

India's 'return' to Central Asia

While the gains from engaging Central Asia may be minimal, non-engagement could be costly



HAPPYMAN JACOB

The inaugural India-Central Asia Summit, the India-Central Asia Dialogue, and the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi – all held over the past four months – collectively indicate a renewed enthusiasm in New Delhi to engage the Central Asian region. India has limited economic and other stakes in the region, primarily due to lack of physical access. And yet, the region appears to have gained a great deal of significance in India's strategic thinking over the years, particularly in the recent past. India's mission Central Asia today reflects, and is responsive to, the new geopolitical, if not the geo-economic, realities in the region. More so, India's renewed engagement of Central Asia is in the right direction for the simple reason that while the gains from an engagement of Central Asia may be minimal, the disadvantages of non-engagement could be costly in the longer run.

Great power dynamics

One of the factors driving this engagement and shaping it is the great power dynamics there. The decline of American presence and power in the broader region has opened the way to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has led to a reassertion by China and Russia seeking to fill the power vacuum. While China dominates the geo-economic landscape, Russia is the dominant politico-military power in the region. But in the end, geo-economics might gain more traction. A somewhat anxious Moscow considers India to be a useful partner in the region: it helps it to not only win back New Delhi, which is moving towards the U.S., but also to subtly checkmate the rising Chinese influence in its backyard.

For the U.S., while growing India-Russia relations are not a welcome development, it recognises the utility of Moscow-New Delhi relations in Central Asia to offset Beijing's ever-growing influence there.

As for China, India's engagement of the region and the growing



warmth in India-Russia relations are not a cause for concern yet, but they could be eventually.

For New Delhi, it's about breaking out of a continental nutcracker situation it finds itself in. In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, New Delhi faces a major dilemma in the wider region, not just in the pre-existing theatres like the Line of Control and the Line of Actual Control. There are growing and legitimate concerns within the Indian strategic community that India in the region might get further hemmed in due to the combined efforts by China, Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan. If so, it must ensure that there is no China-led strategic gang-up with Pakistan and the Taliban against India in the region, which, if it becomes a reality, would severely damage Indian interests.

Focus on Afghanistan

India's engagement of Central Asia would also help it to consolidate its post-American Afghan policy. U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has landed India in a major dilemma – it has very limited space to engage Taliban 2.0 despite the current relationship whose future depends on a number of variables. During the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani governments, given their proximity to India and the presence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, India was able to engage Kabul without too much resistance, despite Pakistani resistance. Now that the Taliban have returned to Kabul, New Delhi is forced to devise new ways of engaging Afghanistan. That's where the Central Asian Region's (CARs) and Russia could be helpful. For instance, given its lo-

cality explored the possibility of joint Indo-Russian defence production in some of the existing Soviet-era defence facilities in the CARs to meet local and Indian demands. The non-paper also reportedly discusses potential trilateral defence exercises among India, Russia and the CARs. In any case, joint defence production by India and Russia has been on the rise and the CARs could play a key role in this. This growing India-Russia partnership also explains India's non-critical stance on the developments in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Challenges
That said, India's 'return' to Central Asia is not going to be easy. For one, China, which shares a land border with the region, is already a major investor there. China is the region's most important economic partner, a reality that worries Russia and sharpens India's relative irrelevance in the region. It is even bigger challenge for India to reach the CARs by using a hybrid model – via sea to Chabahar and then by road/rail through Iran and Afghanistan) to the CARs. So, for New Delhi, the ongoing re-negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (or the Iran nuclear deal) are of crucial importance. If there is a deal, it would bring Tehran back into the Western fold and away from China (and Russia), which will be favourable to India. While Iran getting closer to the West is not preferred by Russia (but preferred by India), if and when it becomes a reality, India would be able to use it to its advantage and join Russia in engaging the CARs. India's ongoing outreach to Iran and the now-postponed visit of the Iranian foreign minister to New Delhi to help repair some of the damage done to the relationship over the years.

But finally, perhaps most importantly, will India walk the talk on its commitments to Central Asia? Does it have the political will, material capability and diplomatic wherewithal to stay the course in the region?

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A new form of untouchability

India lacks a robust politico-legal framework to address the open calls to economically boycott Muslims



ANSHUL TRIVEDI

Recently, a video, purportedly showing villagers from Surguja district of Chhattisgarh taking an oath to implement an economic boycott of Muslims, went viral on social media. This was not a spontaneous reaction of the villagers to a brawl in the village but allegedly orchestrated by a Hindu outfit.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is known to distribute pamphlets calling for the economic boycott of those it labels "anti-national, anti-Hindu, love jihadists" – all convenient epithets to convey a communal message. These acts are not merely 'expressions of hate'; they can be characterised as the emergence of a new form of untouchability guided by the political imperatives of Hindu nationalism rather than the religious dictates of Hinduism. A progressive re-articulation of the concept of untouchability or a re-reading of the anti-discrimination legislation is required to end this abomination.

The hierarchical caste-based Hindu social order was governed by the ideology of purity and pollution. The primary function of the ideology was to maintain ritual hierarchy. Untouchability was a mechanism through which power was exercised over the Dalits and the hierarchy reinforced. One of the most common forms of untouchability was the imposition of social and economic boycott of Dalits if they dared to transgress social norms or exercise their rights. In Ambedkar's opinion, the method of boycott was more effective than even open violence. Collective discrimination, marginalisation and disempowerment was justified as the right of the individual to choose freely in a marketplace. He argued that the boycott was effective for two reasons – one, the Dalits constituted a minority within the village; and two, they were economically weaker and hence, dependent on the 'upper' castes. Therefore, it was of paramount importance to outlaw this 'tyranny of the majority' for their uplift.

Limits of anti-boycott laws

During the freedom struggle, the struggle to eradicate untouchability gained momentum. This struggle found its highest expression in the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution under Articles 14, 15 and 17. However, although untouchability was abolished, its definition remained vague. Even during the Constituent Assembly debates, it was argued that the scope of un-

touchability should be restricted to practices related to religion and caste, lest it be left open to unwarranted tinkering. However, the Assembly voted against such a circumscribed definition. Therefore, the limits of untouchability under Article 17 have been contested. While the conservatives restrict it to caste-based discrimination, the progressives argue that it includes other forms of untouchability as well. However, there is a consensus that only those practices which are motivated by the ideology of purity and pollution are considered within the ambit of untouchability. These include social and economic boycotts.

In India, mere provision of rights has proved to be insufficient to prevent marginalisation owing to the practice of untouchability and hence, the legislature and the judiciary have had to make and interpret special laws to that effect. Two laws which explicitly make social and economic boycotts punishable are the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2016. However, the scope of both is restricted to criminalising caste-based discrimination and boycotts.

An ineffective approach

The tethering of anti-boycott and untouchability laws to the tenets of purity and pollution and restricting their scope to caste-centric boycotts makes them ineffective to counter the calls of economic boycott of Muslims. Hindutva is using pre-constitutional methods to disempower a community. It is not driven by the motive of maintaining ritual hierarchy but the political imperatives of exclusion. Its ultimate objective is to ethnise the Hindu identity. Such public calls for boycotts are means of constructing such an identity. The act of collectively resolving to boycott Muslims reinforces their 'othering' and re-emphasises the VHP's idea of 'Hinduness'; reconstructing Hinduism, based on caste hierarchy, into a unified, ethnic whole, where the figure of the Dalit is replaced by the Muslim as the significant 'other'.

These grave new developments need to be taken into cognisance and an urgent politico-legal response to such public calls for Muslim economic boycott is required as they militate against the principle of fraternity enshrined in the Constitution. This can be done by a progressive redefinition of untouchability or by expanding the scope of the anti-boycott laws to include discrimination against religious communities.

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STATE OF PLAY

Where guests demand permanency

Low salaries and lack of job security have caused unrest among guest lecturers in Karnataka

SATHISH G.T.

Academic activities in government degree colleges in Karnataka have been badly hit for over 50 days, with guest faculty going on strike demanding that they be absorbed into regular service.

With only about 5,100 permanent teaching staff in 430 colleges, the Department of Collegiate Education (DCE) has had a tough task at hand. There are no lecturers to teach many core subjects in hundreds of colleges, even as the State government has announced implementation of the new National Education Policy, advocating multi-disciplinary studies. The colleges are dependent on the 14,567 guest lecturers who have been recruited over the years. Meanwhile, universities to which the degree colleges are affiliated have announced their timebar for semester exams. The students are worried that the syllabus will not be completed on time.

Guest lecturers have been working for an honorarium: ₹13,000 for those with UGC-prescribed qualifications and ₹11,000 for those without. They are recruited for that academic year with no promise of job security. They have often complained about erratic payment of salaries.

The lecturers began their protest on December 10, 2021, demanding that the government absorb them into government service. They held a dharna at Belagavi, where the Karnataka Legislature was meeting for the winter session in December. They continued to boycott classes where the government constituted a team of officers to recommend measures to resolve the issue.

On January 14, the Higher Education Minister announced a hike in honorarium. The two slabs were expanded to four slabs varying from ₹26,000 to ₹32,000. Those who have more than five years of experience besides the UGC qualification will get the highest amount. However, an increase in honorarium was accompanied by an increase in working hours. The lecturers, who were recruited

earlier for eight hours of duty a week were told to work for 15 hours. This also meant that at least half of them would lose their jobs due to no work. The association of guest lecturers felt that the move was aimed at dividing the unity of lecturers.

Meanwhile, the government decided to recruit more guest faculty while considering their State-level ranking in terms of experience, and educational qualifications. According to the DCE, more than 60,000 people applied, of which 10,636 got jobs. From February 1, the lecturers selected through this process started reporting for duty. However, this may only be a reprieve as the issue of job security remains unaddressed. The guest faculty can lose their jobs whenever permanent faculty are recruited or deployed to their post. And so they have urged the government to absorb them into regular service.

At the heart of the problem is the failure of successive governments to fill up teaching posts even as they opened new colleges. Guest lecturers have always been seen as an ad-hoc arrangement. The last recruitment of permanent teachers was done in 2017 and before that, in 2009. At present, the process to recruit 1,242 lecturers is on. However, the number is insufficient given the vacancies.

Guest lecturers are seen as a financially less burdensome option. However, this alternative has proved too costly on other counts.

