



Bold gamble

The projection of Chhanni as CM candidate was forced on Congress, but is the right decision

If the elevation of Charanjit Singh Chhanni as Chief Minister in September 2021 was an accidental outcome of internal rivalries in the Congress, the party's announcement that he would continue in the post if it wins the Assembly election is a bold gamble. The Congress has been reticent in projecting a singular leader in any State, and has often taken the plea that it believed in collective leadership. The announcement of a CM candidate, though not unprecedented, is rare for the Congress, and in this instance necessitated by the uniquely volatile social dynamic in Punjab at the moment. Entrenched social alignments in the State appear to be unravelling, and the Congress is trying to knit together a viable electoral majority, with a Dalit face as its axis. Punjab has close to 32% population of the Scheduled Caste community, while the Jat Sikh population is over 20%. But since 1977, the State has never seen a non-Jat Sikh Chief Minister – be it of the Congress party or the Shiromani Akali Dal, indicating the political dominance of the Jat Sikh community. Giani Zail Singh was the last non-Jat Sikh Chief Minister of Punjab between 1972-77.

The Congress has usually shied away from pronounced social justice politics, and in that sense, this is an audacious move which will have ripple effects in its strategy elsewhere too. Party leader Rahul Gandhi is driving a more accommodative caste politics, but the approach is evidently facing resistance from within the party and outside. Dalits in Punjab are not a homogeneous category. They are divided into 39 castes, clustered under different religions and sects locally called 'De-ras'. Mr. Chhanni belongs to the Ravidasia community of Dalits, which is a minuscule population of the total Dalits. Whether he can galvanise a large politics of aspiration shared among all communities overlooked in the traditional power sharing models of the State remains an open question, but Mr. Chhanni does deserve the support he has found from the party. He has not been long enough in power to be judged for his track record as CM, but Mr. Chhanni is a good story teller and has a good story – which are essential ingredients for any successful politician. His prominence will in all likelihood set off reactions from Jat Sikhs and upper caste Hindus, considerable segments of whom have been with the Congress. Opponents of the Congress – the Shiromani Akali Dal-BSP alliance, the BJP-led alliance, and the Aam Aadmi Party – will all try to inflame the resentment among these communities to corner the Congress. The Congress is accused of playing caste politics by promoting a Dalit, and it is notable the rotation of power among the dominant Jat Sikhs for decades rarely caused such concerns. Perhaps that itself is proof that Mr. Chhanni deserved this chance.

When the music stops

Despite the UK's success in vaccination, Boris Johnson's leadership is under scrutiny

In the wake of the intensifying 'Partygate' scandal in the U.K., five close aides of Prime Minister Boris Johnson have resigned, putting the Conservative Party and its leadership in a tight spot over their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and their adherence to the associated restrictions on public gatherings. The five senior members of Mr. Johnson's office, including Chief of Staff Dan Rosenfield quit last week, following an incriminating enquiry into multiple social gatherings that took place at No.10 Downing Street during the early days of the pandemic when tight lockdown regulations had been imposed across the U.K. limiting all such parties. The scandal gained momentum after U.K. media published reports, including photographs, of senior members of Mr. Johnson's team attending several parties held around June 2020, a time when gatherings of more than two people indoors were banned. Following the expected outrage in Parliament and the initiation of a police investigation, last week a report by Sue Gray, Second Permanent Secretary, was published. Her report found that 16 events took place between May 2020 and April 2021 including a drinks event in the Downing Street garden attended by Mr. Johnson on May 20, 2020, and a birthday celebration for Mr. Johnson in the Cabinet Room on June 19, 2020.

The scandal has rocked the confidence of Conservative MPs in their Prime Minister's capacity to lead. Even though Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries insisted that a "vast majority" of them still support Mr. Johnson, some, such as Stephen Hammond, have said that they are "considering very carefully" whether he still has confidence in the PM, especially because "telling the truth matters, and nowhere more so than in the House of Commons". Mr. Johnson has written to all Conservative MPs committing to improving "the way 10 Downing Street works". But it appears that MPs are far from convinced that there was sufficient justification to hold these drinking parties at No.10 when the nation was facing lockdowns. Specifically, these events endangered public health, damaged public perception of the government and its commitment to pandemic regulations, and demonstrated failure to explore alternative, pandemic-compliant means to transact business. The most ominous sign of Mr. Johnson's deteriorating prospects of continuing as PM are the MPs who have reportedly submitted a letter of no confidence to Sir Graham Brady, Chair of the 1922 Committee of backbench MPs. If 54 MPs submit such letters to Sir Graham, it will trigger a vote on Mr. Johnson's leadership of the party. Given the progress made by his government in terms of vaccine administration, putting the U.K. at the top of the global vaccination league tables, it would be ironic if Mr. Johnson's time in No.10 was remembered more for drinking parties and lockdown violations.

A dose of science in the vaccination strategy

Vaccination and booster dose plans must have context in the backdrop and be informed by epidemiological evidence



CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA

Six weeks after the Indian government announced 'precaution shots' or the 'third dose' of COVID-19 vaccines for select populations, there have been four relevant developments. First, two COVID-19 vaccines have received 'conditional market authorisation'. Second, phase three clinical trials, which include the booster dose of a nasal COVID-19 candidate vaccine have been approved. Third, the Omicron wave has largely swept through the country. Fourth, ₹5,000 crore has been allocated for COVID-19 vaccines in the Union Budget 2022-23.

What do these new developments mean for the COVID-19 vaccination and booster dose strategy in India? Do healthy adults need a booster and when? Is the budgetary allocation for COVID-19 vaccines enough? Let us discuss these.

Market authorisation
The news of market authorisation of Covishield and Covaxin has generated a lot of interest. Many have thought that from now on, anyone who wishes to, can buy a COVID-19 vaccine and have it administered at their will or on a doctor's prescription. That is what 'market authorisation' usually means for most medical products. However, these two COVID-19 vaccines have received not the full but a 'conditional' market authorisation. Therefore, for the general public, nothing has changed. The Government will continue to regulate vaccine administration as earlier. The already eligible target groups (as per national guidelines), would continue to receive vaccines through authorised COVID-19 vaccination centres. The only effective change is for the vaccine manufacturers.

From submitting safety and efficacy data to the national drug regulatory every fortnight, they can

now submit this data every six months.

The nasal vaccine

Even though in the clinical trial stage, and none been authorised yet, nasal COVID-19 vaccines have always garnered a lot of interest for a variety of reasons. One, the ease of administration without a needle and syringe (and thus less biomedical waste). Two, given that COVID-19 vaccines currently in use in India have limited evidence about their role in reducing transmission, nasal vaccines, through mucosal antibodies, are likely to perform better in reducing transmission. Three, nasal vaccines might be useful for children, in whom the primary objective of COVID-19 vaccination is in reducing transmission rather than the individual benefit. Four, the world needs more vaccines to ensure wider availability and address vaccine inequality. Five, combination use of injectable and nasal vaccines might provide blended protection from severe disease and reduce the transmission. Such an approach could be useful in mitigating the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and ends in the control of outbreaks in the post-pandemic period. However, a flip side of nasal vaccines and mucosal immunity is that protection is usually short lasting.

Epidemiological data and modelling estimates suggest that by the end of 2021, five, combination use of injectable and nasal vaccines might provide blended protection from severe disease and reduce the transmission. Such an approach could be useful in mitigating the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and ends in the control of outbreaks in the post-pandemic period. However, a flip side of nasal vaccines and mucosal immunity is that protection is usually short lasting.

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reason for any urgency to administer COVID-19 booster doses to healthy adults in the age group 18 years-60 years. Similarly, children being at low risk of severe disease and having developed infections, and with further exposure of children in the ongoing Omicron surge, the vaccination of children younger than 15 years is also not an urgency, either.

This does not mean that no population sub-group in the 18-59 years band would ever need COVID-19 vaccine boosters. One, immunity, and thus protection against respiratory viruses (i.e., SARS-CoV-2), whether after infection or natural infection, declines over a period of time. Two, mutations are common in SARS-CoV-2 and the emergence of newer variants of concern with an ability to bypass immunity (provided by natural infection or vaccination) continues to remain a possibility. Therefore, it is likely that a larger proportion of the adult population might need a booster, though at a relatively longer interval. Furthermore, one, there is evidence about the effectiveness of additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines (being used in India) in immunocompromised individuals, the third dose should be recommended for such adults, of any age group.

Finding of COVID-19 vaccines is a key operational issue. Soon after the Union Budget 2022-23, there were concerns that the allocation of ₹5,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccines could be insufficient. However, an objective assessment suggests that the government's decision to list a few vaccination programmes of many countries. These are some of the examples of the context and use of local data.

Second, the success of any vaccination programme is dependent

on citizen participation. It is time science determines the COVID-19 vaccination strategy. Let us, as citizens, not demand a booster for any adult age group. Let us not rush into the vaccination of children younger than 15 years of age. Let us not link vaccination to school attendance. Children need not to be vaccinated to attend school. The unscientific and misinformation about COVID-19 has been an ongoing challenge in India's COVID-19 pandemic response. Therefore, governments at all levels need to step up transparent and timely science communication around vaccines and through trustworthy sources.

Use the time at hand

In a pandemic response, efforts are made to reduce and halt any transmission. However, a fresh wave has a silver lining as well. Any natural infection results in the development of immunity. Therefore, the ongoing third wave gives some time to decide whether to roll out boosters for additional population sub-groups. This time at hand should be used for some reflection and actions. First, in the pandemic, epidemics, outbreaks and in epidemiology, context or the local situation matters a lot. The context of India is very different from that in other countries because of the relatively low median population age, the use of different COVID-19 vaccines, and the vaccination of the majority of the population after natural infection in the second wave, to list a few.

Therefore, the data used by the other countries in deciding on vaccine effectiveness and boosters cannot, and should not, be used for India. Such decisions need to be based on the local data and evidence. For example, Denmark, after analysing local evidence, decided not to administer COVID-19 vaccines to children in the 5 years-12 years age group. A few vaccines administered to children in India, i.e., BCG against tuberculosis or Japanese encephalitis (JE) vaccines are part of immunisation programmes of many countries. These are some of the examples of the context and use of local data.

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Third, there is a need to identify vaccine and vaccination-specific policy questions. Thereafter, analyse the COVID-19 disease and vaccination data and link them with clinical outcomes to assess the effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2. Some time to decide whether to roll out boosters for additional population sub-groups. This time at hand should be used for some reflection and actions. First, in the pandemic, epidemics, outbreaks and in epidemiology, context or the local situation matters a lot. The context of India is very different from that in other countries because of the relatively low median population age, the use of different COVID-19 vaccines, and the vaccination of the majority of the population after natural infection in the second wave, to list a few.

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Notes for India as the digital trade juggernaut rolls on

Sitting out trade negotiations could result in the country losing out on opportunities to shape the rules



ARINDRAJIT BASU

Despite the cancellation of the Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) late last year (scheduled date, November 30, 2021-December 3, 2021) due to COVID-19, digital trade negotiations continue their ambitious march forward. On December 14, Australia, Japan, and Singapore, co-convenors of the plurilateral Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on e-commerce, welcomed the 'substantial progress' made at the talks over the past three years and stated that they expected a convergence on more issues by the end of 2022.

Holding out

But therein lies the rub: even though JSI members account for over 90% of global trade, and the initiative welcomed new entrants, over half of WTO members (largely from the developing world) continue to opt out of these negotiations. They fear being arm-twisted into accepting global rules that could erode domestic policymaking and economic growth. India and South Africa have led the resistance and been the JSI's most vocal critics. India has thus far resisted pressures from the developed world to jump onto the JSI bandwagon, largely through coherent legal argumentation against the JSI and a long-term developmental vision.

Yet, given the increasingly frag-

mented global trading landscape and the rising importance of the global digital economy, can India tailor its engagement with the WTO to better accommodate its economic and geopolitical interests?

Global rules on digital trade

The WTO emerged as a handy analogue world in 1994. It was only at the Second Ministerial Conference (1998) that members agreed on core rules for e-commerce regulation. A temporary moratorium was imposed on customs duties relating to the electronic transmission of goods and services. This moratorium has been renewed continuously, to consistent opposition from India and South Africa. They argue that the moratorium imposes significant costs on developing countries as they are unable to benefit from the revenue customs duties would bring.

The members also agreed to set up a work programme on e-commerce across four issue areas at the General Council: goods, services, intellectual property, and development. Frustration over progress in the two decades that followed, 70 members brokered the JSI in December 2017 to initiate exploratory work on the trade-related aspects of e-commerce. Several countries, including developing countries, signed up in 2019 despite holding contrary views. Most JSI members on key issues. Surprise entrants, China and Indonesia, argued that they sought to shape the rules from within the initiative rather than sitting on the sidelines.

India and South Africa have rightly pointed out that the JSI contravenes the WTO's consensus-



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based framework, where every member has a voice and vote regardless of economic standing. Unlike the General Council Work Programme, which India and South Africa have attempted to revitalize in the past year, the JSI does not include all WTO members. For the process to be legally valid, the initiative must either build consensus or negotiate a plurilateral agreement outside the aegis of the WTO.

India and South Africa's positioning strikes a chord at the heart of the global trading regime: how to balance the sovereign right of states to shape domestic policy with international obligations that would enable them to reap the benefits of a global trading system.

