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**GOVT & POLITICS**

**COVID NOT GONE, COULD SHOW UP ANYTIME, AT ANY PLACE: MODI**

PAGE 7

**HOUSE LEADER ELECTION TODAY**

## Shehbaz Sharif set to be Pakistan PM, Imran party members may quit House

Freedom struggle begins again against foreign conspiracy: Imran



Opposition supporters celebrate in Karachi on Sunday. AP

**SAJJAD HUSSAIN**  
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 10

PAKISTAN'S OPPOSITION leader Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday nominated himself for the post of prime minister after the ouster of Imran Khan, whose party threatened to withdraw its lawmakers from Parliament if the former Punjab chief minister was allowed to contest the election on Monday.

The process of electing the new leader of the House began on Sunday after Khan was removed from office through a no-confidence vote, becoming the

first prime minister in Pakistan's history to be sent home after losing the House's trust.

While the joint Opposition—a rainbow coalition of socialist, liberal and radically religious parties—agreed on 70-year-old

Sharif for the prime minister's post, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) named ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi as its candidate.

The nomination papers of **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## India-Pak ties may see 'diplomatic opening'

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

**EXPLAINED** WITH SHEHBAZ Sharif set to be the next Pakistan Prime Minister, New Delhi is watching the developments in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore with "cautious optimism" about a headway in bilateral ties.

Top sources said the change in regime may offer a "diplomatic opening". According to sources in the strategic establishment, the implications may be far-reaching.

Known to be the Pakistan

**BUSINESS AS USUAL**

By UNNY



Army's candidate, Imran Khan's government was widely referred **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Ukraine & 2+2 in background, Modi and Biden to hold virtual meet today

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will hold a virtual meeting with US President Joe Biden on Monday, the Ministry of External Affairs said even as the White House stated that Biden will continue "close consultations on the consequences of Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and mitigating its destabilizing impact on global food supply and commodity markets".

The meeting is expected to take place at 8.30 pm IST, which will be followed by the 2+2 meeting between the Foreign and Defence ministers of the two countries in Washington DC at 11.30 pm IST.

After the 2+2 meetings, involving Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and their US counterparts, Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and



The meet will be followed by the 2+2 dialogue.

Secretary of State Antony J Blinken, the two sides are likely to sign pacts on cooperation in the education and space sectors.

The two Union ministers will also hold separate bilateral meetings. Jaishankar is also likely to meet Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, while Rajnath Singh will travel to Hawaii, the headquarters of US Indo-Pacific Command after his visit to Washington DC.

In a statement issued Sunday on the Modi-Biden meeting, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Govt plans database to mark countries with overstaying nationals

**ANISHA DUTTA**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

THE UNION government wants to identify countries whose residents tend to overstay in India and is considering creating a database of foreign visitors to help with this process, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

According to sources, the government is planning to use Artificial Intelligence to analyse this database: the resulting list of countries is expected to help Indian Missions put in place checks while issuing visas to foreign citizens. The Home Ministry's Foreigners Division, the External Affairs Ministry, and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) are to be involved in the exercise, it is learnt.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had brought up the idea during a conference of Director Generals of Police (DGPs) and Inspector Generals of Police (IGPs) in Lucknow in November 2021, an official said.

Last month, this plan was again discussed with DGPs and IGPs in a meeting called by the Ministry of Home Affairs, according to officials aware of the development. The action points for this meeting came from the Prime Minister, they said.

"(At last month's meeting), it was discussed to create a database for superior monitoring of people overstaying in India past their issued visas and identifying the regions where they come from. In countries like Bangladesh, India has more than a dozen visa facilitation centres but biometric scanning has to be strengthened across all centres for sufficient monitoring so that the information can be shared with our Indian Missions and other agencies," said an official, requesting anonymity.

In December 2021, the Karnataka High Court had suggested to the Centre to make changes in the law governing grant of visa to foreign nationals to check instances of foreigners staying in India despite expiry of visa.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Two out of five new companies opted for 15% tax in 2019-20

1,244 new firms that took concessional tax regime earned just Rs 35 cr in FY20

**AANCHAL MAGAZINE & PRANAV MUKUL**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

TWO OUT OF every five new domestic manufacturing companies incorporated in 2019-20 (April-March) opted for the 15 per cent concessional corporate tax rate announced by the Union government in September 2019. These companies, numbering 1,244 in 2019-20, cumulatively

accounted for just Rs 35.13 crore in total income, government data showed.

For 2019-20, the number of new manufacturing companies that filed corporate tax returns has been taken as 3,219 (the difference between 1,36,909 manufacturing companies that filed corporate tax returns for 2019-20 and 1,33,691 companies that filed returns for 2018-19).

The regime was introduced **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Sri Lankans protest in Colombo on Sunday. AP

REPORT, PAGE 11

## Anger in Rajapaksa stronghold: Voted for them, see what they did



**NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN**  
TANGALLE (HAMBANTOTA), APRIL 10

IN THE small fishing town of Tangalle, 200 km from Colombo, Carlton, the ancestral home of Sri Lanka's ruling family, used to be

thronged by adoring visitors whenever Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa visited.

The mood has changed. "In 2009, when he finished the war against the LTTE and came here, we were proud. We went to Carlton and like we do for the Buddha, we did the same for him," said Roshan, a tuk-tuk driver waiting for passengers in the local market.

"But if I meet him now, I will say, 'thank you very much for finishing the war, but if you can't do

anything now, please hand over the job to someone better," said the 39-year-old father of one.

Explaining the dollar squeeze that has led to crippling shortages of essential commodities and an unaffordable rise in prices, Roshan said: "When I have 2 kg of rice at home, and 1 kg gets over, I know I have to buy 1 kg to replace it. But they waited till all the dollars were finished."

Until a few months ago, it would have been difficult, if not **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Panel fixes maximum and minimum fee for engg, tech institutes

For engineering, Rs 1.89 lakh max, lower limit fixed at Rs 79,000

**SOURAV ROY BARMAN**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

THE CAP on tuition fee charged by engineering and technical institutes are set to change, with the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) sending a revised fee structure, including a proposed minimum fee limit, to the Ministry of Education.

The revision comes seven years after an expert committee first recommended an upper limit that the institutes can charge as tuition fee, but there was no lower limit, or minimum fees, until now.

On March 10, the executive committee of the AICTE ap-

proved the report of the National Fee Committee chaired by Justice (retd.) B N Srikrishna and forwarded it to the Ministry of Education, which is examining it.

The committee has proposed that in case of undergraduate engineering disciplines, the annual minimum fee cannot be below Rs 79,000 while the maximum has been capped at Rs 1.89 lakh. In its previous report, submitted in April 2015, the committee had suggested that the maximum fee for UG four-year engineering courses be fixed at Rs 1.44 lakh to Rs 1.58 lakh per annum.

The revised fee slabs need the Ministry's as well as the state governments' nod for implementation.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

**WORLD**



**U.S. COMMITS TO ARMS SUPPLY AS BATTLE LOOMS IN EAST UKRAINE**

**'THE EAGLE HAS LANDED' AUTHOR JACK HIGGINS DIES AT 92**

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## Maharashtra govt hospitals run out of basic, vital drugs as non-Covid footfall rises again

**RUPSA CHAKRABORTY**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

ON MARCH 25, Kaliprasad Ramlakhan, 36, was rushed to Mumbai's JJ Hospital, the largest state-run hospital in Maharashtra, after being bitten by a dog. As it did not have even basic medicines like TT injections and antibiotics like Amoxicillin, his brother had to

go and queue up at a private chemist shop nearby.

"There were no medicines in the hospital. It refused to give me even a rabies injection from their stocks, although they obliged when I pleaded," said Ramlakhan, who was running a high fever and had to wait outside the hospital. It is another matter that JJ Hospital gets over 30 dog bite cases daily for treatment.

Ramlakhan's case is not an

isolated one. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, the footfall of patients in the OPD and emergency sections of government hospitals across Maharashtra dropped by nearly 70 per cent, as per the state's public health department. Now, with the flattening of the pandemic curve, these hospitals are flooded with non-Covid patients. For instance, the number of patients visiting JJ hospital

daily has almost doubled to 1,100 since February this year from 600 during 2020-21. A senior hospital doctor said, "Most patients refrained from visiting hospitals during the pandemic. Now, the patients with more severe complications are rushing to hospitals. To meet the demand, we have also added beds."

Maharashtra's nodal official body for centralised purchase of **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Dado is ball, vruksh is tree: Tribal schools shift from Gujarati to English

**RITU SHARMA**  
AHMEDABAD, APRIL 10

"THIS IS a ball... that is a tree," Pooja Goyal explains, holding up a picture book for her students. Himanshi Ninama, 12, looks on quizzically. For the Class 7 student of the Ekalavya residential school in Ambaji, Gujarat, and her friends, the shift from the Gujarati *dado* to ball and from *vruksh* to tree is as exciting as it is baffling.

speaking Gujarati at home, but I learnt Gujarati after I came here. Now we are learning English. It's scary, but also a lot of fun... Sometimes I wonder if I can learn all of this," she says.

The transition that Himanshi is part of is on account of the Centre mandating all 375 tribal schools in the country — also known as the Ekalavya Model Residential Schools — to switch from regional state school boards to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

"The idea behind asking all Ekalavya schools to compulsorily affiliate to CBSE is to help them adhere to common norms and

academic standards," said Asit Gopal, Commissioner of the National Educational Society for Tribal Students or NESTS, an autonomous body set up by the Centre in 2019 to facilitate a more centralised system of administration for the Ekalavya schools.

Ekalavya schools are funded by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs, but administered locally by state governments and affiliated to the state school boards, with the regional language as medium of instruction.

Of the 35 Ekalavya schools in Gujarat, 25 are migrating to CBSE, while the others are relatively new and already affiliated



Students during an additional English class at the Ekalavya Model Residential School in Ambaji. Nirmal Harindran

to the board. Gujarat has the third highest number of Ekalavya schools, only behind Chhattisgarh (71) and Madhya Pradesh (63).

As a result of this board migration, most Ekalavya schools also have to change their medium of instruction since the CBSE allows its affiliated schools to only use Hindi or English as medium of instruction. All Ekalavya schools in Gujarat have opted for English medium from the new academic year, an official said. To begin with, the transition will be implemented in Classes 6, 7 and 8.