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DATA POINT

Poll-bound States: Measuring delivery of justice

An analysis of justice-related indicators across three pillars – police, prisons, and the judiciary – in the poll-bound States shows that Goa and Manipur have a relatively better system of delivering justice effectively. The Uttar Pradesh system is the most inferior and the systems in Uttarakhand and Punjab lie in the middle. The analysis was done by The India Justice Report prepared by Tata Trusts. The tables list the latest value across various indicators in the five States. The States were assessed based on five themes – infrastructure, budgets, human resources, workload and diversity. Under each theme, the best (●) and the worst States (●) are highlighted

BUDGET		Indicator				
The table lists the amount spent towards the key pillars of justice – police, prison and judiciary – in the five poll-bound States		Goa	Manipur	Punjab	U.P.	Uttarakhand
		3,174	4,163	1,786	645	1,455
		35,907	37,100	16,286	34,507	29,384

HUMAN RESOURCES		Indicator				
The table lists the share of posts that are vacant in the justice delivery system among the five States. U.P. scored the lowest in three indicators		Goa	Manipur	Punjab	U.P.	Uttarakhand
		4.4	9.3	6.8	23.5	2.9
		30.6	30.7	18.9	40.4	8.6

DIVERSITY		Indicator				
The table lists the share of women in the justice delivery system among the five States		Goa	Manipur	Punjab	U.P.	Uttarakhand
		10.6	9.1	9.5	9.6	12.2
		13.4	8.1	5.8	3.8	18.4

INFRASTRUCTURE		Indicator				
The table lists the five States' infrastructure capacity to deliver justice		Goa	Manipur	Punjab	U.P.	Uttarakhand
		21,750	39,481	70,134	1,73,736	72,176
		1,38,500	57,588	94,727	1,02,312	76,440

WORKLOAD		Indicator				
The table lists the workload of the justice delivery system in the five poll-bound States		Goa	Manipur	Punjab	U.P.	Uttarakhand
		263	202	462	1,094	696
		25	24	201	268	331

In 12 of the 23 justice-related indicators, Uttar Pradesh scored the lowest among all the poll-bound States analysed. It did not score the highest on any indicator

Manipur scored the highest in eight indicators out of 23, followed by Goa in seven, Uttarakhand in five of them and Punjab in three of them

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 7, 1972

Differences on river waters continue

Trivandrum, Feb. 7: Some progress was made in the inter-State river water talks between Tamil Nadu and Kerala officials, Mr. Ramuni Menon, Kerala Water and Power Secretary, told pressmen at the conclusion of the two-day talks here to-day. He said the technical details pertaining to the discussion were being worked out by the Chief Engineers of the two States. He, however, declined to elaborate stating that it was decided that the officials should report to their respective Governments. The trend of the discussions, it is gathered, has not shown any appreciable narrowing of the differences between the two sides. The Tamil Nadu team was headed by Mr. Sivasubramanian, former P.W.D. Secretary, and the Kerala team by Mr. V. Ramachandran, Chairman, Kerala Electricity Board. The talks mainly related to follow-up action on the inter-State agreement reached in May 1969 for supply of Siruvani waters for drinking purposes in Coimbatore and on the second of the 1965 in respect of the hydro-electric schemes of the two States in the Chaliyar basin.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 7, 1922

Lalaji's rearrest

Mahatma Gandhi writes in "Young India": The Punjab Government could not do even a simple act of penitence gracefully. They were advised that the Judge who convicted Lalaji and his companions did not know the law. They had therefore to release them. Instead of all being released together they were released separately and some at midnight. But that was by no means the most graceless part of the performance. Lalaji was rearrested immediately after his discharge. By this action the Punjab Government have shown themselves more vindictive than penitent. The release they could not help nor could they help their pettiness. They did not want Lalaji to be free for a single moment and therefore they rearrested him. Although an undertrial prisoner, his people including his son are not allowed to see him. They knew that Lalaji would not escape 'justice' if he served on him a summons. But such a natural and courteous step was too simple for the Punjab Government. I congratulate Lalaji on his rearrest and sympathise with Pandit Santanam, Mukli Lallahan and Dr. Gopichand for their premature discharge.

Text & Context

NEWS IN NUMBERS



A profitable venture

82 In percent, is the return on investment given by IPO-bound national insurer Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) in 2020, according to a Crisil report. LIC is also the world's largest when it comes to the home-market share, with over 64.1% of the total gross written premium as of 2020. While for LIC, the market share has been steadily declining—from 100% in the pre-2000 era to 71.8% in 2016 and further down in 2020, for SBI Life, which is the second-largest in the country, the same was only 5% in 2016 and 8% in 2020. **PTI**

Plugging leakage

4.28 In crore, the number of ration cards cancelled by States and Union Territories from 2014 to 2021, according to a reply in the Rajya Sabha. As per the list, Uttar Pradesh has cancelled 1.7 crore bogus ration cards, followed by Maharashtra (41.65 lakh), West Bengal (41.09 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (23.53 lakh), Rajasthan (22.66 lakh) and Karnataka (21.54 lakh). The operational responsibilities of the public distribution system, which include identification of eligible beneficiaries, rest with the States. **PTI**

70-year rule

70 In years is the reign of Queen Elizabeth II as she became on Sunday the first British monarch to reign for seven decades. Queen Elizabeth II acceded to the throne aged 25 on February 6, 1952, following the death of her father King George VI. In a message addressed to the public signed "Your servant, Elizabeth R", the Queen said late Saturday she wished "to express my thanks to you all for your support". She said she wanted to renew a pledge she gave on her 21st birthday "that my life will always be devoted to your service". **AGENCIES**

Wave of military coups

>100 The number of military power grabs in West Africa since 1946. West Africa's new wave of coups kicked off in Mali in 2020, followed by another in Guinea the following year, and then Burkina Faso last month. Just a week later, gunmen tried to overthrow the president of Guinea-Bissau in a machine-gun attack. It's a pattern becoming all too common again in West Africa wherein mutinous soldiers detain a president, then seize control of the state broadcaster to announce their victory. **AP**

Cases surge in Russia

180,071 The number of COVID-19 infections reported by Russia on Sunday, the highest single-day rise ever and a tenfold spike from a month ago. Although the number of infections has increased dramatically in recent weeks, daily deaths are holding steady or marginally declining. 661 deaths were recorded over the past 24 hours, compared with 796 on Jan. 6. The Government is considering loosening restrictions, despite the infections. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

EXPLAINER

The tumbling of Meta platforms' shares

What was the trigger for the sheer drop in shares? Is the Metaverse not profitable?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL

The story so far: The shares of Meta Platforms, the parent company of social media giant Facebook, crashed by as much as 25% on Thursday, wiping out over \$200 billion from the company's market value. The crash came after Meta on Wednesday announced its earnings results for the fourth quarter of 2021 which did not impress investors. The 25% crash in Meta shares is its biggest fall since its debut in 2012.

Why do shares move up or down?

The price of a share generally reflects the expectations of investors regarding the future cash flow that they can earn from the share. This is the reason why shares of even loss-making companies can appreciate significantly if investors expect these companies to earn significant profits in the future. At the same time, established companies earning billions in profits for their shareholders can still see their stock prices tank if investor expectations regarding the future earnings of these companies begin to sour. Since expectations

This is the first time that Facebook has witnessed a drop in its active user base, leading analysts to believe that its long growth story may be over.

about the future earnings of a share can change within a matter of just a few seconds or less, share prices are prone to sudden jumps or falls, as in the case of Meta's stock last week.

Why exactly are investors concerned about Meta's future earnings?

Meta's quarterly earnings statement last week informed investors that Facebook lost half a million active users during the fourth quarter. This is the first time that Facebook has witnessed a drop in its active user base, leading analysts to believe that its long growth story may be over. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who lost around \$20 billion of his personal wealth due to the crash, noted that the company's rival TikTok was a growing threat to its business. There have also been concerns around the demography of Facebook users as younger users prefer other competing platforms over Facebook.

Meta earns most of its revenues through advertising and the fall in the number of active users of Facebook is seen as a huge



red flag. It should be noted that Meta reported an overall increase in active users, thanks to the popularity of its other platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. But analysts believe that it will be much harder for Meta to monetise its user base through these new platforms.

Another area of concern for investors has been the sustainability of Meta's advertising revenues. Of late, changes to Apple's privacy policy have given iPhone users the choice to opt out of being tracked by sites like Facebook. This has made it harder for Facebook to learn more about what its users do online and make money using this information by showing them targeted ads for which advertisers want to pay. It is expected that Meta will lose about \$10 billion in revenue in 2022 due to Apple's new privacy policy.

Investors have also been uncertain about the future of Meta as the company tries to

reinvent itself. In fact, it was only last year that Facebook renamed itself as Meta Platforms to highlight its change in focus, from offering users the traditional social media experience to offering them a new immersive virtual experience through the metaverse. However, the success of the company's new pivot is far from certain and is expected to take years to come into fruition and will cost billions of dollars. The shaky confidence of investors, some say, was reflected in Meta's stock price even before Thursday's crash. Meta's shares have fallen by almost 40% since the peak that they hit in September last year.

What lies ahead?

No one knows for sure what lies ahead for the company. Meta invested over \$10 billion in developing the metaverse last year and only time will tell whether this investment is justified.

As the company adjusts this investment as an expense against current revenues, its profits are likely to be adversely affected in the short-term and weigh on the price of its share.

It should also be noted that the technology business with its low barriers to entry has traditionally witnessed a lot of churn with giant companies which once seemed to enjoy a strong monopoly getting uprooted by new, more agile entrants.

Facebook, for instance, came to be the most popular social networking site by killing Orkut which was once very popular among internet users.

Google's complete obliteration of Yahoo! from the search engine business is another example of creative destruction that is widespread in the technology market.

Gyration in the price of Meta shares will likely reflect all these uncertainties in the coming days.

EXPLAINER

Redrawing the electoral map of the Union Territory of J&K

How have the constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir been reframed? What has been the response from local leaders?

PEREZADA ASHIIQ

The story so far: The three-member J&K delimitation commission, headed by retired Supreme Court (SC) judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, has submitted its interim report to its five associate members, which included three Members of Parliament (MP) of the National Conference (NC) and two MPs of the BJP.

This paves way for the winding up of the exercise and likely announcement of elections in J&K, directly ruled by the Centre since the BJP withdrew from the coalition Government with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2018.

What is the role of the delimitation commission?

The delimitation commission is an independent body constituted under Article 82 after the Parliament enacted a Delimitation Act after every census.

Interestingly, the J&K delimitation commission has not been clear to the associate members about the census report that was made as a base to carve out new constituencies in the Union Territory (UT).



Members of the NC protest against the proposal of the delimitation commission. **PTI**

How many seats have been added?

The Commission has, as per the mandate granted under the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019, added seven assembly constituencies to J&K, increasing its strength from 87 to 90. The interim report proposes an increase of six seats for the Jammu province, taking the number of constituencies to 43, and an increase of one seat in the Kashmir province, taking the seat strength to 47, almost bringing the two regions at par with each other. In Kashmir, Kupwara district has been granted an additional seat and in the Jammu region Kathua district gets one additional seat, Samba gets one, Doda gets one, Rajouri gets one, Kishtwar gets one and Udhampur gets

one. Of six seats, three assembly segments are from the Muslim-majority Chenab Valley and Pir Panjal valley, while three are in the Hindu Jammu-Samba-Kathua belt. The Commission has also proposed to reserve seven seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and three for Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Samba-Kathua-Jammu-Udhampur belt and nine seats for Schedule Tribes (STs) which will help Gujjar and Bakerwals, mostly non-Kashmiri speaking Muslims inhabiting the Rajouri-Poonch belt in the Jammu province.

Prior to the Centre's move to end J&K's special constitutional position on August 5, 2019, the erstwhile State had an 87-member assembly, with 37

constituencies in the Jammu region and 46 in the Kashmir division and four in Ladakh. Besides, 24 seats are reserved and vacant for Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Have the constituencies been reconfigured?

The Commission has suggested redrawing of boundaries of most of the Assembly segments in J&K. It has named and reconfigured 28 new constituencies and deleted 19 assembly segments.

The Commission has also proposed reframing of Lok Sabha constituencies, with J&K having five parliamentary constituencies, which included three seats from Kashmir and two from Jammu. It has proposed a Lok Sabha seat, disjunct geographically, by merging three districts of south Kashmir and two districts of Rajouri and Poonch in the Pir Panjal valley. It will be named Anantnag-Rajouri seat, which will comprise a significant population of the non-Kashmiri speaking Schedule Tribe assembly segments.

What has been the response from regional actors?

This seat sharing was criticised by

regional parties in Kashmir, including the NC and the PDP, on the grounds that the Kashmir province has more population at 68.88 lakhs against 53.50 lakhs in the Jammu province. However, the commission argued that it has taken into account the topography, means of communication and convenience available and not just the population size.

According to the NC, whose MPs first boycotted and later joined the delimitation exercise, none of the suggestions made to the commission had been respected. It has maintained that the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 was "palpably unconstitutional" and has already challenged the J&K Reorganisation Act in the Supreme Court. The party reiterated that the delimitation be carried out after 2026, as ordered by the Supreme court, after the relevant figures of the census were published. It also questioned the formula applied in case of J&K by the commission. CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami termed the Commission's report "an arbitrary overhaul, with no regard for even the terrain, let alone the population that tends to be a basic parameter for redrawing the boundaries of assembly and parliamentary segments."

THE GIST

■ The three-member J&K delimitation commission has submitted its interim report to its five associate members, which included three MPs of the National Conference and two MPs of the BJP.

■ The Commission has added seven assembly constituencies to J&K. The interim report proposes an increase of six seats for the Jammu province and of one seat in the Kashmir province, almost bringing the two regions at par with each other.

■ The Commission has suggested redrawing of boundaries of most of the Assembly segments in J&K. It has reconfigured 28 new constituencies and deleted 19 assembly segments.



CACHE

Understanding Artificial Neural Networks

Through ANNs and the backpropagation method, artificial intelligence has become more powerful

S. VARAHASIMHAN

THE GIST

■ The concept behind an Artificial Neural Network is to define inputs and outputs, feed pieces of inputs to computer programs that function like neurons and make inferences or calculations, then forward those results to another layer of computer programs and so on, until a result is obtained. As part of this neural network, a difference between intended output and input is computed at each layer and this difference is used to tune the parameters to each program. This method is called backpropagation and is an essential component to the Neural Network.

■ It was also observed that instead of CPUs, Graphic Processing Units (GPU) which are good at performing massive parallel tasks can be used for setting up ANNs.

■ A few free ANN frameworks are TensorFlow, Keras, PyTorch and Theano. These can be used for both normal Machine Learning tasks like classification or clustering and for Deep Learning/ANN tasks.

Does the term "neuron" ring a bell in your mind? It is the building block of the brain and it inspired computer scientists from the 1950s – how to make a computer perform tasks like a brain does? It is not a simple problem and the clue to its complexity is in the brain structure. We need billions of artificial neurons if we were to build an artificial brain. With the increase in computing power, mimicking billions of neurons is now possible. The concept behind an Artificial Neural Network is to define inputs and outputs, feed pieces of inputs to computer programs that function like neurons and make inferences or calculations, then forward those results to another layer of computer programs and so on, until a result is obtained. As part of this neural network, a feedback or difference between intended output and the input is computed at each layer and this difference is used to tune the parameters to each program. This method is called backpropagation and it is an essential component to the Neural Network.

The popularity of ANNs

A few newer technical phrases will clear up our understanding of this space. Data Science, used interchangeably with Machine Learning, is the computer technology that uses data to detect patterns. Hand-written digit recognition is a good example of machine learning. However, in order for the computer to do this task, large amounts of sample data need to be manually labelled as examples of images of digits. Manual sampling at this scale is not going to be enough. Can there be a technology that can avoid human involvement to label data but can automatically detect patterns in sample data and tune its parameters to an algorithm so that the algorithm is ready to perform automatic tasks? The Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) mentioned above with its backpropagation does exactly this. This is why

ANNs have become hugely popular in the past decade. This approach of using neural networks of many layers to automatically detect patterns and parameters is called Deep Learning.

A couple of key developments in the past two decades helped ANNs mature. Cloud computing provided enormous computing resources that are needed for ANNs to "work through" massive volumes of data. Along with this, it was observed that instead of the CPU in a computer, Graphic

Cloud computing provided enormous computing resources that are needed for ANNs to "work through" massive volumes of data

Processing Unit (GPU) which is good at performing massive parallel tasks can be used for setting up ANNs. In the last two decades, the software for neural networks matured and backpropagation techniques became robust. Combining these concepts, if thousands of GPUs are available that can take up chunks of data and can execute programs on those chunks, then ANNs can be made available for a variety of tasks. Many commercial and free software have become available which use GPUs and Cloud and offer ready available ANNs. A few popular free neural network frameworks are TensorFlow, Keras, PyTorch and Theano.

Free neural networks

TensorFlow was developed by Google. It uses a specific hardware that is optimised to work with GPU and divides the neural network operations and the corresponding data into units called Tensors. It has an architecture that sets up neural network and uses it on our input data to make it "flow" from one state to another and gives options to choose and operate states that are relevant to us. Keras is a software that can be used

on top of TensorFlow so that software developers can interact with just the relevant parameters instead of lower-level details that need to be provided to TensorFlow. Popular

implementations of TensorFlow are Google's search algorithm RankBrain and Twitter's tweet ranking.

The ANN frameworks or software mentioned above can be used for both normal Machine Learning tasks like classification or clustering and for Deep Learning/ANN tasks. Are there tasks that cannot be done with good accuracy by normal Machine Learning and hence need Deep Learning? The answer is yes. Automatic Image Recognition of rich images (instead of only simple hand-written digits) and Speech Recognition are two popular uses of Deep Learning. Convolution Neural Network (CNN), a special type of ANN, is good at Image Recognition. It connects a neuron in a layer to all neurons in the next layer but uses optimisation techniques to weed out unwanted signals from neurons. For Speech Recognition, Recurrent Neural Network (RNN) is used because it is good at handling inputs of variable length like speech.

Deep Learning has progressed to the next level and instead of only working on input data and detections, it can now actually generate creative output like music or paintings. A special type of ANN called Generative Adversarial Network achieves this.

Deep Learning made news in 2016 when an ANN-based product called AlphaGo defeated a player in a game of "Go".

ANNs are present in many smartphone applications that we use, like voice to type, Siri and Alexa.

If you want to play with neural networks, you can hop on to one of the free frameworks and build a software program. The Cambrian explosion of artificial intelligence is here!

S. Varahasimhan is a senior employee at a software product MNC in Chennai



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Listen and learn

Let your hair down and learn some new phrases!

S. UPENDRAN

What is the difference between 'listen' and 'hear'? (Alyapriya Sabu, Hoogly)

Hearing is an unconscious act. When you listen to the fan in the room, or the sound of traffic. You may not be paying attention to the sound of the fan, but it comes and strikes your ears – there is nothing you can do to block the sound. As a result, you register or 'hear' the sound; it may or may not have any meaning. 'Listening', on the other hand, is an intentional or a conscious act. When you listen to someone, you pay attention to what they are saying, and try to make sense of it. In school, our teachers frequently pleaded with us to 'listen' to what they were saying. They did not want us to 'hear', but 'listen'. This didn't always happen, of course. When we were daydreaming in class, we merely heard the teacher's voice; we were not listening to her.

I heard a strange noise in the middle of the night.

Would you stop reading the paper and listen to what I'm saying?

What is the meaning and origin of 'let one's hair down'? (K Jaiprakash, Kochi)

When you tell someone to let his hair down, what you are requesting him to do is relax. You would like him to enjoy himself; in the given situation, he doesn't have to be careful and behave politely. The idiom, which has been part of the English language for several hundred years, is mostly used in informal contexts.

I need to go to a place where I don't know anyone. Only then, will I be able to let my hair down.

Our boss will be accompanying us on the trip. No question of letting our hair down, I'm afraid.

When it was first used, the idiom applied mostly to the members of the gentler sex. In the past, it was fashionable among women, especially those belonging to the upper class, to grow their hair long. Before they stepped out of their house, these women spent a lot of their time putting their hair up. Using an assortment of pins and feathers they came up with elaborate hairstyles. The only time these ladies actually let their hair down was in the privacy of their home – and that too mostly before retiring to bed. This was the only time when the ladies could be then seen in the past, this act of letting the hair down was called 'disheveling'. Nowadays, the word 'dishevel' has a very different meaning!

Is it okay to say, 'We went trekking despite the rain'? (SV Kunthala, Nellore)

No, it is not. Although the two words, 'despite' and 'in spite' have more or less the same meaning, 'despite' is never followed by 'of'. It is always 'despite something'.

The children went swimming despite the heavy downpour.

Despite her illness, Deepa always has a smile on her face.

'In spite', on the other hand, is always followed by 'of'.

The children went swimming in spite of the heavy downpour.

In spite of her illness, Deepa always has a smile on her face.

"One advantage of talking to yourself is that you know at least somebody's listening." – Franklin P Jones upendranke@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on the life and career of Lata Mangeskar, the legendary singer who passed away on Sunday.

- 1 Lata Mangeskar's family has roots in a village in Goa. What is the name of that village?
- 2 Who was the composer that mentored a young Lata Mangeskar and whom she called her godfather?
- 3 Who is the composer of Aayee a newwala..., the song that catapulted Lata Mangeskar to stardom?
- 4 Ae mere watan ke logon..., is one of Lata Mangeskar's most loved songs. But it is not a film song. Who wrote this patriotic song?
- 5 Lata Mangeskar is not the female playback singer with the highest number of National Awards. How many did she win? And who is the female playback singer with the highest number of National Awards?



◀ There is something remarkably common between these two musical legends, M.S. Subbulakshmi and Lata Mangeskar. What is that?

Please send in your answers to the dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Answers to the February 4 edition of the daily quiz: 1. Serendipity (from Serendib), 2. Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, 3. Mahinda and Sanghamitra, 4. The Muslim and Tamil minorities, 5. It is run by Muttiah Muralitharan's family, 6. Sri Pada, 7. Cinnamon, 8. Assassination of Solomon Bandaranaike, the fourth PM of Sri Lanka

Early Birds: Sriiram Kalingarayaraj Pooja Khyalia! Lucky Mauryal Srijan Patral Akhil Katiyar

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

The EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

INDIA'S SONG

Lata Mangeshkar gave the nation a song for every mood, moment, journey. The stillness after her will be broken by her songs

THE VERY HEART of India throbs in your voice," music composer Naushad once wrote to Lata Mangeshkar. Much of India's population has not lived in a world that did not have her in it. The artist whose voice has been the sound of a nation ever since it gained independence, especially of its women, who expressed themselves in her voice even when they could not find their own, breathed her last in Mumbai on Sunday. With Mangeshkar's passing, India is struck silent, so essential has she been to how it imagines itself through music and song. If there is succour in this moment, it is to be derived from the formidable and multi-hued oeuvre that she leaves behind. It isn't often that musical virtuosity falls in place with lyricism, spirituality, integrity, expression — and soars.

Be it the defiant "Pyar kiya toh darna kya" in *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) or the watershed moment of her career, "Aayege aanevala", so hauntingly picturised on Madhubala, or Waheeda Rehman dancing to "Aj phir jeene ki tamanna hai" in *Guide*, the anthem and freedom song for a whole generation of Indian women, or the voice of the lovelorn courtesan in *Pakeezah* who sang "Yoon hi koi mil gaya tha/sare raat chalte chalte", to one of the most secular and uplifting bhajans from the Indian film industry, "Allah tera naam" (*Hum Dono*) — Mangeshkar defined the gold standard of playback singing. Female vocalists in the country aspired to sing like her. In recent times, there was "Dil hoon hum kare" from Kalpana Lajmi's *Rudaali* (1993), in which Mangeshkar sang of unbearable pain, and upbeat numbers that lifted newer films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) off the ground. Through a universe of film songs in a number of languages and a large and varied repertoire of non-film pieces, Mangeshkar gave India not just a song for every mood, moment and journey, she also gave its people a feeling of shared cultural pride they had not known in quite the same way before. India had the Taj Mahal and Lata Mangeshkar, these were the wonders, and only one of them could sing. It isn't often that India and Pakistan, the two peoples and governments, are completely agreed on anything, but there has never been any difference or doubt on Mangeshkar. The tributes that are flowing in from across the borders — from Pakistan and Bangladesh — are emotional and exquisite.

At a 1974 concert held at Royal Albert Hall in London, the late actor Nargis Dutt was asked to invite Lata Mangeshkar to the stage. "Yun samajhiye, jaise kisi dargah ya mandir mein jaayen, toh waham pahunch kar sar baadlat ke liye khud-bakud jhuk jata hai, aur aankhon se be-sakhta aansoo behate hain (As if one goes to a shrine or a temple, where the head bows in reverence and tears roll down from the eyes, of their own accord)". That was Lata Mangeshkar. It is why the stillness that she leaves behind will be broken by her songs that live on.

THE MISSING GREEN

Failures to honour environment commitments point to institutional deficits. Government must apply correctives

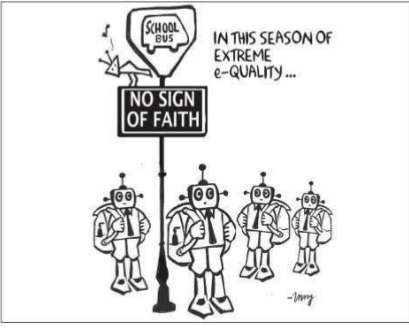
FOR DECADES, ENVIRONMENTALISTS in the country have been alleging that a large number of infrastructure projects are implemented without mandatory due diligence and green clearance procedures are often riddled with irregularities. Their criticisms have sharpened in the past 15 years because successive governments have diluted ecological safeguards — the public hearing requirement in the Environmental Impact Assessment notification, for instance — under the guise of streamlining the clearance procedures. Two years ago, an Environmental Performance Index of Yale University ranked India 168 amongst 220 countries. Now an investigation by this newspaper has revealed that six mega initiatives cleared between 2004 and 2020 — the Mopa International Airport in Goa, the Dibang Hydel project in Arunachal, Kula Coal Mine in Odisha and Tamnar Thermal Project in Chhattisgarh, the Subansiri Hydel Project on the Assam-Arunachal border — have failed to fulfil their green commitments. The omissions are particularly glaring because experts had questioned the environmental sustainability of these projects since their inception.

At the heart of what has gone wrong is the absence of an effective mechanism to ensure environmental compliance. As the newspaper's investigation revealed, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has less than 80 officials to conduct field visits. The state pollution control boards and environmental tribunals are almost always short-staffed. Instead of strengthening the monitoring mechanism, governments at the Centre and states have been relying on procedures such as post-facto clearances and trying to goad project developers into compliance by giving them incentives — subsidies, for instance — despite Supreme Court strictures. In 2020, for instance, a two-judge bench of the Court called out the practice of allowing project developers to report a violation retrospectively as "a derogation of the fundamental principle of environmental jurisprudence". "Allowing for an ex-post facto clearance would essentially condone the operation of industrial activities without the grant of an environmental clearance (EC). In the absence of an EC, there would be no conditions to safeguard the environment," the court pointed out.

As India strives to grow into a \$5-trillion economy — the budget presented by the finance minister last week, for instance, talks of rapid infrastructural development — its policymakers will need to ensure that such prosperity doesn't come at the cost of the environment. This is especially imperative because sites of developmental projects are often located in ecologically fragile zones. Corridors between coal mines and thermal plants — such as the one between Kula and Tamnar — are known to be rife with pollutants that harm people's health, contaminate water bodies, and impair farm productivity. Obviating such hazards requires strong checks and balances. But environmental experts have often complained that short-shift is given to the autonomy of institutions mandated to protect the environment in the country. The government must summon the will to apply correctives.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

IT IS A measure of Lata Mangeshkar's achievement that all tributes and any adjectives seem like a gross understatement. It is hard to imagine any comparable artist, in the annals of any country, who so saturated the cultural, emotional and affective life of their nation. This is not just a statistical achievement. The tens of thousands of songs recorded in 18 languages, the total domination of playback singing for a half century, the ability to define a whole genre of music, the innovations of tonality, pitch and modulation, would alone be formidable. But her impact cannot be measured in technical terms. A great artist might give pitch perfect expression to a variety of emotions. Lata Mangeshkar went further: Her songs became the totality of our emotions to the point where it was impossible to think of an affective life outside of her songs.

Lata Mangeshkar was coming of age when a new nation was coming into being. But a new nation needed a new grammar across the whole gamut of our lives. It needed new cultural forms that could unite rather than divide a country just emerging from Partition. It is often said that Hindi cinema was that cultural form. But in retrospect it seems to be a bit of mischaracterisation. If Hindi cinema acquired a distinct identity as a genre it was largely because of playback singing. In retrospect, it is remarkable how much of that cinema is utterly forgettable. What is not forgettable is the music. The music became our public poetry and our public melody, it became our private therapy and consolation; it seemed to offer an utterance for every emotion and occasion. From loyalty to betrayal, from joy to sadness, from heightened spirits to the depths of despair. One can get too sophisticated about this. But it is hard to imagine an Indian, above a certain age, whose articulation of their inner life is not in the words of a Bollywood lyric. And the voice will invariably be Lata Mangeshkar's.

It is in this context that Lata Mangeshkar's playback singing achieves its unique status. Much can be written about the tone and pitch

Lata Mangeshkar represented us collectively. She also represented each one of us in our singularity

It is difficult to gauge how significant she will be for future generations. It has to be said that there is no dearth of extraordinary musical talent, but the historical conditions that produce the need for a Lata Mangeshkar will probably never come again. The lyrics she sang will probably bear a greater burden of their gendered values, than, say, the ones that Rafi or Kishore got. For someone who sang in any every emotional register, it is hard to imagine a single song as a send-off. But try 'Phaili hui hain sapanon ki bahein' from *House No 44*. It will be hard to come by a better combination of lilting innocence, and soaring dreams. The incomparable gift she gave us.

of her voice over the years. But what is indisputable is the fact that only she could give expression to literally every situation or emotional register. It is not just the melody, but that precision about words and emotions in her singing, that made her an ideal carrier of the totality of our lives. Someone once said, in a profound remark, that the greatness of playback singing in Bollywood's halcyon days, was that no actor really needed to act. The entire affective burden of movies was carried by the songs. In fact the songs were the script, if there was such a thing.

But the success of this genre required three things. It required great poetry and musical compositions. It required a genre of singing that exuded a sincerity with poetry that Lata Mangeshkar had in full measure. The singing would not overwhelm the meaning of the lyric, it would give it perfect expression. But most of all what it required was the creation of singers who could become every-one. The singer had to be a neutral enough medium so that they could appear to be every actor's voice. But in a much more difficult act, the singer had to exude a kind of trust that they also became every listener's voice and the grammar of their emotion. It is, I think, for this reason, more than anything else, that Bollywood playback singing was dominated by a few singers. For every time you heard a voice you also wanted to be familiar so that you could think of it as your own.

Much has been said about how Lata Mangeshkar managed to define the pitch and tonality of what the Indian female singing voice should be like, often to the exclusion of many other registers. But this worry misses the point: Could such a playback role have been performed by any other voice, one in which everyone, as an individual, could find themselves?

It is difficult to gauge how significant she will be for future generations. It has to be said that there is no dearth of extraordinary musical talent, but the historical conditions that produce the need for a Lata Mangeshkar will probably never come again. The lyrics she

sang will probably bear a greater burden of their gendered values, than, say, the ones that Rafi or Kishore got. (Just listen to that trance-like duet with Hemant Kumar, "Chupa layun dil mein pyaar mera", the line "Tumhare chamon ka phool hum main" will now make you wince). For someone who sang in any every emotional register, it is hard to imagine a single song as a send-off. But try 'Phaili hui hain sapanon ki bahein' from *House No 44*. It will be hard to come by a better combination of lilting innocence, and soaring dreams. The incomparable gift she gave us.

If Lata Mangeshkar became representative of India, it was because the lyrics she sang, and the forms in which she expressed them, contained all of India in them: All of its languages, cultural registers, even its conflicts. It was not benchmarking India to a single measure; it was rather connecting its superabundance. She could give voice to collective emotions and mark the turning points in its collective life, as in "Aye mere watan ke logo", the song that made Nehru and a whole nation break down. But what made her the ideal representative of the new nation was not that she represented us collectively, but that she could represent each one of us in our singularity. In every role we can imagine.

Much has been made of the fact that her image was in part propelled by the ideal of the ascetic performer. She made the world of art acceptable to a conservative India, by projecting an ascetic femininity onto it, projecting an ascetic femininity onto it, taking Bollywood out of a courtly grammar of self-representation. But at the end of the day the focus on her persona, her personal asceticism, humility are beside the point. For it is the mark of her greatness that her music transcended every division and identity that was imposed on it. The most dedicated group of fans she has is in Pakistan, where identification with her is more vivid than in India. She had no equal and will never have one.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

WHEN SHE SPEAKS UP

There's a link between assertiveness of minority women and attacks like Bulli Bai



SHILPA PHADKE

JANUARY 2022: BULLI Bai deals, where Muslim women, particularly those who have been visible and articulate, were being auctioned, appeared on GitHub. A similar tool called Sulli Deals had appeared on GitHub in July 2021.

January 2021: While hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the farm laws, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court suggested that women and children should not participate in protests.

January 2020: Women, particularly Muslim women, were on the frontlines of the anti-CAA protests. One might see women's leadership in the anti-CAA protests as the culmination of the claims that they have been making to public space. Campaigns like those led by Blank Noise, the Why Loiter? movement, Pinja Tot, to name only some, have pushed back against restrictions on women's mobility. The book *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* that I co-wrote with Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade suggested loitering as a way for women to gain unconditional access to public space as citizens. Once a niche, even radical idea, loitering has now entered the feminist vocabulary of access to public space.

In the anti-CAA protests, women occupied public space as citizens defending citizenship rights. The country saw many leadership, peaceful protests, like the one at Shaheen Bagh, several helmed by Muslim women. Eighty-two-year-old Bilkis Bano became an icon of the movement. At Jamia Millia Islamia in December 2019, two stu-

While almost every woman has a story of street sexual harassment, many also have stories of online harassment, stalking, and, in the case of the more visible and articulate ones, rape and death threats. In the Bulli Bai case too most of those targeted have been articulate and visible on social media. At the same time, there has been growing violence against Muslims and in December 2021, at a religious conclave, there were repeated calls to kill Indian Muslims.

dents, Ayesha Renna and Ladeeda Farzana, stood between the cops and one of their male friends who was being assaulted. The image of Renna's raised index finger became symbolic of the resistance.

Only months before passing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019, the government had passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, which criminalises instant triple talaq, setting up Muslim women as victims of Muslim men and reminding one of postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's comment in regard to White men saving Brown women from Brown men. In August 2019, the government abrogated Article 370, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Several ministers were reported as commenting on the possibility of buying land in Kashmir and marrying fair Kashmiri women. Muslim women are simultaneously clients of state largesse and the exoticised other to be claimed.

While a part of the anti-CAA protests was already taking place online, the pandemic virtually took away access to the streets for these protests. Relevantly, just as streets are seen as dangerous to women in the mainstream narrative, so also women are asked to be careful online. While almost every woman has a story of street sexual harassment, many also have stories of online harassment, stalking, and, in the case of the more visible and articulate ones, rape and death threats. In the Bulli Bai case, too, most of those targeted have been articulate and visible on social media. At the same time,

there has been growing violence against Muslims and in December 2021, at a religious conclave, there were repeated calls to kill Indian Muslims.

All women are targeted online and Muslims have become increasingly unsafe in the country. Muslim women are marginalised and discriminated against both as Muslims and as women. They are seen as victims of their religion, community and men; as clients under the dubious protection of the state, but also simultaneously as pawns in the demonstration of Hinduva power and masculinity, who might be assaulted in order to show Muslim men their place, as seen, for instance, in the sexual violence against Muslim women in 2002 in Gujarat.

The visibility of Muslim women in public as articulate, fierce and brave, fundamentally shifts something about how they must be perceived. If they can be out on the streets, sleeping under the open sky for three months, then clearly they cannot be only the relentlessly oppressed and silenced victims. It is this claim to citizenship, to free speech, that has created no little discomfort.

Bulli Bai and Sulli Deals must be located within these larger events of the growing visibility of Muslim women and a growing atmosphere of intolerance to diversity and tolerance of hate speech and acts towards Muslims. They are a way of silencing both women and Muslims, demonstrating that neither is safe in contemporary India.

Phadke is the co-author of *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*

FEBRUARY 7, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM'S CONCERN

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi expressed serious concern over the country's prospects of foreign economic aid and said: "We are going to face increasing difficulties." Mrs Gandhi, who was addressing a press conference in Ahmedabad at the end of her two-day visit to Gujarat, said this remark when she was asked about the World Bank decision to cut aid to this country. Asked if she saw in the World Bank decision an indication of the US economic offensive against the country, she said: "It is for you to judge." The prime minister is understood to have taken a grim view of the economic situation facing the country.

ANTULAY TRUST

THE INDIRA PRATIBHA Pratishthan would continue to function as before, the chairman of the trust A R Antulay said in Bombay on Saturday. The former Maharashtra chief minister told newsmen after a four-hour meeting of the trustees that reported saying some of the trustees had resigned were baseless. Antulay, who presided over the meeting held amid speculation about its future, denied that he had ever offered to quit the trust as its chairman.

UNGA ON ISRAEL

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY adopted a resolu-

tion on Friday calling on all UN members to stop aid, trade and diplomatic ties with Israel to punish it for annexing the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The vote was 86-21, with 34 abstentions. The resolution climaxed a six-day emergency special session on the December 14 Israeli annexation. The Security Council called the session after the United States vetoed a council resolution to penalise Israel for its action. A council resolution would have been binding on all 157 UN members. The Assembly resolution amounted to no more than a recommendation. Israel condemned the resolution and said it was part of a UN attempt "to undermine the very existence of Israel."



THE IDEAS PAGE

Lata ji

She became the female voice of a newly independent country. Through it all, and till the end, she also remained her own person



MRINAL PANDE

"Like art, revolutions come from combining what exists into what has never existed before"

Gloria Steinem

LATA WAS ONE of the three daughters born to a well-known performer in Marathi theatre, Dinanath Mangeshkar. Her father recognised her talent early on, and began training her when she was only five. Her younger and very talented sister Asha Bhosle told the Dogri poet Padma Sachdev later how their lives changed when their father passed away suddenly. The eldest, Lata, was only 13. The family first went to stay with their mother's family in Thane village in Dhule, then moved to Mumbai to a small house in Nana Chowk. Lata ji's initial years in the Mumbai film industry of the early '40s were full of struggle. Music directors used to the loud and somewhat shrill and nasal voices of singing stars from courtesan families, were reluctant to give the frail teenager a chance for playback singing. They found her voice "too thin".

A person less in need of money may have argued and told them that their voices needed to be more natural and fluid in the age of the new recording technology. But Lata's overwhelming need was to earn enough for her family of three siblings and a widowed mother. So she played Eliza Doolittle to their Professor Higgins for a while. Flexibility is something young fatherless children learn early in life. Lata did too. But like a true singer, even as she adapted to the composers' demands, she kept alive her classically trained real voice and soon rose to be the patron saint of the "new" female voice of independent India. With her first hit song "Aayega aane wala", from *Mahal*, she was no longer the awkward in-between singer. Even the great Bade Gulam Ali Khan sahib is reported to have said of her that ever since he heard her sing in Raga Yaman, he forgot his own rendering, and that the girl just never goes off-key ("Jab se iss ladki ka Yaman kaan mein pada, main apna wala Yaman bhoal gaya! Kambakhti kabhi besuri hi nahin hoti"). Another great composer of film music, Naushad, wrote about her: "Watch her voice leap up like a ball of fire ('Shola sa lapak jaye hai, awaz tau dekho!')."

In the '50s, Lata Mangeshkar was an undisputed star singing for all renowned composers: Shankar-Jaikishan, Naushad, SD Burman, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Hridaynagar and Madan Mohan. She sang some of the biggest hits for Madhubala in *Mughal-e-Azam*, including the timeless, "Mohey panghat pe Nandlal...". Her long and distinguished career is not a tragic tale of continuing to shoulder the burden of someone else's idea of how a woman should sing. She was a genuinely many-voiced singer who considered it an asset to be able to sing for a Madhubala, a Jaya Bachchan and even a Preity Zinta. Hers was a voice of a simple but grand inheritance from Marathi theatre,



C R Sasikumar

also a realisation of the paternal dreams and aspirations she had imbibed as a young girl. She was a rock to her family till the end.

Still it would be wrong to pin her down to a single identity, of a grand dowager queen of music, all white sarees, and an isolation of fervent religiosity and meditative silences. True, as an individual, Lata remained fiercely protective of her private life. But she was very much her own person. She did not follow the usual pattern of marriage, children and the possibility of a life long contention with a male who felt his masculinity threatened by an eminent wife. She chose, instead, to sing as and when and where she wished, and maintain her personal relationships with various men and women she cared for. She had little interest in the trappings. Her love for all things, from diamond jewellery to devotional music, was not a put-on act. Those aesthetics came naturally to her like to so many of our great musicians. But one admires her for, even as she pursued her music, rightly demanding that musicians be paid royalties, not be sent off with a one-time payment. If this created some disaffection between her and a few big ticket male singers, so be it. Her innate understanding of her self worth remained subtle and capacious till the very end.

Another lovable part of Lata Mangeshkar's life was her deep and genuine love for cricket. In the cricket establishment she found the action-man dimension perhaps of a father she had lost early in her life. Stories about her romantic dedication to one such legend were also rife

Her long and distinguished career is not a tragic tale of continuing to shoulder the burden of someone else's idea of how a woman should sing. She was a genuinely many-voiced singer who considered it an asset to be able to sing for a Madhubala, a Jaya Bachchan and even a Preity Zinta. Hers was a voice of a simple but grand inheritance from Marathi theatre, also a realisation of the paternal dreams and aspirations she had imbibed as a young girl. She was a rock to her family till the end.

over the years. But she chose not to marry for reasons we will never know. The truth or otherwise remained between them. She never cared to discuss it publicly and none of the columnists and society reporters dared ask her about it. She did make clear that she did not wish to be reborn. Ever. And that her favourite poet was Meera Bai who sang "Mai mai, kaise jiyun ree (Oh my mother how can I survive)". "One should gracefully accept sorrow like happiness", she said in one of her last interviews to a Mumbai daily.

Of late, one sees a sudden swell in those who claim to have known her from the years and emphasise how she sang because Veer Savarkar urged her to sing or that singing a song like, "Al mere watan ke logo..." was an ideal public display of true *rashtra bhakti*. From what one gathers about this unusually gifted singer, she abhorred histrionics or public displays of love or hate. She was among those like George Bernard Shaw who believed that patriotism is basically a conviction that the best country is the one that one is born in.

Professionally and personally, the marvelous weight of the pleasure her singing gives embarrasses hyperbolic tributes. Certainly, obituaries will call her "the last of a kind", the "Sur Sarawati" in Hindi film music or "the greatest female singer in the Bollywood firmament". For once, they will not be soppy clichés, for once they will ring true.

The writer is former chairperson, Prasar Bharati

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Patent waivers — backed by the US, but still opposed by the UK and EU — and technology transfer should begin now. Poorer countries can wait no longer."

— THE GUARDIAN

Plugging power reforms

Central, state governments need to be flexible to ensure success of the revamped power distribution scheme



ANN JOSEY AND SREEKUMAR NHALUR

LAUNCHED IN JULY 2021, the Revamped Distribution Sector Reform Scheme (RDS) is the latest of many central government grant-based programmes towards electricity distribution network investments. Others include urban loss reduction schemes such as the Accelerated Power Development Programme and rural connections and network expansion focussed schemes such as SAUBHAGYA. These have played a significant role in increasing access and improving performance.

RDS's outlay of Rs 3 lakh crore for five years can enable financially-strained electricity distribution companies to get similar support. Half of the outlay is for better feeder and transformer metering and pre-paid smart consumer metering. The remaining half, 60 per cent of which will be funded by central government grants, will be spent on power loss reduction and strengthening networks.

But RDS has inherited several design issues from its predecessors. These include complex processes and conditions for fund disbursement. Only 60 per cent of the total Rs 2.5 lakh crore grants allocated in past schemes were disbursed. Lack of public review and regulatory oversight in states is another issue. The prescriptive approach of the scheme design impedes effective implementation. For example, RDS emphasises loss reduction investments over system strengthening. However, high losses are typically connected to sustained poor quality service which, in turn, is affected by inadequate investment in system strengthening. RDS stipulates universal pre-paid metering but post-paid options may be suitable in many contexts. Similarly suggested measures like RDS such as privatisation and franchisee adoption should be critically examined.

As required, states are submitting action plans detailing their contexts, commitments and interests. Despite the challenges, there are opportunities to do better under RDS.

It is important to strengthen rural networks to meet growing demand. In the past decade, 49 crore poor households have been electrified and more than Rs 50,000 crore has been invested in rural networks. However, actual investments have been much less than planned. Moreover, connections given to rural homes were for 250 or 500 watts, assuming few lights, fan and TV. This does not account for use of appliances such as refrigerators and mixers. Transformer and sub-station capacities were designed to meet this minimal demand. Increased supply hours, appliance usage and the needs of rural enterprises will need more network investment. Without this, the risk of power outages is high. The RDS system's strengthening plans can focus on this challenge.

About 25 per cent of electricity sales is to highly subsidised, agricultural consumers who also receive erratic, poor quality supply. Under the national KUSUM scheme, daytime, low-cost supply can be provided to a large number of farmers by installing megawatt scale solar plants, which supply eight hours of quality power directly to dedicated agricultural feeders. This would address farmers' demand for reliable supply and almost halve the discom's cost and subsidy requirements. For this to work, separate feeders for agricultural consumers are needed. RDS prioritises investments and grants towards dedicated agricultural feeders to accelerate feeder solarisation. States must leverage this grant support to provide reliable supply and reduce subsidy requirements.

Third is the need for "automatic" metering of distribution feeders. Desperate efforts, un-metered consumers and non-functional meters at the consumer and feeder level persist. Without functioning meters, accurate energy accounting and loss monitoring is a challenge. Often, discoms under-estimate losses by over-estimating unmetered consumption in a bid to demonstrate loss reduction. For greater veracity, all feeders must be equipped with meters capable of communicating readings without manual intervention. States should leverage RDS's emphasis on automatic meter reading for this.

So far, the experience with smart metering and pre-paid metering has been limited. RDS prescribes a phase-wise roll-out of consumer smart meters, starting with commercial and industrial consumers and urban areas. Such an approach provides states with an opportunity to understand implementation issues and assess benefits. In their action plans, states should emphasise the need for this flexibility and allow the discoms to make an informed choice between pre-paid and post-paid metering. To realise benefits, the state regulator must stipulate a framework to evaluate cost reduction and performance improvement due to smart meters and protect consumers from undue tariff impacts due to such investments.

Next, the network can be prepared for charging electric vehicles. Discoms can avail 60 per cent of the grants under RDS for investments required to address the demand of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. This can accelerate a shift away from petrol and diesel fuels.

To leverage various opportunities, states must emphasise the need for flexibility in prioritising investments in their action plans. This should be accompanied by state-level commitments towards accelerated but deliberate implementation. Central government agencies should also be flexible in the monitoring, tracking and fund disbursement mechanisms. Without these efforts, despite its potential, RDS will likely be important but limited in its impact, like its predecessors.

The writers are with Prayas (Energy Group)



VAMSEE JULURI

"WE ARE SURE even Ramanujacharya will be horrified," began a post on a small western working-class Hindu human rights group's social media feed. It is one thing to build a beautiful statue to honour a revered Guru. It may even be acceptable in a culture that values richness in worship to put a lot of gold into it. But does it make sense to call it a "Statue of Equality"?

This is a question that might well have occurred to people as they watched Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurate a giant statue of Ramanujacharya in Hyderabad on February 5. On the one hand, it seems compassionate that the visionary driving the project, the respected Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji, has chosen to celebrate Ramanuja's chief contribution as advocacy for equality. But at the same time, as we read in the website for the statue about how Ramanujacharya heralded social equality because "males did not learn in front of the females so as to keep the knowledge secret" and how the "church controlled monarchs" and how "tongues were cut" and "ears were filled with molten lead," we are left wondering what exactly Hindu religious leaders are hoping to achieve with their spectacular social change simulation daydreams.

Now, politicians can be given to hyperbole, and guns to tales of magic and miracles to inspire love and faith. But what seems to be happening with modern Hindu religious organisations is a more fundamental confusion of purpose. And like all confusions, it stems from a disconnect with social and economic realities

Branding faith

Statue of Equality discourse points to perils of making spirituality fashionable

of class, and protestations notwithstanding, perhaps, caste privilege too. A giant gold statue can be declared as the solution to global income inequality. A gallery featuring Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln besides Ramanujacharya can be set up to hail them all as great "reformers". Why not Martin Luther, then? Or other "reformers" closer home?

Reality seems to be in as short a supply as platitudinous secular ideals are in a club. There seem to be two different threads in the experience of what is called Hinduism today. One is the practice of traditional rituals such as *yajnas*, *pujas*, *vaidya poornas*, and so on, passed on from one generation to another. The other is the discourse around the meaning of Hinduism, a communicative, modern predilection, that manifests in forms as diverse as best-selling mythology books and the culture of volunteerism among new-age Hindu spiritual movements.

The politics of what is often called "Hindu nationalism," is yet another dimension, which intersects with each of these in different ways. There are traditionalists who support the notion of sacred lands and oppose their transformation into mass tourism sites by the government, as well as more reformist or civic nationalists who are represented in the prime minister's "holy temples" slogan, perhaps.

Arguably, all of this is Hinduism as it is today, at the crossroads not only of various political forces but also of intergenerational changes and choices.

It is in this context that the NGO-ification of Hinduism becomes an interesting problem. In the past few years, I have seen brochures and websites from organisations ranging from traditional Hindu lineages to the modern, more international ones increasingly erasing any discussion of the guru's teachings, philosophy, or "inner" world of Hinduism in any form, for the outward demonstration of NGO-type service.

One spiritual tradition, despite the highly sophisticated philosophical depths of its founder, represents itself now with glossy photos of schools, toilets, computers, medical camps and so on. I did not find even a token quote from the guru in their recent publication.

Now, there is clearly nothing to criticise in the performance of service as a spiritually fulfilling activity. But where the issue becomes more complicated is when it comes to the question of what, finally, is the purpose of whatever is called Hinduism. If everybody's "religion" (for lack of a better word) ends up looking like United Nations slogans about empowerment and social justice, what remains of the vast ocean of experience, creativity, art and thought that are not the business of NGOs or UN-type organisations to support?

Why blame others for the vanishing of these rich traditions if they are not recognised and nurtured by Hinduism who otherwise seem capable of building very large organisations (and states)?

There is, I think, also an issue of class privilege playing out in these two dimensions of

Hinduism, with the "multiplex" or "OTT" Hindus (to borrow some terms from recent debates on cinema) talking to the performance of service (coupled with some private meditation and stress-busting perhaps) with little interest in the old-fashioned rituals and miracles of the common people, and the latter throwing the ancient temples with complete devotion to the deity and the specific traditions and customs followed in his or her (the deity's) sacred dwelling.

For the people, the "statue" is of a divinity. For the colonised urban upper classes, the statue represents, perhaps a concept, a modern ideal, a figure enshrined as "real" in "history". One group will seek miracles, and the other will seek (what it thinks) are facts. Will these two streams accommodate each other? Or will one, by sheer force of privilege, negate the experiences of the masses, seeking to constantly "reform" them?

The discourse around the "Statue of Equality" offers a poignant case study. Two different worlds are being sought to be recast as the same, when both could stay in their place for the good of all. *Agam* or *sampradaya*'s message should not be so flippantly changed from what it was to whatever the misadvised elites think the secular cosmopolis deems fashionable. We should listen to the people, and their *bhakti*. They obey the gods, not the desires of social status and recognition.

The writer is professor of media studies, University of San Francisco

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DIGITAL ISSUES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The digital rupee" (IE, February 4). FM's Budget statement that RBI will issue digital rupees confirms the suggestion by GoI's high-level inter-ministerial committee. In 2017, I advised the RBI to introduce its own central bank digital currency (CBDC). A CBDC is not just another digital payment option. Its effects for the banking system are not clear. If there is a partial shift away from bank deposits to CBDC, what are the implications for the role of banks in credit creation? What will be the implication for monetary policy? Such questions must be answered.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

THE REAL DRAG

THIS REFERS TO the article, "The inequality drag" (IE, Feb 4). For two successive years, the Centre provided almost 70 per cent of the population free grains to tide them through distress. The insistence to put money in the pockets of the poor to generate demand to invigorate the economy or to strengthen schemes like MGNREGA is a throwback to the political economy of socialism that has failed everywhere. China became rich only after embracing market economy. The drag to our economy is ideological.

H N Bhagwat, Chiplun

CLIMATE AND INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the article, "The Climate Cost of AI" (IE, February 3). The examples of Amazon, Microsoft,

Alphabet announcing "net-zero policies" are less suited for the Indian scenario where the main factors of climate degradation are poverty, population, urbanisation, rising use of power, intensification of agriculture etc. India has been an early initiator of change in market regulations when SEBI, in 2012, adopted sustainability reporting and the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) related disclosures as part of the Business Responsibility Report (BRR) for the top 100 listed entities became mandatory. In 2021, the BRR was substituted by Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) enabling market participants to identify and assess sustainability-related risks and opportunities. BRSR will soon become mandatory for top 1,000 listed entities. India also has the National Action Plan on Climate Change.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

THE RIGHT MASK

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Why I wear a mask" (IE, February 3). The writer's arguments are based on a strong belief that masks are highly effective in preventing Covid-19. While it is true that several public health officials recommend masking, a Randomised Controlled Trial study conducted in Denmark had found no significant reduction in Covid-19 transmission due to masking. Many experts have also warned that cloth masks have no impact on viral spread.

Vaun Das via e-mail

12 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI, CHIEF MINISTER, UTTARAKHAND

“People say I didn’t get enough time... I’m the last driver who has to take the vehicle to the station”

Pushkar Singh Dhama discusses the BJP’s chances in the coming Assembly elections, divisions in the party, the *dharm sansad* in Haridwar and dealing with challenges unique to a hill state. This session was moderated by Harikishan Sharma, Assistant Editor, *The Indian Express*

Harikishan Sharma: Uttarakhand has elected four Vidhan Sabhas from 2000 and, in every election, it has changed the government in power. How will you buck this trend?

Earlier there was another trend too — ever since the state was formed, whoever formed the government in the state, didn’t win in Parliament elections and vice-versa. Whether it was in 2004 or 2009, this was the trend but it changed once Narendra Modi became Prime Minister of the country. There was a Congress government in Uttarakhand in 2014 and all the five Lok Sabha seats were won by the BJP. In 2019, it won the five seats again. Since Modi became the PM, the entire country’s trend changed too. If you see, earlier, we never used to form the government in Assam, but now we have formed it twice. We never used to form a government in Haryana, we have done it twice. In UP, we could not form a government since 1991 but we did that in 2017 and will be doing it again in 2022, according to all opinion polls. We are confident we will form a government in Uttarakhand and that too with a huge majority.

Liz Mathew: Uttarakhand’s BJP unit is famous or infamous for internal divisions. How do you see this and how will you overcome it? What are you doing to keep the party together?

Our party is united and there are no differences. Maybe there are some small differences but we are united and fighting the elections together. We have announced our candidates, the tickets have been given, our booth-level (candidates) and *panna pramukh* have been announced. Our work has started. We have always given respect to everyone. We are all working together. Our party will form a government and with a huge margin.

Liz Mathew: The older, senior leaders in the party are unhappy that they are not getting due respect. How will you handle this in ticket distribution and campaigning?

There’s nothing like that, we have given respect to all senior leaders. Did someone tell you that they haven’t been given respect? Give me one name and I will tell you how much the party has paid respect to them.

Liz Mathew: You and the previous CM Trivendra Singh Rawat had to repeal the Char Dham Devasthanam Board due to the VHP’s demand. You have to deal with more hardliners in your support base in Uttarakhand, when compared to other states. Ahead of the elections, have you had any discussions with the VHP?

That issue was not related to politics. The opposition to the Char Dham Devasthanam Board was not from one section of the society; there was opposition from *teerth purohiths*, people from the *panda samaj*, *Ravals*, priests from that area. We had formed a committee under the chairmanship of our senior leader Manohar Kant Dhyani that had worked for three months. The committee submitted its report and then we created a sub-committee of the *mantri mandal*, which also gave its report. Then we took a decision to repeal the board. There’s no question of politics there. Other people work for votes, we didn’t work for votes. We respected everyone’s sentiments and based our decision on the committee report.

Liz Mathew: What do you have to say on statements by hardliners such as Yati Narsinghanand?

He talked about me, too, but I had no role in it. The law will take its course, no one can interfere with the law.

Liz Mathew: Former CM Trivendra Singh Rawat is siding with the dissenters and even withdrew his nomination. What do you have to say on it?

There’s no issue of unhappiness. He was the CM for four years and is a senior leader. There’s no question of unhappiness.

Liz Mathew: But why did he withdraw his nomination?

He himself said that he will work and campaign to help the party win the state. He will go to every area. Our party is big and there’s no unhappiness.

Avaneesh Mishra: There’s an accusation that the delay in taking action in the *dharm sansad* issue in



WHY
PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI

As Uttarakhand goes to the polls on February 14, Pushkar Singh Dhama, who took over as chief minister just seven months ago, has his task cut out. The state’s youngest CM takes on the Congress led by veteran Harish Rawat. Will he be able to lead the BJP to victory in a state known to vote the incumbent out?

unemployment rate of Uttarakhand is higher than the national average. In the last year, we saw that even when the average national unemployment rate dropped a little, it increased in Uttarakhand. It seems that the work the government is doing is not percolating down to the grassroots.

We had started the work but then there was a lockdown. Therefore, a lot of work that was supposed to happen didn’t happen. But the work will definitely be done and we have a long-term vision.

Vandita Mishra: On the *dharm sansad* issue, you talked about the law taking its own course. But there’s also the question of moral and political responsibility. You are the CM of the state, don’t you think you should have said something on such talk that violates the atmosphere and makes it difficult for people to live together?

It was not an official event nor had they asked us anything. Neither did we sponsor the event nor did we invite them. When action was taken, they thought it was taken by the government and when action was not taken, people thought the government had not done anything. There was no role of the government. When the matter came before the law, the law followed its course.

Vandita Mishra: You didn’t think there was a need to make a political statement?

It’s not an issue related to us, so why would we give a statement?

Aakash Joshi: Since the formation of Uttarakhand, there has been an accusation that there’s more focus on the Terai region, the plain regions, while the state was created for the hills. If you win, will Gairsain be made the capital?

We have already made Gairsain the summer capital and it is our priority. Gairsain is the centre of our sentiment. It’s at the heart of the state and the Uttarakhand movement. The people have connections to Gairsain. We will develop

it in the form of a capital.

Aakash Joshi: Your popularity has been quite high in the opinion polls. But there’s a complaint from the ground level that you have not been given enough time. Do you have any regrets that you didn’t get enough time before the elections?

People are saying I got less time and even I say that. The people of Uttarakhand know that I used my strength and energy (to work for the state). Keeping that in mind, the people will give us the next five years.

Aakash Joshi: The way Hinduism was practised in Uttarakhand is different from other states. There is a complaint that since animal slaughter was made illegal in temples, there are a few people who are doing it clandestinely and people in local politics are taking advantage of that. Do you think it is right to pass legislation on an issue which is connected to people’s faith? Do you think these older traditions (of animal slaughter) were wrong and the law had to interfere in them?

Some things don’t change because of a law — people have to understand. People are slowly incorporating good practices and older traditions are slowly ending. People are moving forward from the practices of those times.

Harikishan Sharma: You said you have been given less time; you have completed only 208 days since your term began in July. There seems to be a trend that the sitting CMs lose their seats — your two predecessors, Congress’s Harish Rawat and BJP’s BC

Khanduri lost theirs. In 2012, you won Khatima with a margin of more than 5,000 votes, but in 2017, the vote margin reduced to around 2,700. Will your constituency be a challenge for you this time?

There’s no challenge. Every election is different. They were difficult elections for me but the people helped me win and blessed me. This time, the people have asked me to tour the state and have said they will take care of the poll in my constituency. Hence, I am not even thinking about my constituency. It was only on their advice that I filed my nomination from there.

Harikishan Sharma: Do you think the protests over farm laws will affect the polls in your constituency, which has many farmers and Sikhs?

I am a farmer myself. All the people of Udhamsingh Nagar are happy that I became the CM. All of them will work to form a government because they feel their brother or son has reached this place.

Avaneesh Mishra: Elections in Uttarakhand have always focused on the Army, Congress, AAP and your party are all making a lot of promises but Congress has given tickets to only

are not able to fulfill their promises in other states, how will they fulfill them in Uttarakhand? They raise issues of price rise and unemployment but in states where they are in government — Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan — they have not been able to solve these issues. Then how will they be able to solve them in Uttarakhand? They were here for 10 years — did they end unemployment?

Avaneesh Mishra: But I think BJP’s electoral promises are fewer this time...

We don’t want to give any false promises. The people of Uttarakhand believe in us and Modi and we only talk about the things that we can deliver. People have seen Modi’s performance in the last five years.

Avaneesh Mishra: Many people who wanted to contest on a BJP ticket are planning to fight independently. Do you see that as your loss?

When you are in line to become a candidate and then you don’t get a ticket, you feel a little bad. But we have spoken to all of them. They are our old workers, they won’t go anywhere and will stay with the party.

Liz Mathew: Usually, the contest in Uttarakhand has been between Congress and the BJP. This time there’s a lot of buzz around AAP. In how many constituencies do you think there will be a fight between BJP and AAP? How do you look at the emergence of AAP?

We won’t have a fight with anyone, the election will be one-sided. Our slogan this time is “*Ab ki baar, 60 paar*.” Now your survey is showing 45-50, but till the election day we will reach 60. The blessings of the people of Uttarakhand are with us and with Modi.

Harikishan Sharma: Going into the elections, what do you think will work in your favour and what will go against you?

We have people’s blessings and they know we have fulfilled our promises. These are the factors that will favour us. The six months or so that the people of Uttarakhand, my leadership, PM Modi, the party’s national chairman and the high command gave me, I have tried to give my 100 per cent. I have devoted every moment to it. There are no factors against us. Everyone is saying that I got less time, so I am requesting for more time so that I can work more.

Shubhaji Roy: It seems that you are projecting the work that you have done in the last six-eight months while you’ve not highlighted the work of the previous two chief ministers from your party.

I talk about the six months because I was working more and taking more decisions. People before me have also done good work. The vehicle has started moving, only the driver has changed. I am the last driver who has to take it to the station and, hence, I can talk more about the time I have driven the vehicle.

Shubhaji Roy: There’s a lot of support among people for you. Who do you give this credit to? To the three previous CMs, Modi, Amit Shah or to Yati Narsinghanand?

Definitely, it’s Modi. Any poll that happens today cannot happen without him because of the work he has done for the poor, the common man and people at the lowest rung of society. The work Modi has done for aviation, all road, giving free COVID-19 vaccines, or bringing in Ayushman Bharat Yojana, Swachh Bharat, Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, and several other schemes, none else has. That’s why I want to give credit only to Modi.

Devyani Onial: Do you think so many big infrastructure projects — widening of highways, the Char Dham corridor — in an ecologically fragile state such as Uttarakhand may have short-term benefits but can do harm in the long run?

Roads are necessary to travel from one part of the hills to another. How will development take place or tourists come to the state if there are no roads? How will pilgrims come? Our state is centred around tourism, pilgrimage and power. But going forward, we will take care of our ecology and our economy. We also have to move towards *atma nirbharata* (self-reliance). We have done a lot of homework on this.

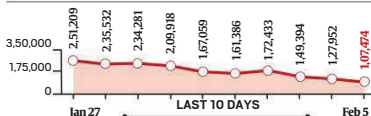
Illustration: Sunojit Dey

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

DASHBOARD, AS ON FEB 5

706 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN	New cases 1,07,474	Active cases 12,25,011	Deaths 865
	Weekly CFR: 0.37%	Overall CFR: 1.28%	Total deaths: 5,01,979

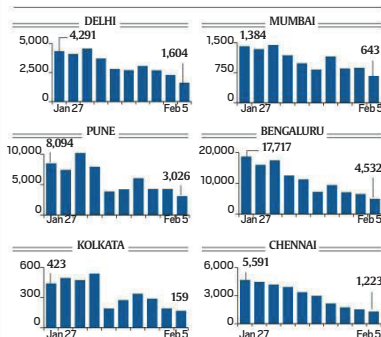
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

State	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	Weekly positivity
Kerala	33538	3,53,152	444	39.77%
Karnataka	12009	1,09,236	50	13.09%
Maharashtra	11394	1,33,655	73	10.27%
Tamil Nadu	7524	1,38,878	37	11.05%
Rajasthan	5602	51,143	19	14.53%

CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS

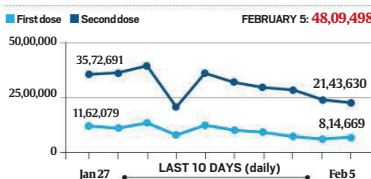


TOTAL TESTS

TESTS ON FEB 5	WEEKLY POSITIVITY	OVERALL POSITIVITY
22,54,908	8.56%	5.70%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES

169,46,26,697
(Adults 1st dose: 89,97,98,864; 2nd: 72,51,53,271; 15-18 age group 1st dose: 4,92,84,464; 2nd: 56,62,424; precautionary: 1,47,27,674)



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EXPLAINED CULTURE

The Lata phenomenon

What made Lata Mangeshkar, who died on Sunday, the soundtrack for generations in the subcontinent? Exploring the musician through her songs, her commitment to perfection, and the women she gave voice to



Then PM Jawaharlal Nehru with Lata Mangeshkar in Mumbai in May 1960. Express Archive

SUANSKHU KHURANA NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 6

WHEN A newly-independent India, still coming to terms with the bloodbath of the Partition, heard Lata Mangeshkar sing *Yun hi muskuraye ja, aarso piye ja... utthaye ja unke sitam* from the Nargis Dutt-Bal Kapoor-Dilip Kumar-starrer *Anand* (1949), it seemed like a salve for broken hearts. When the song reached the other side of the border, the Naushad composition had the same effect — after all, the separation pangs were the same on either side. The song turned a 20-year-old Mangeshkar, a newcomer from Kolhapur, into a superstar and the gold standard of genius.

Undisputed queen

"Kambakht, gali se bhi besuri nahi hoti," Ustad Bade Gulam Ali had once said of her. Indeed, so pervasive was Mangeshkar's influence that generations have grown up listening to her, singing her songs, and, in the case of women musicians, aspiring to be like her.

If Hindi films have been the life of India's masses, the soundtrack to their lives has been its music. The audience formed an emotional connection with the singers: you were either a Rafi believer or a Kishore Kumar acolyte. But when it came to Mangeshkar, she was the undisputed queen, who could sing everything from bhajans such as *Allah tero naam* (*Hum Dono*, 1961, composed by Jaidev and penned by Sahir Ludhianvi) to love songs such as *Ye zindagi usi ki hai* (*Anarkali*, 1953) or nostalgic numbers such as *Mere saaya saath hoga* (*Mera Saaya*, 1966).

Through several decades, Lata Mangeshkar sang for the righteous and chaste Indian woman on-screen, while her sister Asha Bhosle sang numbers that called for sensuality. Mangeshkar had such charisma that filmmakers and composers realised very early on that having her in a project signalled credibility and impeccable standards. Much before a film was shot, the composer, lyricist and singers were signed on for the project. This meant that several films that did badly at the box office had outstanding music helmed by Mangeshkar, that reached listeners through radio, a ubiquitous mode of entertainment in those early days after Independence. In fact, it was radio that took her voice to different parts of the country and made her synonymous with Hindi playback singing.



Singing for various heroines

Mangeshkar never took talent for granted. She would spend time on her rehearsals, practise her diction and ensure immaculate renditions. Once, when superstar Dilip Kumar told her to improve her diction, she asked a family friend, an imam, to come and teach her to read and write Urdu. She sang in a range of Indian languages — from Bengali to Marathi — her mother tongue — to Punjabi. If those in Punjab sang alongside her rendition of Baba Bulleh Shah's *Heer*, those in Maharashtra sang to the tune of her *Saamwre rang ruchi* and her *Najoya na* was a staple at every Durga Puja function in West Bengal. She was a unifying factor, who brought the nation together as a repository of its culture, entertainment and, of course, music.

As films moved to less formulaic tropes, Bollywood, too, underwent changes. Directors moved towards authenticity in representation, and here Mangeshkar was a huge success, setting standards in playback singing. She sang the way her heroines spoke, moving away from the thick, nasal *gayaki* popularised by Noor Jehan or Shamshad Begum, that had, till then been the standard. She could sing for an entire range of characters — from a poetry-loving village girl in a prison (*Mora gora ang layi le, Bandini*, 1963), to a witty and defiant courtesan in Akbar's Sheesh Mahal (*Pyaar kiya toh darna kya*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, 1960), to a

woman savouring the rains as she shares an umbrella with the man she loves (*Pyaar hua iqar hua*, *Shri 420*, 1955) to an emotional mother trying to fend for her children by ploughing the field (*Duniya mein hum aaye hain toh*, *Mother India*, 1957), to a young woman who has just broken away from the shadows of a claustrophobic relationship (*Aaj phir jeene ki tumhara hai*, *Guide*, 1965) to a young singer who's lost her unborn child (*Tere mere milan ki*, *Abhimanyu*, 1973). And who can forget Kavi Pradeep's seminal *Aye mere watan ke logo*, in the wake of the Sino-Indian war of 1962, that reduced then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to tears and has been a fixture at every patriotic function for nearly five decades?

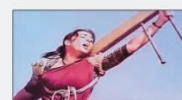
One of the lesser-known facts about Mangeshkar is that she transformed the way Indian music concerts were perceived in the West. Her first performance outside of India was at London's prestigious Royal Albert Hall in 1974. Until then, film music concerts were song-and-dance affairs held in community halls and colleges and rarely taken seriously. Mangeshkar made a demand that was inconceivable back then — she asked to sing in mainstream halls only. This was an honour that until then bestowed upon classical musicians as a result of Pandit Ravi Shankar's collaborations and performances in the West. But it was an honour afforded to her.

Committed to perfection

Even when technology brought in changes, demanding less and less finesse on part of playback singers, fixing flaws in pitch and sur on the console instead, Mangeshkar remained steadfast in her commitment to perfection. Until the 1990s, when Mangeshkar sang more regularly, performances resembled live-stage performances, preceded by extensive rehearsals. They were communal affairs, with 100-piece orchestras divided into string, wind and rhythm sections, coming together in mammoth studios to record one song. If one didn't nail it the first time, the process had to be repeated all over again. But the arrival of auto-tunes changed the game and that used to rankle with her.

If she taught the musicians how to approach music with clarity and focus, for listeners, she was an institution in herself. In her death, India has lost one of her most revered musicians, but she has left behind an immaculate oeuvre that will continue to give listeners joy, comfort and courage for times to come.

SHE LENT HER VOICE TO...



DUNIYA MEIN HUM AAYE HAIN
Mother India (1957): As Nargis is shown ploughing the field to support her family, one hears the struggle in Mangeshkar's voice

AJ PHIR JEENE KI TAMANNA HAI
Guide (1965): Mangeshkar sang for Waheeda Rehman who played Rosie, a woman who finds freedom from a loveless marriage

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The ecological cost of creating artificial snow for Winter Olympics

SHASHANK NAIR NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 6

THE COST of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing has been a snow-making operation by China that has highlighted the poor ecological conditions of the area, and massive amounts of water that have gone into the effort. A report released by Sport Ecology Group at Loughborough University and Save Our Waters has looked into the dangers of artificial snow on athletes' bodies and the amount of water used up to produce the snow.

How is artificial snow created?

Snow injected with water to harden it, and then treated with chemicals to keep it in place, is a form of artificial snow recommended for winter competitions. High volumes of water and energy are required to create slopes of artificial snow that are competition-ready.

For the Beijing Games, machines from an Italian company, TechnoAlpin, have been creating artificial snow since November 2021. These pump out ice particles and a thin mist

of water vapour, which are launched up to 60 m in the air where they combine to become snow and fall to the ground. TechnoAlpin has been using 250 snow cannons in Beijing, according to *The Sunday Times*.