A contested regime

There are several issues upon which the developed and developing worlds disagree. One such issue concerns international rules relating to the free flow of data across borders. Several countries, both within and outside the JSI, have imposed data localisation mandates that compel corporations to store and process data within territorial borders. This is a key policy priority for India. Several payment card companies, including Mastercard and American Express, were prohibited from issuing new cards for failure to

comply with a 2018 financial data localisation directive from the Reserve Bank of India. The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on data protection has recommended stringent localisation measures for sensitive personal data and critical personal data in India's data protection legislation. However, for the IT and IT-enabled services developed world looking to access new digital markets, these restrictions impose unnecessary compliance costs, thus arguably hampering innovation and supposedly amounting to unfair protectionism.

There is a similar disagreement regarding domestic laws that mandate the disclosure of source codes. Developed countries believe that this hampers innovation, whereas developing countries believe it is essential for algorithmic transparency and fairness – which was another key recommendation of the JPC report in December 2021.

India's choices

India's global position is reinforced through narrative building by the Indian and industrial leaders alike. Data sovereignty is championed as a means of resisting 'data colonialism', the exploitative economic practices and intensive lobbying of Silicon Valley companies. Policymaking for India's digital economy is at a critical juncture. A key recommendation of the JPC report in December 2021.

Hastily signing trading obliga-

tions could reduce the space available to frame appropriate policy. But sitting out trade negotiations will mean that the digital trade juggernaut will continue unchecked, through mega-regional trading agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). India could risk becoming an unwitting standard-taker in an already fragmented trading regime and lose out on opportunities to shape these rules instead.

Alternatives exist; negotiations need not mean compromise. For example, exceptions to digital trade rules, such as 'legitimate public policy objective' or 'essential security interests', could be negotiated to preserve policymaking where needed while still acquiescing to the larger agreement. Further, any outcome need not be an all-or-nothing arrangement. Taking a cue from the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) between Singapore, Chile, and New Zealand, India can push for a framework where progressive countries can choose modules with which they wish to comply. These combinations can be amassed incrementally as emerging economies such as India work through domestic digital regulations.

Despite its failings, the WTO plays a larger role in global governance and is vital to India's strategic interests. Negotiating without surrendering domestic policymaking holds the key to India's digital future.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Hijab and rights

The issue around hijab wearing has to be distanced from religion and looked at from the point of view of women's rights. It cannot be denied that women's expression and their communicative skills with other people will be only visible without the hijab. Its continuance leads to a loss

of precious women's rights. The French government opposed the display of religious symbols as it was detrimental to peoples' integration in society. Women wearing hijabs and covering their face cannot be compared to a Sikh wearing a turban or carrying a kirpan, for the reasons are different. Being

compelled to wear a hijab denies women of their bodily autonomy.

The possibilities of the Bharatiya Janata Party capitalising on the issue should not deter the possibilities of banning the hijab. 'More' is lost on account of religion but 'most' is lost on account of the hijab which is symbolic

of women's subjugation.

N.G.R. PRASAD,
Chennai

Lata Mangeshkar

The passing of Lata Mangeshkar is a reminder of days past when films and the music of that era had a classic halo around them and were insightful. One wishes that these pristine

recollections of an age gone by remain in India's world

where vulgarity in the name of modernism has seeped into almost everything. GAURAV NOHWAR, Agra, Uttar Pradesh

I have been an ardent listener of Lataji's songs. I had the fortune of being the

neighbour of a former Army man who used to play Lataji's Hindi songs as 78 rpm records (available at that time) on his HMV gramophone. He later gifted all the old records to me, which I still play to this day. P.M. GOPALAN, Kochi

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Majoritarianism is wearing the veil of debate

Right-wing groups are holding hostage the rights of Muslim women to education and dignity



KAVITA KRISHNAN

Along coastal Karnataka, many colleges have caved in to the demand by right-wing groups, including the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that Muslim women cannot be allowed to enter college wearing hijabs even if the headscarves match the colour of the college uniform. Instigated by the ABVP, Hindu students declared that they would wear saffron stoles if Muslim women wore hijabs. In response, the BJP government of Karnataka banned in campuses "clothes which disturb equality, integrity and public law and order". This decision draws its legitimacy from the Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 25(a) (all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion) to the effect that "essential practices" of religions are protected from restrictions imposed by the state except to uphold "public order, morality and health".

The Kerala High Court had held in *Ammah Bint Basheer v. CBSE* (2015) that the CBSE could not prevent a Muslim girl from writing her exams while wearing a hijab. This decision draws its legitimacy from the Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 25(a) (all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion) to the effect that "essential practices" of religions are protected from restrictions imposed by the state except to uphold "public order, morality and health".

The elephant in the room These interpretations of "public interest" and "public order" and "essential practices" may not offer the best guidance at this current jun-



A faculty member talks to students after the school authorities denied them entry for wearing hijab, in Kundapura of Udupi district, Karnataka.

ture, since they seem to be shutting their eyes to the elephant in the room: majoritarian Hindu supremacist intimidation which is holding hostage the fundamental rights of Muslim women to education and dignity. Hindu supremacists are achieving their demand that Muslim women can only study with their peers from other religions if they erase any appearance of "Muslimness". If Muslim women want to wear hijabs, says the BJP regime and its student stormtroopers, they can study in Muslim-run colleges. How can such an outcome be in public interest? Such an outcome will enable the agenda of segregation and isolation of Muslims and radicalisation of Hindus, which Hindu supremacist groups in coastal Kerala have pursued for over a decade by violently coming down on interactions between Hindu and Muslim classmates, friends and lovers. Public interest is served here only by nurturing diversity in educational institutions: by allowing Hindu, Muslim, Christian students to learn to look beyond their superficial differences and form lasting friendships.

Majoritarian coercion and state-approved violence is wearing the veil of a "debate" over the "patriarchal" hijab. How hypocritical is it to point an accusing finger at the hijab as an offensive symbol when the hijab is India's only woman Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as well as the country's only woman President Pratibha Patil both covered their heads in public - presumably in deference to the patriarchal expectations from women in public life in India? Can In-

dia's imagination then not accommodate a hijab-wearing Muslim woman as the country's Prime Minister or President? Can we not then unequivocally defend the right of Muslim women to attend college without having to be coercively stripped of the hijab?

Whether the hijab is "essential" to Islam or not need not concern us; the fact is that hijabs are widely worn by Muslim girls and women in India and should not be stigmatised or banned. The false equivalence between the ABVP's saffron stoles and the Muslim women's hijabs is dangerous. Muslim women are not wearing hijabs to disrupt colleges or force any other group of students to adopt or give up any dress or practice. They are wearing hijabs with uniforms for the same reason as Sikh men wear turbans, or Hindus wear bindis/tilak/vibhuti with uniforms. The ABVP has never worn saffron turbans to protest against Sikh turbans. They are singling out the Muslim hijab, and their saffron stoles - a political, not religious, garb worn by BJP and RSS followers all over India - are clearly motivated by Islamophobia.

The constitutional freedom to practise religion should mean protection for a woman's freedom to interpret and practise her own religion in keeping with her own conscience. Religious practices cannot be allowed to violate the constitutional rights and liberties of individual citizens in the name of their "freedom to practise religion" (see Sabarimala and instant triple talaq judgments); educational institutions cannot violate the rights of individual students

in the name of their right to administer a school or college.

Pressure of patriarchy Every day, girls and women across communities accommodate their family's patriarchal concerns to go to school or college. "Wear a hijab" is no different from "don't mix with boys, don't fall in love outside the caste or community, dress modestly" injunctions. A young woman will hear from her parents no matter which community she is from. Keeping women wearing hijabs from accessing education does not "empower" them, it only places added hurdles on this already thorny path.

All women feel the pressure of patriarchy on their choice of clothing, no matter if it's a hijab or high heels; burqa or spaghetti-strap tops. Supporting the struggle of women in hijabs in Karnataka does not amount to endorsing the patriarchal notion that deems the pulla or hijab to be modest and other clothes to be "immodest". The point is that no institution should be allowed to shame us or discriminate against us for what we wear. Support women's struggles against the Taliban's imposition of the burqa and ban on "western clothes" in Afghanistan; support women's struggles against Hindu-majoritarian bans on the hijab or ban on "western clothes" in India.

It is worth recalling here the ABVP's long track record of imposing dress codes on women, forbidding jeans and uniforms for the same reason as banning couples on Valentine's Day. Its Hindu supremacist fellow travellers attacked women in 2009 for visiting a pub and dancing in "western" clothes. In the past year, they have held online auctions of Muslim women and made speeches at "Hindu nation conventions" calling for mass sexual enslavement and rape of Muslim women. It is a travesty for constitutional arguments of "public order" and "public interest" to be invoked to allow thugs to tell women what to wear. Today they have achieved a ban on the hijab. Tomorrow the government can falsely equate saffron stoles and women dancing at pubs or wearing skirts and "ban both" to keep public order.

Kavita Krishnan is Secretary, All India Progressive Women's Association, and Politburo member of CPI (ML) Liberation

A self-reliant pharma industry

The production-linked incentive scheme needs to be modified in order to attract the industry



REJI JOSEPH & RAMAA ARUN KUMA

The pharmaceuticals industry is a key sector for the Atmanirbhar Bharat programme. The objective of the Phase-I Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme in this sector was to reduce import dependence on active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), drug intermediates (DIs) and key starting materials (KSMs). This scheme was expected to attract a lot of interest as countries had begun to adopt measures to reduce their dependence on China for APIs. However, the response to this scheme did not meet expectations.

A total of 239 applications were received in two rounds from an industry of over 3,000 firms. Of these, 61 were selected. As 11 beneficiaries withdrew from the scheme, the number reduced to 50 as on December 9, 2021, against the maximum number of 136 beneficiaries as mentioned in the guidelines. No beneficiary was identified in five of the 41 products notified for the scheme.

Creating confidence among investors A recent study conducted by us on this scheme, published as a working paper for the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), shows that India needs a strategy, not just a scheme, to realise the objective of reducing import dependence. There are three areas where this PLI scheme requires changes. Other complementary measures also need to be put in place for India to become self-reliant in APIs, DIs and KSMs.

Firms will invest in production in India if they see a prospect of producing at prices cheaper than the cost of imports. As cheaper imports from China are critical for maintaining their global competence in the export of formulations, investors will face an investment uncertainty if the proposed measures do not ensure the price competitiveness of domestic production. More than half the turnover of this industry is from exports. Imports from China are reported to be cheaper by 35-40% compared to indigenously produced products. So, any strategy aimed at achieving self-reliance should focus on achieving price competency in production.

Technology plays a very crucial role in reducing import dependence as Indian producers have constraints in overcoming some of the advantages of Chinese producers such as scale of operations. Without appropriate technology, APIs/DIs/KSMs manufacturers

in India will not be in a position to beat their Chinese counterparts in pricing. This PLI scheme doesn't have a technology component.

Two, this scheme also insists on new manufacturing facilities, which doesn't make business sense for firms which have idle capacities. Many firms used to produce these products and have wound up production as cheaper imports began to flow from China. Permission to utilise existing but inoperational or underutilised facilities for production would have elicited a better response.

Three, the history of development of the indigenous pharmaceutical industry in India shows the significance of an industrial policy that is in tandem with trade and science and technology policies. This PLI scheme remains a standalone measure; it is not connected to other relevant policy measures.

Nearly three-fourth of the production of pharmaceuticals in India is by MSMEs. Historically, large private sector firms have been interested in formulations, not APIs. As APIs are sold with their chemical names and without branding, large firms have no interest in their production. The production of APIs by large firms, if at all, is largely for captive consumption. The focus of the PLI Phase-I scheme, however, is on large firms. The data we obtained for 13 of the beneficiary firms shows that all of them are large firms, if the definition of MSMEs that existed at the time of announcement of the scheme is used. If the new definition is used, all except one are large firms. It seems like policymakers are interested in taking advantage of efficiencies associated with the scale of operations by encouraging large firms. But it is equally important to include smaller firms which are into the KSMs/DIs/APIs business in a major way.

Involving public sector enterprises

In spite of the two rounds of applications, no beneficiary was identified (or no application was received) in five products, which are all antibiotics. It appears from our interactions with the industry that four of the five products - Neomycin, Gentamicin, Tetracycline and Clindamycin base are APIs that are not used much by the industry. This may be one of the reasons for the lack of enthusiasm by the industry. However, we should note that such APIs may be of great significance for public health. In such cases, public sector enterprises (PSEs) should focus on the production of APIs and their KSMs and DIs. The lead role that PSEs had played in the development of an indigenous pharmaceutical industry in India can never be forgotten.

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STATE OF PLAY

Keeping the flock together

Infighting in the smaller parties of the LDF has dented the image of the Pinarayi-led government

BIJU GOVIND

Last year, 11 political parties, led by the CPI(M), came together to fight the election as the Left Democratic Front (LDF). This strategy helped the Left coalition shatter the State's 40-year record of voting out incumbents. However, since the time of Cabinet formation, the LDF has been facing problems, as its minor constituents are plagued by infighting. Internal strife in the Lokantrik Janata Dal (LJD), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Indian National League (INL) and the Kerala Congress(B) now appears to have robbed the Pinarayi Cabinet 2.0 of its sheen.