Back at the Ambaji school,

teacher Goyal is now translating simple sentences from Gujarati to English. Every day, her batch of 58 students waits eagerly for Goyal, their new English teacher hired specifically to handhold the students through this transition.

The school, located on a hilllock nearly 3 km from the temple town of Ambaji, has 448 students enrolled from Classes 6-12, most from underprivileged families.

So far, the transition from Gujarati medium to English has had its fair share of challenges. When Goyal was hired in December, she was told that the students did not know English

and that she would have to start with the alphabets. "I had to begin with A-B-C-D and cursive writing. I would bring kindergarten-level books for students of Classes 6 and 7," she says.

With preparations for the switch initiated only late November, school principal Girish Patel has had to hit the ground running. He has divided the daily schedule into two halves — the first when regular classes in Gujarati are held, and the second for the English bridge course.

Two months on, there has been some progress. Goyal's students, a total of 113 in Classes 6 **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

**IDEA EXCHANGE**

'Everybody can be instigated... people haven't shifted, the lid has been lifted'

**ARUN SHOURIE**  
FORMER MINISTER, JOURNALIST

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# 3 THE CITY

## Aaditya blames Railways for delay in Delisle Bridge reconstruction

Mumbai: In another round of tussle between the Centre and the state government, Cabinet minister Aaditya Thackeray blamed the Indian Railways for the delay in the reconstruction of the Delisle Bridge at Lower Parel. The bridge is a crucial connector between Lower Parel and Curlew Road stations. The bridge was demolished in August 2018. The Western Railways (WR) and the BMC are jointly reconstructing the bridge that was shut owing to structural damages.

The minister had visited the construction site on Sunday. Thackeray in a series of tweets lashed out at the delay. "This morning I visited the ongoing work at the Delisle Road bridge. While multiple reviews have been held, all hurdles smoothed, the work of the girder launching by @RailMinIndia has been delayed for over a year, with no explanation to either @mybmc or citizens. I had earlier written to Union Minister, Railways for his intervention..." he tweeted. **ENS**

## Senior inspector suspended over MSRTC employees barging in at Pawar house

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

MAHARASHTRA HOME Minister Dilip Walse Patil on Sunday suspended Gamdevi senior inspector R Rajbhar in connection with the recent incident in which MSRTC employees tried to barge into the Mumbai residence of NCP chief Sharad Pawar. An officer said that Rajbhar had knowledge that a group of MSRTC employees was headed to Pawar's residence. Despite the knowledge, Rajbhar did not do much to stop the protesters, the official added. This was part of a report that was presented to the state Home Minister following which Rajbhar was suspended.

Mumbai police said its investigation has revealed that the

staffers had carried out a recce of Pawar's south Mumbai residence a day before the incident on Friday. Sources said that four people could be seen in the CCTV outside Silver Oak -- the residence of Sharad Pawar -- a day before the incident. These four people, later identified as striking MSRTC staffers, were placed under arrest by the police.

An officer said the police are probing if the incident was a planned conspiracy or a spur-of-the-moment episode.

Over 100 striking employees along with advocate Gunaratna Sadavarte were arrested by the Mumbai police following the incident. While others are in judicial custody, Sadavarte is in police custody and will be produced before the court on Monday.

Following the incident, act-

ing DCP and senior inspector of Gamdevi was shunted out. Meanwhile, on Sunday, it also came to light that inspector Anup Dange, who was earlier suspended by former police commissioner Param Bir Singh, was posted back at the Gamdevi police station. Pawar's residence falls under the jurisdiction of this police station.

Dange had earlier taken on Singh when he was the complainant in the case against the former Mumbai top cop, alleging that the IPS officer had demanded a bribe in lieu of reinstating him in the force following his suspension.

An officer, however, clarified that Dange was posted at Gamdevi police station only as an inspector and was not given charge of the senior inspector of the police station.

## FLOODING DURING MONSOON

## Construction of tanks for storing rainwater at Hindmata, Parel to be ready by year-end

LAXMAN SINGH  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

THE CONSTRUCTION of underground water storage tanks to tackle flooding in the infamous Hindmata and Parel area will be over by end of this year. However, with the ongoing construction work, the Hindmata area is unlikely to get respite from flooding, this monsoon too.

According to an official from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the additional work on tanks' capacity expansion has pushed the deadline further. Mumbai suburban guardian minister Aaditya Thackeray on Sunday inspected the construction of an underground water storage tank at St Xavier's Ground to store rainwater at Hindmata.

With work still being carried out, it is unlikely that tanks will be used for this monsoon. Officially, the four-month monsoon season commences in the city in June. To resolve flooding at Hindmata, the BMC's Storm Water Drain (SWD) department is constructing two underground water tanks -- one below Pramad Mahajan Kala Park in Dadar west and another below St Xavier's Ground in Parel.

According to the plan, the excess rainwater accumulated at Hindmata will be diverted into these tanks. After the rain subsides, the water from the tanks will be pumped out into the nullah. "We have decided to expand the capacity of these tanks. The work will be finished by this year-end," said P Velrasu, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Projects).

Officials are checking the feasibility of partially using these tanks for the upcoming monsoon. However, since the construction work for expansion is still on it would be challenging, an official from SWD added.

While speaking to the media in June 2021, when it took over 12 hours for floodwater to recede from the Hindmata area, Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal had said, "Just eight days back, we have received permission to lay the underground water pipelines below Tata mills (at Parel), which will carry floodwater from Hindmata to the two underground water tanks, which are 1-1.5km away. It will take another 30 days to complete the work, after which the flooding woes of the area will be resolved. In July-August rain, the project's result will be seen."

According to the old plan, the tank at Dadar was expected to be made with a storage capacity of 1.5 crore litres of water and 1 crore litre in Parel. BMC is now working to increase the capacity of the tank at Dadar to 6 crore litres while St Xavier Ground can store 4 crore litres of water. The expansion proposal was passed by Standing Committee in January this year. Hindmata and Parel are the city's chronic and oldest flooding spots. Every year in monsoon the areas are water-logged for hours.

Meanwhile, the BMC said that this year flooding spots in Mumbai remain at 386 like the last year. "We have taken up several works to mitigate the flooding spots. We have two months before rains arrive and many pending works will be cleared till then," said a BMC official.

## Aaditya flags off Vintage Car Fiesta 2022

KRUTARTH PATNAIK & PRANAY MANIAR  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

AADITYA THACKERAY, Minister of Tourism and Environment, Maharashtra, flagged off the 'Annual Vintage Car Fiesta 2022' at the World Trade Centre in Mumbai on Sunday.

A total of 117 vintage cars and 66 two-wheelers participated in the rally organised by the Western India Automobile Association (WIAA) and the Vintage & Classic Car Club of India (VCCCI). The event was also supported by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation.

In line with the minister's last year's announcement on the opening of a vintage car museum in Mumbai, Nitin Dossa, chairman of WIAA/ VCCCI, said, "It is high time that Mumbai gets its vintage car museum." Dossa said that Mumbai can have a vintage car museum featuring 100 cars and 50 two-wheelers. "It will get foreign



A total of 117 vintage cars and 66 two-wheelers were part of the event held on Sunday. Pradip Das

tourists and our next generation will get a look at what cars we have today as every car is a different car," he added. Among the collection of cars were seven Rolls Royce, five Cadillacs and three Lincoln Continentals, including Pope John Paul's Lincoln. Ravi Shastri's 1984 Audi-100, Jagdish Thackersey's 1935 Bentley sports drop head coupe, 1948 Lincoln Continental V-12, 1964 Cadillac convertible of Viveck Goenka, President

WIAA/VCCCI and Chairman of The Indian Express Group, also participated in the rally. Jimmy Tata's 1967 Dodge Charge was also present at the event.

Several vintage and classic cars made appearances at the event, including the 1927 Duesenberg Model A of Gautam Singhania, MD of Raymond Group, which also was the oldest car completing the run. The show also featured a 1923 American La France

Type 12 Fire Truck and Hormusji Cama's 1936 Lancaster that was also awarded the Conour d'Elegance Vintage car award.

Starting at the World Trade Centre, many vintage cars proceeded via Mantralaya-Chowpaty-Peddar Road-Worli Sealink. A few others did a small lap and returned to WTC to showcase their most prized possessions.

Among the two-wheeler lineup, the oldest bike to complete the run was Jehangir Farogh's 1927 AJS. Others included the 1955 BSA of Reban Solomon, 1954 BSA B33 of Jamshed Maraoia and the 1973 Norton Commando MK2 owned by Xereus Zend.

Minoo N Pittar was awarded the lifetime achievement award. S S Dhabolkar, also dubbed as the "Grandfather of the vintage car movement in India", was also present with his 1933 Austin 6.

In an interesting contrast, the students of DJ Sanghvi College of Engineering also showcased their Formula-race style electric race car at the car show.

KANAK SINGH  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

LOCATED AT Maharshi Karve Road between Chami Road and Marine Line is a mesmerising green space -- SK Patil Udyan. The garden, closed for an upgrade for more than eight months in 2018-19, had opened its gates to the public just before the pandemic hit. The upgraded pathway makes it an ideal spot for an evening stroll.

Located between two local train stations, the place is a heaven for weary travellers looking for shade in Mumbai's humid summer heat. Along with the locals, the garden gets visitors from across the city travelling to South Mumbai. The place is easy to find



The park also has zones for various activities such as yoga, meditation. Express

and has a walking path, running along the periphery solely dedicated to those who want to stretch their legs. The park also zones for various activities such as yoga, meditation, and relaxation.

As soon as one reaches the entrance, one is introduced to a land-

mark. Sakhi Kutumb is serving poha (flattened rice snack) to the locals and weary travellers for over four decades. For many, the garden of the SK Patil Udyan is located next to Sakhi Kutumb and not the other way around.

The garden offers various activities for everyone. There is an open gym, an amphitheatre, and two playgrounds for the children. Benches along the walking pathway were recently added for senior citizens. A skating rink, a walking track, and a children's play area were some other new additions.

Other than the greenery, the garden also provides a study centre in its vicinity. In the morning, many children find a place to catch up on their lessons away from all the noise. The park has a spread of green cover and has gazebos built for people who want to sit and enjoy.

Abir a thirteen old year said, "This is my favourite part of the day, I come here every day to play with my friends and because there is so much space in the park, we have the best time playing games here." A local resident, Shailesh said, "This place is perfect for all, the young, the elders, the students. I've been coming here every day for my evening walks and this space gives me the calm and the relaxing spirit that I come here."

