived as its increasing isolation on the global stage and growing anti-war sentiment – as per the view of one section (mainly Western and allied) of the media and allied discourse?

It is difficult to offer any valid prognosis of the situation considering the fickle unpredictability of human affairs and the presence of "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns", as colourfully described by then US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2002 ahead of the US (mis)adventure in Iraq.

But one yardstick to gauge the situation may be the universal Russian sentiment – present through Tsarist, Communist, and modern times – of a markedly strong disinclination to have hostile powers or alliances near their country's borders, a demonstrated capability to go to extreme extents to deter enemies and invaders and endure whatever privations this objective may entail, and in such moments of peril, subsume political and other differences to come together against an external enemy.

Napoleon and Hitler learned the lesson the hard way. After their initial successes, it was the limitless Russian terrain, unforgiving weather, and the Russian obduracy that defeated them and their Russian foe, after being chased hard and long as it traded space for time

The moot question is whether the Americans and the Europeans will continue to remain committed to Ukraine, and have a credible strategic end in their sight

– even including abandoning Moscow (to Napoleon), swung back powerfully and launched a massive counterattack that chased both would-be conquerors back to their capitals.

However, it might be not as well known outside the circle of historians and Russian affairs experts that Napoleon and Hitler were not the best examples when it comes to prevailing against Russia, as the only power that only successfully controlled Moscow – albeit for a brief time – was Poland – and that too in the early 17th century. The Swedes and Turks did prevail sometimes against the Russians, as did the Mongols earlier but mostly indirectly, and the Japanese in 1905 – but at one periphery.

Even after the 1917 Revolution, at

least 6 powerful nations – including the UK, the US, and Imperial Japan, flush after their World War I victory – could not change the course of the Russian Civil War, following the downfall of the Romanovs and the emergence of Lenin's Bolsheviks, and all had to eventually withdraw without any successes.

To be fair, historical precedent cannot be applied unthinkably to the present, given that circumstances change with time – and President Vladimir Putin is not a 21st-century version of Tsar Alexander I or Generalissimo Josef Stalin, but still, it can offer an illustrative indication of national character, intention, and psyche.

And then, the West, or actually the EU nations, with their rather understandable policies of lumping all Russians – pro and anti-war – together with the stringent raft of sanctions, the withdrawal of businesses, and now, the diktats of seizing cars, and even personal effects, of Russian visitors, seems geared to brand all Russians with the same brush and prevent a significant peace constituency from coalescing there. ■



The Hamas attacks on Israel are reminiscent of the Pakistani tribal invasion of Kashmir way back in October 1947

There can be nothing more horrifying than seeing terrorists overrun parts of an independent nation. It has happened in Israel and the October 7 shock has been too unnerving for the rest of the saner world.

For many Indians, the situation is a reminder of the October 1947 invasion by raiders from Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.

Hordes of tribals from Northwest Frontier Province backed by Pakistan army had invaded the Kashmir valley on October 22, 1947 under the code-name 'Operation Gulmarg'.

An estimated 5,000-10,000 raiders armed with axes, swords and rifles supplied by the Pakistan army and also military lorries came to capture Kashmir. The raiders plundered, looted, killed men, women and children. Hundreds of women were kidnapped and raped. The Sikhs and Hindus were particularly targeted.

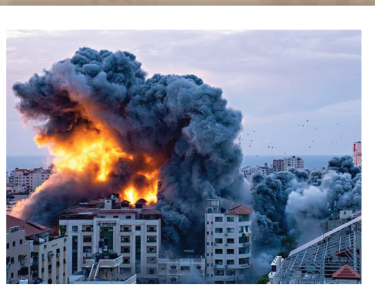
The Maharaja of J&K, seeing the gravity of the situation, approached the Indian government for assistance on October 24. He agreed to accede to India and the Instrument of Accession was signed on October 26.

The first Indian troops were airlifted and landed in Srinagar on October 27. The raiders were punished and thrown out. But they left a huge trail of bloodshed and fear. Families were wiped out, women brutalised, and many were forcibly converted.

For J&K, October is a month of freedom from tyranny, and October 27 is annually observed as the Infantry Day to commemorate and pay tribute to the brave Indian infantry soldiers who lost their lives while defending the country against Pakistani invaders.

What India's J&K endured in October 1947, similar is being witnessed in Israel – the only difference being that Muslims in Kashmir stood against the raiders and helped the army defend Srinagar. The crimes unleashed by the Pakistani raiders against Kashmiris and

SIMILAR HORROR



Fire and smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike, in Gaza City.

minority Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs then were barbaric.

The crimes being committed in Israel by terrorist-raiders are no less than what was endured by Kashmiris seven decades ago.

India was quick to condemn the attack and expressed solidarity with Israel. Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X, "Deeply shocked by the news of terrorist attacks in Israel. Our thoughts and prayers are with the innocent victims and their families. We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour."

Videos emanating from Israel showed women being brutalised and forcibly taken in jeeps by armed terrorists. The terrorists seemed to be enjoying a free run. They were breaking into houses and apartments.

The terrorists were seen shooting civilians, kidnapping people, including women and children, and taking them away as trophies.

In one horrifying video, a woman soldier was seen naked being assaulted by terrorists. In another video, the lifeless body of a soldier taken out from a vehicle is trampled upon by the terrorists and their supporters' raising slogans. There are hundreds of similar shocking videos of Israelis being attacked savagely.

The calibrated attack took place during Simchat Torah and Shabbat, which are significant days of rest in the Jewish calendar.

The Hamas terrorists infiltrated Israel borders under the cover of missile attacks. They entered Israel by land, sea and air using paragliders, said the Israeli army. The people were caught unawares as the terrorists attacked from



The tribal raiders invaded Kashmir with the backing of Pakistan Army in October 1947.

the air and ground.