In December 2021, LJD rebels led by State general secretary Sheikh P. Harris and State secretaries Angathil Ajaykumar and V. Rajesh Prem quit the party and are now waiting for the wings to join the CPI (M). Before they quit, they were removed from their posts after they sought the sacking of party State president M.V. Shreyams Kumar for failing to take responsibility for the poor performance of the party in the Assembly elections.

The NCP has been in turmoil since former Congress leader P.C. Chacko joined the party before the Assembly polls and was later elevated to the post of State president. The division of electoral spoils, particularly the recent nomination of a member to the Kerala Public Service Commission, has exposed the rift in the party between Mr. Chacko and Minister A.K. Saseendran. The differences have forced CPI(M) State secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan and LDF convenor A. Vijayaraghavan to step in and ask the leaders to resolve their differences and party national president Sharad Pawar to summon them to Mumbai.

In the INL, the factions led by State president A.P. Abdul Wahab and general secretary Kassim Irikur are at loggerheads over sharing of State boards and corporations. In July, supporters of these warring factions came to blows at a leadership meeting in Kochi and the lone party legis-

lator, Ahamad Devarkovil, who secured a Cabinet berth for his party for the first time, had to be escorted out of the house. The party's national president Mohammad Suleman expressed anxiety about the future of the party in Kerala and has asked the State leadership to summon the party working committee. Previously these factions had decided to hold a truce and follow talks of rapprochement initiated by Sunni leader Kanthapuram A.P. Aboobacker Musliyar and the intervention of CPI(M) leaders.

In the Kerala Congress(B), a group of rebels protested against the party's only MLA, K.B. Ganesh Kumar, and elected his sister Usha Mohandas as the new chairperson over a month ago. Subsequently, Mr. Ganesh Kumar said that he was still the official chairman of the party formed by his father, the late R. Balakrishna Pillai.

Out of the 10 no electoral area polls in 2024, the Left government is firmly in the saddle. Unlike the United Democratic Front, whose smaller constituents count the Congress, the CPI (M) apparently gives voice to its allies on issues.

Now CPI (M) leaders are pushing for the merger of the Janata Dal (Secular) and the LJD and the amalgamation of the Kerala Congress(B), the Democratic Kerala Congress and Kerala Congress (Skaria Thangal). Knowing fully well that various interest groups have evolved over the years in tune with Kerala's political diversity, the CPI(M) had decided that four parties would share a maximum of 10 seats between themselves, with each getting a two-and-a-half year term.

Its State leadership feels that it has to strike a balance even though minor parties are slowly fading into irrelevance.

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DATA POINT

Poor turnout in parliamentary committees

Parliamentary committees are pivotal to the functioning of Parliament. When a Bill is referred to a committee, the members consult experts and stakeholders to arrive at an informed opinion about the pros and cons of the Bill. The recommendations from the committees lead to better legislation. However, in the recent past, the share of Bills that reach the committees has dwindled. Worryingly, the attendance of MPs, who are members of various such committees, barely crossed 50% in the last three years. By Jasmin Nihalani

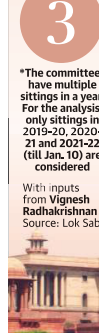
In the analysis, one member-sitting is defined as one member attending one sitting of a committee

The analysis is restricted to Departmentally Related Standing Committees of the Lok Sabha (DRSCs). According to PRS Legislative Research, there are 24 DRSCs that oversee the working of a Ministry. Each DRSC is composed of 31 members: 21 from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha. These DRSCs are constituted for a period of one year.

3

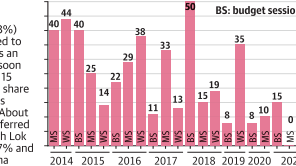
"The committees have multiple sittings in a year. For the analysis, only sittings in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 (till Jan. 10) are considered"

With inputs from Vignesh Radhakrishnan Source: Lok Sabha



1. Committee reference

In the last winter session (WS) of Parliament, four out of 12 Bills (33%) that were introduced were referred to a parliamentary committee. This is an improvement from the 2021 monsoon session (MS) when not one of the 15 Bills introduced was referred. The share of Bills referred to committees has drastically decreased since 2014. About 60% and 71% of the Bills were referred to committees in the 14th and 15th Lok Sabha, whereas this reduced to 27% and 13% in the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha



2. <50% attendance

The chart shows the total number of possible member-sittings and the % share attended. If all members had attended all the sittings, there would be 18,903 member-sittings during the period considered. However, only 8,632 member-sittings were recorded. Hence, the attendance during the period was 46%

Sittings attended 46% Possible member-sittings 18,903

3. House-wise attendance

The chart shows the number of possible member-sittings of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members and the share sittings attended. In the 16th Lok Sabha, if all the Lok Sabha members had attended all the sittings possible, there would be 12,519 member-sittings. However, only 5,992 (48%) member-sittings were recorded. If all the Rajya Sabha members had attended all the sittings possible for them, there would be 6,384 member-sittings. However, only 2,640 (41%) member-sittings were recorded

Lok Sabha Sittings attended 48% Possible member-sittings 12,519

Rajya Sabha Sittings attended 41% Possible member-sittings 6,384

4. Committee-wise attendance

The chart shows the number of possible member-sittings in all committees if all the members had attended all the sittings. The attendance was also small, the number not exceeding 40% in all. Sir William Vincent presented the Select Committee's Report on the limitation Bill.

The Home Member next moved the resolution on the suppression of traffic in women as adopted in the Council of State but with a small amendment. The amendment was also small, the number not exceeding 40% in all. Sir William Vincent presented the Select Committee's Report on the limitation Bill.

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The Hindia

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 8, 1972

'Non-Bengalis are safe in Bangla Desh'

Calcutta, Feb. 7: Sheikh Mujibur Rehman declared here to-day that the life and property of non-Bengalis in Bangla Desh were safe. The Bangla Desh Prime Minister, who was replying to a civil reception by the Corporation of Calcutta at Raj Bhavan, asserted that neither he nor his followers believed in retaliation. He said the Mukti Bahini and the Indian forces who jointly fought against the Pakistani armed forces, did not harm a single non-Bengali. Sheikh Mujib said the life and property of non-Bengalis were safe during the freedom struggle and safer now. He would expect non-Bengalis to regard themselves as citizens of Bangla Desh. The Bangla leader said some "friends" seemed to be more worried about the fate of non-Bengalis in Bangla Desh. He would only advise "these friends to mind their own business" instead of reminding him of his duty towards non-Bengalis.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 8, 1922

Traffic in girls

The business before the Legislative Assembly to-day was short, there being a resolution by the Home Member on White Slave Traffic and a non-official Bill for the amendment of the Criminal Code. The attendance was also small, the number not exceeding 40% in all. Sir William Vincent presented the Select Committee's Report on the limitation Bill.

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Text & Context

NEWS IN NUMBERS



Housing assistance
41,415 The amount in ₹ crore disbursed as interest subsidy to 17.68 lakh beneficiaries so far under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). The PMAY-U launched in June 2015 aims at giving central assistance to States, UTs and Central Nodal Agencies (CNAs) for providing houses to all eligible families and beneficiaries in urban areas within the scheme period up to March 31, 2022. Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said a subsidy of ₹5,320 crore has been disbursed so far. *PTI*

Domestic coal demand
727 In million tonnes, is the requirement of domestic coal for coal-based power generation for 2022-23 according to a reply in Rajya Sabha. Coal Minister Prasad Joshi said that the country's dependence on imports for meeting thermal coal demand had sharply reduced. He said that in the next financial year, the demand would be met from Coal India, Singareni Collieries Company Ltd and captive mines. The minister added that there was no shortage of coal in the thermal power plants of the country. *PTI*

Coast under pressure
15 The percent of coastal areas across the world that remain intact due to pressures caused by human activity, according to a study led by researchers at the University of Queensland (UQ), Australia. Coastal regions containing seagrasses, savannah, and coral reefs had the highest levels of human pressure compared to other coastal ecosystems. The team found that Canada was responsible for the largest expanse of coastal region that stood intact. Other large expanses were located in Russia, Greenland, Chile, Australia, and the United States. *PTI*

Passenger vehicle sales
10 The percentage by which retail sales of passenger vehicles declined year-on-year in January 2022, as companies continue to suffer production loss amid semiconductor shortage, according to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA). Two-wheeler sales last month declined by 13.44% to 10,17,785 units, compared to 11,75,832 units in January 2021. Commercial vehicle sales, however, witnessed a growth of 20.52% last month at 67,763 units, as against 56,227 units this time a year ago. *PTI*

Vaccine donation
2 In million, the number of doses received by Nigeria of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine from Finland, Greece and Slovenia. The delivery is part of a donation pledge by the EU to African countries via the COVAX initiative launched by the World Health Organization in 2020 to distribute vaccines to some of the world's poorest people. The vaccine expires in August 2023, the longest shelf life that Nigeria has received. The Government in December said it would have to destroy about 1 million donated doses after they had expired. *REUTERS*

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

EXPLAINER

RBI's digital currency plans

Why is the Government introducing CBDCs? What will be the risks in the transition to a new monetary system?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL

THE GIST

■ In the 2022-23 Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the introduction of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). A CBDC is no different from physical cash, except that it would exist in a digital form. The CBDC will be held in a digital wallet that is supervised by the RBI.

■ Central banks claim that there is an increasing demand for digital currencies as is evident from the rise of private digital currencies such as bitcoin and the increasing use of digital payments. Central banks also believe that the cost of issuing digital currencies is far lower than the cost of printing and distributing physical cash. The RBI can create and distribute the digital rupee at virtually zero cost.

■ Many fear that people may begin withdrawing money from their bank accounts as digital currencies issued by Central banks become more popular. The withdrawal of bank deposits can also affect the amount of loans created by the banks.

The story so far: In the Budget presented for 2022-23, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the introduction of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and that the digital rupee would give a 'big boost' to digital economy. She had indicated that technologies such as blockchain would be used by the Reserve Bank of India to issue the currency, starting 2022-23. The Reserve Bank had, in July 2021, indicated that it would soon begin work on the 'phased implementation' of the CBDC.

What is a Central Bank Digital Currency?

A CBDC is no different from the cash that we hold in our wallets, except that it exists in a digital form. The CBDC will be held in a digital wallet that is supervised by the Central Bank. In India, it will be the RBI that supervises the digital rupee although it may delegate some power to banks. However, it does seem probable that the RBI will take steps to encourage the use of its digital currency over physical cash. It should be noted that the RBI's digital rupee will not directly replace demand deposits held in banks. Physical cash will continue to be used by banks, and people who wish to withdraw cash from banks can still do so. But they can also opt to convert their bank deposits into the new digital rupee.

Why are central banks issuing digital currencies?

Central banks claim that there is an increasing demand for digital currencies, which they wish to satisfy. They point to the rise of private digital currencies such as bitcoin and also to the increasing use of digital payments as examples of this secular trend. Central bank digital currencies are promised as reliable, sovereign-backed alternatives to private currencies which are volatile and unregulated. Critics, however, note that the demand for private currencies comes primarily from people who have lost faith in fiat currencies issued by Central banks. They argue that governments across the world have been debasing their respective currencies by printing them in excessive amounts, thus forcing many to switch to private currencies whose supply is

limited by design. So the mere digital version of a national currency like the rupee or the U.S. dollar is unlikely to affect the demand for private currencies, they believe.

Central banks also believe that the cost of issuing digital currencies is far lower than the cost of printing and distributing physical cash. The RBI can create and distribute the digital rupee at virtually zero cost since the creation and the distribution of the digital rupee will happen electronically. Another likely reason for the introduction of digital cash may be to bring down the use of physical cash. Unlike physical cash, which is hard to trace, a digital currency that is monitored by the RBI can be more easily tracked and controlled by the Central bank. This feature of digital currencies, however, has raised various concerns regarding their privacy and could slow down their adoption. In fact, it is worth noting that the need for privacy has been one of the primary reasons behind the switch to private digital currencies.

Is CBDC becoming common across the world?

It is worth noting that several countries, including the United States, those in the European Union and China, have been working seriously towards issuing their own Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) in recent years. In October 2020, the Bahamas launched the world's first CBDC. However, a few countries, including Finland and Denmark – have taken a step back and have said they had cancelled efforts to introduce a digital currency, according to CBDC.org.

In a 2017 note, Denmark's central bank indicated that it was "unclear what central bank digital currency would be able to contribute that is not already covered by the current payment solutions."

It added that the potential benefits of introducing CBDC in Denmark were not "assessed to match the considerable challenges that this introduction would present."

What are the risks in adopting digital currencies issued by Central banks?

Many, including various central bankers, fear that people may begin withdrawing money from their bank accounts as digital

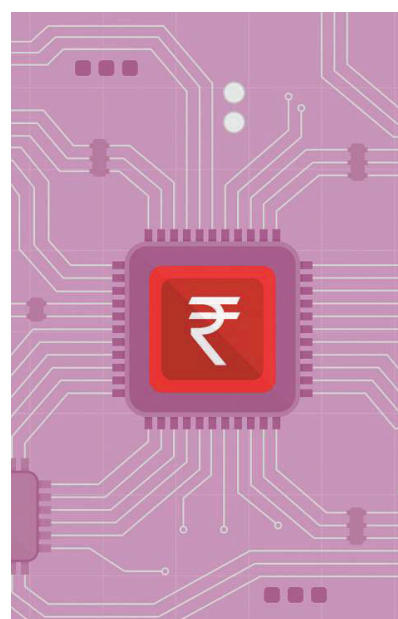
currencies issued by Central banks become more popular. This concern was flagged by the RBI Deputy Governor as well. Remember that many people currently use bank accounts to safely store their cash. When the digital wallet offered by the RBI can serve the same purpose, people could very well begin converting their bank deposits into digital cash.