MUMBAI  
GREENS

## Prohibited Casuarina plantations regulate temperature in Olive Ridley turtle nests: study

SANJANA BHALERAO  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

A NEW study into the Olive Ridley nesting has found that the sparsely vegetated casuarina plantations along the state's coastline, plantations of which have been prohibited by the Union Environment Ministry, will regulate the incubation temperature of the Olive Ridley turtle nests.

The Mangrove Foundation under the state government commissioned a research study to assess the incubation temperature of nests. The project, which completed its third and final phase was conducted by Smedha Korgaonkar, a PhD scholar from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

The incubation period is the number of days from egg-laying to the emergence of hatchlings inside the nest. The incubation period is inversely proportional to temperature. The greater the incubation period the hatchlings tend to be larger, more active in the movement and less malformed thus increasing their chances of emergence and survival success. Generally, after a 50-60-day incubation period, juvenile turtles break the eggshell and crawl to the sea.

Termining it as a "break-through", the study stated that the Casuarina plantation on the beach provides cooler ambient temperature and dispersed light that helps to maintain the nest temperature below its threshold temperature of 33 degrees Celsius. "In the current scenario of the highly skewed sex ratio of hatchlings due to an increase in temperature, it provides the most natural means to balance the sex ratio. This is the break-through of the data logger project," stated the report.

The National Marine Turtle

Action Plan released by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) last year has prohibited the plantation of Casuarina, calling it non-native and an invasive species.

Casuarina is native to Australia and is extensively found along the state's coastline as it is found to be an effective bio-shield, which can minimise the impact of rough seas.

Based on the guidelines, the Maharashtra Forest Department announced to stop planting casuarina along the coast.

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## 6 HARDLOOK

## URBAN PLANNING

## Bump in the (Coastal) Road

To speed up the commute to and from South Mumbai, the BMC is building a coastal road along the city's sprawling waterfront. However, at a time when cities globally are planning high-quality waterfront urban interventions to turn their shorelines into vibrant neighbourhoods, the civic body's initiative to build an expressway is being questioned by a group of architects who want the agency to alter its plans to make the project and the areas around it more "citizen-friendly"

ZEESHAN SHAIKH AND  
LAXMAN SINGH  
MUMBAI

THE MUCH-TOUTED 10.58-km-long coastal road, which is being built from Marine Drive to Worli by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to speed up the suburban commute to and from South Mumbai, is fundamentally going to change how the city travels.

But even as the sprawling concrete pathway is expected to help accommodate more cars and commuters, questions are now being raised on whether the present design of the mega road will cut away easy access of Mumbai's space-starved residents to the city's sprawling sea front.

Interestingly, while there is a global trend to "retire" or take down highways that run within cities and help create more connected, walkable neighborhoods, Mumbai will become one of the few cities to build an eight-lane expressway right in the heart of the city that will run parallel to the city's waterfront.

In light of this, a group of Mumbai's Architects, Urban planners, Designers, and Principals of Colleges of Architecture had written a letter to the Maharashtra Chief Minister in March seeking a realignment of the way the coastal road had been planned.

The architects suggested that slight realignment would greatly improve the revenue and tourist potential of Mumbai's waterfront besides allowing the residents more open space. The BMC, for its part, says that with 50 per cent of the project already complete, there is no scope for any structural changes.

### The Coastal Road as proposed by the BMC

The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) had planned the Mumbai Coastal Road on the western side of the state capital to provide an alternate North-South Trunk route to improve mobility along with development of recreational open public spaces and greenery.

The proposed coastal road has a length of 29.20 km along the western coastal stretch of Mumbai. The project is to be constructed in two parts; the first part is the 10.58-km-long South Section, which would connect Princess Flyover Road to the Worli Sea Link for which work is presently on. The second phase involves connecting Bandra Sea Link to Kandivali Junction. Work on this stretch is yet to commence.

The first phase of the project to be built at a cost of Rs 12,700 crore also entailed reclamation of land from the Sea. As per the plan, around 111 hectares of land was to be reclaimed. A part of this would be used for construction of the road while the remaining reclaimed space is to be used for constructing



The architects suggested that slight realignment would greatly improve the revenue and tourist potential of Mumbai's waterfront besides allowing residents more open space. The BMC, for its part, says that with 50 per cent of the project already complete, there is no scope for any structural changes. File



development.

"The reclaimed open space is a veritable real estate gold mine. While the BMC has assured that no commercial development will be allowed on this open space, the fact that our leaders are known to tweak rules pertaining to real estate is well known. By shifting the open space towards the sea, these open public spaces will be better protected from future proposals for built-up development," another architect who is a signatory to the letter said.

The architects have also raised questions on the rationale of having an 11-metre wide median that the BMC has proposed to divide the two carriageways. An 11-metre wide median is equivalent to a three-lane road and architects have claimed that reducing this median could further allow the BMC to increase the total open space area. The median on regular city roads and expressways is between one and two metres.

Pranav Naik, another architect and signatory to the letter, said that open spaces closer to the sea can allow them to be designed as a "coastal resilience zone" where the force of the tides can be buffered.

"Having the open spaces closer to the sea can allow them to be designed as 'coastal resilience zones' where the force of the tides can be buffered, as well as holding ponds for the flooding that occurs regularly," said Naik.

He also pointed out that bus lanes made on a "highway-type road" with no connection to residential spaces are useless. "Overall, there is no clarity about what is being built. While we are suggesting changes, we are also asking for clarifications. We can help, as citizens, and architects. We have the brightest architects in the country signing this letter," he added.

### BMC's take

The BMC, meanwhile, has said that the ship has already sailed with regard to any realignment of the project. It has claimed that more than 50 per cent of the project's physical progress is already achieved as per the present alignment and hence any changes at this point of time are not possible.

"The suggestions of the Group of Architects, Urban Designers cannot be considered at this stage of the project due to following reasons. The present alignment has been planned in such a way that it fulfills the geometric requirements of alignment as per IRC Code ensuring suitability for urban high-speed Arterial road with 80-100Kmph speed and technical feasibility of interchanges to connect the coastal road with the existing road network," Ashwini Bhide, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Eastern Suburb) and in-charge of Coastal Road department, said.

Architects, meanwhile, have stated that while the suggested changes could end up costing the BMC some more money, the changes could be worth the effort.

parks, cycle lanes, jogging tracks, promenades, and open green spaces.

As per the present proposal of the BMC based on which construction is taking place, the coastal road will contain a 20-metre wide promenade abutting the coast that will consist of a sidewalk, a cycling track and green zone. This will be followed by a 17-metre wide four-lane carriageway, an 11-metre wide median followed by another 17-metre wide four-lane road. Abutting this road stretch will be a sprawling open space of around 135 metres in width. This width of the open space will vary in size along the entire length of the coastal road.

According to the BMC, the coastal road will transform the way Mumbai commutes, adding the proposed green space will provide much-needed recreational spaces to the city. It also claimed that these seaside facilities would be within easy reach of the common public as opposed to such spaces being private backyards of a few or spots housing unsightly encroachments.

"Mumbai has been able to add only 320 Ha of public amenity spaces, including green spaces over the last two decades. It has not been possible to expand the open space area in the city due to sheer non-availability of land, since the city has limited land area, high density of population and nowhere to expand," according to a report commissioned by the BMC on the coastal road.

The report highlights the "extremely poor access to open spaces in Mumbai, stating that open space ratio per 1,000 persons in



Mumbai is only 0.03 hectares as against the planning norm of 6.2 Ha per 1,000 persons.

The report states that the massive reclamation that is being carried out for the coastal road project will generate 70 hectares of green space along the seaside for perpetuity. This open space can be developed for the public by creating cycling tracks, promenades, landscape and theme parks.

While BMC is betting big on the coastal road as a project that will not only improve city commute but also make areas around its vicinity more livable for Mumbai's public, many architects and urban planners are questioning whether the project will actually revitalise the visual and economic aura of Mumbai's western coastline.

### Changes that Architects and Urban Planners are seeking

On March 2, 70 architects, urban designers, planners and professors wrote a letter to BMC commissioner IS Chahal, CM Uddhav

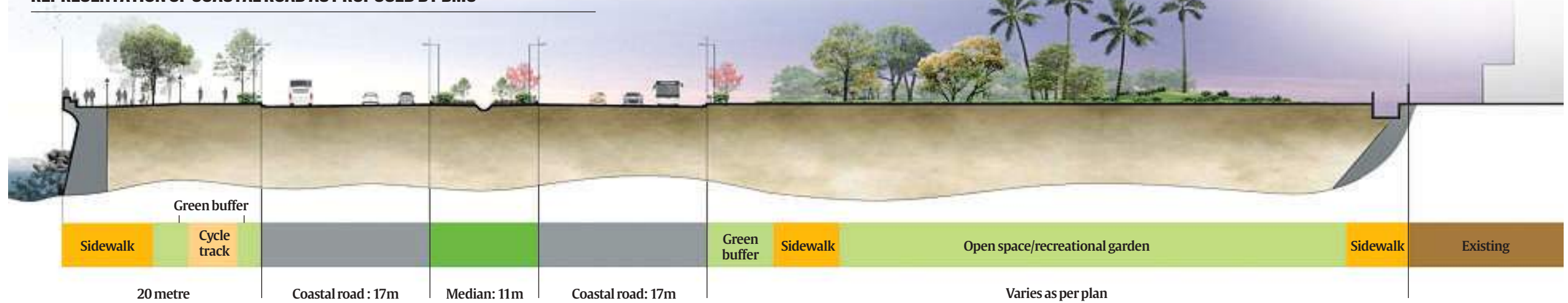
Thackeray and state environment minister Aaditya Thackeray expressing their views on the need to undertake a "slight realignment" of the Coastal Road which, they said, would greatly improve the revenue and tourist potential of Mumbai's waterfront.

The letter was written as many of these architects feared that the existing alignment of the coastal road would break Mumbai's connect with the seafront, restricting not only access but also acting as visual barrier in way of people looking out towards the sea.

The proposal that was presented involved shifting the proposed open spaces towards the seaside.

"Considering the level of reclamation, while keeping the road in its entirety - we think it wise to move as many of the open spaces to the seaside as possible - this would enable a world-class waterfront open to all citizens retaining the much necessary vista on to the open uncluttered horizon..." the letter states.