In earlier times there was no social media, only the stories remained and were carried from generations to generations. But in Israel everything is happening in real time and people all over the world are witnessing the barbarity.

The images that emanated from Israel are deeply disturbing and unnerving.

Hordes of tribals from Northwest Frontier Province backed by Pakistan army had invaded the Kashmir valley on October 22, 1947 under the code-name 'Operation Gulmarg'

After entering Kashmir, the tribesmen were busier in killings, plunder and abducting women than moving forward to capture Srinagar airport. (Image source: Ministry of Defence)



The unprecedented assault saw Hamas gunmen infiltrating several Israeli towns and over 5,000 rockets launched from the Gaza Strip. The infiltration came on the 50th anniversary of the 1973 War, which saw Israel's Arab neighbours – led by Egypt and Syria – launch a surprise attack on October 6 and lasted for three weeks. The 1973 War started on the holiest day of the Jewish Calendar.

And 50 years later, again during its holy day celebrations, Israel was attacked. This time not by countries but by terrorists.

The fact that terrorists could overrun a country like Israel, whose intelligence network is said to be the best in the world, should be a grim reminder to all those who believe in good and bad terrorists. India has long endured this and has been forewarning the world about the dangers of good and bad terrorists. ■

CRYING SHAME

With Bihar still woefully lagging behind in facilitating a proper menstrual hygiene programme, the state's girl students continue to suffer a lot on the school attendance front

Neeta Kumari (15) is a class 10 student at Kalanand High School in Dhurvapur village of Bihar's Purnia district. Every time there is an 'emergency', the teacher reluctantly gives her a sanitary pad, only on the condition that another will be deposited later.

"We have demanded several times that a sanitary pad vending machine be installed, but the teachers here decline it with the excuse that when they installed an LCD screen for smart classes a few years ago, it was stolen. The school is no longer interested in getting machines," she said.

There are many schools in Bihar, where girls or even teachers have no idea about sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators required to burn used pads. This, despite a Patna High Court order in April, directing the state government to install such machines in all middle, high and higher secondary schools. Apart from ensuring adequate menstrual hygiene facilities in proportion to the number of enrolled students, the court also asked the government to ensure clean toilets and clean drinking water.

Nevertheless, little seems to have happened on the ground.

"We have separate washrooms for boys and girls, but they are very dirty. Thankfully, for drinking water, there is a reverse osmosis system as well as a

hand pump," Neeta added.

Bihar was the first state in India to introduce menstrual leave, a revolutionary step in the 1990s. But when it came to menstrual hygiene, the state has lagged behind in facilitating an effective programme.

"If we are in school when the periods begin, we take leave and go back home. Naturally, studies suffer in those few days," said Anu Kumari, a class 11 student of Ramdayalu Adarsh High School of Damodarpur village in Vaishali district.

"Teachers do not discuss 'such issues' with us. Whatever I know about menstruation, I learnt from my elder sisters and mother," said Anu in a hushed voice, as her father was present while she talked to this reporter.

At 59 per cent, Bihar ranks lowest in India in terms of adoption of menstrual hygiene practices among women. Only 7 per cent of the state's total budget is allocated for health and family welfare, out of which Rs two crore is dedicated for menstrual hygiene schemes.

Last year, the State Education Department launched a pilot project to install sanitary pad vending machine and incinerator in schools. As many as 93 schools got the machines in the first phase of the project and 243 in phase two. Each school was given Rs 40,000 to purchase the machines. Maintenance was the responsibility of the schools.

Bihar has 90,000 government schools, of which about 40,000 are middle, high and senior secondary schools.

In that context, a vending machine in less than 350 schools is like a drop in the ocean, said activists working on menstrual health.

"Even in schools that have vending machines and incinerators, the staff do not know how to use them. Sometimes, sanitary pads are not available. The government, apart from giving machines, also needs to organise training sessions for teachers. Otherwise, this project might not last long," said Amrita Singh, Chairperson of Nav-Astitva Founda-

At 59 per cent, Bihar ranks lowest in India in terms of adoption of menstrual hygiene practices among women. Only 7 per cent of the state's total budget is allocated for health and family welfare, out of which Rs two crore is dedicated for menstrual hygiene schemes

tion in Patna. The foundation has been working on menstrual hygiene awareness in Bihar for the last eight years.

Apart from vending machines and incinerators, other WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) components like clean toilets and safe drinking water are also a struggle to achieve in many Bihar schools, making lives difficult for girls



in the age group of 12 to 18.

No regular support staff is available in schools to clean toilets.

"There are five washrooms in our schools, but not one is usable. They are extremely dirty and remain shut most of the time. Students are forced to use toilets in the old school building. A few days ago, a teacher came from Pune for a teacher training programme. When she raised the issue, the management unlocked the toilets and got them cleaned," said a teacher of Mahavir Middle School in Lutaha village of East Champaran district, on condition of anonymity.

The situation is no different at the middle school located at Makandpur in Bhagalpur district.

"There are separate toilets for boys and girls, but the boys' toilet is non-functional so they have to go out in the fields. Even the staff toilet is in bad shape. For drinking water, we have a hand pump and a water tank connected to a borewell, but both are not operational. So we have to depend on water decanters," said Riya Rani, a science teacher in the school.

"I have no idea about a vending machine and we do not have a pad bank in our school. Many girls take a period leave... I try to hold discussions on menstruation, puberty and conception with both boys and girls, but I see that boys are hesitant to talk about these issues. Sometimes, they make inadvertent comments," she added.

The state government organised the Teenage Girls' Health Awareness Programme in Patna last year, in which some teachers from each district participated. All the participants were distributed four packets of 10 sanitary pads each for use in their schools. Given that most middle and high schools have more than 100 girls, this meagre quantity stood out starkly, raising a question on the state government's seriousness about menstrual hygiene.