One thing that could prevent any large flight of capital from bank accounts to digital currencies is the fact that bank accounts, unlike digital currencies, offer interest on deposits. But in developed economies, where interest rates are near zero or even negative, the risk of people rushing their money out of bank accounts and into digital currencies is real. This may not be an immediate concern for banks in India which still offer returns that are positive, at least in nominal terms, to their depositors.

The withdrawal of bank deposits can also affect the amount of loans created by banks. However, this could happen not simply because banks will have fewer cash deposits to lend to borrowers. Contrary to popular belief, banks do not loan out actual cash deposits. Instead, they use cash deposits as a base on which they create a pyramid of electronic loans far in excess of the cash deposits. So banks hold lower amounts of cash in their vaults than what their depositors and borrowers could demand from them anyway. The real reason banks will be able to create fewer loans is that when customers convert their bank money into CBDCs, banks will be forced to surrender at least some cash and will thus lose an even smaller base on which to create loans. Also, when bank customers convert their deposits into digital rupee, the RBI will have to take these liabilities from the books of banks and onto its own balance sheet.

What lies ahead?

There is speculation already that Central banks will cap the amount of money that an individual can hold in the form of CBDCs. This is to prevent the mass withdrawal of deposits from banks. Some even believe that some Central banks, such as the European Central Bank, may impose a negative penalty on their digital currencies. This could be done to force people to spend their digital



currencies and to discourage the withdrawal of deposits from banks that impose negative interest rates.

Central banks may also have to inject fresh money into banks to ensure that the ability of banks to create loans is not affected by depositors' rush to digital currencies. (With inputs from K. Bharat Kumar)

EXPLAINER

The BrahMos deal and India's defence exports

Has the domestic defence manufacturing industry grown? How is the Government making military export sales easier?

DINAKAR PERI

The story so far: On January 28, Philippines signed a \$374.96 million deal with BrahMos Aerospace Pvt. Ltd. for the supply of shore-based anti-ship variant of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. This is the first export order for the missile which is a joint product between India and Russia and also the biggest defence export contract of the country. This adds impetus to the efforts to boost defence exports and meet the ambitious target set by the Government to achieve a manufacturing turnover of \$25 billion or ₹1,75,000 crore including exports of \$35,000 crore in aerospace and defence goods and services by 2025.

What is the BrahMos missile system?

The Philippines contract includes delivery of three BrahMos missile batteries, training for operators and maintainers as well as the necessary Integrated Logistics Support (ILS) package. The coastal defence regiment of the Philippine Marines, which is under the Navy, will be the primary employer of the missile system.

BrahMos is a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya. The missile derives its name from the Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers.

Beginning with an anti-ship missile, several variants have since been developed and it is now capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets and has constantly been improved and upgraded. The missile has been long inducted by the Indian armed forces and the Army recently deployed BrahMos along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh.

The range of the BrahMos was originally limited to 290 kms as per obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) of which Russia was a signatory. Following India's entry into the club in June 2016, plans were announced to extend the range initially to 450 kms and subsequently to 600 kms. BrahMos with extended range upto 450 kms has been tested several times since.

Which other countries are in discussion for the BrahMos missiles?

In addition to the deal signed last week by Philippines, there is another long pending deal under discussion for BrahMos missiles for the Philippines Army which could see progress in the near future, officials said. The procurement for Philippines Army (PA) is included in the Horizon 3 Modernisation programme of Philippines (Year 2023-2027), diplomatic sources had stated.



The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile with increased indigenous content test-fired from the Integrated Test Range, Odisha. *PTI*

While the first export order for BrahMos took a long time, the next order is likely to be concluded soon with negotiations with Indonesia and Thailand in advanced stages. There is reportedly interest for BrahMos from countries in West Asia as well.

Philippines is also looking at several other military procurements from India and South East Asia as the region has emerged as a major focus area for India's defence exports. For instance, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has received

interest from Philippines Coast Guard for procurement of seven Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters and eight Dornier Do-228 aircraft under the \$100mn Line of Credit (LoC) extended by India. Progress on this has been delayed due to the pandemic situation, officials said.

Kanpur based company MKU has supplied Bullet Proof Jackets (BPJ) to Philippines in the past and is now in the race for bigger contracts for BPJs and helmets. In addition, maritime domain and ship building is another potential area for Indian companies in the Philippines.

What is the status of defence exports?

From 2016-17 to 2018-19, the country's defence exports have increased from ₹1,521 crore to ₹10,745 crore, a staggering 700% growth. The value of exports of defence items including major items in Financial Year 2014-15 and 2020-21 was ₹1,940.64 crore and ₹8,434.84 crore respectively. As per data given by the Government, defence exports for 2020-21 stood at ₹8434.84 crore and the export target for financial year 2021-22 was ₹10,000 crore.

There have been a series of measures announced to incentivise and promote domestic defence manufacturing as well as efforts to boost exports which include simplified defence industrial licensing,

relaxation of export controls and grant of No Objection Certificates (NOC), extending Line of Credit (LoC) to foreign countries to import defence products and empowering Defence Attachés in Indian missions abroad to promote defence exports. The draft 'Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020' is expected to be finalised soon.

In December 2020, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the export of indigenous Akash Surface to Air (SAM) missile systems which several countries in South East Asia and West Asia have expressed interest in.

To provide faster approvals for export of major defence platforms, a committee comprising of the Defence Minister, External Affairs Minister and National Security Advisor was set up. The Defence Ministry had said in December 2020, that "This Committee would authorise subsequent exports of major indigenous platforms to various countries. The Committee would also explore various available options including the Government-to-Government route."

In the last few years, India has put out a range of military hardware on sale which includes various missile systems, Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), helicopters, warship and patrol vessels, artillery guns, tanks, radars, military vehicles, electronic warfare systems in addition to other weapons systems.

THE GIST

■ On January 28, Philippines signed a \$374.96 million deal with BrahMos Aerospace Pvt. Ltd. for the supply of shore-based anti-ship variant of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. This is the biggest defence export contract of the country.

■ BrahMos is a joint venture between India's DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya. Beginning with an anti-ship missile, several variants have since been developed and it can now be launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets.

■ From 2016-17 to 2018-19, the country's defence exports have registered a staggering 700% growth. There have been a series of measures announced to promote domestic defence manufacturing as well as efforts to boost exports.



Wiping out: President Joe Biden speaks about a counterterrorism raid carried out by U.S. special forces that killed Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. • AP

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The theory of the Islamic State

The IS will be defeated only when its ideology is overcome in a region free of interventions — a tall ask for the moment

STANLY JOHNY

THE GIST

■ The IS is fundamentally different from earlier terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. It took insurgency a step further. It started holding on to territories it captured, established a proto-state in those territories and called it the Islamic State. It declared a Caliphate, trying to revive an Islamic institution that ceased to exist following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. This type of violent jihadism comes from the puritanical interpretation of Islam which has echoes from Salafi Islam. Yet, there are Salafi organisations whose members dedicate themselves to a "pure" Islamic way of life and have nothing to do with violence.

■ The IS has stood opposed to everything modern liberalism offers — individual freedom, equality and liberty. The IS also denies critical thinking, demanding only loyalty to its cause. At the same time, the IS has been able to exploit the contradictions within modern societies. The identity crisis of Muslims in liberal societies, is what the IS tapped into using modern communication technologies. It offered a violent, alternative, vengeful vision to trap these people, while in Muslim-majority societies, western aggression was used as the propaganda for recruitment.

■ Even though the leader is dead, the objective conditions that led to the rise of the IS remain intact in West Asia. The IS will be defeated only when its ideology is defeated.

On February 3, 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden announced that the leader of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS), Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, died in a U.S. counterterrorism operation in the Idlib province, in northwestern Syria. In this article published on November 8, 2019, in the context of the assassination of the former IS leader Baghdadi, Stanly Johny explains how a complete defeat of the Islamic State is possible only by tackling its ideological and organisational apparatus.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. But the Islamic State (IS) is not. The death of its "Caliph" is certainly a blow to the terrorist group. But the IS is ideologically stronger to survive the fall of its leader, and the geopolitical conditions that led to the rise of the group remain more or less intact. Much has been discussed about these conditions. Geopolitical tensions, civil conflicts and foreign interventions have been a source of power for jihadist groups such as the al-Qaeda and the IS. Remember, Osama bin Laden was a nobody before the Americans and their allies started bankrolling and training the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet Red Army. The Taliban, which rose to power from the civil war-stricken Afghanistan was hosting the al-Qaeda when it carried out the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Virginia. The al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) rose from the ruins of the Iraq that was destroyed by the American invasion. And the AQI morphed into today's IS, exploiting the chaos Syria fell into in the wake of the civil war. While these are the objective conditions behind the rise of terrorist-jihadism, what is its subjectivity? Do these groups have an agency?

Brothers with arms

Though the al-Qaeda and the IS are cut from the same cloth, there are tactical and strategic differences in their operations. The al-Qaeda was basically a hit-and-run organisation. The IS changed the landscape of terrorism. The group would carry out attacks and then retreat to the deserts, caves or mountains where it was hiding. It did not expose itself to the conventional military might of its enemies. Barring certain pockets that al-Qaeda-affiliated groups now control, such as Syria's Idlib, the group largely remains a hit-and-run organisation. The IS, however, took insurgency a step further. It started holding on to territories it captured, established a proto-state in those territories and called it the Islamic State. While the al-Qaeda also wants to create a global emirate, the IS took steps to implement its world-view. It declared a Caliphate, trying to revive an Islamic institution that ceased to exist following the disintegration of the

Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. And by doing so, Baghdadi tried to place himself in the long list of Islamic Caliphs, the rightful leaders of the *ummah* (the global Muslim community).

Violent jihadism is inherently anti-modern and very unpopular among Muslims across the world. It is because of their unpopularity that these groups are involved in extreme violence. With their asymmetrical barbarity, jihadist groups have sought to overcome not just the shortcomings in their military capabilities but also the lack of their political capital. For Baghdadi's group, violence was both a means and an end in itself. The puritanical interpretation of Islam by the IS has echoes from Salafi Islam. The Salafis follow the "pious forefathers" of Islam. For them, man cannot interpret the holy book or the Hadith. But Salafism itself is not a monolith. It can be a spiritual way of life. There are Salafi organisations whose members dedicate themselves to a "pure" Islamic way of life and have nothing to do with violence. But for groups such as the al-Qaeda and the IS, Salafism is a political ideology to attain power. And since they cannot attain power through mass movements, popular elections or revolutions, they turn to violent jihadism as a vehicle to reach that goal, which makes them Salafi-jihadists.

'Pure' Islamic State

Unlike the al-Qaeda, the IS's operations were not confined to carrying out suicide attacks in the West or West-backed countries. It wanted to create a "pure" Islamic State where the "true" believers can come and live. These "true believers", for the IS, were Sunni Muslims alone and who followed the IS's dictates. The Shias are in this worldview, considered "rafidha" (rejectionists, who "reject" the first three Caliphs of the Sunni Islam), and therefore merit second class status. In areas under their control, the minority communities had to pay minority tax to the state for protection. They could not publicly practise their religion. In the IS worldview, homosexuals were to be thrown off high-ribs, the fingers of smokers had to be chopped off, slavery permitted and music and films forbidden. The concept of "nation-states" is also alien to the IS worldview, for whom the world is the Caliphate and where the *ummah* should be living under the leadership of their rightful Caliph.

In effect, the IS has stood opposed to everything modern liberalism offers — individual freedom, equality, liberty are all completely denied by the group. The IS also frowns upon and denies critical thinking, demanding only loyalty to its cause. At the same time, where the IS succeeded is in exploiting the contradictions within modern societies — the contradictions that

were swept under the carpet by the roadroller of nationalism. The identity crisis of Muslims, especially young Muslims, in liberal societies, is what the IS tapped into using modern communication technologies. It offered a violent, alternative, vengeful vision to trap these people, while in Muslim-majority societies, western aggression was used as propaganda for recruitment. The IS managed to do this while holding on to territories that it captured within Iraq and Syria. It was for the first time in decades that a group claimed to have established a caliphate by erasing the borders of modern states (Iraq and Syria in this case) and by calling upon followers to migrate. The IS succeeded in attracting tens of thousands of people to its "Caliphate" — from Tunisia to India and the U.S. It was also opposed to the diversity of Islam termed Shias, Ismailis, Ahmadiyas and Alawites as non-Muslims. Syncretic traditions of Islam such as Sufism were branded anti-Islam by the IS. Even if Sunni Muslims did not buy into the IS version of Islam, they could be excommunicated (takfir) and killed according to its worldview. It is no surprise that most of the IS's victims in the Arab world were Muslims.