### REPRESENTATION OF COASTAL ROAD AS PROPOSED BY BMC



### INTERVIEW

## 'Suggestions cannot be considered at this stage of the project'

Ashwini Bhide, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Eastern Suburb) and in-charge of Coastal Road department, talks to The Indian Express about the project, its potential benefits to the city and reasons behind not being able to consider the suggestions of urban designers at this stage

### How much work on the Coastal Road Project has completed? Has the reclamation in the sea been over?

More than 50% of overall work on the Coastal Road Project is completed. So far, 105 hectares of reclamation in the sea has been completed.

### What are the benefits of the project for citizens? How much open space will it create for the city?

The Coastal Road project will reduce commuting time by around 70 per cent and fuel saving by about 34 per cent; it will also reduce noise and air pollution. This will also help in creation of about 70 hectare of green/open areas, which will reduce the pollution level thereby, improving the health of

citizens of Mumbai. The green space includes cycle tracks, public parks, jogging tracks, open theatre, butterfly garden, biodiversity park etc. There will be underground multi-level car parking to facilitate the public visiting the nearby green or open area. The road will have a dedicated bus lane, which will help to reduce traffic congestion on existing roads which will, in turn, aid safe, faster and low travel cost. The seawall constructed along the coastal road will help in preventing coastal erosion and storm surge.

Recently, a group of architects and urban designers wrote a letter to the Chief Minister and Municipal Commissioner suggesting that all the open spaces that would be created by the project be

### moved towards the seaside for long-term benefit to the city. Is BMC considering those suggestions?

The suggestions of the Group of Architects and Urban Designers cannot be considered at this stage of the project. The present alignment has been planned in such a way that it fulfills the geometric requirements of alignment as per IRC Code, ensuring suitability for urban high-speed Arterial road with 80-100Kmph speed and technical feasibility of interchanges to connect the coastal road with the existing road network. The project has



provision of interchanges at Amarnagar Garden, Haji Ali and Worli Sea face. Also, the most important thing is, Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearance and wildlife No-Objection Certificate (NOC) has been obtained as per present alignment. Now, at this stage, any modifications in alignment will have serious impacts on the project in terms of redoing design works, loss of executed works on major structures, change in work logistics, seeking fresh NOCs from various departments and cost, time and legal implications on this project.

### What is the logic behind keeping the open spaces on the city side rather than the sea side?

The very purpose of reclamation in this project is to construct the road on fill instead of stilts/bridges. Open spaces formed are incidental to this as per alignment and design.

### How difficult is it to make changes now?

In the current scenario, provision of interchanges to the coastal road is technically not possible... More than 50 per cent of the project's physical progress has already been achieved as per the present alignment.

It has been discussed among urban planners that the existing alignment of the Coastal Road creates a visual barrier

### For Mumbaiers and hinders their view of the sea. Is it true?

This is not true.

### How will the BMC ensure that there are no commercial developments allowed in the open space in the future?

We have issued a circular in this regard to ensure that no commercial development takes place in the open space in future.

### The architects have said the BMC is earmarking 11 meter of space as median on the Coastal Road. Can you explain this?

The 11-meter wide median in the project will be maintained as a green belt and if required in future, additional lanes can be provided.





## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Failing the test

The vision of a Naya Pakistan is in tatters as  
Imran Khan bows out



AJAY DARSHAN BEHERA

## CHANGE NEXT DOOR

Pakistan's new PM has his task cut out — he must also face  
Imran Khan in trying conditions

EVERY LAST BALL does not yield a turnaround in sagging fortunes, and so it was with Imran Khan. Even after he knew that his government had lost its majority in parliament, Khan fought every inch of the way to remain prime minister, pulling surprises on the Opposition, and delaying the inevitable. A no-confidence motion against him, which he and his party did their best to stall since it was submitted to the speaker on March 8, finally went through Pakistan's National Assembly with 174 votes in the House of 225, bringing his term in office to an end 16 months ahead of time. The last minute delays, and a late night cabinet meeting, suggested he was preparing to try one final move. Was Khan playing with the idea of removing the army chief and appointing a new man before he was voted out, as suggested by a late night petition asking the Islamabad High Court to restrain him from doing this? Whatever it was, it threatened to turn what was an open-and-shut case of the removal of a prime minister by means of a parliamentary process, a first for Pakistan, into a full blown constitutional crisis.

Pakistan will have a new prime minister today, barring last minute surprises. Parliamentary elections are due in next July or August. It is upto the new government to decide if these elections should be held earlier than that. Khan's various gambits also carried more than a hint of a campaign for the next election. His ruse of alleging an American conspiracy to unseat him was possibly intended to tap into a deep-seated hostility in large sections of Pakistanis, especially the young who form the bulk of his support base, against the US. Khan has made clear he will remain in politics, and even if he does not win the next election, it will be no surprise if he and the PTI emerge as a strong opposition.

From India's point of view, Khan's exit could create opportunities for repairing ties with Pakistan. The Pakistan military establishment has so far been the main obstacle in this, but Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and his frequent assertions in favour of trade and "geo-economics" as the way forward for the region, give the impression that he wants to pursue these ideas with India. It is not clear though if all his army colleagues back him, or even if the new government will endorse his plans. Khan and his government did not. Bajwa's own term in office ends in November this year. Irrespective of this, if and when a new page is turned, New Delhi should respond with an open mind. At the same time, given the fraught equations in the wake of the growing Russia-China axis, it must remain vigilant for spoilers.

## BOND IDENTITY

Court must settle challenge to the electoral bonds scheme  
quickly. The sanctity of elections is at stake

INDIA'S APEX COURT will hear the petitions challenging the electoral bonds scheme. While this news should be welcomed, it is noteworthy that Chief Justice of India N V Ramana has not specified any specific date or set any timeline for arriving at a judgment. Two prominent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India — Common Cause and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) — have legally challenged the scheme that was started in 2018. They, along with several other critics, have been alleging that the introduction of electoral bonds is "distorting democracy" in India. Given the increasingly polarised nature of India's polity, it is of utmost importance that the Supreme Court either removes all doubts about the validity of the scheme or orders the government to make the necessary changes.

The electoral bonds scheme was first mentioned in 2017 when then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented it as a way to reform electoral funding in the country. Until then, most political parties used to bypass scrutiny of their finances by claiming that they received most of their donations in cash. Further, since cash amounts less than Rs 20,000 were exempted from scrutiny, parties routinely claimed that most of the donations they received were in cash and in amounts less than Rs 20,000. This opened channels for black money to flow into political parties. So Jaitley capped cash donations at Rs 2,000 and introduced electoral bonds, which could only be bought either by cheque or a digital transfer. These steps, it was assumed, would ensure that black money was not used to fund elections.

However, in actual practice, the electoral bonds scheme has left a lot to be desired. For one, it has not improved transparency in electoral funding. Worse still, it is being argued that this scheme has rigged the game in favour of the ruling party. That's because while a donor's identity is hidden from the public view, it is possible for the ruling party to know since these bonds are issued by a government-owned bank (State Bank of India). This advantage with the ruling party allows the possibility for the government of the day to either extort money or victimise those individuals/entities that fund the Opposition. The fact that the BJP has cornered more than 75 per cent of all such bonds issued to date gives credence to this criticism. Another key area of concern is that the government, as part of the introduction of the electoral bonds, had removed the cap on how much money a company could donate. A quick closure in these matters is necessary to ensure transparency in campaign financing, critical to the integrity of the electoral process.

## FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



PRIME MINISTER IMRAN Khan's loss in the no-confidence motion may have been the first in Pakistan's history. But that fact may not be as significant as what has been reiterated about the political stability of elected regimes: No elected regime in Islamabad has managed to complete its tenure since the formation of the country.

Khan, who has had a remarkable political journey in a short period, became the prime minister in 2018. He has been instrumental in single-handedly building the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). From just one seat in parliament in 2002, his party increased its tally to 116 in the 2018 elections. By holding agitations on an anti-corruption agenda, he created a new support base. His campaigns reached out to the young educated people and he successfully projected the PTI as an alternative third force capable of bringing change from the feudalistic and dynastic rule of the past. However, the 2018 elections were questioned for their fairness. It is strongly believed that he came to power due to the political engineering by the military establishment.

His politics reflected an eclectic set of agendas — Khan mixed his anti-corruption agenda with soft Islamism and anti-Westernism. He spoke about turning Pakistan into an egalitarian, modern, Islamic, democratic, welfare state. He gave the slogan for "Naya Pakistan" and promised to bring change. That vision of a "Naya Pakistan" has been shattered for some time now. He proved to be no different from other politicians when he dissolved parliament instead of facing the no-confidence motion and plunged the country into a constitutional crisis. His claim of being different from the existing political leadership and practising clean politics is now seen as hypocritical.

Khan's tenure in office was a difficult one. He came to power at a time when Pakistan

Pakistan has become a difficult country to govern. Even if the military does not wield power directly, it remains the final arbiter in Pakistan's politics as the 2018 general elections had shown. Years of social and political engineering have unleashed forces in Pakistan that have created structural incapacities to address social, economic and security challenges. Neither the political class nor the military has solutions to these problems.

Eventually, it was Imran Khan's relationship with the military and the Opposition that was instrumental in his fall. His standoff with the military over the appointment of a new ISI chief and differences over foreign policy issues created a rift with the military establishment. In the face of Pakistan's difficult challenges, Khan was not able to build consensual politics of any kind and carry the Opposition along with him. He resorted to demagoguery to undermine the Opposition. The military has taken a neutral stand in the Opposition's attempt to constitutionally unseat Khan. Whether Khan and the PTI will remain a formidable force in Pakistan's politics is difficult to predict. While it is still believed that he has popular support, how he will fare in electoral politics without the support of the military is not clear. Given his self-image and ego, will he be able to rebuild bridges with the military? Can he reach out to sections in the Opposition, which is necessary

in coalition politics? We must remember that the 2018 mandate was probably not reflective of the PTI's actual popular support.

Questions have been raised about the role of the military in the current political crisis. Is this a sign of the military retreating from politics? While the military still remains dominant in the power structure in Pakistan, it is increasingly becoming clear that it is unlikely to seize power again. Pakistan has become a difficult country to govern. Even if the military does not wield power directly, it remains the final arbiter in Pakistan's politics as the 2018 general elections had shown. Years of social and political engineering have unleashed forces in Pakistan that have created structural incapacities to address social, economic and security challenges. Neither the political class nor the military has solutions to these problems.