Bihar also runs Mukhyamantri Kishori Swasthya Yojana, under which Rs 300 is deposited annually in the bank accounts of girls studying in classes 7 to 12 for buying sanitary napkins. The amount was increased from Rs 150 this year.

"But we do not get it regularly. Anyway, this amount is too less to buy good quality sanitary napkins throughout the year," said Reena Kumari, a class 10 student of Shambhupur Higher Secondary School in Vaishali district.



The government has been running a strong campaign for full attendance in schools for the last few months, but it is still difficult to get girls to attend schools. Unless there are proper toilets in schools, girls will not be able to have full attendance. There should be a mandatory pad bank in each school"

— Rashmi Jha, a gender expert based in Patna

Teachers felt that for students coming from a weak economic background, even this small grant was used for other things.

"For people who cannot afford basic food, clothing and housing, menstruation has always been a secondary issue," said Sapna, a teacher at the Girls' Secondary School, Khagaul, Patna.

"The government has been running a strong campaign for full attendance in schools for the last few months, but it is still difficult to get girls to attend schools. Unless there are proper toilets in schools, girls will not be able to have full attendance. There should be a mandatory pad bank in each school," said Rashmi Jha, a gender expert based in Patna.

She said the government should promote start-ups working in the field to provide reasonably priced sanitary pads or set up its own production unit where women from Naari Niketan (a

shelter for women and children) can make sanitary pads.

The UNICEF has instituted 'Meena Manch' and 'Bal Sansad' platforms to involve girls and school children in creating awareness about health, hygiene and WASH issues.

"We do not have a vending machine but we do run a pad bank in school with the cooperation of school management and teachers. We also discuss puberty issues with teenagers," said Kavita Kumari, a teacher at Bariyapur Middle School in Munger district. Since 2015, Kavita has been a government-appointed state trainer under the Bihar Disaster Management Campaign to educate children on health.

The Women and Child Development Corporation (WCDC) plans to install sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators in all Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, the residential schools run by the Central government for girls from economically weaker backgrounds.

"The WCDC's main responsibility is to create awareness about menstruation. We are working on a major policy around it. However, for the supply of resources for menstrual hygiene in schools, the Education Department is responsible," said Bandana Preyasi, Managing Director, WCDC, Bihar.

"Socio-economic status has a deep connection with education. Good education means better access to information and financial resources. To improve menstrual health in India, there is a need to invest in girls' education as well as campaign for behavioural and social change on a large scale, so that people are more vocal on the issue," said Arundhati Muraleedharan of the Menstrual Health Alliance India. ■

RUNNING OUT OF TIME



While a GI tag for Bikaner Usta Kala is a step in the right direction, a lot more needs to be done to bring back the glory days of the dying art form

Sitting cross-legged at his workshop in Rajasthan's Bikaner, Shaukat Ali Usta (52) is engrossed in laying warq (fine slivers of gold) on a wooden frame. His work involves not only acquired skill, but also loads of patience. The intricate designs that he has laid out on camel leather-embossed exhibits have not only won him a national award instituted by the Ministry of Textiles, but also many valuable customers over the last 30 years.

Shaukat learnt the art from Mohammed Hanif Usta, a disciple of Hisamuddin Usta, a doyen in this field. Despite Bikaner Usta Kala receiving the Geographical Indications (GI) tag last month, getting more artists into this

Usta kala flourished in the Mughal courts, before Raja Rai Singh, the sixth ruler of Bikaner, patronised it and welcomed artists from Iran, belonging to the Muslim community, to the city famed for its camels

profession has become an arduous task.

Usta kala flourished in the Mughal courts, before Raja Rai Singh, the sixth ruler of Bikaner, patronised it and welcomed artists from Iran, belonging to the Muslim community, to the city

famed for its camels. No wonder their work, involving gold meenakari and munawwat, was done on camel skin. Nowadays, wood, mirror and marble also form the raw materials. Glass jars, wooden boxes, wall paintings and gift items with usta work are quite popular. There are big works like bandanwars (work on doors) too.

Usta kala in Bikaner's Bhandra Shah Jain temple is almost 400 years old. Anup Mahal in Junagarh Fort, Jain mansions, mosques, Rampuria Haveli, Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Jama Masjid of Delhi, Neelkanth Mahadev Temple in Nepal, and mosques of Sri Lanka and Saudi Arabia are fine examples of workmanship.

However, by 1967, Hisamuddin Usta



hammad Asgar Usta and Ajmal Husain Usta have received state awards for their commendable works. His grandson Mohammad Jameel Usta has been working for the promotion of the art through innovative experiments. He has also been a member of the Rajasthan Lalit Kala Akademi.

Thanks to Hisamuddin and his disciples, the number of usta artists has increased. However, it is still not satisfactory as only less than 70 artists are present in the field.

Usta artists admitted that lack of skilled people was a reason for the art not making much progress, despite having all the necessary ingredients to

Lack of skilled manpower eventually means a shortage of talented teachers. The art has been confined to a particular caste and that too only to Bikaner. This has had a negative impact on its growth

flourish. Usta artists are well-off and there is no dearth of work. The income of artists depends on how many pieces they can complete in a month, their worthiness and selling prices. Some pieces can fetch Rs 7,000, while some others Rs 50,000.

There are more opportunities now as new works are commissioned and renovations are carried out on a regular

basis at various places, including Delhi Airport, Jain temples and buildings outside the country. The artists also benefit from handicrafts fairs organised at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi and other big cities.

However, lack of skilled manpower eventually means a shortage of talented teachers. The art has been confined to a particular caste and that too only to Bikaner. This has had a negative impact on its growth. As for women in this field, Shaukat said, "I believe use of purdah makes it difficult for women to do this art." He added that some Hindu women have entered the field, but their numbers are negligible.