Problems in the anti-IS fight

The IS' Caliphate has now been destroyed and its leader gone. But there are two problems in the fight against the IS. One, the objective conditions that led to the rise of the IS remain intact in West Asia and the larger Arab world. The group still has affiliates and arms in several parts of the world such as Afghanistan, Egypt and Nigeria. The recent Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria is threatening even the limited advances made in the fight against the IS. The Shia-Sunni sectarianism that the IS tried to exploit is still burning across West Asia.

Two, the IS will be defeated only when its ideology will be defeated, which is a tall ask. The IS is not an organisation that was created by "western imperialism", but an organisation that used the chaos created by "imperialism".

It will continue to do so even after all these setbacks — this includes even the rump of the IS. The group does not need a standing army of thousands of soldiers to attack civilians through suicide blasts. For them, violence is linked to their survival. If the IS goes silent, it becomes irrelevant in the global jihadist landscape and all its talk of the expansionary Caliphate will come to an end. It is like Macbeth. The group will retain its need to kill in order to survive.

To stop the group, its organisational and ideological apparatus has to be taken down in a region that is free of foreign interventions and repressions. For now, this looks a distant possibility.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

"Good morning, sir."

"Goodmorning, when did you return from Guntur?"

"Yesterday, sir. The conference was very good. I don't know how can I describe it."

"Was it so good? I am glad you liked the conference. By the way, you don't say 'I don't know how can I describe it'. It should be 'I don't know how I can describe it'. Other examples: I don't know how you are able (not 'how are you able') to do so many things. I am not sure why he is learning (not 'why is he learning')."

He did not tell me where he was going (not 'where was he going').

I asked him when he would return from Madras (not 'when would he return from Madras').

She told me how the journey was (not 'how was the journey').

"Sir, we do say, 'Where are you going?'"

"Yes, we do. That's a direct question. When it is reported, we change the structure. Example:

She said to me "Where are you going? She asked me where I was going."

In indirect speech you don't retain the original structure "Is this clear?"

"Yes, sir. The trouble with me is I hardly have time to read some good book."

"You must find time to read good books. By the way, you say I hardly have time to read any good book. Any is used with the negative generally."

I don't have any money.

She does not have any sense.

There is hardly any milk in the jug.

He does not have any friends.

"Some" is used in affirmative sentences.

Please get me some bread.

He is not totally bald: he has some hair on his head.

You must have some consideration for me.

There must be some mistake.

She bought some oranges.

He asked for some money: I gave him some. He had asked a number of people earlier. They did not give him any.

I hope you understand the difference now.

"Yes sir. Sir, what is the difference between 'economical' and 'economic'?"

"Economic" implies careful and frugal management of expenditure. 'Economic' means 'pertaining to the science of economics'. 'Economical' is related to economy or thrift and 'economic' to 'economics'.

The two words are indiscriminately used by bad writers and speakers. You can talk about economic policies of the government.

India would be thoroughly misunderstood if a government representative said that we are offering economical assistance to some country!

"That would be awful. I must go now, sir. My friend will be awaiting for me. We want to see a movie."

"Have a nice time. By the way, your friend will be waiting for you and not awaiting for you. 'Await' is never followed by *for*. Examples:

I await his arrival.

I await his decision.

I am waiting for his decision.

I am waiting for his reply.

I am waiting for his transfer.

I am awaiting his transfer.

Well, your friend must be waiting for you. You may go now.

"Thank you sir. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

February 7 was Charles Dickens's birth anniversary. How well do you know the literary celebrity?

1 This place was given a fictional name in Dickens' last novel, which remained unfinished. This place was also used as a setting for parts of *The Pickwick Papers* and *Great Expectations*. Which place are we talking about?

2 When Dickens was 12 years old, he was sent to a factory. It was because of his experience there that he focused on child labour in many of his works. What factory was this?

3 What was Dickens' pen name for his early pieces?

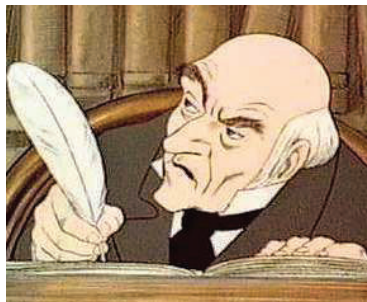
4 A great writer who went for a reading by Dickens left feeling most unimpressed. In his report about the event, he criticised Dickens' narration, voice and pronunciation. He wrote: "Every passage Mr D. read, with the exception of those I have noted, was rendered with a degree of ability far below what his reading reputation led us to expect." Who was this writer?

5 "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." In which famous film by Christopher Nolan were these lines from *A Tale of Two Cities* used? The film was also inspired by the book.

6 *A Tale of Two Cities*, set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, was one of the two works of historical fiction by Dickens. What was the other, set against the backdrop of the Gordon Riots?

7 What is Dickens' connection with Kolkata?

8 Which one of his works was Dickens' favourite?



Which film is this still from?

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

Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Mangeshi, in North Goa district. The surname, in fact, was adopted from the village's name by her father Deenanath. 2. Ghulam Haider, 3. Khemchand Prakash. The song is from the 1949 film *Mahal*, 4. Pradeep. It was composed by C. Ramchandra. The song was homage to the Indian soldiers who fought against China in the 1962 war, 5. Three. K.S. Chithra has won six, more than any other female singer, 6. They were both recipients of the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour — Subbulakshmi in 1998 and Lata in 2001.

Early Birds: Arundhati Ratnaparkhi Keerthi Purushottaman Kanika Barman Mayuri Udupa Amrutha

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
 RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

HER RIGHT TO LEARN

Karnataka government invoking a law to ban hijab makes the space in a school separate and unequal. The court should step in

BY BACKING THE "ban" on wearing the hijab to colleges, the BJP government in Karnataka violates the fundamental freedoms of students — and promotes an exclusionary code of public behaviour. Instead of finding ways to defuse the confrontation between an Udupi college and its students, the state government has doubled down and invoked provisions of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983, and directed colleges to ensure that "clothes which disturb equality, integrity and public law and order should not be worn". This is dubious framing — and one that does not stand the test of the Constitution, which guarantees citizens the right to equality, the right to education, and the right to practise their religion.

The potential consequence of the Karnataka action could be to force young women, who face enormous odds to reach the gates of schools and colleges, to retreat from classrooms to the confines of their homes or religious institutions. The BJP's much-vaunted commitment to girls' education (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao) and the rights of minority women that it championed in the legislative assembly triple talaq rings hollow when its government can so recklessly risk the hard-fought gains of educating Muslim girls. The common sense of coexistence by which millions of Indians live their lives shares nothing with the hardline secularism, say, the French republic. Here, secular spaces like schools and colleges regularly see displays of religiosity. Wearing religion on the sleeve — from the woman on the street to the highest functionaries of the government (though the state must be held to higher standards of neutrality) — is part and parcel of daily life. Ironically, the BJP often dismisses secularism as an affliction of the *ancien regime* it has uprooted. That a dispute over a uniform can lead to colleges shutting out students of a community suggests that even the pretext of secularism is being weaponised to target minorities. The discriminatory logic of such a polarising campaign was evident in a Kundapur college, which allowed protesting women students inside the campus but herded them into separate classrooms. The Indian republic's success in resolving the competing claims on public spaces and resources from various communities might be up for debate, but it has never been guilty of sanctioning a segregation of spaces. Separate can never be equal in a democracy.

Courts have spoken on the rights of an individual, the rights of a community and the freedom of choice. It is up to the courts again to step in and draw the line. The anti-hijab campaign may be part of a larger agenda of polarisation in coastal Karnataka where the ruling BJP has ratcheted up anti-Muslim, anti-Christian rhetoric and the Congress has abdicated and even ceded space to hardline groups. Children at the barricades of their schools and colleges faced off over identity, being herded into separate rooms, doesn't deepen democracy, it aggravates many a risk. The hope is that the court, the custodian of rights, takes note.

THE CM FACE

Congress picks Channi for Punjab but its explanation for the choice is self-defeating

RAHUL GANDHI'S ANNOUNCEMENT on Sunday that Charanjit Singh Channi would be the CM face of the Congress in Punjab marks a departure from the party's tradition of declaring the leader after the election. By projecting Channi, the incumbent chief minister, the Congress hopes to dispel the impression that the party is a divided house and enlists cadres to campaign hard. It also banks on the choice helping the party tap into the Dalit community that constitutes over 30 per cent of Punjab's electorate — Channi is the first Dalit CM of the state.

Speaking at the rally, Rahul Gandhi said Channi was the choice of people — "It's the decision of Punjab. It's not Rahul Gandhi's decision," he said. The Congress had undertaken a social media poll on the leadership question and Channi polled the highest number of votes. However, the Congress culture since the time of India Gandhi has been for the party high command to decide the CM even when the party under the incumbent CM won a clear mandate — for instance, when a popular Sheila Dikshit won a third consecutive term in Delhi in 2008 she was made to wait by the central leadership before she was nominated for office. In many instances, the high command imposed its nominee overruling the choice of the legislative party or changed the CM at its whim. This culture, which allowed the party to set the impression that the chief minister held office at the pleasure of the high command and not the legislators, undermined the credibility of state leaders and weakened the office of the CM.

Ironically, Channi's appointment as CM last year was forced on the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) by the party high command. It is now known that although the CLP's preference was Sunil Jakhar, a former state unit chief and legislator, Channi got to the seat because of Gandhi's intervention. In this backdrop, Gandhi's claim of listening to the people's voice is a little too rich. It's more likely that an embattled party leadership, cornered by the ambitious state chief, Navjot Singh Sidhu, and the AAP's projection of a CM face, found a way out in "people". Predictably, Gandhi harped on the social background of Channi to claim that the choice was made also because "the people wanted a chief minister from a poor family, one who understands poverty and the pain of the poor". This poveritarian logic would rule out many Congress leaders, including Gandhi himself, from occupying public office. As the party's chief campaigner, Gandhi ought to have taken stronger ownership of the decision to choose Channi, not signal a political distance from the choice.

CLASS OF 2022

U-19 win in West Indies points to India's robust cricket infrastructure, but transition to senior level is not easy

THE FUTURE OF Indian cricket is not just glowing, it is sparkling. The reclaiming of the U-19 crown in the West Indies illustrated not just the country's depth of talent but also a streak of ruthlessness that made their game a cut above the rest. They looked skilled and adequate, operating in a league above their competitors. Most of them hadn't played any serious cricket in the last two years, most of them had barely travelled outside their country. At the start of the group stage, a clutch of important players tested positive for Covid-19. Yet, at no moment during the tournament did they panic.

India's domination of junior cricket — they have won four of the last eight editions, besides losing two finals — owes to a robust structure that ensures no good talented youngster slips through the system. That a Shaikh Rashed from Guntur, whose father did odd jobs to sustain his son's dreams, could access quality coaching demonstrates how efficient the structure is and how extensive the scouting system is. There is, obviously, eye-popping talent too. Left-arm seamer Ravi Kumar already has the in-swing to the right-handed batsmen that takes years to master. Dinesh Bana's wicket-keeping is purists' joy. Rashed's composure under duress was supreme; left-arm spinner Nishant Sindhu's orthodox was like a breath of fresh air. Tracking them — not just these names, but the whole team — could be a rewarding experience. After all, it's in the ICC World Cup that the best of talents have advanced their arrival. The lineage is rich — from Yuvraj Singh and Mohammad Kaif to Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja to name a few who have blossomed into fine cricketers at the senior level.

But there are those who have fallen by the side, offering a cautionary tale that U-19 World Cup wins don't necessarily guarantee fruitful careers. Among 178 cricketers who have played junior World Cups for India, only 51 have gone on to play international cricket.



JANAKI NAIR

KARNATAKA IS BEING dealt fatal blows, as new wounds are being inflicted on a population already laid low not just by devastating medical and economic crises, but by the impatient haste with which the Hindu Rashtra is being birthed. The heightened war cries about the prohibition of hijab in the *sarkari* classroom, which has set the state aflame, are further signs of the new directions in which the state leaders are carrying out, with the zeal of new converts, the mandate of their masters in Delhi/Nagpur. The chief minister himself has aided and emboldened the actions of groups who initiate actions which the political and judicial establishment are expected to endorse. He has, on at least two recent occasions, justified the actions of those (usually young men) who are "reacting" to "provocations". The list of "provocative" red tags gets longer each day. These pertain to (minorities) finding jobs in Covid war rooms, (minorities) praying together in private places, (mixed) couples travelling together in public transport, humour, comments on the ironies of Brahmin *madhuphathis* who visit Dalit homes, people's personal food habits, and now, of course, (Muslim women's) sartorial preferences.

This moment, however, marks a new turn. Following the prohibition by college managements in coastal Karnataka (and now elsewhere as well) of the use of the hijab in classrooms by young women students, BJP leaders and ministers in particular have taken great pride in being the purveyors of "secularism" in the classroom. Girls (and now boys) have been conveniently added) should come to the college to study and not to assert their cultural/ethnic/religious identities or differences. At first glance, this seems like a blameless injunction — only the unmarked "secular" citizen/subject classroom can engage in the true pursuit of knowledge, and buttress a constitutional democracy such as ours.