The vision of a Naya Pakistan lies shattered. It is back to the old Pakistan with its intermittent political instability, difficult economic challenges and a military that will not allow the political class to govern. The challenges for the new prime minister will be no different. He has to deal with these structural issues. There is not much light at the end of the tunnel. The military might take a back seat for some time, but it will ensure that it is able to decide outcomes. The political class will have to get its act together to ensure that governance is the main agenda of the political regimes. Pakistan needs a major reorientation in its politics and foreign policy. It has to set its relations with external powers and its neighbours right. Cutting off support to religious militants and improving relations with India will be helpful in dealing with its economic challenges.

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RAHUL BAJAJ AND NISHTHA GUPTA

## THEIR RIGHT TO WORK

Exempting central services from reservation for disabled is legally untenable

IN THE JUDGMENT delivered late last year in *Ravinder Kumar Dhariwal and Anr. v. Union of India and Ors.*, the Supreme Court dealt with the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against a mentally-ill CRPF employee. While concluding that the initiation of the proceedings against the employee was indirectly discriminatory, the Court held that it will have to develop, in an appropriate case, the standard of justification for evaluating the government's decision to exclude any establishment from the nondiscrimination guarantee contained in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 [RPwD Act].

A case that the SC is currently hearing (*National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled v. Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities and Ors.*) might just offer it the opportunity to enunciate this standard. The petitioner has challenged a notification issued by the Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities (Department). The impugned notification exempts all categories of posts in the Indian Police Service, the Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli Police Service, as well as the Indian Railway Protection Force Service from the mandated 4 per cent reservation for persons with disabilities under the RPwD Act.

This notification is legally and constitutionally untenable. First, on the same day as the issuing of the impugned notification, the Department also issued another notification exempting from the purview of reservation under the RPwD Act posts only of "combatant" nature in the paramilitary police. This

classification between combat and non-combat posts was premised on a clear recognition of the fact that persons with disabilities are capable of occupying non-combat posts in the central forces. The Department has offered no justification as to why this classification would not hold good as regards the services covered in the impugned notification.

Second, in an office memorandum issued in January last year, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had identified a range of ministerial/civilian posts as being suitable for reservation for the disabled. The impugned notification is in the teeth of this identification exercise, by virtue of its blanket character. Further, on November 22, 2021, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs released Draft Accessibility Standards/Guidelines for built infrastructure under its purview (police stations, prisons and disaster mitigation centres) and services associated with them. These Draft Standards state that the police staff on civil duty could be persons with disabilities. Curiously, even as the Centre appears committed to creating a more disabled-friendly police service, it has foreclosed the possibility of the disabled being part of the police force through the impugned notification.

Third, the impugned notification appears to be a colourable exercise of power. This is because, as per the RPwD Act, the grant of any exemption has to be preceded by consultation with the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. It is common knowledge that the office of the chief commissioner has been lying vacant for many years, with the secretary in the Department

officiating in that role. Further, in the debate in Parliament at the time of the passage of the RPwD Act, an exchange between Sitaram Yechury and the then Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment is revealing. Yechury had feared that the central government would use the power granted to it under the RPwD Act to exempt people with disabilities from seeking reservation for posts that they are perfectly capable of occupying. The minister had assured that this concern would be addressed in the rules. By issuing the Impugned Notification, the Department has belied that assurance.

In a heartening development, on March 25, the SC passed an interim order, allowing physically disabled persons who have cleared the civil services (mains) exam to provisionally apply for posts in the IPS, IRPFS and DANIPS, considering this request to be "just and reasonable". The Court has asked the government to explain its stance on the impugned notification and listed the matter for April 18.

This case presents the SC with the opportunity to rule that the disabled are not a monolithic entity. Every disabled person is different, and it is unfair to paint all disabled people with the same broad brush, based on a stereotypical understanding of what they can do. Let us hope that the Court recognises that the disabled have the right to exist and work in the world just like their able-bodied counterparts.

Bajaj is a senior resident fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and Gupta is a student at the NALSAR University of Law

## APRIL 11, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

### SNAG IN INSAT

ISRO SCIENTISTS FACED the first problem with Insat 1-A when their attempts to put it on a transfer orbit failed. The master control facility at Hassan announced that the apogee motor of the satellite failed to fire on command from the ground. The satellite, heralding the country's most ambitious project, to take the benefits of space technology to 60,000 villages developed the snag two hours after it was placed in the transfer orbit of the Delta rocket. Consequently, the apogee motor firing manoeuvre has been put off by a day. The control team at Hassan is now engaged in working out contingency operations. Insat 1-A, the first civilian satel-

lite to combine the function of telecommunications, TV broadcasting and meteorology will have a life span of seven years.

### SIGNAL TO ARGENTINA

BRITAIN WON VITAL support in its diplomatic offensive against Argentina when the rest of the European Common Market banned imports in reprisal against the seizing of Falkland Islands. The 10-member EEC announced the ban, the toughest it has imposed, after a meeting in Brussels. The EEC response came as PM Margaret Thatcher waited for news from the US Secretary of State who is in Buenos Aires to convince the

Argentines that they risk an armed conflict with Britain if they do not leave the islands.

### LEFT FRONT'S DEMANDS

THE LEFT FRONT wants Article 356 of the Constitution that enables the Centre to dismiss state governments to be scrapped. It has also demanded a guarantee that the requirement of President's assent will not hold up bills passed by state assemblies. These are amongst the first time demands in the Front's manifesto released by its chairman Pramod Dasgupta. It also wants the eligible age for voting to Parliament and other elected bodies be reduced to 18 years.





# Blueprint for a prosperous Punjab

Addressing depleting groundwater, diversification of crops holds key to the state's future



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI,  
BHARAT SHARMA AND  
PURVI THANGARAJ

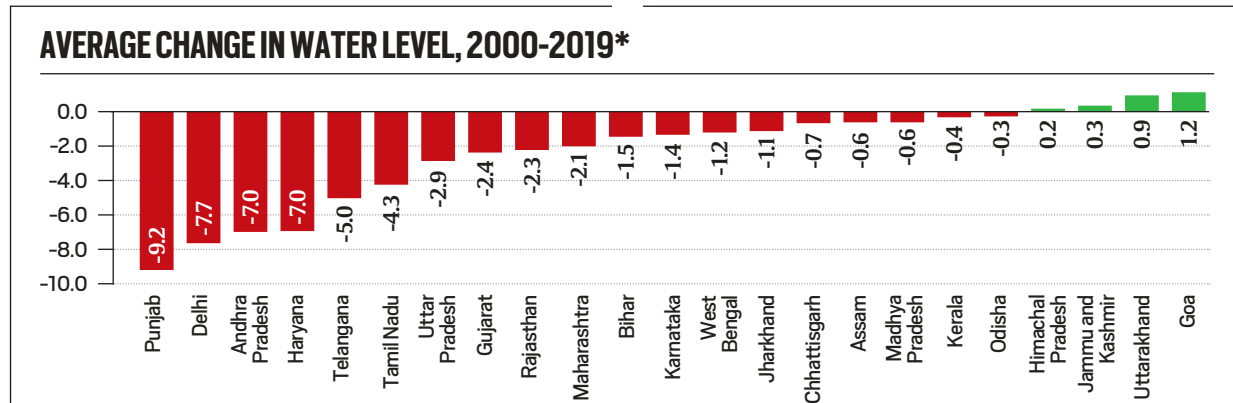
THE PEOPLE OF Punjab need to be complimented for giving a clear majority to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the recently-held Assembly elections. Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann has a golden opportunity to put Punjab back on the track to higher sustainable growth, lower corruption and ensure freedom from the drug mafia. Only then can Punjab regain its happiness and prosperity.

Mann has already vowed to root out corruption from government offices, but so far, he has not revealed a blueprint for agriculture — a sector in which Punjab has been the front runner by ushering in the Green Revolution. But the state has been languishing of late. We attempt to sketch out the key issues in Punjab's agriculture, the factors that have driven it to the current situation, and what could be the potential solutions that lead to sustainable prosperity.

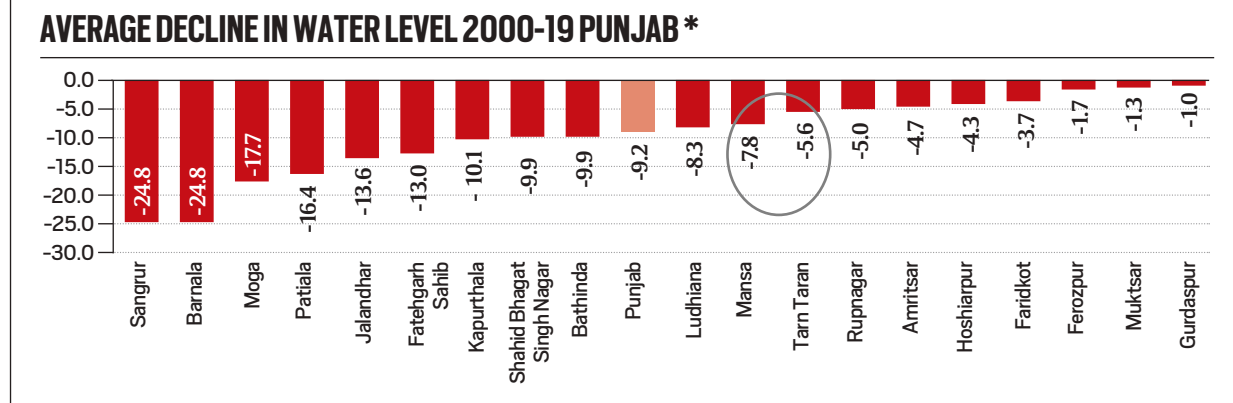
The biggest problem facing Punjab's agriculture is the fast-depleting and degrading quality of its groundwater resources. Over the last two decades (2000-2019), the groundwater table in Punjab has depleted by 9.2 metres, the highest amongst all major states in India (see graph). Groundwater stress is the highest in Punjab, with 78 per cent of the assessment units being categorised as "over-exploited" and the remaining falling under "critical" (4 per cent), "semi-critical" (6.7 per cent), and "safe" (11.3 per cent) categories. Moreover, within Punjab, groundwater has depleted by 24.8 metres in districts like Sangrur and Barnala (see graph). This is nothing short of plundering groundwater and robbing the rights of future generations.