Another important aspect is the time taken to complete a piece. Showing a bandanwar he did, Shaukat said it took around three months to complete, and it will be priced at above Rs 50,000. Such long periods of work put off the youth, who are keen on getting educated and entering other professions.

Not just that, it takes at least three to five years to master the art. The lack of proper publicity and government efforts to train people also hamper the art.

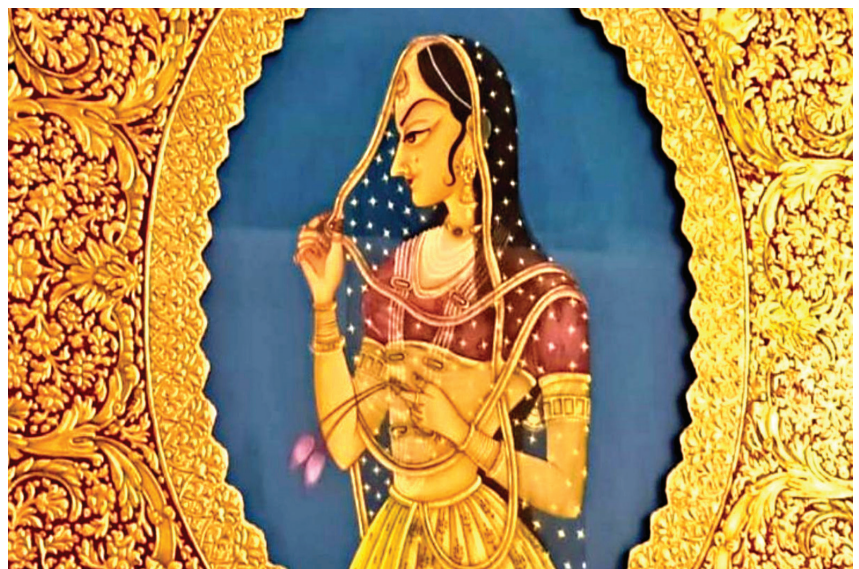
The GI tag is the first step to protect usta kala. Bikaner District Industries Centre (DIC) General Manager Manju Nain Godara and NABARD officer Ramesh Tambiya agreed that duplication of usta artworks has been an issue. However, the GI tag will curb the issue as the names and details of the usta artists will be mentioned on their artworks, which can be scanned to check authenticity.

was the only usta artist left in the country. When Munna Lal Goyal became Bikaner Collector in 1976, he exhorted Hisamuddin to impart lessons to others. This led to the launch of Camel Hide Training Centre. Mohammed Hanif Usta soon became Hisamuddin's disciple and started learning the nuances of the art.

While Hisamuddin received Padma Shri Award in 1986, Hanif was honoured with the President's Award in 1993 for his miniature work on marble. The latter had decorated the walls of Anup Mahal and Nizamuddin Dargah.

During Bill Clinton's official visit to India in 2000, Hanif and 14 other artists got a chance to meet the then US President. Looking at his marble exhibit, Clinton said he wanted that in the White House. However, Hanif replied that he would not sell the work that fetched him a national award to anyone.

Hisamuddin's other disciples Mo-



Tambiya, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, Bikaner, said the GI tag will boost employment opportunities in the area and will give the art a place in the international market.

However, Shaukat believed that merely getting a GI tag will not protect and promote usta kala. "The art will survive only if it is propagated in a complete manner," claimed the artist, who has made efforts in collaboration with Prayas Welfare Institute, Bikaner, to get the GI certification. Godara, NABARD and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, New Delhi, also played important roles in making it a reality.

For the art to be propagated in a complete manner, there should be schemes to promote it. Godara that no such scheme was being run to help the craft. "For the last four years, I have been striving to get GI certification for usta kala. Now, we will make further efforts to encourage the artists," she said.

The true expansion of usta kala is possible by providing artisan cards, a rightful place to capable artists and by properly implementing schemes meant for them

Asked about training camps for artists, Godara said, "The DIC's mandate is to run government schemes only. Earlier, we used to organise such camps under the aegis of Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation Limited. At present, the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Jodhpur, runs them. USTTAD, a skill upgradation scheme of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, also aids the artists. The NABARD finances it. However, the duration of the camps is short. If a course is designed by the Centre or state government for usta kala, then the DIC can play an important role in it."

Godara informed that the DIC would display usta works at an exhibition of GI products to be held in Jammu and Kashmir in this month. "We always try to provide artists with information about various fairs and exhibitions, so that they can participate," she claimed.

Ajmal Hussain Usta, aged around 60, has 40 years of experience in the field. He said that the government was



Rajasthan Bikaner Usta Kala art done on camel skin.

not doing things right. "We do not get full information about schemes. The dissemination of information given on the website of the Union Textile Ministry's Handicrafts Department is negligible among our artists."

"Like music, usta kala cannot be learnt completely by attending a training camp of only two or three months. It needs constant practice to attain perfection," Ajmal asserted. While echoing his views, Shaukat said, "We need to connect with the youth. Only a few have come to learn the art as it is limited only to Usta families. There is also a misconception that it is very expensive to learn."

Ajmal felt the Camel Hide Training Centre should hold its training sessions more regularly. That apart, the Central and state governments should try to link usta with the tourism department initiatives.