The richness of the irony arises when we consider those who make these utterances. Since seizing power in 2019, the BJP in



ASHOK KHEMKA

INDIA IS a quasi-federation, with its executive organised between the Centre and the states. Under Article 309 of the Constitution, the Centre and states are empowered to erect and maintain services for running their administration. Both the Centre and the states exercise full control over their services independently of each other. However, to preserve unity between them, Sardar Patel envisioned the creation of the All-India Services. Unlike a central service or state service, an All-India Service is compositely administered under Article 312. While recruitment and allocation to a cadre (state) are determined by the Centre, the states determine the work and posting. Hence, All-India Services are carefully balanced between the Centre and the states. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), and Indian Forest Service (IFS) are the three All-India Services.

The IAS is popularly seen as the crown jewel of all services, occupying the highest bureaucratic berths in the district (district magistrate), the state (chief secretary), and the centre (cabinet secretary). Being an All-India Service, officers of the IAS are posted to the states, from where they are deputed to the Centre with the tripartite consent of the officer, the state government and the central government. However, the proposed amendment to Rule 6 of the IAS (Cadre) Rules 1954, seeks to do away with the con-

In the tumult over hijab, it shouldn't be forgotten that battle of Muslim women is for right to education

The richness of the irony arises when we consider those who make these utterances. Since seizing power in 2019, the BJP in Karnataka has strained every nerve to proceed at a fast and furious pace towards the larger RSS goal of creating a Hindu Rashtra: Passing the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020, with the conspicuous and unprecedented conduct of a "cow puja" in the legislature building, or ramming through the legislative assembly the ironically-named Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill 2021, which goes much further than other similar acts in interfering in interfaith marriages and targeting institutions whose licences can be suspended on mere suspicion of "conversion". Or when personnel belonging to at least two police stations, Kaup (Dakshina Kannada) and Vijayapura (Bijapur), flaunted "saifon" clothing on police premises on Vijayadashami day (Oct 15) in 2021. Or in the state government order for a weeklong performance of "surya namaskar" in pre-university colleges across the state, in commemoration of 75 years of Independence.

The legislative overdrive continued in the quick and unanimous passage of the Karnataka Religious Structures (Protection) Act in September 2021. It was prompted by the belated fulfilment of a 2009 Supreme Court order to demolish 93 illegal religious structures identified at public places, including roads, junctions and parks, in Mysore district. The new act was "considered necessary to provide for protection of religious constructions on a public place constructed before the date of commencement of this Act, in order to protect communal harmony and not to hurt the religious sentiments of the public..." while allowing the district administration to allow "religious activity in such protected structures subject to custom, law, usage and any other conditions as may be laid down by the State Government from time to time". Mysuru-Kodagu MP Pratap Simha helpfully clarified matters when he reportedly said, "Churches and mosques cannot be weighed equally with temples as they are just prayer halls".

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Public space and public discourse in Karnataka, in short, is saturated with neo-Hinduness. The invocation by Home Minister, Araga Jnanendra, of the "secular" space of the classroom is, therefore, not just ironic, but diabolical in intent. It "rescues" the Muslim woman, oppressed by a patriarchal Islam of which the hijab is the prime marker, from her captors. Having for so long and loudly proclaimed, along with C T Ravi, Pratap Simha, K S Eshwarappa, Tejasvi Surya and myriad other elected BJP MPs and MLAs, that Hindu culture was in danger, the honourable home minister, while fearlessly sporting a red mark on his forehead, offers Muslim women "secular" protection in the classroom.

Jnanendra had boasted just last week that if he had attended classes and been a good student in school and college, he would not have been able to build a political career. He added that he now had ample time for "research". But unfortunately, logic and reason may prove elusive while in power: Will Jnanendra now exhort Sikh students to lose their turbans before entering the classrooms? Alternatively, to show off his new "secular" credentials, would Jnanendra put compulsory *surya namaskar* on par with "Allahu Akbar", which after all only means "God is most Great"? Or insist that Hindu foreheads remain clean?

Make no mistake: Muslim women's fight is for their right to education, a hard-won place in the classroom, that neither the Hindu or Muslim patriarchy can be allowed to snatch away. Whether Muslim women choose to wear the hijab or not — and let us be clear that both of these can be subversive actions at this time — they deserve their space as citizens of this democratic republic. Already reeling from the effects of Covid on learning, they must be enabled to return safely to their studies, fearing neither their new "protectors" nor their adversaries.

The writer taught history at Centre for Historical Studies, JNU

UPSETTING THE BALANCE

Proposed changes to cadre rules will strain Centre-state relations, dent trust

Because the top bureaucratic brass is composed almost entirely of IAS officers, the states — especially the opposition states — fear losing their key officers to conscribed central deputation. To protect their administration from becoming paralysed, states may resort to altering their Transaction of Business Rules to divert IAS officers of key posts in the state, and vesting the same with the state officers.

sent of both the officer and the state government and has drawn a sharp wedge between the Centre and the states along political lines.

At the outset, stripping away the consent of the state government is a move towards greater centralisation in the IAS, bringing it functionally closer to a central service. This has the potential to disrupt the delicate balance between the Centre and states and the sui generis character of the IAS as a composite service, and render Article 312 as a dead letter law.

The reason for the amendment, as declared by the central government, is to ensure adequate availability of IAS officers for central deputation, which at present is "not sufficient to meet the requirement at the Centre". Therefore, the states have been mandated to ensure adequate availability of IAS officers under the Central Deputation Reserve. However, the central government has gone beyond its declared reason and stretched the cadre rules to also allow for appropriation of IAS officers "in public interest". Bereft of any limitation on what constitutes "public interest", the Centre has virtually conferred upon itself the plenipotentiary power to pull out any number of IAS officers from the states.

Because the top bureaucratic brass is composed almost entirely of IAS officers, the states — especially the opposition states — fear losing their key officers to con-

scribed central deputation. To protect their administration from becoming paralysed, states may resort to altering their Transaction of Business Rules to divert IAS officers of key posts in the state, and vesting the same with the state officers. Alternately, states may conjure provisional berths for retired bureaucrats to re-enter administration as special appointees, outside the cadre rules.

As it is, the implementation of cadre rules is left to the mercy of the states, with the Centre showing a disinclination to enforce them. Some states openly flout the cadre rules with impunity in matters of postings and transfers. The Civil Services Board has been rendered impotent, non-cadre officers are being unilaterally appointed to IAS cadre posts, and the minimum tenure guarantee is openly flouted.

The proposed amendment to the IAS cadre rules portends ill for Sardar Patel's vision of the All-India Services as a unifying link between the Centre and the states. Not only could it allow distrust to fester in Centre-state relations, it would also result in the functional depreciation of the IAS in the states. It is important for the states to be reassured that they are in control of their administration, and for the service to not lose its relevance.

The writer is a senior IAS officer. Views are personal



FEBRUARY 8, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

AIR FORCE CRASH

TWENTY-THREE MILITARY PERSONNEL and crew were killed when an Air Force Packet aircraft crashed in blinding snow and rain in the Lohi Malhar hilly area in Kathua, 136 km northeast of Jammu. Police and rescue parties, which went to the accident site, found 15 mutilated bodies. Search for more bodies was abandoned because of approaching darkness, and heavy rain and snowfall. According to a senior Air Force official, the aircraft fell Pathankot in the morning for Leh with supplies of troops in forward areas and servicemen returning from leave. An official source said the crash occurred when the pi-

lot on encountering rough weather tried to return to base but lost radio contact. A police picket which saw the aircraft crash informed the Kathua police.

INDIRA CRITICISES US

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi has lashed out at the US for its utter lack of understanding of the Indian position. In an interview in the latest issue of *US World and News Report*, Mrs Gandhi criticised Washington's decision to sell F-16 fighters to Pakistan as the latest demonstration of this lack of understanding. She charged that the sale adds "tremendously to our burdens and it has brought dangers and

pressures much closer to our borders".

OPPOSITION UNITY

Representatives of three Opposition parties talked of joint action rather than merger. A coordination committee set up by the Janata Party, the Congress (S) and the Lok Dal to discuss the modalities for their merger concluded its day-long session with the realistic plan of joint action based on a common minimum programme. Biju Patnaik, convener of the front, said that they did not want to repeat the mistake of 1977 by talking of a merger first. The Janata Party was formed but there was no unity of mind and vision, he said.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The Great Power rivalry

As Russia-China and US-led blocs consolidate their global coalitions, it will get harder for Delhi to tread the middle ground



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

IF LAST WEEK was about celebrating the new "united front" between China and Russia, this week is about fixing the main chink — Germany to be specific — in the Western coalition against Moscow and Beijing. If the construction of the Sino-Russian united front has been dazzling, equally impressive has been the rebuilding and expansion of US alliances.

As both sides consolidate their global coalitions, it will get harder to be in the middle. India's abstention at the United Nations Security Council last week on the question of debating Ukraine is a reminder that Delhi's space in the renewed bloc politics is shrinking. The example of Germany, which is struggling to sustain its self-appointed role as a bridge between the West and Russia, might be instructive for the Indian strategic community.

Meeting in Beijing last Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping proclaimed that the "friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation." This week, the German chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is meeting President Joe Biden at the White House, will be under enormous pressure to reassure Washington that Berlin has not gone soft on Russia and is not abandoning its NATO partners. Meanwhile, the French president is travelling to Moscow to explore the possibilities for de-escalation of the crisis in Ukraine.

Putin's summit with Xi highlighted the convergence between the two sides on a range of issues from NATO expansion to the AUKUS alliance. Those familiar with the twists and turns in the Sino-Russian relationship over the last seven decades — allies in the 1950s, enemies in the 1960s and 1970s, and partners again in the 2000s — will point to potential contradictions in the new united front.

Despite their problems with the US, both Moscow and Beijing want a productive partnership with Washington. Both Russia and China want to leverage the united front to negotiate better terms from America. Washington, in turn, wants to explore the cleavages between Moscow and Beijing. Biden's outreach to Putin last year was based on the premise that the US could build focus on the challenges from China in the Indo-Pacific if there was a reasonable relationship with Russia in Europe. Putin is trying to take advantage of that proposition by raising the stakes in Europe. Xi, who challenges US primacy in Asia, continues to find ways to limit confrontation with the US. If Putin is focused on military means to rewrite the European security order with the US, Xi is focused on the economic means to alter the US ties.

Xi is making a big play for the Wall Street bankers who see merits in engagement with Beijing, and lobby Washington to scale down the confrontation with China. Washington too is warning that if Beijing backs Moscow in the Ukraine crisis, there might be major financial costs to Chinese companies. US officials have pointed out that the word "Ukraine" does not figure in the 5,000-word document and suggested that Beijing might not go all the way with Moscow in Europe.

Equally important is the underestimation of American resilience in Moscow and Beijing. It has been easy for Russian and



C R Sankaranarayanan

Chinese propagandists to harp on "American and Western decline." The chaos of American domestic politics and the continuing arguments between the US and its European partners tend to amplify the dissonance within the West. It would be a terrible blunder for Putin and Xi to mistake Western disagreements for strategic divergence.

The last few years have seen the quick emergence of a new US consensus on challenging China despite the polarisation of the American political class. On the Russian question, there is no difference across the US political divide.

The idea that the US can't risk a two-front challenge with Russia and China is popular but mistaken. The US has enough military resources to address aggression by both Moscow and Beijing. Equally misleading is the notion that the US retreat from Afghanistan reflects Washington's weakened political will. Biden's decision to pull out of Afghanistan was rooted in the recognition that the time is now to move away from counterinsurgency in the Greater Middle East to focus on the conflict with other great powers.

Despite the dramatic rise of China and its new partnership with Russia, the united front can't really match the comprehensive national power of the US and its allies. Russia does not figure in the top 10 world economies today; seven of the countries among the 10 — Japan, Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, Canada, and South Korea — are allies of the US, which has been at the top of the heap for a century and more. India is now a strategic partner of the US and faces growing challenges from China, which is second in the hierarchy.

When he took charge in January 2021, Biden and his team began with the proposition that America's greatest advantage was in its long-standing alliances in Europe and Asia. Unlike Trump, who trashed US alliances, Biden and his team focused on refurbishing and expanding them.

Asia. Biden has revived the Anglosphere (the AUKUS alliance with the UK and Australia), elevated the Quad to the summit level, and reached out to the ASEAN. In Europe, the US is getting its NATO ducks in a row. Britain has taken the lead in the diplomatic

Where does the return of bloc politics leave Delhi?

India's approach will depend upon the new dynamic between the two coalitions as well as its own relations with China, Russia, and the US.

With the return of great power rivalry coinciding with India's deteriorating ties with China, Delhi now stands closer than ever before to the West. The meeting of the Quad foreign ministers in Australia this week and the planned summit of their leaders in Japan during May will give some clues to India's future navigation between the great powers.

confrontation with Russia. French President Emmanuel Macron, who declared NATO "brain dead" a couple of years ago, is coordinating with the US in dealing with the Ukraine crisis. Berlin, which seemed unwilling to challenge Moscow and Beijing given Germany's large commercial stakes in Russia and China, is likely to show greater solidarity with the US on both fronts this week.

If the Chinese aggression in Asia helped the US to reboot its regional alliances and draw in new partners like India, Putin's brinkmanship on Ukraine could achieve what Russia wants to prevent — the strengthening of the NATO alliance.