In addition to this depletion, is the increasing degradation of water quality. Fluoride and nitrate contamination is directly linked to excessive use of fertilisers. Intensive use of urea and other nitrogen-bearing fertilisers leaves residual nitrates, which leach into the groundwater. Punjab also faces high uranium concentration in groundwater (CGWB, 2021), which is linked to anthropogenic factors leading to cancerous effects. There is the infamous "Cancer Express" that goes from Abohar to Bikaner. Nothing can be more serious than this. This trend must be arrested and reversed if we have any love and respect for our children and grandchildren. Interestingly, Mann comes from Sangrur, and reforms in this regard should start in his home district.

But how can we do that? Let us first understand the drivers behind this downward spiral. Punjab's success in the Green Revolution led to an explosion of tubewells during the 1970s and '80s. Then, in September 2001, the government an-



\* Metres below ground level (both graphs). Source for both graphs: India Water Resources Information System (GoI)



nounced free power for farmers. Paddy cultivation, which was already on the rise, became more entrenched with assured and open-ended procurement by the government at minimum support price (MSP). Massive subsidies for urea (almost 75 per cent of the cost) further lured the farmers to overuse it in a race to increase productivity. It is these subsidies on power, fertilisers, and open-ended procurement, at assured MSP, that made paddy more profitable compared to competing crops like maize and kharif pulses. Today, Punjab's famous cuisine of "makki ki roti and sarson ka saag" and "dal makhni" are not supported by the state's cropping pattern, which has become largely a paddy-wheat rotation. Punjab needs to get out of this for its prosperity and the sustainability of its agriculture.

It is clear that the solution lies in moving away from paddy to other remunerative crops that are less water-intensive. Today, paddy is grown on almost 3.1 million hectares, which needs to be cut to at least half. It cannot be done overnight. But Mann has five years to convert his dreams into reality. A five-year plan as a New Deal for farmers can be chalked out. Punjab has the highest irrigation cover (almost 99 per cent) of any state. It can move toward horticulture and other high-value crops with fertigation (drip irrigation with soluble fertilisers). This will immediately cut down water depletion and environmental degradation. But a horticulture revolution requires significant participation by the private sector in building efficient value chains from farmers to consumers.

Punjab can target airlifting horti-produce for countries in the Persian Gulf. Punjab has a huge agri-surplus and it must look to market its produce beyond the government agencies. The MSP business has

The solution lies in moving away from paddy to other remunerative crops that are less water-intensive. Today, paddy is grown on almost 3.1 million hectares, which needs to be cut to at least half. Mann has five years to convert his dreams into reality. A five-year plan as a New Deal for farmers can be chalked out. Punjab has the highest irrigation cover (almost 99 per cent) of any state. It can move toward horticulture and other high-value crops with fertigation (drip irrigation with soluble fertilisers).

outlived its utility and needs revamping. New start-ups in agri-marketing must be invited and given support to market "Grown in Punjab" produce in metro centres and large cities, as well as export them to Europe, Gulf, and Central Asian countries. Horticulture requires a cold storage chain, reefer vans, air-conditioned outlets, along with agro-processing. This is a great investment opportunity.

Punjab's dairy is doing very well, with the highest yields. It needs to build on that with more value-added products such as Punjabi lassi, makhana and kulfi. Punjab can also emerge as a centre for buffalo meat export to Southeast Asian countries. The replacement of some paddy farms with dairy and fodder farms is water-efficient, too.

Basmati rice and wheat can continue with more value addition and branding. Pulses and oilseeds must be rewarded by extra incentives given directly to farmers to save groundwater, using less subsidised urea (as they are nitrogen-fixing), less power, and cutting down on methane and nitrous oxide emissions. Per hectare, direct benefit transfer for switching from paddy to pulses and oilseeds would be the way to go (not-MSP bound procurement by government agencies). This is like creating carbon credits and rewarding farmers for that through innovative policies and pilots. That would be the road to farmers' prosperity with sustainability.

The challenge for Mann now is to device policies and scale-up pilots, especially in central Punjab's hotspot districts, that can save groundwater and cut down emissions while making farmers more prosperous.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor, Sharma is Senior Visiting Fellow, and Thangaraj Research Assistant at ICRIR

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Though inexperience ultimately became its undoing, the PTI did also record some commendable achievements." —DAWN

## Without a coup

Imran Khan's ouster as prime minister of Pakistan has a silver lining: Judiciary performed its role, and the army's hand in the matter was subtle



KESAVA MENON

IMRAN KHAN, WHO ceased to be prime minister of Pakistan after losing a trust vote in the National Assembly, has not shed his anti-American affectations because he has few other viable political assets. What is puzzling is that so many should have fallen for his line that the United States administration was involved in a conspiracy to oust him from office.

When US officials desire to steer Pakistan in a particular direction, they do not need to deal with elected civilians. They deal with the men in uniform sitting in Rawalpindi. Politicians, even those possessing rabble-rousing abilities, can at best cause delay in the arrival when it comes to decisions on national security. However, in times such as the present, obstructionist tactics can have dangerous consequences. Given the context in which Imran Khan was kindling the hostility of a superpower, it is reasonable to think that the most formidable force against him was within Pakistan, not outside.

There is one great difference this time round in that the necessary political cleansing was carried through democratic, constitutional means. Pakistan's Supreme Court upheld the spirit of democracy by annulling a presidential decree dissolving the National Assembly and another order by the Deputy Speaker of the House by which a no-confidence motion against the government was invalidated. Imran Khan was judicially mandated to take a floor test. The ruling Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf resorted to all manner of delaying tactics when the revived House reconvened but was eventually defeated.

Khan could not have taken Pakistan out of the US orbit and into the Russian one no matter the degree of excitement he felt when meeting Vladimir Putin on the morning the 21st-century Ivan Konev drove his forces into Ukraine. Given the current closeness between Russia and China — and Islamabad's multi-dimensional dependence on Beijing — there could not have been any wholehearted endorsement of US policy by Pakistan. But the Americans surely understand that. As they also know that with only about \$200-million trade between Pakistan and Russia, there is hardly anything the South Asian country can do to stiffen the sanctions regime.

To the US, Khan does not and never has posed the sort of threat that would have necessitated a regime-toppling effort. Within the country, he had become a loose cannon that could jeopardise the operations of the ship of state during a difficult passage through stormy waters. This is a phase in history when Pakistan, like India, has to manoeuvre with precision to safeguard its interests.

Can it be that the conspiracy, if any, originated in Rawalpindi, not Washington? No one will perhaps ever know the truth.

According to the broad trend of independent opinion from across the border, the crisis erupted at a tricky moment for the military. Antipathy towards Khan was increasingly being directed at the army as well for installing and keeping in office a grossly incompetent prime minister. On the other hand, disgust at the military's proclivity to grab power and make messes even messier had built up over the decades. The dam of respect that had held it back was about to be breached. The military, apparently, was not of a mind to mount a coup and invite more opprobrium.

Whatever be the truth about the army's active participation in anti-Imran operations, that is less relevant than the manner in which it handled the reverberations. Its moves before Khan's coup of April 3 and afterwards, have been sure-footed. While maintaining an overall posture of rectitude, the military top-brass flashed signals at just the right moments to keep national policy and politics on the tracks it prefers.

Even as Khan was boasting about being the only politician who had dared to confront the US, Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa was to tell a security conference that Pakistan had an excellent relationship with the superpower and had every intention of maintaining it. Immediately after Khan declared that the National Security Council had endorsed his assertion that a letter from Washington provided irrefutable evidence of his conspiracy charge, Inter-Services Public Relations issued a communique that had no mention of this letter being discussed. Khan still claimed that he had the army's endorsement only for a top officer to deny it in a private briefing to the media.

The operations of this "guiding hand" certainly had political implications. Khan's whole case, legal and political, was that the no-confidence motion was unworkable because it was the product of a US-backed conspiracy and thus violative of the country's constitution. The "letter from Washington" was cited as evidence of this conspiracy. By rubbishing the letter and celebrating ties with the US, the army damaged this case severely.

That done, GHQ seemed content to let the judiciary perform its duties. A five-judge bench seemed to be taking inordinately long to settle what many senior advocates in the country believed was an open and shut case. To be fair to their lordships, they seemed to have moved with due deliberation, giving all sides a hearing so that they would not themselves be later accused of mounting a judicial coup.

From the long-term perspective, the verdict might itself be only a little more momentous than the processes through which it was wrought. For the first time in Pakistan's history, the guardians (of the national interest and not the ideology on this occasion) seem to have done their job with a sense of responsibility and due seriousness. A dangerous megalomaniac had to be ousted from power and that outcome was achieved without the stench of direct intervention.

The writer is former editor of *Mathrubhumi* and was a correspondent in Pakistan from 1990-93



RUCHI GUPTA

## Politics of disinformation

Current system of content moderation on social media is more of a PR exercise

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS have effectively supplanted traditional information networks in India. The dialectical relationship between online content, traditional media and political networks means that the messages propagated online effectively touch even those who are not yet online.

This ubiquity could have been a golden moment for India — democratising access to information, fostering community, increasing citizen participation and reducing the distance between ordinary people and decision-makers. However, social media platforms have adopted design choices that have led to a proliferation and mainstreaming of misinformation while allowing themselves to be weaponised by powerful vested interests for political and commercial benefit. The consequent free flow of disinformation, hate and targeted intimidation has led to real-world harm and degradation of democracy in India: Mainstreamed anti-minority hate, polarised communities and sowed confusion have made it difficult to establish a shared foundation of truth.

Organised misinformation (disinformation) has a political and/or commercial agenda. However, even though there is growing recognition of the political motivations and impact of disinformation, the discourse in India has remained apolitical and episodic — focused on individual pieces of content and events, and generalised outrage against big tech instead of locating it in the larger political context or structural design issues. The evolution of the global discourse on misinfor-

mation too has allowed itself to get mired in the details of content standards, enforcement, fact checking, takedowns, deplatforming, etc — a framework which lends itself to bitter partisan contest over individual pieces of content while allowing platforms to disingenuously conflate the discourse on moderating misinformation with safeguards for freedom of expression. However, these issues are adjunct to the real issue of disinformation and our upcoming report establishes that the current system of content moderation is more a public relations exercise for platforms than being geared to stop the spread of disinformation.