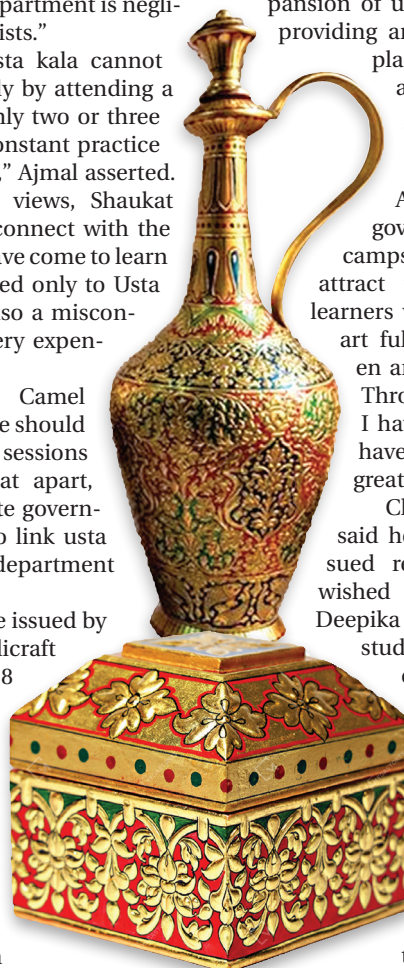
Artisan cards are issued by the Centre to handicraft artists aged above 18 years on application, so that they could travel in trains free of cost to attend government fairs. They also get free stalls at fairs to exhibit their works. Using the card, they can

also participate in art related marketing schemes of the Central and state governments.

According to Shaukat, the true expansion of usta kala is possible by providing artisan cards, a rightful place to capable artists and by properly implementing schemes meant for them.

Usta artist Naveen Acharya (30) said the government training camps should be able to attract young and energetic learners who want to learn the art fully. "Only a few women are present in this field. Through my interactions, I have known that they all have learnt the work with great difficulty," he said.

Chanchal Suthar (24) said her artisan card was issued recently and that she wished to get more training. Deepika Shrimali (35), who has studied Master of Fine Arts course, said she learnt usta kala from a guest lecturer. "It is not possible to gain professional knowledge in a short time. If an usta course is launched, many students of Bikaner will become proficient in the art," she added. ■





Vital Link

Despite the arrival of a pro-China president in the Maldives, India must continue to engage earnestly with the island nation

Mohamed Muizzu, Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM)-People's National Congress (PNC) coalition candidate was recently elected the President of Maldives. Muizzu defeated incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who was known for being close to India. The 45-year-old Muizzu won 54.06 per cent of the vote in the run-off contest.

Solih, 61, will continue as caretaker president till Muizzu takes charge on November 17.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Muizzu on being elected President.

The Prime Minister posted on X: "Congratulations and greetings to @MMuizzu on being elected as President of the Maldives."

"India remains committed to strengthening the time-tested India-Maldives bilateral relationship and enhancing our overall cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region," he said.

The elections in Maldives will have

implications for India's polity.

Last year, India extended \$100 million to the Maldives in the form of budgetary support to help Male address the economic challenges.

Besides the ambitious Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), last year, Male and JMC Projects (India) inked a contract for Maldives Hanimaadhoo International Airport Development Project. It is being developed under the \$800 million concessional Line of Credit (LoC) extended by India to the Maldives. Under the GMCP, a 6.74-km long bridge and causeway link is being built. This will connect the national capital Male with three adjoining islands – Villingli, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi.

Muizzu, a supporter of former President Abdulla Yameen, who is currently serving an 11-year jail term, has been a strong supporter of the "India-Out" campaign in the island nation. Known to be pro-China, he had promised to build closer ties with Beijing. In a meet-

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India must also continue with its financial assistance to the nation and stick to timely and professional execution of infrastructure projects"
– Dhanuraj D, Chairman, Centre for Public Policy Research

ing with Chinese Communist Party officials last year, Muizzu said that his party's return to office would "script a further chapter of strong ties between our two countries," Al Jazeera said, adding that this may also mean freedom for Yameen, Muizzu's mentor.

Even though it may be Advantage China for now, India must continue with its focus on Maldives. While most analysts said though it is expected that a new political structure in Maldives will play out in the future, India must not deviate from its existing policies.

Maldives will seek greater economic engagements from other countries.

"India needs to play its cards well. New Delhi must continue to focus on Maldives. Irrespective of the election outcome, one of the ways to build stronger and long-term ties with Maldives is by boosting connectivity," said Dhanuraj D, Chairman, Centre for Public Policy Research.

Dhanuraj added that people-to-people contact must be increased between the two countries for sustained ties.

"India must also continue with its financial assistance to the nation and stick to timely and professional execution of infrastructure projects," he said, adding that the archipelago must be brought in India's tourism strategy by creating a circuit much like Sri Lanka.

"While the government-to-government dealings have been on, it is time India also focuses on improving people-to-people contact," Dhanuraj said, adding that the trust deficit, which exists in the island nation towards India, must be worked on.

Maldives is not only India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it occupies a special place in Modi's vision of SAGAR or 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. ■

The destructive pests are making life increasingly harder for cotton farmers in northwestern India

More than 4.25 lakh hectares in villages along the Punjab, Haryana and Pakistan borders of Rajasthan are under cotton cultivation. However, pink bollworms have been eating into the profits of cotton farmers for the past few years. This year, it has taken a more serious turn.

The invasion started early into the cropping cycle this time. With cotton-picking season (September to October) on, farmers claimed their yields have never been this low and demanded that the government should declare pink bollworm infestation as a natural disaster to offer them compensation.

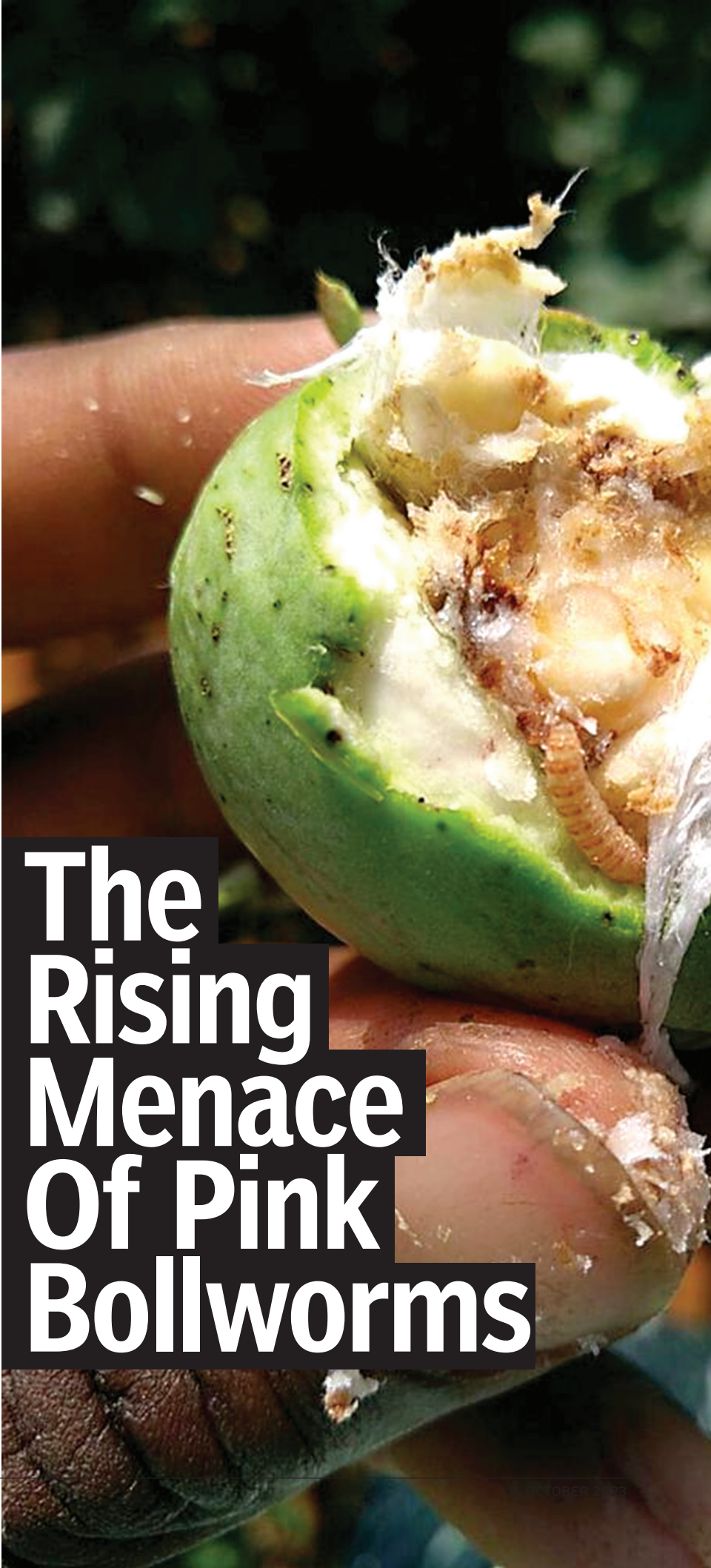
“The crisis has gripped Hanumanagarh, Anupgarh and Sriganganagar districts. Pink bollworm infestation on BT cotton has affected every village without exception. Full crop loss has been registered in certain areas,” said Resham Singh, president of Bhartiya Kisan Union, Hanumangarh.

Singh requested the government to conduct a girdawari (field inspection) in these villages to determine the extent of crop damage. This assessment is crucial for governments and insurance companies to determine the financial assistance or insurance payouts that the affected farmers may be eligible for.

“Pink bollworm infestation should be declared a national disaster. A provision should be made for nationwide compensation in case of insect infestation, similar to the compensation provided for damages caused by unseasonal rain, hailstorm, storms and other natural calamities,” Resham said.

Meanwhile, agriculture department officials said that the pest has destroyed approximately half of the cotton crop planted between April and May. “A team of agriculture officials and scientists are conducting a damage assessment survey,” said an official, on condition of anonymity.

Deputy Director of Rajasthan Agriculture Department Subhash Dudi said that decisions regarding the classifica-



The Rising Menace Of Pink Bollworms



tion of insect infestations as natural disasters and the subsequent compensation fall under the purview of the state government.

While Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana does have provisions for claiming compensation for crop damage due to pest attacks, cotton farmers rarely opt for it due to delayed and pending compensation. In addition, the high insurance premiums – double that of other crops – add to the financial burden of cotton farmers, with no guarantee of returns.

“Earlier, I insured my crops regularly, but I never got a penny despite suffering damages. So, I stopped getting insurance two years ago. This year, the cotton crop on my six bighas has been



Pink bollworm infestation should be declared a national disaster. A provision should be made for nationwide compensation in case of insect infestation, similar to the compensation provided for damages caused by unseasonal rain, hailstorm, storms and other natural calamities”

– Resham Singh, president of Bhartiya Kisan Union, Hanumangarh

affected. I do not know what will happen,” Surendra Nain, a farmer from Malarampura village in Hanumangarh, said.

Jagtar Singh of Jodkiyan village in the district shared a similar story. “Despite taking a loan from the cooperative society and insuring my wheat crop sown on my seven bighas of land, I never received any claim for the losses I suffered four years ago. After repaying the loan, I made the decision to discontinue the insurance,” he said.

Raghuveer Singh of Lambi Dhab village of the district agreed with Jagtar. “In 2021, my paddy crop on seven bighas was affected due to adverse weather, but I was not deemed eligible for a claim... so I do not have any insurance for this year. My farm has

witnessed pink bollworm infestation and I think my harvest will drop by 50% this year. I still do not regret not taking insurance because I would not have received any money even after paying a substantial premium.”

Explaining the cautious approach of farmers regarding crop insurance, Resham said insurance companies often employed various tactics to avoid settling claims. “Sometimes farmers are blamed for not taking care of their crops. The premium for cotton is exceptionally high as it is a cash crop,” he said.

“The notion of cotton being more profitable than other crops is no longer applicable. The cost of cotton production has risen significantly, with farmers investing up to Rs 20,000 per bigha for the same return as before,” he added.

Crop insurance premiums for crops like moong (green gram), guar (cluster bean), paddy and bajra (pearl millet) typically amount to 2% of the sum insured. In contrast, cotton insurance charges a premium of 5% per hectare.

Farmers claim that this year the bollworm infestation has spread uncontrollably and unprecedentedly. However, recurring loss of cotton crops due to pest attacks is common here. In the 1990s, cotton-producing farmers were severely affected by pest infestations, causing significant hardships.

In 2003-04, the introduction of hybrid BT cotton seeds brought hope, as it was believed to be pest-resistant. This proved accurate during the initial years. But in the last three to four years, even BT cotton has come under attack from whiteflies and pink bollworms.

Dudi agreed that compared to the past two years, the pest infestation occurred on cotton at a much swifter rate this year. “In northern India, the pink bollworm infestation was observed last year during the final days of the season. However, this year, it was evident right at the onset of the cotton season,” Dudi said.

“This early onset has resulted in a more substantial damage, particularly as the insect continues to harm the crop throughout its growth cycle, impacting the middle and final phases significantly,” Dudi said, adding that farmers who took precautionary measures from the outset have experienced fewer losses.

Ramkumar Saharan of Chunvadh in Sriganganagar district said seed-producing companies assured them that the seeds were resistant to pest attacks.



Cotton crop damaged due to pink bollworm infestation.

“However, their claims have been proven false. Over the last two to three years, there has been a surge in pink bollworm infestations on BT cotton,” he said.

He attributed the rise in pest infestations to poor quality BT cotton seeds “Companies are distributing low-quality seeds, making crops susceptible to pest attacks. Once infestations begin, pests quickly spread throughout the fields, rendering various solutions ineffective,” Saharan added.

In a memorandum submitted to the administration, farmers asserted that the companies gave them BT seeds that were mixed with non-BT seeds. Farmers are urging the formation of a high-level committee to thoroughly investigate the matter.

The cotton-producing regions in northern India remained relatively free from pink bollworm infestation until 2017-18. Starting 2018-19, reports of pest attacks emerged, particularly from Punjab’s Bathinda and Jind district in Haryana. Since then, the insect has consistently posed a threat to cotton cultivation in the region.

For the past three to four years, agricultural scientists and officials from Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan have



In northern India, the pink bollworm infestation was observed last year during the final days of the season. However, this year, it was evident right at the onset of the cotton season ... This early onset has resulted in a more substantial damage, particularly as the insect continues to harm the crop throughout its growth cycle, impacting the middle and final phases significantly”
 – Subhash Dudi, Deputy Director of Rajasthan Agriculture Department

been emphasising the need to implement effective measures to address the issue of pest infestation.

During annual meetings held at Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University in Hisar, attended

by agricultural scientists and officials from these three states, growing concerns were expressed regarding the escalating incidence of pink bollworm infestations.

Vijendra Singh Nain, a retired agriculture department joint director, said that the decision to entrust BT cotton seeds to the private sector was misguided. Instead, he suggested that it should have been entrusted to government agricultural universities and research centres.

“These institutions not only conduct ongoing research on BT seeds, but also have the capability to develop and register new seed varieties if necessary. In contrast, the private sector has primarily focused on profit generation, and the detrimental consequences of this approach are now evident,” he said.

Nain elaborated that the seeds developed by government institutions remain highly effective to this day. “For instance, the RJ 8 variety of native cotton, pioneered by the Agricultural Research Centre of Sriganaganar in the 1980s, is still in active use. There is a need to stop the neglect of agricultural research institutes. It is time to research about indigenous cotton varieties and to preserve them,” he added. ■

Mutually Beneficial

With permission to sell power to India in real time, Nepal will bolster India's energy security as well as its own economy

India has taken a fresh step to integrate Nepal's electricity with its market by allowing the Himalayan nation to sell its power generated by two hydroelectric projects to its real-time energy market.

It is the first time that Nepal has got approval to sell its power in the Real Time Market (RTM) where, according to Nepal Electricity Authority, which is solely responsible for bilateral trade of electricity till date, Nepal can sell power by participating in bids just one hour 15 minutes earlier than selling the power.

The Central Electricity Authority of India recently granted approval to sell power generated from 19.4 MW Lower Modi and 24.25 MW Kabeli B-1 hydro-power projects in RTM, the NEA said in a press statement.

"The approval has been granted to sell starting from October 1 or Saturday midnight," Prabal Adhikari, power trade director of NEA, said last month. "With this approval, Nepal has also become the first country to participate in India's RTM from South Asia."

By amending the 'Procedure for approval and facilitating import/export (cross border) of electricity by the designated authority' issued in February 2021, the southern neighbour, on July 31, had opened the door for Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh to participate in its real-time energy market.

India first opened its energy exchange market for Nepal in November 2021 by allowing the mountainous country to sell its power in the day-ahead market where quantum of power and prices are determined a day ahead of trading. Its southern neighbour has also started buying power from Nepal



under a medium-term five-year power deal starting from early September.

In the day-ahead market, Nepal has been allowed to sell upto 522MW while it has been selling 110MW in Haryana state through NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited [NVVN], under a five-year deal signed in May, according to NEA.

Now, New Delhi started granting approval to sell Nepal's power through the third option, i.e. RTM. "Having multiple options of trading minimises the risks," said Adhikari.

Access to the Indian market has been vital for Nepal as the country has been producing excess electricity in the wet season (rainy season) from its mostly run-of-the river power projects

After this approval, the NEA planned to sell a partial quantum of approved volume of the power in the RTM. "Initially, we will sell a limited volume of power in RTM," said Suresh Bhattarai, spokesperson of the NEA.

NEA officials said that the main advantage of the RTM is that the power system operator can get flexibility in balancing the demands and supply. "For example, Nepal can instantly sell its power if there is excess power generation than estimated," said Adhikari. "It reduces the risk of power spillage."

According to the NEA, India granted approval for the two projects to sell power in the RTM for the first time along with renewing the approval granted to them to sell power in the

day-ahead market.

The Indian authorities grant one-year approval for the day-ahead market which needs to be renewed every year. Nepal has been seeking an end to the provision of annual renewal arguing that it brings unpredictability in access to India's vast power market.

Access to the Indian market has been vital for Nepal as the country has been producing excess electricity in the wet season (rainy season) from its mostly run-of-the river power projects. The country, however, has to import from India in the dry season (winter time) as the power projects produce just around one-third of their capacity.

In July, India also opened the door for Nepal to buy power from India's real-time market too. But, according to Adhikari, Indian suppliers need not be determined in advance like in the case of export. "But the Indian suppliers should have generated the power from the imported coal in the case of coal-fired power generation," he said.

These developments have taken place at a time when power sector co-operation between the two neighbours is moving forward smoothly in recent years.

The southern neighbour has promised to buy as much as 10,000MW of electricity from Nepal in the next 10 years and two countries have taken a number of measures to boost India's investment in Nepal's power sector as well as improve cross-border transmission infrastructure to enable evacuation of power across the border.

"Nepal is also expecting the long-term power trade agreement between the two countries, which was initially during Nepali Prime Minister's visit to India a few months back, to be signed as early as possible," said Adhikari. ■

Gut Realities



Rajgopal Nidamboor

Picture this — the damage to soil caused by powerful chemical pesticides, not to speak of their impact on beneficial soil microbes as also intrusion on the natural growth of plants, including those that are genetically-modified (GM) to resist them. When you add a contentious body of independent, new research, you are witness to an alarming prospect — that certain pesticides may trigger abortion and sterility in farm animals. What next? We are not sure yet.

Research implicates that chemical pesticides may be just as toxic to human placental cells, especially in farm workers exposed to high concentrations. Studies in Europe have found that pesticide levels in human urine exceeded “safe drinking water” limits. Critics, however, insist that farmers do not use ‘pure’ pesticides anyway — they argue that there are far more toxic ingredients than pesticides used in the world today.

The ‘counter-punch’ is more and more people are being exposed to the dangers of pesticides. It’s a different thing that research cannot disrupt, or tweak, our metabolic process. What actually wobbles such a function are microbes — in addition, we may be harming our inner biological canvas with varied ‘gut’ pesticides, including herbicides, whose deleterious effects have not been fully understood, or established yet. As research grapples with newer pesticides, including herbicides, while exploring the composite idea, the jury is out that certain pesticides may

exterminate several species of beneficial, or ‘good’ gut bacteria, while not affecting harmful, or ‘bad,’ gut bacteria, like *Escherichia coli* — the cause of epidemics in cattle. One shudders to think of the likely impact the same bacteria, which have colonised the human species, may possibly exert.

Our gut bacteria play a key role in maintaining our health and wellness. On the contrary, an unhealthy gut, as new studies reveal, may trigger obesity and other disorders of the gut, such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Recent research also points out to a potential long-list of health disorders that pesticides, in combination with other environmental toxins, may contribute to — depression, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) — also referred to as motor neurone disease — aside from multiple sclerosis, infertility, developmental defects, cancer, and so on.

It is imperative, in the whole context, that we circumspectly took a fresh, new look at the origin of our food. Here is how it goes. Conventionally-produced vegetarian produce and animal products are often grown, or fed, from farming practices that make use of factory-farmed manure and raw human sewage. The fact today is animal and human excreta are extraordinarily toxic. This also includes a vast array of chemicals, pharmaceuticals, hormones and antibiotic-resistant bacteria, not to speak of pathogens that taint our food and our bodies too — if we opt to eat them, which we do, primarily because of certain compulsions. We are not talking of another perilous dimension yet — the use of nuclear waste-based food irradiation and bacteriophage sprays, to disinfect inherently toxic

food, which produce different and far more hazardous compounds as a consequence.

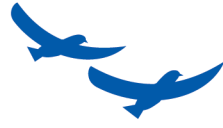
There’s yet another paradox that dawdles us — non-organic lobbies are increasing the amounts of anti-microbial pesticides and herbicides in our food. What’s worse — we do not have adequate data as to how much we’re exposed to such chemicals, in the first instance, on the periphery, and within us, or elsewhere. Yet another downside is certain new-found pesticides, to highlight a classical example, are difficult customers to ‘test’ for. Their usage is expanding, not just in the US, but also across the globe. If this isn’t nothing short of a distress call, or formula for disaster, what is?

Is there a way out? Yes, there is. It isn’t easy though. The big point is — it is time we stalled that archaic, rationally unrefined idea that disease, or illness, is, for the most part, caused by germs in the environment, rather than viewing our risk of infection as being principally determined by immune, or gut, vulnerabilities within us.

We ought to go for a paradigm change, if not shift, and drastically alter our understanding of health and illness, if we are to endure the indiscriminate demolition of our biosphere, while refraining from supporting, endorsing, buying, or consuming food produced through dubious non-organic, or chemical, farming practices. We need to respect and revere our body — which is encased grandeur, derived from the molecular framework of the cosmos. If we don’t, we will have to blame ourselves for not only ‘genetically-modifying’ nature and the environment, but also for vilifying ourselves — in mind, body, spirit and soul. ■

The writer is a wellness physician, independent researcher and author





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