Beyond the rebuilding of US alliances, Washington has an important lever that is bound to come into play sooner than later. It is the exploitation of the domestic political vulnerabilities of "Czar Putin" and "Emperor Xi." While their strong-men shines bright in the face of perennial chaos in Western democracies, there is no escaping their brittleness.

Where does the return of bloc politics leave Delhi? India's approach will depend upon the new dynamic between the two coalitions as well as its own relations with China, Russia, and the US. With the return of great power rivalry coinciding with India's deteriorating ties with China, Delhi now stands closer than ever before to the West. The meeting of the Quad foreign ministers in Australia this week and the planned summit of their leaders in Japan during May will give some clues to India's future navigation between the great powers.

India would like to see Russia find an accommodation with the West in Europe; but if Russia comes to blows with the West in Europe, Delhi is unlikely to let Moscow undermine its growing partnership with the US and its allies. Delhi has no power to nudge Moscow towards Washington, nor does it have a veto over Russia's strategic partnership with China. Moscow too can't inhibit Delhi's new realism in the rearrangement of India's great power relations.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The summit between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in Beijing on Friday sends a strong message to the West that China and Russia are displaying strategic convergence on a number of key global issues." —DAWN

Wrong diagnosis

The budget lost an opportunity to revive growth by not raising spending on social welfare, agriculture and rural infrastructure



HIMANSHU

A DAY BEFORE the Union budget, two important documents were released on the state of the Indian economy. The first was the revised estimates of national accounts for 2020-21. According to these estimates, the economic growth rate slowed down from 8.3 per cent in 2016-17 to only 3.7 per cent in 2019-20, the year before the pandemic. The downward revision of the 2019-20 estimate implies that the slowdown in the economy was worse than what we knew. It is certainly a tribute to the smartness of the government to have brought down the growth rate of the economy to less than half the level in 2016-17 in just three years when there were no droughts, no financial crisis, no external shocks or any other act of God! The second document was the Economic Survey which takes this smartness to next level by its analysis that the crisis in the economy is not a result of demand deficiency, but due to supply constraints, despite a plethora of evidence to the contrary even by the government's own official statistics. Of course, the budget is a sheer genius with a blueprint for creating further misery for a majority of the population already battered by the "Great Indian Slowdown" followed by the pandemic.

That the worsening of economic growth has led to unprecedented misery and hardship of a large majority of citizens is further confirmed by data from multiple sources. Two-thirds of the country's rural population in rural areas has suffered a decline in incomes in the last five years. Wage workers which account for one-fourth of all workers have seen real wages decline. More than two-fifths of all workers engaged in agriculture and they have seen a decline in income from crop cultivation as has been reported by the Situation Assessment Survey of farmers for 2019. Forget the government's promise of doubling farmers' income in 2022, farmers are struggling to maintain their real income. These are all-India estimates that the government has not refuted or has indulged in its usual tactics of denial, diversion and deletion. Even on employment, there is now clear evidence that not only has the economy failed to create jobs for millions entering the labour force, but even those who remain in the workforce have also seen the condition of their work deteriorate. Finally, the data is also clear from almost all sources that the slowdown and the pandemic have contributed to an unprecedented rise in inequality.

With the budget being an official statement from the government, the first expectation was a recognition of this reality, followed by reassurances to protect the lives and livelihood of the citizens suffering from the policy-induced economic crisis followed by the pandemic. While the latter was not on record, even the little that was offered by the government as a package of pandemic relief in the last two years has been withdrawn

or reduced at a time when the third wave of the pandemic is still on. In fact, this is one message that is obvious and written all over the revised estimates of 2021-22. A clear example of this is the government expenditure on MGNREGS. As against the actual expenditure of Rs 11,170 crore in 2020-21, the revised expenditure for 2021-22 is only Rs 98,000 crore, which has been further reduced to Rs 73,000 crore for 2022-23. The same is true for the allocation to the National Food Security Act where even the excluding the one-time payment for PDS, the budget in 2022-23 is much lower than either 2021-22 or even 2020-21. Clearly, the government has given up any pretence of using social safety nets to protect the lives and livelihood of a majority of citizens. Several other schemes have either been discontinued or have been killed by reducing the budget allocation. For example, Rs 30,944 crore disbursed as part of cash transfers to women Jan Dhan account holders in 2020-21 was discontinued last year. While social protection schemes faced the guillotine, making it difficult for the poor and vulnerable to manage basic expenditures with inflation eroding the real value of earnings, the budget further contributed to reducing earnings. The best example of the government's insensitivity to the agricultural sector which has been under distress for the last five years with farmers' protests building up throughout the country. With a decline in demand for agricultural commodities contributing to lower price realisation, the reduction in interest subsidy in agriculture will necessarily add to input costs and reduce profit margins even further. The budgeted subsidy at Rs 1,05,222 crore for 2022-23 is not only lower than Rs 1,40,122 crore for last year, but also lower than Rs 1,27,922 crore in 2020-21 when global fertiliser prices were much lower. With declining or stagnant expenditure on other agriculture support schemes, the crisis in agriculture is unlikely to go.

The issue is the approach to managing the economy. With the pace of the budget increasing only by Rs 17 lakh crore, barely rising in real terms, the budget is in fact deflationary at a time when the need was to expand public expenditure. The justification that the government has increased capital expenditure by 25 per cent as against the withdrawal of expenditure on social welfare does not hold much ground given the level of distress that exists. But even for reviving growth, expenditure on social welfare, agriculture and rural infrastructure is, in fact, the best strategy in an economy struggling with low demand and low investment. Expenditure on social welfare at this juncture is as much a necessity as capital expenditure. What is, however, not necessary is the unwarranted giveaways to the corporate sector that were first given in 2019 to revive the economic slowdown. These not only continue to have been extended and enlarged. They are at the cost of the rightful welfare needs of the majority who have lost their lives, livelihood and dignity. For those at the bottom of the income spectrum, surviving the rupee-lull today with uncertain jobs and incomes is a precondition for dreaming of *amrit* kad 25 years later.

The writer teaches economics at JNU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LATAJI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "India's song" (IE, February 7). It is difficult to imagine an India without Lata Mangeshkar. Her voice used to waft over the radio, the only medium of entertainment then, and have a lingering effect on listeners. Other singers such as Rafi and Usha had a similar effect but the sheer number of songs that Lata sang and the mesmeric quality of her voice made her a class apart. Music dominated Hindi films, so much so that practically every of them was a musical, and as she was the preferred singer for most heroes, Lata's voice could be heard everywhere. The many tributes flowing in on her passing away are a testimony to the debt of the film industry to Lata Mangeshkar.

Hemant Contractor, Pune

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "India's song" (IE, February 7). Lata Mangeshkar transcended four generations in her lifetime and her voice remains eternal. Her incredible, endless variety and genres of songs transcended plausibly beyond artificial boundaries of languages and cultures. As a unique musical genius, she represented the very spirit of India — a true symbol of unity in our vast diversity. Lataji's vast contributions to the field of music will always remain irreplaceable and unforgettable. "Meri oonchi pe chhaan hai" "Garayad rube" is just one of the soul-stirring songs of Lataji.

SS Paul, Nadia

CRUDE BACKLASH

THIS REFERS TO the article, "When she speaks up" (IE, February 7). It is disap-

IDEAS ONLINE

ONLY IN THE EXPRESS

● CENTRE WON'T ACKNOWLEDGE PANDEMIC SUFFERING: BINOY VISWAM

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pointing but not surprising that Indian women continue to face curfews, restrictions on their mobility, and moral policing to this day. In recent times, Muslim women, in particular, have defied these restrictions via campus protests and on-line activism to agitations against the CAA. Unhated with this resistance and fuelled by hatred, the crude backlash at life-time to "put them in their place". The recent ban on the hijab in some colleges in Karnataka, cited as a threat to law and order, should be seen in this light.

Ila Raikar, Mumbai

THEY OVERCAME

THIS REFERS TO the report, "A COVID decade, a family's trials: behind U-19 trophy" (IE, February 7). Kudos to the U-19 cricket team, they certainly did our country proud by winning the World Cup against all odds. It was heartening to see the coordinated efforts of the manager, the coaches and the physiotherapists in bringing out the best in the team.

Mehvish X D'Souza, Mumbai



DHANMANJIRI SATHE

A FEW YEARS ago, Lata Mangeshkar was interviewed by Javed Akhtar for a talk show on a private channel. While talking about her struggling years, she mentioned something heart-wrenching. In her younger years, the recording shift used to be from 8 am to 2 pm. All the others — that is, the men — would step out in the middle of the shift and eat. But she didn't know that there was a canteen and would remain hungry till she reached home. Lata Mangeshkar's words, "Meri bhokhi rehti thi", evoked the picture of a single woman (unless it was a chorus) in the recording room, struggling on several counts, and going hungry as well. It is touching and annoying that she had to remain "hungry" even when she was earning. I was hoping that Akhtar would probe her a bit more. But, perhaps, sad stories have little currency in today's advertisement-driven, hyper-enthusiastic world.

The revelation struck a chord for another reason. My grandfather was a schoolteacher in Kolhapur. A Savarkarite and a Hindu Mahasabha member, he had connections with Bhalji Pendharkar, the well-known Marathi filmmaker from

The solitude of Lata Mangeshkar

In many ways her life encapsulated the loneliness of successful women

Kolhapur — also a Savarkarite. Latabaji's (as she was called in Marathi) and her father's ideological leanings were always clear and so she was close to Pendharkar. My grandfather got acquainted with her. Lata Mangeshkar wanted to visit his house and said so several times. That perhaps might have been somewhat burdensome for my grandfather given his humble station in life. Nevertheless, she prevailed upon him and he was very keen on meeting my grandmother.

Latabaji visited my grandfather sometime in 1971-72. She must have been in her mid-forties. She talked about spirituality, how to read and re-read Dnyaneshwari, arguably the most important spiritual text for Marathis. She also said that many a times she would get nervous and had a sinking feeling. She wanted to know what she could do to overcome it. More poignantly, she said that she would come back from recordings late, around 3 pm or so, by which time she would have lost her appetite. The food would also become cold, so she would not feel like eating it. It seemed the food problem persisted for decades.

I heard this story then, and it was re-

peated several times by family members. I was not even a teenager then and with youthful arrogance, I rejected the story outright. My reasoning was simple. Oh, she is rich, she can easily keep some help to give her proper food.

Now I know better. I completely believe her and know that women, even when they are the main breadwinners in the family, can be and are neglected. Sometimes, they could even be made to feel guilty, put on the defensive for various reasons. This is one way of controlling them. This does not happen to the breadwinning men. This is not to blame her family in any way — they were younger than her in any case. All the men from that recording room (from the top male singer and music director to the junior staff) quite likely went back at the same time — probably even later — and got proper, hot meals. But not her.

Another question that Akhtar asked her was: If in her long career, was there any song that had lingered in her mind for long? She thought for a few seconds and answered, yes there was one: "Ae dil-e-naadan". For the uninitiated, this is a soulful song from the movie, Raza Sultana that Raza hums to al-

lude to her loneliness, desires, and purpose in life. It was written by none other than Nanar Akhtar, Javed's father.

A penny dropped. What was Lata Mangeshkar, if not the Raza Sultana of Indian music? It was so appropriate she had selected this song out of thousands. *Lata* had a rich life with relationships that are well known and need not concern us here. But what about the lingering loneliness of a super successful woman? Can women have it all? It starts with food and goes on. Things have changed a lot for the better over the 70-odd years when she was active.

In the interview, Latabaji gave immense credit for all her achievements to her father. In contrast, was Javed Akhtar's well-known angst towards his father that found expression in several movies. But as Akhtar said in the interview: "Baap to baap hota hai".

My salute to a life fully lived and loved — Latabaji you taught us both. Today, the whole of India is one in its mourning. As a friend put it, "May Lataji now give peace to God's soul".

Sathe is an economist based in Pune

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

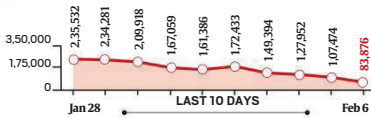
DASHBOARD, AS ON FEB 6

707 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN

New cases 83,876 **Active cases** 11,08,938 **Deaths** 895

Weekly CFR: 0.36% | Overall CFR: 1.27% | Total deaths: 5,02,874

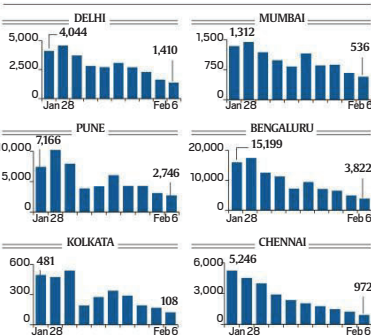
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

State	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	Weekly positivity
Kerala	26729	3,30,105	515	34.80%
Maharashtra	9666	1,18,076	70	9.29%
Karnataka	8425	97814	47	11.60%
Tamil Nadu	6120	1,21,828	26	9.43%
Madhya Pradesh	5171	44,778	6	8.60%

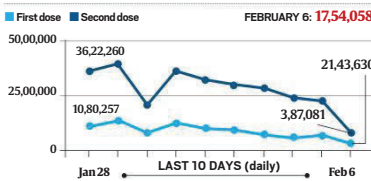
CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



TOTAL TESTS	74,15,61,587
TESTS ON FEB 6	13,74,446
WEEKLY POSITIVITY	7.72%
OVERALL POSITIVITY	5.70%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES 169,63,80,755

(Adults 1st dose: 90,01,85,945; 2nd: 72,59,87,585; 15-18 age group 1st dose: 4,94,74,550; 2nd: 58,41,998; precautionary: 1,48,90,677)



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I&B Ministry's powers to regulate content on TV, other platforms

KRISHNAKAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

ON JANUARY 31, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I&B) informed Media One, a Malayalam-language news channel, through an order that its broadcast licence had been cancelled, citing a Home Ministry order that had denied security clearance to the channel.