A meaningful framework to combat disinformation at scale must be built on the understanding that it is a political problem: The issue is as much about bad actors as individual pieces of content. Content distribution and moderation are interventions in the political process. There is thus a need for a comprehensive transparency law to enforce relevant disclosures by social media platforms. Moreover, content moderation and allied functions such as standard setting, fact-checking and de-platforming must be embedded in the sovereign bipartisan political process if they are to have democratic legitimacy. If this is not to degrade into legal sanction for government censorship, any regulatory body must be grounded in democratic principles — its own and of platforms.

Given the political polarisation in our country (and most others), the constitution of such a regulator and its operational legitimacy is difficult. However, the failure of a po-

litical ecosystem to come to a consensus is not a free pass for the platforms. Platforms are responsible for the speed and spread of distribution of disinformation and the design choices, which have made disinformation ubiquitous and indistinguishable from vetted information. It is thus the responsibility of the platforms to tamp down on the distribution of disinformation and their weaponisation. We argue that platforms are sentient about the users and content they are hosting and bear responsibility for their distribution choices. Moreover, just as any action against content is seen as an intervention in the political process, the artificial increase in distribution of content (amplification) too has political and commercial value.

We recommend three approaches to distribution that can be adopted by platforms: Constrain distribution to organic reach (chronological feed); take editorial responsibility for amplified content; or amplify only credible sources (irrespective of ideological affiliation). The current approach to misinformation that relies on fact-checking a small subset of content in a vast ocean of unreviewed content is inadequate for the task and needs to be supplemented by a review of content creators itself.

Finally, as the country with the largest youth population in the world, it is important that we actively think of how we want our youth to engage in our democratic processes and the role of social media platforms in it. There are three notable effects of social

media on our politics, which require deliberation.

First, social media has led to a dislocation of politics with people weighing in on abstractions online while being disengaged from their immediate surroundings. Second, social media has led to a degradation of our political discourse where serious engagement has been supplanted by "hot takes" and memes. Third, it has obscured the providence of consequential interventions in our political discourse because of opacity in technology.

Meaningful politics, especially in democracies, is rooted in local organisation, discussion and negotiation. However, the structure of social media has facilitated a perception of engagement without organisation, action without consequence. This wasn't and isn't inevitable — there are more thoughtful ways to structure platforms, which would help connect and root people in their own communities instead of isolating them locally while "connecting" them virtually.

Instead of moving towards more grounded communities, there is an acceleration towards greater virtuality through "metaverse". Social media cannot be wished away. But its structure and manner of use are choices we must make as a polity after deliberation instead of accepting as them fait accompli or simply being overtaken by developments along the way.

Gupta is founder, of the Future of India Foundation

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### IMRAN'S EXIT

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Imran Khan goes, kicking & screaming' (IE, April 10). As anticipated, Pakistan PM Imran Khan was removed from office through a no-confidence vote. His ouster more than a year ahead of elections expected by next summer comes at a time of mounting economic challenges for the country.

The nuclear-armed nation is in the midst of a \$6 billion loan programme from the IMF that has involved unpopular measures including increases in utilities prices. His promise to create a "Naya Pakistan", was dogged economic mismanagement as his government battled depleting foreign exchange reserves and double-digit inflation. Now, the whole world is watching to see that who will be next PM of an economically and administratively torn country and whether unlike all of his predecessors since 1947, he will be able to bring the nation, out of the clutches of extremists and army generals and succeeds.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### WORK TOGETHER

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'If SC takes up all issues, what are LS, RS there for: CJ?' (IE, April 8). Chief Justice of India NV Ramana must have made two pithy statements not in passing but in all seriousness as the SC must have felt the alleged dereliction of duty on the part of our elected representatives and the alleged unsavoury attitude of the government in some cases. In order to avoid such unedifying situations in the future,

all three wings need to have broadened outlook and open mind to see and agree on what is good for the country.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

### HIGH-HANDED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Look out, look in' (April 9). That the government routinely uses central investigative agencies to settle scores against dissenters is unfortunately not a new development. Its suspicion of "foreign" interference is well known. However, the CBI's defiance of the Delhi court's order clearing Aakar Patel for travel abroad smacks of high-handedness and contempt for the judicial process. The message sent couldn't be clearer: Toe the line or else.

Ila Railkar, Mumbai

### EC'S ABDICATION

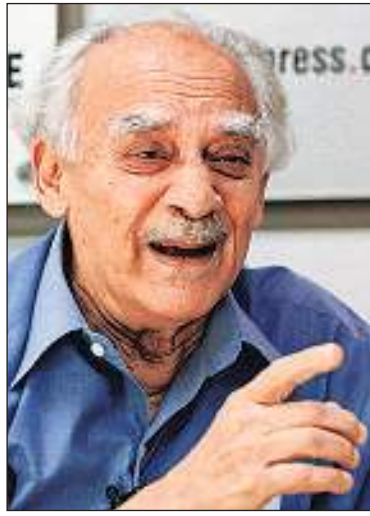
THIS REFERS TO the report, 'ECI to SC: No power to check parties, governments from promising freebies' (IE, April 10). The Election Commission is cleverly avoiding its responsibility of ensuring free and fair elections. The irrational offer of freebies certainly vitiates the sanctity of the election process. In one sense, it is also a crime. The offence attracts Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code because the political party concerned allured voters to cast votes in its favour knowing full well that freebies as promised shall not be given. The financially weak voters become the worst sufferers. How long shall the EC remain indifferent about this matter?

Arun Gupta, Kolkata

# 10 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

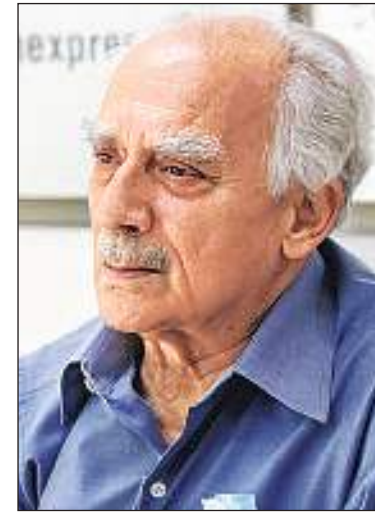
You have to be different from the person whom you are going to take on. If you are little Modis, then people will already reference Modi, who is in the stratosphere...telling them about his dictatorial tendencies won't hold



## WHY ARUN SHOURIE

As editor of *The Indian Express*, Arun Shourie had taken on the Indira Gandhi government during the Emergency. In his latest book, *The Commissioner for Lost Causes* (Penguin), Shourie, who went on to serve as a Union minister in the Vajpayee Cabinet, documents his work as an editor that unsettled

governments, institutions and systems. Be it freeing 40,000 undertrials, uncovering the Bhagalpur blindings, nailing corruption lies and unmasking the establishment, he faced punishing consequences but never traded his integrity, one that has made him one of the few World Press Freedom Heroes of our time



No one knew Kejriwal in 2013 but Modi was studying him. He asked IT wizard Rajesh Jain to come to Delhi and study AAP's campaign methods. Modi recognised that AAP's door-to-door approach was worth studying

**Vandita Mishra:** You quote VS Naipaul on the art of non-seeing, something you have raged against. Fighting for lost causes seems to agree with you as the cover has a photograph of you and your wife, you are smiling... Looking back, what are the moments that made you smile like this?

I don't have any particular story in my mind but I do remember the special bonds that I forged over time as a journalist. Similarly, in government, there were just one or two dramatic occasions. But what matters are bonds. I'm absolutely certain that if I were in need and I rang up any one of my friends with whom I have worked, they would go out of their way to help me.

**Vandita Mishra:** Considering all the big cases that you fought — the undertrials, Kamala, Bhagalpur blindings and Bofors — these could be grist for the mill of whataboutery. People could say that the Indira, Rajiv or VP Singh government, too, responded with obfuscation and saw conspiracy theories behind dissent. What's different about this Government?

The answer is the scale. Murder has always been going on but slaughter is a different dimension. Yes, there were lies on Bofors but today, you have to search for a truthful statement on everything, not just GDP figures. Similarly, electoral bonds are nothing but institutionalised corruption.

The second most visible differentiator is the fact that the BJP is working according to an ideology. And it is our great failing, including mine, to have not studied it. The RSS ideology, since Dr Hedgewar's time in the 1930s, is single-minded, defining Hindus as those who follow Hinduism, who subscribe to thousands of years of culture, who are purist and reject other influences.

The third difference is technology by which BJP cadres amplify what anyone says. Then somebody else says the same thing and it becomes the new normal. Sometimes, people don't work out the implications of a stray statement. For instance, while launching the hologram of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Our nation is thousands of years old." If that be the case, then the question would automatically arise, how is Gandhiji the father of the nation? Now, this question was actually raised soon after Gandhi's assassination in 1948 but died down following charges of conspiracy against the RSS. Now it is being revived. This is very significant because Panditji (Jawaharlal Nehru) is not, I repeat, not the problem for this government. But Gandhiji is. So, after the erasure of Panditji, it will be the erasure of Gandhiji. Somebody might just say, how is Gandhi the father of the nation, efface him. Ours is a motherland, how can it have a father?

**Ritu Sarin:** As an editor, you've been a conscience keeper and activist. And in the Zail Singh episode, you seem like a participant in politics. Is it possible for editors to play this role now?

When I was working in *The Indian Express*, nobody recognised me as a journalist. When I was in government, nobody recognised me as a politician. But I did stand up for what I felt was wrong. I remember the time when Tarlochan Singh (then President Zail Singh's aide) had asked me whether the dismissal (of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by Zail Singh following their tension) would happen. And I had given all my reasons as to how it would be unconstitutional. Whether I was with the paper (*The Indian Express*) or not, I would still have rushed to Rashtrapati Bhavan the way I did. Gianiji, too, did not think that an editor had come though he must have felt that he (Shourie) had brought *sneh* (affection) and a message, that the earlier message had been rescinded. But other than that, he would just say, a Punjabi has come.

**Ritu Sarin:** How would you like people to remember you as, considering you joined the Government...and there is a bit of a defensiveness there?

No defensiveness but I would be known only as Adit's father. I don't think I'm priding myself for it or anything but when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was PM, the personnel supervisor at the Parliament security gate exempted me, saying, "Shourie *saab*, your identity is not of a minister, we read your articles in college." It was an important lesson that we should not become our jobs and worry about the perks that go as the froth subsidies. I was inspired by my father, who, at 75, taught himself painting. He was a one-man Common Cause and until 94, was as active as anybody else.

**Vandita Mishra:** These days the government can go straight to people using technologies and social media.

## 'Everybody can be instigated...people haven't shifted, the lid has been lifted'

Arun Shourie on his days at *The Indian Express*, what's changed since then, what's new about the current establishment, the media's challenges and the weakening of institutions. The session was moderated by Vandita Mishra, National Opinion Editor



Vandita Mishra, National Opinion Editor, in conversation with Arun Shourie at *The Indian Express* office Abhinav Saha

**What are the media's challenges now?**

We are not important to the government. So, the government should not be important to us in our writing also. The best stories in this newspaper have been done by field reporters or by getting documents out through RTI or otherwise. Those things are in spite of the government, not because of the government.

However, a few years from now, even the few freedoms we have for occasionally doing a story that's inconvenient to the government will not be there.

Therefore, we must find ways to disseminate news. We must now set up networked groups in which people collect information and disseminate it one at a time.

**Coomi Kapoor:** What would you say was more rewarding and impactful: journalism or politics?

I don't know about the impact but both periods were interesting and exciting because of two individuals. It would be Ramnathji (Ramnath Goenka) for journalism and Vajpayeeji for politics. I liked what-*ever* I was doing at that point of time. It's not one or the other. Both roles came to me by happenstance. I'll quote Ghalib here: *Lai hayat aae qaza le chali chale/apni khushi na aaye, na apni khushi chale* (Came with life, will go with death).

**Vandita Mishra:** When you fought pitched battles with the government, the court would act as a friend of the Press. Now with institutional authority waning, how do you see the challenge?

The investigative institutions, the police, in fact all institutions are in a very bad way and the challenge is infinitely greater. Ramnathji would always say, "Nahin, abhi hathiyar chhodne ki koi zaroorat nahin hai, court hai (there's no need to drop your weapon, the court is still around)!" Now, whether the court is there or not, one judge can speak in favour, the other may not.

As journalists, we can keep a hawk's eye on institutions, particularly the financial, regulatory institutions and even the RBI, regardless of the growth figures they give out. It's an absolute scandal. If you read the speech the late Arun Jaitley gave while introducing the Bankruptcy Bill, the resolution limit was 90 days. Yet cases are pending at the NCLT for years. Every reform has been proclaimed as great and nobody sees what's happening on the ground.

**Vandita Mishra:** You argue that in reportage or commentary, you should not be giving all sides of the story, you form a conclusion and give it to the reader. What about the middle ground in the time of polarisation?

This is one of the pills for laziness. Our job is to look at the facts and report them as we see them at that time. Maybe we will be wrong, we'll correct them later or somebody else will point out the facts. Let's take

the hijab controversy in Karnataka. You have a wonderful article of Faizan Mustafa and then you give a contrarian column on the other side. You are giving analytical pieces on different viewpoints. But as far as facts are concerned, there can be no middle ground.

**Ritu Sarin:** Did you struggle with confidentiality issues while writing this book? Did you debate whether discussions should be outed given the fact that Ramnathji is no more?

No, I did not struggle at all. I remember being criticised over my account of a lunch with the then Karnataka Chief Minister Gundu Rao. I had asked him, "What do you feel about Mrs Gandhi?" He said, "She can give me the keys and go to sleep." I wrote about what transpired but then editor Nihal Singh decided not to publish it on grounds of privacy. So, I sent it to (MJ) Akbar and he published it in *Sunday* magazine. I sent our resident editor E Raghavan back to Gundu Rao, telling him to ask Rao not to contradict for I could have recorded that conversation. Gundu Rao did not contradict but said the revelation was wrong as the information was a matter of privacy. I am nobody's confidante. It may not be the right attitude and you should not have it, provided you don't mind losing friends. If the matter is of public concern, then your account is your little contribution, maybe just a comma in the writing of history.

**Vandita Mishra:** In the book, you quote Gandhiji as saying that the adage, *yatha raja tatha praja* (as is the king, so are the subjects), is just half the truth. It is also *yatha praja tatha raja* (as are the subjects, so is the king). Do you think that people have changed and are endorsing polarising politics?

People have not shifted but they have been instigated. For example, there was anti-Semitism all over Europe, below the surface, for 2,000 years. But when you scratched it, almost everybody participated in identifying and isolating the Jews. We

saw how old animosities were fanned during the break-up of Czechoslovakia or among Trumpists. Then you have a mob and with state protection, there's no limit. Everybody can be instigated to beat up small, poor people in the name of any big cause. People haven't shifted but the lid has been lifted. Be it the *namaaz* row in Haryana or the hijab controversy in Karnataka, their echo reached UP where elections were due. This is part of the BJP's technique.

**Shyamal Yadav:** The BJP is an election-winning machine. Can a challenge come to it from outside or inside?

Not from the inside. It's no longer a party but an electoral machine. It has a *sadhan* (resource) which the others don't have and that is the cadre of the RSS. The RSS is rationalising that its agenda is being carried out. Besides, the top leadership of the RSS is now just the *mukhota* (facade). The second-rung leadership and the cadres have all been co-opted by Mr Modi and are now his army. The only possibility of a challenge is external, if other parties join forces.

**Anant Goenka:** Do you believe that the mainstream media is to blame for not addressing majoritarian insecurity? Would that be one of the reasons why the BJP strategy is working so well?

Yes. Nobody in the mainstream media or in the academic community has looked at the primary literature of the RSS. So that neglect of ours has certainly contributed to the current state of affairs. We are surprised by what is happening while they are correct in saying, "*Hum jo kehte hain wohi karte hain* (We do what we say)." But we were not listening.

Second, we did not pay attention to the people they have mobilised. For instance, we talk to ourselves in very small circles. But the RSS has been working since the 1940s to bring into its fold groups like the *sadhus*. They are influential in society but it never occurred to us to reach out to them and make sure that they do not become the instruments for things that are, let's say

non-Hindutva. In our neglect, they have become easy prey for others.

**Anant Goenka:** For instance, the emotions of the Kashmiri Pandits and the way they have been brought out by one film. Do you think the mainstream media has ignored the issue?

I am not a very good reader of newspapers, so I don't want to comment. But in this art of not-seeing, we don't want to look at what's happening. Kashmiri Pandits would have suffered from the same aversion to seeing the facts. Not that they were singled out.

**Rakesh Sinha:** What is the difference between the Opposition of a majority government like Rajiv Gandhi and the Opposition now?

I was interacting more with the government than with the Opposition. The selective bias was maybe because of the people I was meeting. Also, governments are so much larger in our mental space than the Opposition.

Still, I will say, it's not as if the country is in peril. Each of you (Opposition/regional leaders) as individuals are in peril. So at least for that reason, get together. Gulliver was brought down by Lilliputians. But that's not just going to be by stitching together. Each Opposition leader is a formidable figure in his/her state. Most leaders have a good organisation, reach; some of them have a reputation of doing good. But in the end, you have to be different from the person whom you are going to take on. If you are little Modis, then people will already reference Modi, who is a very big figure in the stratosphere. If the local ruler is as authoritarian or as oriented and if the government is as personality-oriented in that state, then to tell the voter about Modi's dictatorial tendencies won't hold. One has to be different.

**Shubhra Gupta:** How do you see polarisation playing out till the end? Is there a way where people with different ideologies can start having conversations?

The pattern is being set by people at the top that unless you are the sole of my foot, you are my enemy. This whole fanning of social media to abuse somebody is being done from the top. That is what is leading to polarisation. We should maintain our friendships, this politics is not that important. Why lose your friendship on that count? Nothing is going to change because of our opinions expressed to each other. So why make them so important in our lives? It's up to us to defeat the designs of the government which wants to polarise us.

The second factor is that we must not give currency to labels. This is a bad habit acquired from the Communists. You are rightist, I will not examine your facts. Now it has become generic to the entire society. Whether I am for or against the

PM, please examine the facts.

**Shyamal Majumdar:** You talked about regulators and how they have been almost hollowed out. Many people say that the RBI has become the cheerleader of the government. Others say it is being pragmatic. Your views?

It has become a cheerleader... The fact that people like Raghuram Rajan and Urjit Patel were removed or it was made difficult for them to continue shows the attempt to reduce the RBI to yet another instrument of power.

**Narender Singh:** Do you ever regret joining the BJP? Wasn't it in the making, whatever is happening today?

Not as long as Mr Vajpayee was there. Maybe it was my blindness but I was very focussed on him and the work that I was assigned. He had a way of dealing with contentious issues. I remember the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Kuala Lumpur, where I was the Minister accompanying Atalji. At a press conference, after which he was to meet Sri Lankan leaders, somebody asked him to comment on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP's) call for a *shila puja* in Ayodhya. Atalji simply said, "*Ayodhya walo se hum Dilli jakar milenge, abhi toh hum Lanka walo se milne ja rahe hain* (I will address Ayodhya concerns in Delhi, now I have to meet the Lankans)." And he deflected the issue.

**Rakesh Sinha:** How do you see Rahul Gandhi and the Congress? Is there an issue or has the BJP been successful in shrinking him?

I don't know Rahul Gandhi but the thing is he has stood up for the right issues against the government. This is not what I expected when he came into public life. He may be restricting himself to social media and may not have a mass base but he has taken up issues of considerable importance, much more than regional leaders. Maybe he should be the spokesman of the party and not someone who is running it.

Modi is a 24x7 politician, always devoting time to organisational matters in the party and listening to partymen. Congressmen have complained they don't get appointments with the leadership. The problem with the Congress is not ideology or G 23, it is the fact that its cadre has disappeared. That is why Modi is concerned about AAP and not anybody else, because that party just has volunteers signing up. I remember I was in Ahmedabad in 2013 and no one knew Kejriwal. But Modi was studying him and he asked IT wizard Rajesh Jain to come to Delhi and study AAP's campaign methods. Modi recognised that AAP's door-to-door approach was worth studying. After Punjab, AAP may very well form the government in Himachal, it might be formidable in Haryana. And even if it gets 15 seats in Gujarat, it's a victory.



Panditji (Nehru) is not the problem for this government. But Gandhiji is. So, after the erasure of Panditji, it will be the erasure of Gandhiji. Somebody might just say, efface him