Following an appeal by channel owner Madhyamam Broadcasting Limited, which is backed by Jamaat-e-Islami, the Kerala High Court granted a stay, allowing the channel to continue functioning. The High Court, which reserved its order on Monday, which pronounced it on Tuesday.

In which sectors can the I&B Ministry regulate content?

Until last year, it had the powers to regulate content across all sectors — TV channels, newspapers and magazines, movies in the theatres and on TV, and the radio — barring the

internet. On February 25, 2021, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, extended its regulatory powers over internet content too, especially on digital news platforms and OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Hotstar.

What kind of powers does it have?

On paper, these are limited. However, the ministry wields those powers, however, is what gives it a much broader scope of what it wishes to allow on any platform.

For example, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has a mandate to give any film that will be played in a theatre, a rating indicating the kind of audience it is suitable for. For example, a movie with sensitive or sexual content would get an adults-only certificate. In practice, however, the CBFC has often suggested changes or cuts to a film before giving it a certification. While it isn't the CBFC's mandate to censor a film, it can withhold giving a rating unless the filmmaker agrees to its suggestions.

When it comes to TV channels, the government last year came up with a three-tier grievance redressal structure for viewers to raise concerns, if any. A viewer can successfully approach the channel, then a self-regulatory body of the industry, and finally the I&B Ministry, which can issue a showcase notice to the channel, and then refer the issue to an inter-ministerial committee (IMC). For content on OTT platforms too, there is a similar structure.

The ministry has in the past issued orders to temporarily ban news and other channels, including a 48-hour ban on Media One two years ago, along with AsiaNet for its reporting of the Delhi riots. In November 2016, it imposed a one-day ban on NDTV for its reporting of the Pathankot terror attack.

The ministry also has the Electronic Media Monitoring Cell, which tracks channels for any violations of the programming and advertising codes mentioned in the Cable TV Network Rules, 1994. Violation can lead to revocation of a channel's uplinking licence (for sending content to a satellite) or down-

linking licence (for broadcasting to viewers through an intermediary). It is these licences of Media One that the government revoked.

In print, based on the recommendations of the Press Council of India, the government can suppress its advertising to a publication.

And last year's IT rules allow the I&B Ministry issues orders to ban websites based on their content.

What kind of content is not allowed?

There are no specific laws on content allowed or prohibited in print and electronic media, radio, films or OTT platforms.

The content on any of these platforms has to follow the free speech rules of the country. Article 19(1) of the Constitution, while protecting the freedom of speech, also lists certain "reasonable restrictions" including content related to the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency and morality etc.

Action can be taken if any of these restrictions is violated. There have been several instances when cases have been filed against

filmmakers, channels etc for other alleged offences such as hurting religious sentiments.

In January 2021, *India on Amazon Prime* became the first show on an OTT platform to edit out scenes after direct intervention by the I&B Ministry. After complaints that certain scenes hurt religious and caste sentiments, the government called a meeting with the show's makers. This happened when the new IT Rules were still a month away from being issued.

Do other agencies play a role?

There is no direct involvement, as the powers to regulate content rest only with the I&B Ministry. However, the ministry relies on inputs from other ministries, as well as intelligence agencies.

In of Media One's case, its licences were revoked because the Home Ministry had denied it security clearance, which is essential as part of the policy. I&B Minister Anurag Thakur told a delegation of Lok Sabha members from Kerala that they should meet Home Minister Amit Shah regarding this issue.

There is also a new mechanism the I&B Ministry adopts: It has used emergency powers it has under the new IT Rules to block certain YouTube channels and social media accounts based on inputs from intelligence agencies.

In December and January the I&B Ministry issued orders to YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter to ban over 60 YouTube channels and social media accounts based on inputs from intelligence agencies. I&B Secretary Apurva Chandra said in January that Pakistan-based channels were banned for their anti-India content.

He said "intelligence agencies are now alive to this issue", and even asked that people send inputs for any channels or websites involved in propagating such content. He said the ministry had used its emergency powers to get these accounts banned. This happened even before the inter-departmental committee could sit. The recourse available to anyone whose channel or account has been banned, I&B officials said, would be to go to the courts.

SIMPLY PUT

Caste on US campuses

California State University, the largest 4-year public university system in the US, has added caste as a protected category against discrimination. The move has triggered a backlash from the Hindu Right in America.

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

ON SEVERAL American campuses, a new battlefront is emerging: caste is making its way into anti-discrimination frameworks, and drawing Hindu rightwing backlash.

After California State University (CSU) announced last month that it had added caste as a protected category against discrimination, a section of the faculty protested, fearing it could be used to target teachers of Indian and South Asian descent.

CSU wasn't the first American university to act against caste but its decision carries significant implications, given that it is the largest four-year public university system in the US, with 23 campuses, almost 5 lakh students, and 25,000 teachers.

Over the last two years, at least three other institutions — Colby College in Maine, Brandeis University in Massachusetts, and the Ivy League Harvard University — have adopted safeguards against caste discrimination.

Leading the pushback

An American Hindu Right advocacy has led the pushback against CSU. The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) wrote to CSU's board of trustees last month opposing the decision.

HAF has said it was approached by "concerned faculty members" at CSU and is helping teachers to mount a legal challenge against the university.

"We are helping concerned faculty explore all legal avenues to ensure their constitutionally guaranteed rights to equal protection and due process are protected," a spokesperson for the foundation told *The Indian Express*.

The HAF says it is not affiliated to any religious or political organisation, but its co-founder Mihir Meghani has been actively involved with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. HAF had opposed the State of California's lawsuit against Cisco Systems Inc., which was a watershed moment in caste conversation in the US.

In 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing had sued Cisco and two of its employees for alleged discrimination against a Dalit engineer. HAF filed a motion to intervene in the case, arguing that the State of California's assertion that caste is "a strict Hindu social and religious hierarchy" is an "inaccurate and unconstitutional definition" that would "perpetuate the harmful targeting of and discrimination against Indian-



Cal Poly Pomona (left) and San Diego State University (centre), part of the 23-campus California State University network. Cisco (right) is at the centre of a landmark case, with California authorities prosecuting alleged caste discrimination at the company. Wikimedia Commons & Reuters



origin, and particularly Hindu workers".

Criticism and defence

Two Indian-origin faculty members, Praveen Sinha and Sunil Kumar, have publicly criticised CSU's decision as "misguided overreach", since American laws already protect against different forms of discrimination.

"We cannot but oppose the unique risk that CSU's move puts on us as they add a category that is only associated with people of Indian descent, such as myself and thousands of other faculty and students in the CSU system. It is going to create divisions where they simply do not exist," Sinha, a professor of accounting at CSU Long Beach, said in a statement released by HAF.

According to Kumar, who teaches engineering at San Diego State University, the policy was changed without referring to any scientifically reliable evidence or data.

"Rather than redressing discrimination, it will actually cause discrimination by institutionally singling out and targeting Hindu faculty of Indian and South Asian descent as members of a suspect class because of deeply entrenched, false stereotypes about Indians, Hindus and caste," he said in a statement that was put out by the HAF.

Neither Kumar nor Sinha responded to questions emailed by *The Indian Express*.

Vamsee Juluri, a professor of media studies at the University of San Francisco, said he was "disappointed" with the attitude of the American Hindu groups. "There has been too much unnecessary polarisation in the Indian/Hindu/South Asian community as a result of mixing up partisan political interests from India with the realities of life, struggle, and privilege in America," he said.

Juluri said he did understand the concerns over the operationalisation of anti-caste poli-

cies, "especially given the tendency of some Silicon Valley diversity experts and other racists in America to refer to Indian immigrants as 'parasites'", and the existence of "a lot of anti-Indian and particularly anti-Hindu hatred and ignorance" in the US.

While that should be "confronted and checked", however, "the lasting solution... is not to deny the victims of caste, but to more directly confront the sources of white supremacy and corporate power in securing appropriate protections", he said.

"American society recognises anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and a range of historic and structural wrongs. If Hindu Americans have failed to persuade a large part of the Indian American community, let alone the broader American society, that they deserve similar protections too for Indophobia/Hinduphobia from racial and religious supremacists in America, the fault is at least partly their own. They should be... open to the possibility that both Hinduophobia and casteism can be opposed," Juluri said.

Student-led push

At Colby College, the move to take on caste discrimination was led by teachers Sonja Thomas and David Strohl, who study caste in South Asian Muslim and Christian societies. The action at CSU by contrast, marked the culmination of a long process that was driven by students.

In October 2020, Prem Pariyar, 38, then a student at the Social Work department of CSU East Bay, complained of caste discrimination on campus. Pariyar, a Dalit from Nepal who had gone to the US in 2015 to claim asylum from caste atrocities, told *The Indian Express*: "I found myself bullied by Nepali dominant caste students on campus, and I realised the importance of caste protection at the de-

partment. I started a conversation with my professors on my experiences in Nepal, while working in the restaurant industry in the Bay Area, and in CSU."

His professor Ruwani Fonseka connected him to Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Executive Director of Equality Labs, a Dalit civil rights organisation in the US. Pariyar gave his testimony at a faculty meeting, where Soundararajan presented on caste discrimination in the US.

It was decided to add caste as a protected category at the department level, and the Academic Senate subsequently adopted it at the college level.

The resolution acted as a template in student groups across CSU campuses, and student governments on two other campuses, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly Pomona, passed similar resolutions. Student leaders such as Manmit Singh, who was then at San Luis Obispo, worked to mobilise student networks to build a "multi-racial and multi-caste effort".

In April 2021, four students including Manmit drafted a resolution that was passed by the California State Student Association (CSSA), a body with representatives from all 23 campuses, after a three-hour hearing. It was decided that CSSA would urge the Chancellor that caste be adopted as a "Protected Status" category.

But there was pushback, too. "I saw when a student would speak about a Dalit issue, saying 'this is what happened' or 'this is what I experienced', immediately someone would come after that and say 'no that doesn't exist', 'that doesn't happen'," said Krystal Raynes, a student trustee on CSU's board of trustees.

Meeting with the Chancellor's office followed that summer, and in January 2022, the addition was made to the anti-discrimination policy.

What Karnataka order on student uniforms says

JOHNSONTA
BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 7

AN ORDER issued by the Karnataka government's Department for Pre-University Education on February 5 has not made uniforms compulsory in pre-university colleges, but has attempted to argue that banning hijabs for students attending classes is not a violation of the right to practise their religion.

The trigger

The government order seems directed at justifying a recent ban on Muslim girls students for attending class wearing headscarves or hijabs in a few government pre-university colleges in the state. The Karnataka High Court is set to address this issue on Tuesday following pleas by affected Muslim girls.

Last week, a letter issued by the Under-Secretary of the Pre-University Education department had stated that "there is no uniform prescribed by the department" and that "after

the incident in Udupi district where students demanded to be allowed to attend college in clothes of their choice (hijab), the state government has decided to analyse the court for this issue" to prescribe a policy for uniforms.

Education Minister B C Nagesh said on Sunday that new rules for uniforms in PU colleges issued on February 5 were meant to emphasise that uniforms prescribed by college managements will remain in force for the current academic year including a ban on hijabs in classrooms in some colleges.

The new order

It states that the students in all government pre-university colleges must follow the rules for uniforms set by the local college development committees, but that in colleges where no uniform is prescribed efforts must be made to ensure unity.

The order says that all government schools have to abide by the uniform policy prescribed by the state and that private schools can have uniforms as decided by their councils. At present,

uniforms are mandated in state-run schools but are optional in PU colleges.

The three-page order states that the state government can prescribe rules for curricula "to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women" under section 7(2)(g) of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983 and that the state has powers under section 15(2) of the Education Act to issue directions to institutions for implementing provisions of the law.

It states that school and college councils have the responsibility of maintaining equality on their campuses while imparting education. The order says that by the education department that in some educational institutions students are following the customs of their respective religions and this is affecting the equality and uniformity in the institutions.

The order quotes judgments of the Supreme Court and various High Courts to ar-

gue that banning hijabs in schools and colleges is not a violation of the fundamental right to practise religion as prescribed by Article 25 of the Constitution. These include a Kerala High Court judgment on December 4, 2018, in which it quoted a Supreme Court observation in Asha Rani and others vs State of Bihar (2017) to state that "individual interest must yield to larger public interest".

The reference

Incidentally, the government cites Clause 7(2)(g) of the Karnataka Education Act — which is meant to prescribe curricula — in issuing the order on dress codes that maintain equality and unity on pre-university college campuses.

Clause 7(2)(g) says the curriculum must inculcate "the sense of following duties enshrined in the Constitution" and Section 7(2)(g)(i) says curricula must teach students "to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem".