



THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2020

Higher education gets a big lift

The NEP 2020 sets right many lingering problems, especially on regulation, but the govt's fee fixation could undo gains

HOW SLOW INDIA has been in reforming policy for a dynamic sector like education is evident from the fact that the National Education Policy (NEP) adopted by the Cabinet on Wednesday succeeds the one adopted in 1992. Indeed, while there has been talk of greater autonomy for higher education institutions (HEIs) for nearly a decade now, there have been many a slip between rhetoric and action on ground. The IIM Act, which gave the premier management education institutes significant autonomy, was passed in 2017, and yet, just a week ago, the University Grants Commission (UGC) was fighting the IIMs over one-year Masters programmes. Sadly, this is not the only instance of regulatory straitjacketing, nor is UGC the only regulator with a broad sweep of powers, often with contradictory objectives. Last week, as per The Indian Express, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), derecognised three programmes offered by MDI Gurgaon, a top management education institute, as they didn't meet its duration criteria. Add to this the government having waited till the pandemic to liberalise online education—had this been done even a few years earlier, higher education would have perhaps been better prepared for handling the pandemic restrictions—and others such as policy myopia, and it is clear why Indian universities haven't been able to break into the top-100 in global rankings or why China has a tertiary GER of close to 60%, against India's under-30%, despite having lagged India just two decades ago. Against such a backdrop, NEP 2020 replacing the existing higher education regulatory regime with a single higher education regulator, and among other things, moving forward with graded autonomy for HEIs is a tonic shock for the better.

The Higher Education Council of India (HECI), with four vice-chairs, will replace the UGC-AICTE regime—given the regulatory functions have been separated and assigned to the four vice-chairs, it is expected that the conflict of interest that affected UGC's functioning and created several quality issues will be a thing of the past. The regulatory treatment will be the same for all universities, private or public, which could translate into greater evenness of standards among HEIs. The NEP 2020 also provides universities the freedom to submit self-disclosures, which will preclude the need for regular inspections. It also opens the doors for multi-disciplinary education, by adopting a major-minor structure for university education that allows students to graduate in a science subject, while having a minor in arts subject as part of their degree, or vice-versa. The decision to have multiple exit and entry points for higher education will ensure that time spent at HEIs doesn't go unrecognised.

However, the government's fixation with fee regulation is a major challenge; it makes little sense since the bulk of the universities in India are public-funded, which means education is significantly subsidised in these institutions with fees being capped anyway. Preventing private universities and premium public universities from charging the fees that they need for expansion plans and sustaining quality hardly seems to be the route to ensuring high-quality higher education. Indeed, even the graded autonomy plan needs tweaking, with more parameters being brought in to judge whether a government-funded university deserves autonomy, extending it to private universities, though, smacks of the old command-and-control approach. A good sign is that the system that the government has talked about will only work if HEIs is liberal in its approach.

While foreign universities—now allowed to set up campuses in India—will count the end of the UGC regime as a big positive, the government or a central regulator stymieing them on fees will offset this. There will be little incentive, thus, for a top-notch global university to create an Indian foothold. Over-regulation is one of the chief reasons Indian universities don't figure high in global rankings; the government needs to be mindful of this.

Act against antibiotic abuse

Recent study shows the scale of India's antibiotic problem

THE WHO CONSIDERS antimicrobial resistance (AMR)—of which antibiotic resistance is a subset—a global health emergency. Indeed, AMR already kills nearly 700,000 people every year—230,000 die due to multi-drug-resistant (MDR) TB—and, in a business-as-usual scenario, could result in 10 million deaths annually by 2050. Now, a study by researchers at the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy, published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases, says that global consumption of antibiotics registered a 40% increase between 2000 and 2015, on the back of a massive increase in consumption in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). The global per capita consumption of Watch antibiotics increased by 90.9% during the period—in 2019, the WHO had come up with the Access, Watch, Reserve (AWaRe) classification of antibiotics, based on resistance potential with Access having low potential, Watch being high-potential and Reserve being last-resort, restricted use antibiotics. India stands out sorely, as the world's largest consumer of antibiotics—6.3 billion daily defined doses (DDD) of antibiotics consumed in 2015, compared with China's 3.8 billion and the US's 2.9 billion, respectively the second- and third-largest consumers of antibiotics.

Worryingly, India's showing is largely on the back of an increase in consumption of Watch antibiotics—while its relative consumption of Access antibiotics (in the overall pool of antibiotics consumed) fell from 56.8% to 27.2%, together with China, it accounts for 6.6 billion DDDs of 15.2 billion of Watch antibiotics consumed in 2015. The relative consumption of Watch antibiotics in India is nowhere close to Japan's 83%, the highest clocked, but India's 65% showing earned it the second spot in terms of indiscriminate consumption of these antibiotics.

While access to life-saving drugs, including Access antibiotics, is a major concern for LMICs, including India, the Indian case also highlights its problem of antibiotic stewardship—or directing responsible use of antibiotics. The WHO sets a target of a 60% share for Access antibiotics in the overall pool of antibiotics consumed. A country like India, which already sees a high number of MDR TB cases, can hardly afford to lose control of antibiotic consumption. The good news is that India has taken significant steps over the past few years: it announced the National Action Plan on AMR in April 2017 and added a sixth pillar to the five pillars of the Global Action Plan—strengthening India's leadership in the global fight against AMR. Kerala became the first state to adopt a state-level AMR action plan last year. India has also set up an AMR lab surveillance network, apart from laying down national guidelines on antimicrobial use. But, there are still many gaps—on the broader level, from clinical antibiotic abuse to antibiotic quality and safety, from improper pharmaceutical disposal to drug pricing policy's impact on drug quality, it has to be a multi-front battle.

DoubleEDGED

Cautious celebration is the most prudent reaction to GPT

LAST WEEK, OPENAI, an AI research concern, launched the third iteration of its natural language processing software GPT-3. Considered one of the most advanced natural language processing algorithms, GPT-3 is already proving its mettle as tests show that it can be used to create code, query databases, and even write tweets and headlines. But, a significant feature is the large database it is dependent on—at 175 billion parameters, this is a 100-fold increase over GPT-2. Although, the full suite of functions are not yet available, test results from GPT-2 show how far the NLP has progressed. In the case of children's textbook writing, the accuracy of GPT-2 was 89%. In contrast, humans did only slightly better at 92%. Now, GPT-3 will surpass that.

But, what AI/ML still must contend with is the problem of inherent bias. As most data is collated from online sources, it is quite influenced by pop vogue. This means that, if an opinion is tilted in favour of one side, the technology will replicate this bias. This was also the problem when Microsoft launched its chatbot, Tay, on Twitter years ago. Although Tay behaved well for a few hours, it soon got cornered, spewing extremist propaganda. GPT-3 could face similar problems. The issue is complicated by scale. Given the advancement of GPT-3 or any such algorithm can create, say, fake news faster and likely in a harder-to-fact-check manner than before. This is also the reason why people have been calling for responsible AI. But, for that, governments, companies and researchers will need to collaborate.

NEP 2020 IS PRECISELY WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DOMINATE IN THE FUTURE DECADES OF GROWTH, AND DRIVE THE EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS OF OUR YOUNG POPULATION

A new dawn for India

TV MOHANDAS PAI & NISHA HOLLA

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nately, who represent 5.2% of the enrolment against 13% of the population now. The Muslim community is the only group in danger of being left behind. NEP 2020 lays out a clear-sighted vision for full equity and inclusion that ensures no social group is left behind while honing focus on massively improving quality of education and making the Indian education system global destination. The following reforms announced in NEP 2020 must be undertaken immediately to facilitate this change.

■ Grant full autonomy to top 200 institutions

Keeping our institutions under heavy government regulation has taken the focus away from quality. NEP 2020 has boldly put forth a light but tight regulatory framework that will change this legacy. Via NEP 2020, India must grant full academic, administrative and financial autonomy to its 200 top-ranked universities. This will free the NPE that will fund the variety of updated course offerings to keep up with the interdisciplinary nature of global innovation.

■ Establish the National Research Foundation (NRF) to fast-track innovation

India lags other major economies in research and innovation funding. Responding to the urgent need to change this, NEP 2020 sets up the NRF that will fund competitive, peer-reviewed grant proposals across disciplines to recognise and support outstanding research. With this funding, but students and their parents tend to dislike online classes, so many simply decide to skip it. In addition, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement has said it will ban international students from entering the US if their classes would be held entirely online.

And, if some students find that a combination of distance learning and internet-enabled socialising is just as good as the traditional college life, it could spark a longer-term shift away from college campuses as an institution. If young people realise that they can get almost as good an educational experience with "zoom university", and satisfying personal growth and career networking experience via various social apps, they might start to question the need to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for the high-end package of university life. Even before the pandemic, many Americans were beginning to question whether astronomical tuition was worth it; letting students get a taste of life without the full college experience might turn that trickle into a long-term flood.

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So many colleges are likely to risk coronavirus outbreaks in order to save their pocketbooks. But ironically, they may end up getting the worst of both worlds. Just as premature reopening of bars, stores and restaurants ended up causing big Covid outbreaks and hurting business activity in many Sun Belt states, virus outbreaks on campuses could cause a stampede away from universities eroding trust in universities as responsible stewards of

university laboratories and research centres on a competitive basis.

■ Incentivise India's top 100 universities to increase the number of trained PhDs

NEP 2020's focus on professional education and frontier technologies like AI/ML, genomics, etc, can serve as a catapult for India to raise the bar on top-quality PhDs. Today, India only produces about 40,800 PhDs a year, mostly of indifferent quality. We must quickly scale to 50,000 more per year to a total of 100,000 of high global standards of quality. Incentivising India's top 100 universities to produce 50,000 more PhDs annually—fueled by NEP 2020's push toward autonomy and NRF funding—will improve our innovation and specialisation talent.

■ Improve higher education infrastructure with long term loans from the market

NEP 2020 extends a well-rounded view on new-age learning environments, research and development, sports, culture, hostel facilities, medical facilities and more. Currently, Indian universities are short of infrastructure required to execute this vision. The HE Finance Corporation must be authorised to raise money from markets with a GoI guarantee to grant long term 20-30 year loans to Indian universities to create the necessary infrastructure.

■ Impending need to improve GER in tier-2 & tier-3 districts

Many states and districts of India have a GER below 25; states like Bihar (13.6), West Bengal (19.3), and Jharkhand (19.1), as well as districts with

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Prime minister of India Narendra Modi

Framing of NEP 2020 will be remembered as a shining example of participative governance. I thank all those who have worked hard in the formulation... May education brighten our nation and lead it to prosperity

low GER within other states. These states and districts must be given special grants with a 50/50 participation from central and relevant state governments. The HE Finance Corporation can grant long term loans for this purpose with a goal to bring the GER of these districts and states to the national average in 10 years. NEP 2020's direction on integrating vocational education in the educational system can serve as a tremendous growth driver for education among these populations.

■ Allow top 100 global universities per global QS/Times rankings to set up in India

The ministry of external affairs estimates there are 7.5+ lakh Indian students studying across 90 countries abroad spending around \$20 billion a year. This is an expensive affair. Instead of students travelling abroad to attend universities, we must incentivise world-class universities to come to India. NEP 2020's push to facilitate the top 100 global universities to operate in India is a welcome one. While inviting these universities, the terms must be set to provide a degree on par with the parent institution while operating within India with full autonomy.

■ Set up a National Scholarship Fund

NEP 2020's focus on financial support for students will enable equity in access for all Indians to receive a quality higher education degree. The National Scholarship Fund can be modelled as a Public-Private Partnership, with a private-sector board to oversee the organisation. 50% of the funding can be raised from citizens all over India on a 100% tax exemption. This model has the potential to fulfil at least one crore scholarships per year of over ₹20,000 each with the government putting in 50% of the total.

Proper implementation of the reforms and ideas envisioned in the NEP 2020 will fundamentally transform India. With the emphasis on knowledge economy driven growth in the 21st century, how precisely what India needs to dominate in the future decades of growth and drive the education requirements of our young population.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Draft EIA notification

The draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification 2020 issued by the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change, has received stringent criticism not only from the opposition but also from the environmental researchers, ecologists, activists, and conservationists. Rather than dubbing the notification as the draft notification as unfounded, the Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar has the onus to listen and consider the claim that it (draft notification) legitimises post-facto environmental clearance, excludes major industries from EIA process, subverts the public hearing procedure, reduces the scope of citizens to report violations, and fails to report project's impact on the wildlife and their habitats with the seriousness it truly deserves. As one of the fastest growing economies of the world and an aspiring world power, India needs to have a robust environmental regulatory mechanism and an EIA process, which puts high premium on environmental protection, and subjects all its massive developmental projects to intense EIA scrutiny and assessment. With climate change induced adverse weather events becoming a regular feature as excessive droughts and biblical floods afflicting major parts of the country every year, time has come to move on to a greener path of economic development. Unless we make environment the top priority or the highest priority in our policy making, sustainable economic development will only continue to be an elusive dream.

—M Jayaram, Sholavandan

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Covid-19's impact on college campuses

Many colleges are likely to risk coronavirus outbreaks in order to save their pocketbooks. But ironically, they may end up getting the worst of both worlds

NOAH SMITH

Bloomberg

COLLEGE LIFE THIS fall is going to be a potential source of trouble—both on campus and for the towns where colleges are located. Meeting friends, dorm life, socialising and attending classes are among the highest-risk activities in terms of spreading Covid-19 because they involve prolonged indoor personal contact. A study from South Korea shows that young people in their late teens and early 20s spread the virus faster than people of other ages.

The most responsible thing universities could do in terms of protecting public health would be to close dorms, hold classes online and bar all in-person student social activities for the fall semester. On their own, young people are unlikely to be safe and responsible, even if classes enforce strict social distancing and masking requirements, parties and dorm rooms will become breeding grounds for the virus. Young people don't often die of the disease, but they can suffer long-term respiratory, neurological and other effects. They can also infect more vulnerable populations such as professors, administrators, family members and other community members.

Unfortunately, many colleges are refusing to shut down in-person student life. The reason is probably financial. Coronavirus has hit university budgets hard—keeping out high-paying foreign students, reducing state education funding and making students wary of attending. Fear of losing additional revenue from dormitory fees appears to be overriding public health concerns for many institutions or higher learning—just one more way in which a concern for money over health has degraded the US's pandemic response.

Some will be responsible about holding classes online, at least some of the time. But, some are insisting that classes be held in person. Colleges can charge full tuition for a semester of online learning, but students and their parents tend to dislike online classes, so many simply decide to skip it. In addition, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement has said it will ban international students from entering the US if their classes would be held entirely online.

And, if some students find that a combination of distance learning and internet-enabled socialising is just as good as the traditional college life, it could spark a longer-term shift away from college campuses as an institution. If young people realise that they can get almost as good an educational experience with "zoom university", and satisfying personal growth and career networking experience via various social apps, they might start to question the need to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for the high-end package of university life. Even before the pandemic, many Americans were beginning to question whether astronomical tuition was worth it; letting students get a taste of life without the full college experience might turn that trickle into a long-term flood.

So many colleges are likely to risk coronavirus outbreaks in order to save their pocketbooks. But ironically, they may end up getting the worst of both worlds. Just as premature reopening of bars, stores and restaurants ended up causing big Covid outbreaks and hurting business activity in many Sun Belt states, virus outbreaks on campuses could cause a stampede away from universities eroding trust in universities as responsible stewards of

young people's health and safety. And at the same time, enough classes are online, and enough students are staying home, that a long-term shift toward distance education is unlikely to be stayed off simply by having kids on campus in the fall.

So one way or another, a big hit to university tuition is coming—on top of the big hits from state budget cuts and the decline in foreign students. That triple whammy will end up closing many colleges that are barely profitable—a trend that began before the pandemic and will force many others to cut salaries and services.

All of this also means big trouble for college towns, which serve as economic engines for many areas that otherwise would be in decline. A research university increases the economy of the surrounding area by drawing in skilled workers, which in turn draws in private investment. Even colleges that don't do much research generate significant amounts of economic activity simply from student and staff spending in the region. Public universities in small towns also redistribute wealth from the big cities via the tax system. As things stand, college towns tend to have higher wages and higher gross domestic product per capita than other places.

With some students staying home and universities themselves under both short-term and long-term financial pressure, all that is now at even greater risk. With stores, restaurants and other businesses quiet or empty, college towns could face a very strange and difficult autumn. And, many of those troubles may last long after the pandemic is gone.

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NEW AGRICULTURE REFORMS

Farmers' collectives set to gain the most

FPOs have the potential to transform marginal and small farms from being sites of subsistence farming to market-oriented commercial farms, provided that the promotion and nurturing of FPOs is implemented in a mission mode

THE IMPORTANCE of the agricultural sector in India has always been measured more in terms of the number of people engaged in it for their livelihood, rather than its share in the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country; therefore, fostering rapid growth in the farm sector remains an important policy concern in India despite a significant decline in its share in GDP, from 59% in 1950-51 to about 14% in 2018-19.

In India, 126 million marginal and small farms together operate on 74 million hectares of agricultural land, with 0.58 hectares of average size of holding. Being small entities in terms of landholdings, they face numerous challenges in the form of poor access to markets and finances. It is now realised that some of the constraints related to product and financial markets that marginal and small farms face can be

mitigated by aggregating the farm produce by forming farmers' groups and then linking these groups to an integrated value chain that brings chain actors together. Till date, 7,000 farmer producer organisations (FPOs) have been promoted in the country by various agencies. In fact, the NABARD alone has promoted 4,484 FPOs under its various promotional initiatives.

Covid-19 crisis has expedited the agri-market reforms process. During the Covid-19 crisis, the government of India, through its various ministries, announced various relief measures including Atmanirbhar Bharat having medium and long-term solutions. The government launched new features on the e-NAM platform to help farmers sell their produce without physically visiting wholesale *mandis* during the Covid-19 crisis. These were (1) warehouse-based trading module based on e-NWR, and (2)

FPO trading module whereby FPOs can sell their produce at a collection centre without bringing the produce to agricultural produce market committees (APMCs). Further, direct buying facility by bulk buyers outside the *mandi* premises without any licensing or registration process or as decided by states/Union territories were also allowed.

Two recent ordinances on agricultural reforms—The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Ordinance 2020 and the Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance 2020—promulgated by the President of India were necessitated by the urgency to help farmers by putting some legal mechanism/reform in place to facilitate inter-state and intra-state trade of agricultural produce, while allowing farmers to sell their agricultural produce at a place of their choice at a remunerative price during the Covid-19 crisis. Timely promulgation of these two ordinances reflects the Prime Minister's vision of converting crisis into opportunity.

Ensuring sustainability of collectives in agri, allied sectors

Since operational guidelines for promoting 10,000 new FPOs with One District, One Product (ODOP) motto have already been issued, some protocols need to be followed while implementing the scheme and also creating more number of sustainable groups. The best part of this scheme is the creation of credit guarantee funds by the NABARD and the NCDP (National Cooperative Development Corporation), besides augmenting the corpus of equity grant fund earlier set up in the SFAC (Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium). The scheme also enables states/UTs to avail assistance for FPOs under the Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF) for the development of marketing and farm-level value addition infrastructure for FPOs.

Since operational guidelines for promoting 10,000 FPOs with the ODOP motto have already been issued, the following points may help in establishing more number of sustainable groups/FPOs.

■ Implementing agencies need to identify experienced and credible cluster-based business organisations (CBBOs) having desired technical and administrative expertise to promote sustainable FPOs. Linking FPOs to various, especially in areas of

technical support.

■ FPOs should have their members from within a reachable contiguous area to have better execution of various decisions taken by the executive committee. Cohesiveness and regular meetings ensure success in the business.

■ Federating FPOs at some level, especially at the district or the *mandal* level, will always be good for scalability and sustainability, and also to ensure better backward and forward linkages from the approachability viewpoint and promote ODOP.

■ Unlike in case of milk & milk products that look homogeneous irrespective of the source of animal, the same is not true with different varieties of vegetables, fruits cereals, etc, which vary in shape, size and colour. Lack of homogeneity of product fetches lesser price both in domestic and international markets. FPOs, therefore, need to grow only one or two varieties of a crop for better marketability.

■ FPOs should be output-centric and concentrate on creating and managing the whole value chain for the identified product/crop.

■ In many FPOs, shareholding is concentrated in a few hands that corner most of the profit, and this discourages other members to take interest in group activities. Although this anomaly is addressed in the new guidelines, practising equal amount of shareholding for all the members may have to be insisted upon.

■ The aggregation of farm produce as well as bulk purchase of inputs are yet to be started by many FPOs. CBBOs should encourage FPOs to start experimenting with the aggregation model by registering themselves on the e-NAM platform to take advantage of better price discovery.

■ The cultivation of agri-horticultural crops in north-eastern states is guided by local demand. Developing the north-east region as a single agricultural market would help the region to grow faster. FPOs should produce those crops that enjoy comparative advantage.

Finally, FPOs have the potential to transform marginal and small farms from subsistence farming to market-oriented commercial farms, provided that the promotion and nurturing of FPOs is implemented in a mission mode. The central government's efforts are laudable and these will be further accentuated with regulatory amendments, particularly those related to land and tenancy rights.

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Urban centres need more relief

Capital-intensive manufacturing emerged as the most vulnerable to the pandemic; with reverse migration, MGNREGA has to be a focus too

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THE DAILY SPIKE in Covid-19 cases in major cities, along with the virus spreading in smaller towns, raises questions regarding prospects of urban dream of Indian middle-class. People had migrated from rural to urban areas, especially to metropolises, for a better future. However, whether urban areas, driven by production processes in manufacturing and services, are resilient enough to absorb the income shock and keep hope alive in times of a pandemic, is an open question. This question is now more important as there has been a massive reverse migration, and there is a need to develop employment opportunities for these people. Should we encourage them to go back to cities or develop employment opportunities in their native places? We attempted to find answers through in-depth telephonic interviews with the affected people.

A 28-year-old lady, holding a post-graduate degree in psychology, pursuing her career as a professional child therapist/developmental psychologist in New Delhi, draws salary of ₹40,000 per month before the lockdown. Post that, she faced a pay cut of 50% in the initial two months, and 65% in June. Before the lockdown, her family used to earn ₹25,000 as house rent, but this stopped post the lockdown. As a result, she can spend only on basic household needs.

The condition of a migrant from Mehsana (Gujarat) to Noida (UP) who used to work as a BPO executive is much worse. He lost the job he had joined six months ago. He used to earn ₹25,000 per month. His father also lost his job at the Gujarat

Industrial Development Corporation, where he used to earn ₹6,000 per month. His mother is a diabetic. She needs her daily dose of insulin and other medicines. He returned to Mehsana during the later phase of the lockdown. His father is back at his job but he is uncertain about getting any employment in the near future. He and his family are under mental distress as his mother's health is deteriorating.

The plight of a 40-year-old lady from Pune is different. She works in a reputed international school as a helper (*stapal*). Although she gets ₹9,780 as monthly salary, she has to return ₹3,000 to the employers. Post lockdown, there is no role for her in the school. So, she has to return

₹4,890 (50% of salary). Though the effective reduction of salary is not very high, she faces the danger of job loss. The school has laid off her staff strength. She has started engaging with stitching and other embroidery work, and earns ₹1,500-3,000 per month in her new occupation.

It is worth exploring coping strategies of households in rural India. A 48-year-old illiterate from a village in Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu used to earn ₹6,000 per month before the lockdown from agricultural labour. Her net household income has fallen to ₹4,000-5,000 per month. Another woman from same district lost her job at a coccopatt cottage unit, where she used to work at a monthly salary of ₹20,000. Her income is



now zero as the industry shut down, but her husband continued to earn ₹4,000 per month as an agricultural labourer. Both these women are willing to work as MGNREGA workers. However, the former has a job card while the latter doesn't. The former also considers another cocoon-related occupation as a fall-back option.

These case studies raise questions about the resilience of the economic system. The capitalist development process encourages the manufacturing mode of production, such as work in factory, firm, school, etc. Factory mode of production is based on economies of scale and capital accumulation, which also drives urbanisation. People need to come together to work

in the same place. But, this is antithetical to distancing norms. That's why the manufacturing mode of production is the worst affected. As a result, urban centres are more affected by income shocks than rural areas due to Covid-19.

Modes of production where labour requirement is high, say, agriculture, have been less affected during a pandemic. Self-employment is another mode of production that holds a lot of promise in these difficult times. The previously-mentioned psychotherapist is planning to start an online counselling sessions. The woman from Coimbatore is also attempting to cope up with the crisis through self-employment.

Government intervention should attempt to smoothen out the problems of consumption and income stream of the affected families. The government should focus more on urban centres, where the crisis is deeper. Guaranteed employment opportunity for unskilled labour in less capital-intensive sectors such as agriculture or public works may be helpful. MGNREGA in rural areas should be strengthened, and must be designed and extended to urban areas. To develop alternative employment opportunities, the skill-mapping exercise by the Uttar Pradesh government for migrant workers is a move in right direction. In the next stage, market linkage of products produced in small towns and villages is crucial.

NGOs have to play a role in imparting skills for alternative occupations and linking local products to the national and global markets. SEWA Bharat, in Phulia of Nadia district of West Bengal, has linked the sarees produced by women to the market through an online platform called the Anubandh. Women are also engaged in production of masks, which are sold through the contacts of NGOs. Instead of looking for livelihood only in cities, people should be given an opportunity to find decent livelihood in villages. Governments and NGOs should work in tandem to fill the existing gaps in the supply chain and marketing of rural produce. We should learn from major IT companies coped with the pandemic by providing tele-education and allowing employees to work from home. A transformative approach in modes of production would help developing a resilient economic institutional structure.

Making financial inclusion work

MANAVENDRA PRASAD

The author works on skill development among the youth

Comprehensive financial awareness can catalyse financial inclusion

NOBEL LAUREATE AND economist Amartya Sen opined that poverty is the deprivation of opportunity. Financial inclusion is the panacea for this as it provides equality of opportunities to access financial services; hence improves the financial well-being of the financially vulnerable.

In practical terms, financial inclusion in India has traditionally been about making credit available to the masses. From the All-India Rural Credit Survey Committee report of 1954, the nationalisation of banks, to the introduction of the mandatory system of priority sector lending in 1972, all efforts have been about access to credit. Even the concept of the Lead Bank Scheme introduced in 1969 or the establishment of Local Area Banks in 1996 was with the primary objective of meeting the credit needs of the local economies and, as a result, achieving financial inclusion.

Despite this multi-decadal institutional effort, a majority of Indians, especially in rural areas, remain financially weak and are effectively excluded from the formal economy. Over the years, India's financial inclusion strategy has become truer by incorporating new elements. With the mission mode effort of Jan-Dhan, almost 90% of adult Indians have bank accounts. Use of Aadhaar and mobile phones has direct transfer of benefit payments and digital payments has powered a dramatic rise in financial inclusion. But real financial inclusion that can support poverty reduction is seen only when the poor not only have access to microcredit to generate additional streams of income or can receive social benefits in their bank accounts, but when they can also channel savings into investments and create assets; or buy insurance products that protect them financially in times of disease, disability, death, and can help fund children's education. This kind of inclusion will create significant changes in the economy.

What is the new perspective?

India's financial inclusion strategy needs to bring in a new element of comprehensive financial awareness. There is no single source of independent and unbiased information related to personal finance. All effort is product-specific. In the absence of a comprehensive solution, there is no entity harmonising conflicts between various financial products. Access to comprehensive application-oriented solutions will aid financial inclusion through improved financial health.

Armed with adequate knowledge, a lay-citizen can make his/her money work harder for him/her and that can allow families to save, manage cash flows and reduce the need to sell assets in times of crisis. It can enable them to build their assets and cushion themselves against external shocks.

Citizens will learn that their small businesses can also avail of insurance or that fixed deposits are not the only way to create wealth. They will appreciate that the primary function of insurance is protection, and not wealth creation. Efficient management of limited resources will increase savings and allow the poor to make the transformation from everyday survival to planning to fulfill life-stage goals. Parents will be able to pay for their children's tuition, better their living conditions, and seek out and pay for healthcare services as they are needed. The multiplier effect created by this cannot be underestimated. It is only with this knowledge that one can prevent mis-selling and protect lay-citizens from Ponzi schemes. The lower-income category lives under the constant shadow of financial duress and any mis-sold product can make the equation go awry.

The aim of strengthening financial protection of weaker sections of the society, with special social schemes, often remains unfulfilled because the information is not adequately available. A strong financial awareness programme will help lay-citizens benefit from government schemes.

Advantages of the new perspective

Financial awareness as a tool to achieve financial inclusion is easier to implement than making credit available. It is a more cost-efficient, its reach is wider, and efficient financial awareness, will India witness a revolution in the prevalence of financial instruments. It will lead to an effective 're-tilt' of our capital markets and make them robust. Lending and helping hand to citizens in achieving their financial goals is politically very sound. It is apt to assert that achieving financial competence needs to be integral to any customer-centric financial inclusion model.

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE



A recovery that has very little steam of its own

An incipient revival of the Indian economy after the lockdown seems to have stalled. Merely unlocking India is not enough and demand looks too weak to rise without government help

A few indicators of economic activity had looked up in May, as India began to reopen for businesses after a prolonged covid lockdown, but since then, this incipient recovery appears to have lost momentum. Key aspects of the prevailing gloom are captured by the latest update of the Mint Macro Tracker published in this newspaper on Wednesday. Of the 16 big variables under its watch, 12 were in the red—that is, doing worse than their five-year average performance. While tractor sales rebounded up in June, consumption measures such as sales of passenger vehicles and air tickets showed a crash. Industrial production, non-food bank credit, rail freight traffic and core infrastructure growth clawed back in May and June from earlier depths, but not enough to return to their pre-covid trends. If the external sector had better numbers, it was because foreign reserves stayed high and imports shrank even more than exports, resulting in a positive trade balance for a change. The broad picture is not just dismal, it seems to confirm what was feared in April—that a revival would not be as simple matter of unlocking our economy. Ravaged by an abrupt halt of commerce and wracked by uncertainty, it needs more than just a simple restoration of supply. Demand matters, too, and it looks too weak to get back up on its own.

Unfortunately, July figures may not be much better than June's. The question of a post-lockdown rebound in growth was always based on hope more than a realistic assessment of this crisis. It is not just a failure to contain the spread of coronavirus that has resulted in output forecasts for 2020-21 getting grimmer.

Some analysts now expect our gross domestic product to contract by even more than 5% with the second half of the year showing only mild improvement over the first. Off-and-on curbs on business operations have played a role in this, with apathetic work of intermittent lockdowns under local authorities bringing back memories of our permit raj days, when petty officials would cash their power to badge private producers. But a bigger reason for the economy's dim outlook is compressed expenditure by private agents, the classic cause of a deep recession. Yes, it is true that our rural sector has not been as badly hit as the rest of India. It is also undeniable that some retail investors appear gung-ho on stock market speculation. Yet, as things stand, the impulse to spend rather than conserve cash is unlikely to stage a sudden comeback even if a vaccine were to overcome health anxieties.

So far, the Centre has been signalling a need to abide by pre-covid fiscal restraints, hinting of stimulus measures aimed at demand only later, once the pandemic is past its peak. This frame of analysis adheres too strongly to the notion that it is always unwise for government to spend beyond its means. It also seems to assume that the economy will get going by itself after covid-19 recedes as a scare. Further, it seems to ignore its underlying weaknesses. These were visible in flagging sales in various sectors even before the virus showed up, possibly an outcome of sclerotic investment. The relief package unveiled by the government in May seems too reliant on credit disbursements to prove very effective. It is time to spur demand directly, lest revenue collections drop even more, making a worrisome situation worse.

Gandhi, King, Lewis and others who lit an eternal flame of valour

We should pass the inspiration we have gained from our childhood heroes down the generations



ANURAG BEHAR is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation and also leads sustainability initiatives for Wipro Ltd

The crashing monsoon rain beyond the shut windows and the hushed tones as alive as this morning. Blurring out my defiance of insufferable oppression with all the might of a seven-year-old is a vivid. So is the cutting glare from my Maus (aunt), my best friend, barely having entered college then, and her whispered warning, "You will also be jailed and so will all of us." All this in the dining room of my Nana's (maternal grandfather's) bungalow in Bhopal, back in '97.

Then they went back to talking about "J.P. George and Dharai" in low voices. At some point, I heard Nanamention aking, and that had he been alive, he would have come, to struggle in solidarity, for the freedom of the people who gave him Gandhi. These days, about once a year, I run past that house—as all the others I have lived in—and their memories in that city which is home. Remembrances of that distant time, form as they did in a child's head, must be jumbled. But not so I felt I asked Nana who this thinking of ours, who could not come to save us. That I show I first heard of him—when Nana said, "Not the king, but Martin Luther King, Junior." Since then, King and Gandhi have lived together in my head. Even when I have playfully jostled with who was the better of the two, they were inseparable. By the time the Emergency was lifted,

I was soaking up books, which, even to me now, seem totally incongruous with my age then. The number was also about. Almost a book a day. So, I just cannot recollect where I read of the young man who stayed up one night in Nashville, writing a list of non-violent 'do's and don'ts' to help his fellow students if they got arrested. The last point in that list was: "Remember the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King Jr." That this line was not alignment of my childhood imagination got settled only recently, when I read one of my most treasured gifts, Taylor Branch's *Painting the Waters* in which the incident is described as I remembered it.

I can't recollect whether I read first about Dharasana or Selma. They are fused in my head. And into Webb Miller's wrenching words that were first read by millions in mid-May '60: "Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood, I saw the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls."

The first skull to be cracked open on 7 March 1965 in Selma was that of the young man who led the 600 protesters across that bridge. And he was the same young man who prayed to the flame that passed from Jesus to King, through Gandhi and Thoreau.

Thus, John Lewis became muddled in my head with Gandhi and King and Thoreau. When I saw the terrifying Dharasana scene in Attenborough's *Gandhi* in 1982, I read more about him. Never methodically, but just along the way in my chaotic but copious reading. His preaching to chickens as a child, because he wanted to be a priest, one of the original '3 Freedom Riders, leading the March on Washington in August 1963, and more. Forever in good trouble—asking had advised him.

While my heroes are muddled in my head, my memories of events are clear all the way back to the age of three,

when sirens would blare at night during the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Lying on the floor in my Maus's room, in the usual scorching summer afternoon of Raipur, I remember picking up a book with a green cover. It was '69, and by then my Nana had moved from Bhopal to Raipur. I didn't drop it until I finished it late that night. The back-flap listed the author's other books. The next morning, I went with Nana, who dropped me at his university's library, which by then was used to the odd requests of a kid. They searched for the other books, and got me *Under the Sea Wind* and *The Edge of the Sea*.

Maus and I fought the next two nights. She wanted me to switch off the lights, and I would not, lost as I was in Rachel Carson's lyrical conjuring of the wonder of nature, magical enough to vanquish the atrocious of the Raipur summer. Ever since, a copy of *Silent Spring* has been with me, like the *Gitar* Bible. And Rachel (she can't be called Carson) is among my heroes.

Some years ago, I started going regularly to Washington DC. On every visit, I would think of trying to meet Lewis. And then my courage would falter. I was afraid that I would start crying when I saw him. He was himself and that was enough. But he was also King and Gandhi, and Selma and Dharasana. Not only because he crossed that bridge in '63, but because he had kept crossing the bridge to good trouble, every day, since.

On 16 July 2020, I read one of Rachel's soulless complaint lines again: "Against this cosmic background the life span of a particular plant or animal appears, not as drama complete in itself, but only as a brief interlude in a panorama of endless change." The next day, the 80-year-old Lewis passed away. And it dawned on me how completely wrong my hero Rachel was.

The life of Lewis and Rachel's own life are ennobled interludes. But eternal flames of moral clarity and courage. And when I fail to carry that fire, you and others still will. Because they lived.



JUST A THOUGHT

True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

GUEST VIEW

A plan for Indian self-sufficiency in an AI-driven world

PARMINDER JEET SINGH



is a member of the Kris Gopalakrishnan committee on non-personal data governance and works with IT for Change, an NGO

Geo-political and economic power in the industrial age was determined by one's expertise in manufacturing. In a digital society, it's likely to be based on command over artificial intelligence (AI). As an information age takes over, hastened by the covid crisis, every country has to assess where it stands in terms of AI. This could decide its position in the global hierarchy. AI is not a separate sector. Rather, it's expected to manage and lead every sector. There is mobility AI, education AI, health AI, agriculture AI, and so on. If every sector was earlier controlled by whoever had prowess over mechanical and chemical technology in that sector, it would now be led by whoever has the best AI for a given sector.

AI competence in every sector tends to get concentrated in one or two top companies. AI capabilities are now across sectors. Google's parent company Alphabet, for instance, is into automobiles, media, health, education, travel and perhaps more. With an immense emerging global concentration of

AI power, the field has basically become a race between the US and China. All other countries are fast being left behind. The International Monetary Fund's chief recently expressed fears of a 'digital Berlin Wall', with countries forced to pick a side. To avoid becoming AI dependent, countries and regions like the UK, France, European Union (EU) and India are signing their AI strategies towards establishing a strong domestic AI industry. AI has two elements: one is the technology itself, and the other is the social element of intensive, granular information about potential subjects of AI, or what we call data.

While also providing directions for technical development, AI strategies of most countries focus on widespread availability of data for the development of their domestic digital industries. The US occupies the top AI position, partly because its first-mover digital platforms have gained from network effects, turning many of them into global data monopolies. Only China has been able to match the US because its internet firewall—first set up for political reasons—let local data companies emerge, develop quickly, and become globally competitive. Kai-Fu Lee, AI scientist and businessman, writes in *The New York Times* that all other

countries will be "forced to negotiate with whichever country supplies most of their AI software—China or the United States"—essentially become that country's economic dependent, taking in welfare subsidies in exchange for letting the parent nation's AI companies continue to profit from the dependent country's users'. Observers such as Elon Musk and the late Stephen Hawking have warned of the unprecedented dangers of a concentration of AI power.

What are the options for countries like India to retain AI independence and self-sufficiency? AI strategies cannot just hope for greater data sharing. There is no reason for global data to be voluntarily shared their data hoards for the facilitation of domestic startups that would compete with them. Some form of mandatory sharing of data is thus being mulled in places like the EU, UK, France and Germany. It was against this backdrop that a committee set up by India's government on gov-

erning non-personal data, led by Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan, recently put out its draft report for public consultation. At the report's core is an effort to ensure that non-personal data is widely shared and made available to enable the development of a strong domestic AI industry. The report characterizes data collected from a community or society as 'community data', and asks for it to be shared for the community or society's benefit. Such data should be available to the local AI industry.

Ensuring wide data availability may help India develop its AI industry and avoid external dependence

Databeing a highly valued resource, enforcing its sharing would require a legal basis. The panel has gone to a considerable length to develop a conceptual framework for this. Since such community data is about—and arises from—the community, it is considered to "own" it. All collectors of such data can only do so on the implicit condition that it will be made available to startups, if sought. This would be legally enforceable, thanks to "community ownership" of data.

Not that the report does not call for the sharing of data that is private to a business; rather, only such data need be shared that is collected from sources not owned by it, and is about the rest of the community. Further, all businesses, while not having to share data, also get access to the data gathered by other businesses, which could be a considerable net gain. Digital businesses must shift from data hoarding as a key competitive advantage to devising innovative uses of widely-shared data for the benefit of consumers. All players could gain from such a shift, so would the Indian economy, and it could help India avoid an abject dependence for its AI needs on the two global AI superpowers.

In a digital age, being self-sufficient in terms of AI is central to any conception of an Atmanirbhar Bharat. This requires India's data to be made widely available for use by the Indian AI industry. For this, the Gopalakrishnan panel seeks to create a new regulator. India has considerable technical capabilities in AI; data availability would enable robust AI industry to emerge. Once the process is set in motion, positive feedback loops will keep improving AI technology as well as data availability. This is a reliable route to an India that is self-sufficient in AI. *This is the author's personal views*

The limits of Rahul as Gandhi

He thinks he can further his politics by merely being a moral force but he cannot be a Gandhi in today's India



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

Rahul Gandhi's futile detours into politics continue to excite his opponents and supporters, followed by predictable reappearances of old obituaries of the dynasty. Mr. Gandhi has met the midday train in the Congress party in Rajasthan, close on the heels of the collapse of its government in Madhya Pradesh, with cameo digital performances on unrelated topics. Meanwhile, a new chapter for his return as the party president is being orchestrated. An aspiring rebel trapped in the body and privilege of a preordained dynasty, Mr. Gandhi's infectious confusions have disoriented his opponents, supporters and observers alike.

Dynasties are everywhere
The dynasty's rivals and ringmasters make points that are excusable, but an expert argument that the Gandhis are the sole reason for the absence of a viable non-BJP politics is obtuse. If the dynasty is so bereft of ideas and following, as it is said to be, how can it muffle anyone? What are those who cannot walk over a withered dynasty worth in taking the reins? What is their formidable leader Narendra Modi? The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty could not stop the emergence of an Arvind Kejriwal right under its nose, when it was in power. The Gandhis can be criticised for their inadequacies, but they are not by any long shot responsible for the failure of those who are independently impotent in meeting the Modi challenge.

That the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is blighted is evident, but the reasons for it are not. The notion of a widespread antipathy towards elites is overstated in the Indian context. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, dynasties do not merely continue to survive, but flourish in all fields, including politics and cinema. Direct public approval is essential for success. In the BJP, the Scindia dynasty, across two generations, hold the veto power in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. One reason for the planation cites Arab scholar Ibn



Khalidun who said dynasties flounder by the fourth generation. Mr. Gandhi is fourth generation – or may be fifth – and hence detestable, while all others – the Scindias, Naveen Patil, Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Gowda family, the Karunanidhi family – all become acceptable. It is indeed true that Mr. Gandhi has lost the original qualities of his forebears, but that is only one, perhaps a minor, factor in his unpopularity to take off.

Modi versus Rahul Gandhi
Mr. Gandhi's unpopularity is understood better in comparison with Mr. Modi's popularity, both uneven across the country. Where Mr. Modi is more popular, Mr. Gandhi is more unpopular. Mr. Gandhi is most derided in the north and the west and among upper castes and new middle classes. His residual popularity comes from the south and among the poorer sections in the BJP strongholds, and religious minorities.

One explanation in 2014 for Mr. Modi's popularity was that he represented aspiration and hard work and had proven abilities of governance, while Mr. Gandhi represented entitlement and inexperience. That does not explain the rural class differentiations. But this theory still held some water, though then too, Mr. Modi's promise of development, employment, national honour and security came wrapped in a Hindutva. The current situation does not merely offer an alternative understanding but demands one. By 2020, the Modi package has been unravelled layer by layer and all that remains of it is the planation cites Arab scholar Ibn

Gandhi is unreliable because he is the twin is Hindutva – while Mr. Modi is its proponent. Mr. Gandhi is its antagonist. If Hindutva can reinforce the popularity of Mr. Modi despite his governance record, it is possible that Mr. Gandhi is the target of a cancel campaign because of his opposition to it, and irrespective of his other attributes, including being a dynast? Mr. Gandhi is being attacked even by Congress leaders for his positions on Jammu and Kashmir, secession, and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, among other things.

Mr. Gandhi is constrained by environmental factors, primarily the mass appeal of religious majoritarianism, but his inherent deficiencies aggravate them. He believes that the power of his convictions is so strong that he does not need to do anything else, even as he continues to pay the price for those anachronistic beliefs. He bears the cross for all the sins of his forebears but gets no laurels for their contributions. The change has to be in him first, which will in turn enhance his capacity to alter the environment. Assuming that he does not want to become a substitute player of majoritarianism as Mr. Kejriwal has turned himself into, what can Mr. Gandhi do?

Mr. Gandhi has wasted half his life in silly experiments to democratise the Congress, when he should have

earned some experience as a Union Minister. He can get his way in the Congress if and only if there are a few thousand Rahul voters in each Assembly constituency. The challenge to his authority within the party can be tackled only through attaining that strength, not by whining about the old guard. Ahmad Patel is responsible for the fall of the Congress only as much as the Gandhis are responsible for the emanation of opposition politics in India – both equally unreasonable and self-defeating arguments. Mr. Gandhi wants to be the moral force of the party – perhaps like M. K. Gandhi or what his mother Sonia Gandhi used to be at one point. But the moral power of Indian politics is occupied by his primary opponent, Mr. Modi, who is worshipped as a demigod by a considerable section of the Congress's erstwhile voters. The only avenue before Mr. Gandhi therefore is one of drudgery.

What Rahul needs to do
His self-perception of being a grand visionary and moral force has meant outsourcing of HR management and knowledge processing – allowing others to act and think on his behalf. If he wants to be in politics, Mr. Gandhi needs to pay attention to who gets the tickets and who is appointed. Assuming that he is as altruistic as he would like the world to believe, he must learn to deal and live with the pell and peridy of politics, starting with his own party. He needs to know what the average Congress worker in U.P. and Bihar thinks; he needs to pay attention to details of policy and not merely headlines. He cannot be an ordinary Congress MP as he tries to make it appear. He cannot stand at the door with one leg in and let people walk out of it. Either he leads or he quits. For a dynasty there is no midway. A dynasty has a baggage to carry; he also has advantages. For instance, the only political family in India that is not identified with a particular religion, caste, region, or sect is the Gandhis. Who knows when that might be fashionable again, after the current sectarian turmoil? Mr. Gandhi could find his moment. But he has no choice of being the home quarantined moralist; he has an outside chance of making it as a workhorse.

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Shaping the digital world

India's passivity in influencing global tech rules must end



KARTHIK NATCHAPPAN & ARINDRAJIT BASU

On June 29, the Indian government banned 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok, ostensibly to protect security, sovereignty and privacy. There was no public review of these apps and no assessment of the implications of this ban for the right to free speech of many people, particularly in non-urban spaces. Like India, the U.S. is considering banning TikTok citing national security concerns. American allies and partners including India are now wondering whether they should allow Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE to build their 5G networks. Linkages between countries, particularly in the tech sector, are being exploited and manipulated to achieve security or strategic interests. Indian decoupling with Chinese tech comes in the wake of border tensions, while the U.S. continues its trade war with China.

Long-term strategic thinking
While banning Chinese apps could have been a strategic necessity in the short run, the hastiness of this move should propel long-term strategic thinking on how digital issues constrain India's foreign policy. Reactive and ad hoc tech squabbles cannot be a replacement for a robust foreign policy that marries India's constitutional ethos with the twin needs of national security and economic growth. The realisation of this vision requires India to engage more confidently in global technology governance debates and shape incumbent rules and norms.

The problems caused by various technologies and technology firms have generated demand for international negotiations, to create viable rules and norms. For instance, social media companies are facing a backlash after years of ignoring abuse on their platforms that stoke social and ethnic tensions. Cyberattacks are rising from state and non-state actors. Conflicts over national laws concerning data use and storage are common. Issues like data, 5G, AI, social media and cybersecurity have domestic and global effects – who controls these technologies and how they are developed and used matters greatly as it defines how nations trade, behave and fight with each other.

These interactions hinge on drafting rules and norms that provide clarity and deter subversive behaviour. For India, the costs of not actively shaping technology rules are high. India's economic, political and security

future rests on deploying technologies and having robust rules that accelerate the empowerment of its vast demographics while deterring the use of such technologies against strategic objectives.

Global governance is imperative for restraining, if not halting, the disruptive effects of cyberspace as the number of nefarious actors online proliferate. India has been a member of five of the six Group of Governmental Experts processes set up by the UN to foster norms for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. Yet, it has not sufficiently exercised its diplomatic clout to weigh in on critical issues. This passivity must end.

Apart from protecting security interests through these debates, India must function as a rule-shaper to preserve the civil, political and economic rights of its citizens. New Delhi must ensure that export control regimes like the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Missile Technology Control Regime regulate the use and impacts of dual-use surveillance technology that has been used to target Indian journalists, lawyers and activists. Officials must extend the ethos of fundamental rights guarantees to global debates on Internet shutdowns and facial recognition technology while ensuring domestic policy fulfils constitutional responsibilities.

Economic assertiveness
India has been assertive when technology debates affect the economy. As campaigns like Make in India and Digital India get ramped up, policy enthusiasm on e-commerce and data flows has risen. Until recently, India's cautious approach to 5G, involving Huawei in its plans, was influenced by a desire to have space to allow multiple vendors who can meet India's telecom needs. New Delhi's disinclination to support unfettered data flows across borders is propelled by 'data sovereignty'. This pronounced emphasis to nationalise data, however, could pose problems for entrepreneurs and startups who prefer relaxed data-sharing rules to foster innovation and product development. The sheer volume of data generated by citizens at home makes India an essential destination for foreign technology firms enabling India to exercise its authority in shaping global trade rules. But this, without balancing the interests of all Indian stakeholders in mind, not privileging the large and powerful. India's distinct economic and demographic position allows it to shape, influence and constrain the global rules that serve its strategic interests. It can and must significantly shape the making of the digital world.

Karthik Natchappan is a Research Fellow at the National University of Singapore; Arindrajit Basu is Research Manager at the Centre for Internet and Society.

Fewer species, more disease

Ecosystem integrity will restrict the transmission of pathogens from one species to another

PRAKASH NELLIVAT

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted human life and the economy in an unprecedented way. Across countries, lockdowns have kept people indoors and provided opportunities for wild animals to roam around spaces they otherwise don't venture into. Scientists believe that the loss of biodiversity, and wildlife trade, have strong linkages with the emergence of epidemics. The pandemic is an opportunity for the global community to explore the consequences of its unscientific actions on nature and prepare for behavioural change.

Loss of biodiversity
Dangerous infectious diseases (Ebola, Bird flu, MERS, SARS, Nipah, etc.) have been transferred from wild animals to humans, in order to clear land for agriculture and development, forests and habitats have been destroyed. In the process, we have lost several species. Human-induced environmental changes reduce biodiversity resulting in new conditions that host vectors and/or pathogens.

It is not yet fully understood which species have contributed to the transmission of COVID-19 and how. However, according to experts, there is strong evidence that it spread from a wildlife market in Wuhan, China. Two hypotheses have been put forward: (a) the virus jumped from bats directly to humans; and (b) from bats to pangolins and then to humans. Apart from wildlife markets, illegal trade of wildlife is part of the growing problem. Trafficking in wild plants and animals and wildlife products has become one of the largest and most lucrative forms of organised crime. By deliberately pursuing and hunting certain species or by establishing monocultures, habitats and ecosystems are being damaged, fragmented or destroyed.

Illegal wildlife smuggling is an emerging threat to India's unique wildlife heritage. According to an NGO based in Guwahati, which works for the protection of Eastern Himalayan biodiversity, India shelters a number of vulnerable and threatened species. Body parts of animals including pangolins, Asiatic black bears and rhinos are being traded illegally to

countries such as China, Vietnam, and Laos. Another study has found that there was a significant increase in the poaching of wild animals in India even during the lockdown. Species are being wiped out by organised trade networks, with new poaching techniques, for manufacturing traditional Chinese medicines.

The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services shows that people extensively modify natural habitats, hence biodiversity is declining significantly. By disturbing the delicate balance of nature, we have created ideal conditions for the spread of viruses from animals to humans. We should realise that we live in a world where biodiversity is our common heritage and natural capital.

The way forward

We need to revisit our relationship with nature and rebuild an environmentally responsible world. Nations should work towards realising the 2050 vision for biodiversity, 'Living in Harmony with Nature'. We must follow a 'one health' approach which considers the health of people, wild and domesticated animals, and the environment. We need to strictly regulate high-risk wildlife markets, promote green jobs and work towards achieving carbon-neutral economies. We should realise that the transmission of pathogens from one species to another.

Prakash Nellivat is a Chemist-based researcher



DATA POINT

Hunting in pairs

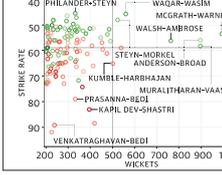
English pace bowler Stuart Broad became the seventh bowler and second Englishman, after fellow pacer James Anderson, to pick up 500 Test wickets. The Anderson-Broad duo ranked joint second in the list of bowler pairs with 895 scalps between them in games played together, pointing to their enduring excellence. In terms of lethality as a duo, Pakistan's Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram were a cut above the rest. By The Hindu Data Team and Kartikeya Date

BEST OF THE LOT! Among pairs with at least 500 wickets, the Australian duo of Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne have picked up 992 wickets bowling together, the highest, Waqar and Wasim were the most lethal, picking a wicket every 45 balls they bowled while playing together. The pair also contributed equally, having an almost even share of wickets

Pairs	Matches	Wickets by 1st	Strike rate (SR) of 1st	Wickets by 2nd	SR of 2nd	Total Wickets	Combined SR	% wickets by 1st	% wickets by 2nd
McGrath & Warne	103	485	50.56	507	56.13	992	53.41	48.89	51.11
Muralitharan & Vaas	95	586	55.69	309	62.94	895	58.2	65.47	34.53
Anderson & Broad	117	473	54.70	422	57.24	895	55.89	52.85	47.15
Wahab & Ambrose	95	373	57.22	389	55.03	762	56.15	48.95	51.05
Waqar & Wasim	61	277	42.03	282	49.21	559	45.65	49.55	50.45
Ntini & Kallis	93	350	54.69	188	66.87	538	58.34	65.06	34.94
Steyn & Morkel	62	305	42.99	217	54.95	522	47.96	58.43	41.57
Kumble & Harbhajan	54	281	61.81	210	69.17	501	65.04	56.09	43.91

BIG PICTURE

The chart plots bowlers picked up by a duo against their combined SR. Broad and Anderson are well above the cohort of bowlers who picked up most wickets, and did so with a low SR



MOST LETHAL | Vernon Philander and Dale Steyn had the best strike rate among pairs with at least 200 wickets. The table lists duos who picked up wicket within 50 deliveries while playing together. Pacers dominate the list

Pairs	Matches	Total Wickets	Combined SR
Philander & Steyn	40	33	45.38
Waqar & Wasim	61	559	45.65
Ntini & Steyn	34	294	46.35
Starc & Hazlewood	37	336	47.06
Steyn & Morkel	62	522	47.96
Philander & Rabada	31	232	48
Anderson & Finn	27	231	48.22
Marshall & Holding	33	291	48.4
Marshall & Garner	36	322	49.58

From The Hindu

RECALLS

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 30, 1970

11 Years of Castro

Cuba was bleeding under the cruel dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista when, on July 26, 1953, a band of 200 rebels led by a 27-year-old lawyer, called Fidel Castro, tried to stage a *batista* by attacking Fort Moncada, the second strongest military fortress in the country. The rebellion was crushed but the Cuban revolution had begun. Castro was captured at Moncada and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, but in one of those turning points of history, the man who was out to destroy Batista himself released Castro 18 months later as part of a general amnesty for political prisoners he declared to celebrate his "re-election" as President. Castro went to Mexico where he organised a small invasion force of 82 men. They landed in Cuba on December 2, 1956, only to walk into a trap set by Batista's army. Only 12 of the invaders, including Castro, his brother, Raúl, and Che Guevara, managed to escape. They took to the mountains, from where they organised the revolution. It needed them just two years to tear Batista out and assume power. Castro brought hope to the oppressed and poor Cubans who rallied to him enthusiastically. After being 11 years in power, he is still to deliver the goods in terms of a better life.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 30, 1920

Is it peace?

(From an editorial)

The appeal made by Lord Sinha from his place in the House of Lords that the Amritsar controversy should be dropped has found but faint echo in this country among Indians of any political creed. But there is noticeable a certain amount of anxiety amongst the Anglo-Indian Press that the whole matter should be wiped clean off the slate. So far as we know the only organ of Indian opinion which has echoed the ignominious suggestion is the Bengalee, who is apparently prepared to preserve its peculiar ideals of cooperation even at the cost of self-respect. Mr. Pickford, the Secretary of the Amritsar Committee, has suggested that his community should drop a controversy of such dangerous potentialities. It is beyond doubt however that so far as the vast majority of the Indian nationalists are concerned there is no inclination to listen to an appeal which is so ridiculously premature. It may suit the Bengalee's books to cry peace when there is no peace. We are glad, and we hope, that pleasurable feeling will have cause to last.



Trouble in Nepal

India will have to deal with KP. Oli in Nepal whether he is ousted or stays on as PM

The storm raging in Nepal's ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) is again rocking the Khada Prasad Oli government, and putting Kathmandu's polity in suspense over what might follow. A crucial meat to announce an end to the differences between the party's two leaders, Mr. Oli, and his rival, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), was postponed on Tuesday. Last week too, the two rival factions decided to put off a meeting of the Standing Committee after Prime Minister Oli failed to attend. While the bone of contention, which has roiled party members, is that Mr. Oli continues to hold two posts — that of NCP Chairperson and Prime Minister — it is clear that there is a more complex power game going on. Party members leading the move against Mr. Oli point to growing discomfort over his autocratic style. The Dahal faction, which had merged with the Oli-led United Marxist-Leninist (UML) in 2018 when their combine won a massive mandate in the general election, is also impatient for a chance to rule. Mr. Dahal is already unhappy over past power sharing agreements that he believes Mr. Oli reneged on, and Mr. Oli still has residual bitterness over Mr. Dahal's decision to pull out of his previous government in 2016. There is also concern over Mr. Oli's head-on collision with India over the past few weeks, beginning with the constitutional amendment to adopt a disputed map as well as his rather rash language against India, including a recent controversy over the birthplace of the Hindu god, Lord Ram. Mr. Oli has said that he believes there is a conspiracy against him, and alluded to alleged machinations by the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. Finally, there is considerable disquiet in the party and in the press over the public role played by the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal in bringing together the warring factions, especially after Mr. Oli's threat to split the NCP and revive the UML earlier this month.

Many in South India will take heart, and may even rejoice over Mr. Oli's troubles, given his recent petulant behaviour with the Modi government. India-Nepal ties have hit new lows, with neither side willing to schedule the much promised meeting of Foreign Secretaries to begin to sort out their problems. Yet, it is important for the Modi government and the Indian mission to take a mature stand and play a more constructive role in the current political crisis. The larger struggle for the continuance of Nepal as a parliamentary democracy rather than as a poll-bureau-style polity dominated by a ruling elite also depends on the outcome of this tussle. While Mr. Oli is outnumbered in the ruling party structure, he has won a mandate, and there is little doubt that he remains popular in Nepal. In power or out of it, New Delhi will still need to contend with Mr. Oli, whose polarising politics could impact the country's fragile ethnic mosaic, if not channelled deftly, and with some delicacy.

Fall from grace

Malaysian PM Muhyiddin must not undermine the rule of law to cling to power

For over four decades, Najib Razak was one of the most powerful voices of Malaysian politics. The son of a former Prime Minister, a legislator for decades and an all-powerful Prime Minister for nine years, he suffered the biggest setback in his eventful career on Tuesday when a trial court found him guilty on seven corruption charges in connection with the Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB) financial fraud. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison and fined \$50 million. Billions of dollars were allegedly stolen from the IMDB — an investment fund he launched in 2009 when Prime Minister — by employees of the fund or of the government. The money was traced by prosecutors to a mega-yacht, a Picasso painting and the Hollywood film, 'The Wolf of Wall Street'. His bank accounts received about \$1 billion. The allegations cost him dearly, leading to the first election defeat of Mr. Najib's party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), in 2018. But infighting within the ruling coalition led by nonagenarian Mahathir Mohamad led to the fall of the new government, returning Mr. Najib's party to power earlier this year. The country's prosecution and judiciary went ahead with the trial despite the change in government and held one of the most powerful men accountable for his actions. The trial court has stayed the sentences until a higher court gives a final verdict on his planned appeal. The verdict comes at a time when the Southeast Asian country continues to grapple with political instability. The new government of Muhyiddin Yassin has a razor-thin majority in Parliament. The Opposition, led by the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim, accused the government of trying to help Mr. Najib. In May, prosecutors had cut a deal with Mr. Najib's stepson Riza Aziz and dropped IMDB-related charges against him, which triggered a political backlash. With Mr. Najib's conviction, the Opposition is likely to revive its calls for a vote of confidence, which Prime Minister Muhyiddin has resisted so far. He would also face pressure from the UMNO, whose 39 MPs are supporting his government. UMNO leaders have already come out in support for Mr. Najib, calling the case politically motivated. If Mr. Muhyiddin dismisses Mr. Najib, who, besides the appeals, also faces a host of other corruption charges, the Prime Minister could face a revolt from the UMNO, leading to his government's collapse. If he interferes in the investigation and trial, it could politically strengthen the Opposition narrative and prove risky for him, especially when Malaysia is going through a volatile phase. Ideally, Mr. Muhyiddin should uphold the law, respect the independence of the prosecution and distance his government from Mr. Najib. But that would also mean putting his government at risk.

COVID-19 and a country club India must leave

Instead, an opportunity awaits the nation to join other states that recognise the value of a just public health-care system



VIKRAM PATEL

As a billion Indians watch with horror as the pandemic sweeps the land, many look with envy to countries to the east of us where the virus originated, and to the west of us in Europe which were devastated just a few months ago but appear to have beaten the bug and are starting to repair their societies. We can only draw some consolation from the fact that, thankfully, we are not alone in our spectacular failure to contain the pandemic: we have Trump's U.S. and Bolsonaro's Brazil to give us company.

The poison of inequalities Others have also noticed the curious composition of this country club, perhaps the only one in the world which no one wants to be a member of, and have begun to wonder what features these three countries might have in common, apart from the fact that they are all populous, federal, diverse and democratic. No prizes for guessing which is the most common theory which crops up in the fertile imaginations of perceptive observers. But that is not the theory which I believe tells the whole story. My proposal is that what these three countries share is the toxic legacy of historic inequalities which affect every structure of society including, most importantly, the health-care system. The value of investing in a just public health-care system has never

been as starkly obvious, for never before have entire countries been brought to their knees by one disease. To be sure, there have been far deadlier epidemics which continue to kill many more people than COVID-19 but they, like HIV, diarrhoeal diseases and tuberculosis, have mostly killed the poor and the marginalised, outside the conscious radar of those in power. More to the point, no previous epidemic brought the engines of the economy to a standstill. If some poor chaps died of a horrible disease in some godforsaken slum, G-grade town or village in the back of beyond, the stock market could not care less. However, on this occasion, for the first time, the wealthy and the powerful in their urban palaces have found themselves marooned. And their high-tech doctors and "super-specialist" hospitals can do little to rescue them.

On universal coverage What differentiates countries which have been able to pick themselves up and start walking within a few months after their first case was detected from those, like ours, which remain mired in the muck, is the commitment by both the state and civil society to the principles of universal health coverage. To be fair, if universal health coverage is conflated with the simple existence of a publicly financed health-care system, then India, like the United States and Brazil, can already boast to have met this commitment. However, not universal health coverage means in spirit: only a system which all people, rich and poor, those in power and those who are powerless, can rely on to be given care with the same quality regard-

less of their station in society, can be truly considered "universal". A question of quality Such a universal health coverage system does not exist in India, or the U.S. or Brazil, where more than half the population, concentrated in the upper income groups, seeks health care in the free-for-service private sector. The private sector in India provides almost 80% of outpatient and 60% of inpatient care, as a result of which falling ill is one of the most important contributors to indebtedness in the country. While the government's much heralded insurance scheme does buffer a segment of our population, the very poor, from impoverishment due to hospital admissions, outpatient care which comprises the bulk of health-care expenditure remains untouched. Whereas universal health coverage is recognised by many countries as a strategy to empower people to lift themselves out of poverty and as a foundation of sustainable development, health care in India has become a leading cause of poverty. The fact that, despite this knowledge, the powers that be continue to give private care, is a damning testimonial

to their experiences of the public health-care system. I have often heard the titans of corporate medicine in India justify their costs by arguing that these are much cheaper than in the U.S. or Europe; such comparisons are ridiculous as they are oblivious of the fact that India's per capita income places us as one of the poorest countries in the world. But beyond the clearly visible ills of the wholesale commercialisation of health care, there are a host of other challenges to realising universal health coverage, from the standards of our infrastructure to the honesty and competency of health-care workers which contribute to the abysmal quality of care, in both the private and public sectors.

The pandemic has brought the scandalous quality of our health-care system into sharper relief: our daily diet of front-page headlines alternates between the numbers of dead on the one hand with stories of pigs roaming freely and the absence of doctors in public hospitals to shameless profiteering and refusal to care by private hospitals on the other. The proclivity of doctors to irrational medical procedures and drug prescriptions, the lack of dignity with which the poor are cared for, and the legendary levels of corrupt practices across the health-care system are well documented.

At the heart of this pathetic state of affairs is the complete lack of accountability of either the private or public sector, and the absence of the stewardship role of the state in ensuring justice and quality of health care for all its citizens. It comes as no surprise that this is a fundamental breakdown of trust between civil society and

the health-care system, exemplified at its most extreme by violence against health-care providers. Fixing the rot will need structural reforms far beyond the top-down "missions" and knee-jerk punitive actions which have dominated our policy-making for over 70 years. But for this to happen, we will need a broad coalition across the political establishment and civil society, in particular the wealthy and ruling classes, to demand change.

A historic opportunity For the first time, I see the possibility of this happening, as economists, business leaders and politicians who were wont to view a charitable cause to address disease and death of the poor, to be attended to as a footnote to the task of building our economy, can finally witness as clear as daylight how a dysfunctional, fragmented and unaccountable health-care system will ultimately destroy the economy itself. Even if the pandemic has hit the poor the hardest, it has also crippled the nation. But we need more than just new money for while health care is the wisest investment for the economy, such an investment must be accompanied by a social compact that the same system caters to all. This philosophy of universal health coverage is already practised in diverse ways, including engagement of the private sector, by scores of countries. I cannot imagine a more historic opportunity for India to join that illustrious club.

Vikram Patel is the Pershing Square Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School

A quest for order amid cyber insecurity

Better arrangements and intense partnerships, but with extra safeguards, are needed in a more contested domain



SYED AKBARUDDIN

In cyberspace, it is the best of times for some and the worst of times for others. Between them, Apple, Amazon and Microsoft have added more than a trillion dollars in market value, since the start of 2020. On the other hand, cyberattacks have grown. In one week in April 2020, reportedly, there were over 18 million daily malware and phishing emails sent to COVID-19 monitored by a single email provider, in addition to more than 240 million COVID-19-related daily spam messages. Twitter hackers collected \$20,000 in full public cake, while a "ransomware" target in California quietly paid \$16.4 bitcoins, or \$1.4 million. There is also concern about the role of states. Australia mentioned attacks by a state actor. China has been accused of hacking health-care institutions in the United States working on novel coronavirus research. The United Kingdom has warned of hackers backed by the Russian state, and getting pharmaceutical companies conducting COVID-19 vaccine research. The ban on specified Chinese Apps, on grounds that they are "engaged in activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India" adds another layer of complexity to the contestation in cyberspace. Cybersecurity of individuals, organisations and states is expanding amidst COVID-19.

While we are embracing new ways of digital interaction and more of our critical infrastructure is going digital, the parameters of the transformation under way are not understood by most of us. Like global public health, cybersecurity is a niche area, left to experts. COVID-19 made us realise the role of the global public health infrastructure and need to abide by agreed rules. Similarly, a better understanding of the global cyberspace architecture is required.

No global commons Borderless cyberspace, as a part of the "global commons" does not exist. It is an illusion that connectivity across national boundaries nurtured. The Internet depends on physical infrastructure that is under national control, and hence is subject to border controls too. Each state applies its laws to national networks, consistent with its international commitments. States are responsible for cybersecurity, enforcement of laws and protection of public good. States are responsible for their actions, as well as for actions taken from within their sovereign territories. This is easier said than done. The infrastructure on which the Internet rests falls within jurisdictions of many states, each differing in its approach. Cyberspace has multiple stakeholders, not all of which are states. Non-state actors play key roles — some benign, some malignant. Many networks are private, with objectives differing from those of states. Finally, cyber-tools are dual use, cheap and make attribution and verification of actions quite a task. Nevertheless, states alone have

and crime are acknowledged as important, discussion on these has not been focused on, as ostensibly done in other UN bodies. The net result of the UN exercise has been an acceptance that international law and the UN Charter are applicable in cyberspace; a set of voluntary norms of responsible state behaviour was agreed to in 2015. What aspects of international law and in what circumstances will be applicable remains to be decided. UN Secretary-General António Guterres's recent report, "Roadmap for Digital Cooperation", gently calls for agreement. A few confidence building measures may follow. However, short of a cataclysmic event, these processes do not hold much hope in the current geopolitical circumstances.

More engagement needed Generally the growth of technology is way ahead of the development of associated norms and institutions. Cyberspace is experiencing this too. It provides countries such as ours some time and space to evolve our approach, in tune with the relevance of cyberspace to India's future economic, social and political objectives. Despite the digital divide, the next billion smart phone users will include a significant number from India. As India's cyber footprint expands, so will space for conflicts and crimes (both of a private and inter-state nature). Shared "rules of the road" become imperative. We have a very active nodal agency for cybersecurity in the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technolo-

gy. India has had representatives on five of the six GGGs. We participate actively at the OEWG, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The net result of the UN exercise has been an acceptance that international law and the UN Charter are applicable in cyberspace; a set of voluntary norms of responsible state behaviour was agreed to in 2015. What aspects of international law and in what circumstances will be applicable remains to be decided. UN Secretary-General António Guterres's recent report, "Roadmap for Digital Cooperation", gently calls for agreement. A few confidence building measures may follow. However, short of a cataclysmic event, these processes do not hold much hope in the current geopolitical circumstances.

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The next phase in an increasingly contested and fragmenting domain requires better arrangements and more intense partnerships, but with more safeguards. Domestically, we need the clarity that adoption of a data protection legislation will bring. Globally, we need to partake in shaping cybernorms. According to the Budapest Convention, an effort to stop the use of social media for promoting terrorism and violent extremism. The next phase in an increasingly contested and fragmenting domain requires better arrangements and more intense partnerships, but with more safeguards. Domestically, we need the clarity that adoption of a data protection legislation will bring. Globally, we need to partake in shaping cybernorms. According to the Budapest Convention, an effort to stop the use of social media for promoting terrorism and violent extremism.

Syed Akbaruddin has served as India's Permanent Representative at the United Nations

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name of the name with initials.

Tiger numbers Of late, the focus on the conservation of India's tiger population has improved a great deal due to more visible campaigns to save this endangered species. It is good that a third of tiger reserves in India are approaching peak capacity (Page 1, "At 2,967 tigers, India's capacity at peak", July 29). But the fact that the cat is venturing out in search of prey will only heighten man-animal conflict. It would be in the fitness of things if all tiger reserves in our country try and attain balance in terms of their population so that there is adequate space to roam about and scope for a better prey base. N. VISVESWARAN, Chennai

It is a positive feeling that the tiger population is on the rise. But the problem of plenty raises plenty of problems as well, mainly due to dwindling forest reserves. It may also be borne in mind that many experts have expressed doubts about the authenticity of the present system of counting the cats. AVASAKKI RAJENDRANATH, AVANMIL, Kerala

Rising numbers are sure to bring joy to every one of us. In saving the big cat, India is at the centre of global conservation as it hosts 70% of the tiger population. Saving the tiger will have another effect too — helping India's other magnificent species. The tiger's well-being focuses attention on the other big cat as well — the Asian lion of Gir, Gujarat. Steps need to be taken to translocate lions to other areas so that the species is safe. SAMERA AROBA, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Awaiting clearance Given the bill that is set in India-China bilateral relations, it is hardly surprising that 200 investment proposals are awaiting security clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Page 1, July 27). There is no denying the fact that like most nations, India too was wooed by Beijing's aggressive "Going Global" strategy, and perhaps buoyed by the bonhomie of the Muban and Mamallapuram bilateral summits, had encouraged

Chinese investments. Though Beijing's belligerent stance may have been the trigger for the revised FDI policy, and on the rebound, India is striving to become self-reliant, it has to tread cautiously. Weaning off from Chinese investments can be a very slow process. The bitter reality is that China's monumental investment in India cannot be wished away overnight as it could disrupt the supply chain. Rather than set the clock by embracing protectionism, India should look elsewhere for economic and technological cooperation. If the West is not cost-effective, India could turn to Asian nations such as Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and Thailand to replace China. To the investment proposals of China could also be used as a bargaining chip as far as the LAC is concerned. N. JAYACHANDRAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Olivia de Havilland The passing of Olivia de Havilland, at the ripe age of 104, makes the world of culture and the glorious past that much poorer. One of the finest "Hollywood golden age" actors, she left a lasting impression as the demure Melanie in the 1939 epic, "Gone with the Wind". One cannot forget her bagging Academy Awards for her role in "To Each His Own" (1946) and "The Heiress" (1949). She was certainly the last of the top screen performers from the studio era (Sport/Life page, July 27). N. JAY CHANDRAN, Bangalore

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS In the story titled "Conservationists elated as tiger count is up" (July 28, 2020), it was erroneously mentioned that India had 2,226 tigers according to Tiger Census report, 2018. The actual number, according to the report, is 2,967.

This is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the correction by telephone: +91-44-28322611, or by email: corrections@thehindu.co.in. Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (IST). For more information, visit: www.thehindu.com. The Hindu, Kalair Building, 859 B Street, Chennai 600 002, India. All communications must carry the full postal address of the sender. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2020

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

OMAR'S CHOICE

He is spot on that finding a new political plank is a challenge, a lot depends on how he rises to it

AN EXTRAORDINARILY candid and reflective interview and a signed article in *The Indian Express*, breaking his silence since his detention last year, the former Jammu & Kashmir chief minister, Omar Abdullah, spoke of the "betrayal" of August 5, 2019, how it had destroyed the bridge between a mainstream party like the National Conference and the Centre, and reduced such parties, seen to have carried the can for Delhi, into "elements of ridicule". He expressed doubt about whether there was any more space or scope for mainstream parties in Kashmir — "finding a political plank at this point is not going to be the easiest thing". His own politics has become "a lot more angry and resentful" and "less trusting", he said. But Abdullah, who was detained on the day the Centre stripped the state of its special status and bifurcated it into two union territories and released six months later, also appears to have come to terms with the fact that the decisions of that fateful August day are here to stay. He described his state of mind as somewhere between "pessimism and realism", but it is his suggestion that it may be pointless to demand a rolling back of the decision on Article 370 that is politically significant.

The National Conference will fight it out legally, but its top leader says that he is not going to fool people into believing that J&K's special status could be brought back. This and his statement, that he would not contest elections in J&K until statehood has been restored — "then we'll go ahead from there" — have sparked some outrage in the Valley, where these remarks are being seen as an abdication by the main regional party of Kashmir from its commitment to the August 4 CUPAR Declaration. Arrived at between the leaders of all J&K parties, it said that they would remain "united in their resolve to protect and defend identity, autonomy and special status of the JK State against all attacks and onslaughts whatsoever".

Abdullah was careful to draw a thick line between the NC and Kashmiri separatism, asserting that while the experiences of the last year had made him distrustful of the Centre, and "Delhi did its damndest to equate us with separatists", he was not going to come out of detention "espousing a political line that I don't believe in, because it might be popular or it might be favourable at the time"; he would not incite violent protests that end up taking the lives of more people, he said. Even as he has declared he will not participate in the electoral process of a Union Territory, he has underlined his commitment to the democratic process. Going ahead for him and other politicians of the mainstream in Kashmir, the challenge, as he has admitted, will be to find the next steps in a politically denuded landscape — where the persistence of a political vacuum has always been fraught with the danger of hardliners rising.

A HOME FOR TIGER

Survey shows a third of India's tiger reserves are nearing peak capacity. Creative solutions can reduce human-animal conflict

LAST YEAR, INDIA'S tiger census revealed that the country is home to nearly 3,000 of these big cats. That was rightly considered a significant achievement given that India's tiger population had come down to around 1,400 in 2006 and the animal had been completely wiped out of reserves such as Sariska. A survey by the Union environment ministry, whose report was released on Tuesday, also celebrates this success. But it adds a caveat: Seventeen of India's 50 tiger reserves are approaching their peak carrying capacity. In fact, nearly a third of the country's tigers today live outside protected areas (PAs). As these carnivores spill out of the national parks, they come into proximity with human settlements. This is a major reason for the rise in human-animal conflicts in the past five years.

Male tigers require a range of 70-150 square km and females need about 20-60 sq km. The animal is highly territorial and does not like sharing space with even its siblings or cubs. When it is about a year-and-a-half old, a tiger begins its search for territory. When it cannot find space in a PA, the adolescent either moves out or forces an ageing tiger out of the reserve. The itinerant animal is confronted with a shortage of prey — research shows that one tiger requires a prey base of 500 animals to survive. The big cat is forced to shed its natural reticence towards humans and stalks farms and villages for livestock. Tigers do not have a natural propensity to attack humans. Even then, reports of people being mauled to death by tigers are increasingly becoming frequent. According to data presented by then minister of state for environment, forest and climate change, Mahesh Sharma, in the Lok Sabha last year, more than 100 people were killed by tigers between 2015 and 2018.

The tiger population seems to be growing in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand. Experts suggest that the problem of plenty can be solved by relocating some tigers from places whose carrying capacity is challenged to ones that have space to host more animals. The country's conservation authorities could take a cue from last year's census which had revealed scope for improvement in the Eastern Ghats' reserves. As the country celebrates its conservation success, policymakers and scientists will have to put their heads together to devise more creative solutions and find homes for the increasing number of tigers.

YOU HAVE NO MAIL

COVID-19 claims an ageing victim — the railway dak carrier who bore sensitive letters from the burra sahibs

IT'S LIKE EXECUTING a dead horse. Just to make sure it stays dead, the dak carriers who bore world's biggest railway system were already supernumerated as the officers they served turned to email. But now, the financial belt-tightening in response to the pandemic has closed around their throats like a noose. They have been replaced by digital communications.

The idea of a dak carrier seems impossibly quaint now, but back in the day, they served the same purpose as 128-bit encryption. We have forgotten that India's railway system was laid out after the uprising of 1857. Its first priority was rapid troop movement. Its second was the efficient carriage of goods and produce from the hinterland to industrial centres and ports. Paying passengers came a distant third. With people, the railway also carried the flu and the plague across the country. And it carried Mahatma Gandhi in third-class compartments, protesting about filthy loos and bearing word of freedom. But originally, the railway was a strategic asset of the empire, and information and orders would have had to be delivered by trusted carriers, in the interest of security.

Modernity has ended the romance of the rails, and now, privatisation looms. The drivers' running orders with porcelain service and white linen are long forgotten. The station master is no longer a pillar of the community. The neat staff lines beside stations, with their tided gardens, wicker gates and the characteristic chinaware chimney bent like an upside-down J, are much reduced. Only a few stations remain relatively untouched — picturesque Barog in the hills, and imperial palaces of the age of steel and steam like Howrah and VT. Amidst this general eclipse, will the loss of the dak carrier, the most obscure relic of the colonial era, be noticed very much.



VIKRAM PATEL

FOUR MONTHS SINCE the world's most stringent lockdown was imposed with four hours' notice on over a billion unprepared people with the promise, buttressed by scientific jargon and graphs of curves, that this extreme action would flatten the curve of infection down to zero by mid-May, we remain mired in the grip of multiple epidemics unfolding with different trajectories across our cities and towns. As I try to make sense of why things have gone so awry, one thought which troubles me the most is an honest appraisal of the contribution of science, whether in this country or globally. After all, I belong to that community. Never before has science been so much in the spotlight in global and national affairs and yet, it seems to me, we have not quite covered ourselves in glory. In particular, we have failed in our obligation to acknowledge the uncertainties in our observations, the limitations of our methods and the importance of other traditions of knowledge.

The history of this pandemic is littered with premature and often inaccurate scientific predictions ranging from the estimates of the numbers of people who will die unless nations impose a lockdown to the effectiveness of drug treatments. Crowning these scientific disciplines is the field of modelling, for it was its estimates of mountains of dead bodies which fuelled the panic and led to the unprecedented restrictions on public life around the world. None of these early models, however, explicitly acknowledged the huge assumptions that were made, for example that mortality was distributed evenly across the population (incorrect, because it is heavily concentrated in the elderly) or that everyone who is not infected is vulnerable (likely to be incorrect as evidence of innate immunity mounts). The assumption that the virus would range uniformly in all populations, which was a rather neat beginning with, for both the social conditions and human biology which influence the transmission of infectious diseases vary enormously across contexts, can be safely junked.

While it is fair to defend modelling science as just one tool intended to predict an uncertain future and guide governments, such models must never be interpreted as if they occur in a vacuum, agnostic to their historical, social, cultural and economic context. This responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the scientific community, as much as policy

The limits of science

Reputation of scientists, already tainted as being elitist, will be further muddied by our role in this pandemic

malers. The latest example of the myopic perspective which dominates modelling enterprises is the unpublished but publicly accessible paper authored by scientists from two Ivy League US universities which recommends the closure of red-light areas in India to dramatically reduce the number of COVID-19 deaths. The paper has, rightly, prompted fury and spurred JVR Prasad Rao, former Health Secretary and UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on AIDS, to write a letter, co-authored with India's leading activists and researchers, expressing outrage at the study's research methods and ethics. Perhaps the most egregious concern is the ludicrously naive observation that sex workers, already amongst the most discriminated groups on the margins of society, could simply be redeployed to other vocations to stave off the hunger and violence that would befall them when the red-light areas are shut.

Indeed, this kind of tunnel vision has characterised scientific proclamations from the outset of the pandemic, with little attention to their societal implications which would require a thorough assessment of the impact of policies on the most vulnerable. The fact that many lives will be lost as a result of the lockdowns is now emerging across the world, with recent reports from UNICEF documenting tens of millions of children whose routine vaccinations have been disrupted and from Oxfam that "up to 12,000 people could die from hunger every day globally — 2,000 more than died from COVID-19 each day in April". Most of these deaths will occur in the poorest communities. It is perhaps not surprising that some scientists vociferously called for governments to act swiftly to impose lockdowns. After all, most of my community, and the government officials who conjure and implement these policies, enjoy salaried jobs which can seamlessly pivot to on-line platforms which we can engage with ease from our spacious homes in which being locked down can evolve into a rather congenial opportunity to master culinary skills and regularly commute to work. It will not surprise me if the reputation of scientists, already tainted in some quarters as being elitist, will be further muddied by our role in this pandemic.

As there were over a month of being tantalised by headlines of billions of dollars allocated to fund dramatic scientific discoveries, implementing strategies we

known about for decades: The humble front-line worker burrowing systematically through the community to identify cases, trace their contacts, isolate them at home, and restrict movements in areas where clusters emerge. It is instructive that Massachusetts in the US, home to the world's leading medical school and teaching hospitals, has deployed Partners in Health, a NGO which has previously worked in the poorest countries, helping contain epidemics such as Ebola through community based first-responders, to guide the state's pandemic control programme. The success stories in India, from Kerala to Dharwad, also bear the hallmarks of such a strategy.

What marks the current pandemic out as being unlike any other public health emergency that precedes it is its global stage, with the cacophony of debates and disputes between scientists played out in full public view on digital platforms. It comes as no surprise that waves of panic and anger sweep the world, as populations which were led to believe that scientific commandments were written in stone and that government leaders were responding accordingly, are coming to grips with the truth that there is much that we don't understand about the virus and the responsibility of containment has been devolved to the ordinary citizen and the local authorities. Which is, ironically, what it should have been from the start.

While science-informed policies are an aspiration, we also need to appreciate their limitations and assumptions to ensure that such policies do not lead to avoidable harms and promise unrealistic results. I hope the scientific community can emerge from this experience with more humility, to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers all the time, that other disciplines such as the humanities are just as important, that our recommendations are often founded on an incomplete understanding of the problem, that these will change as new knowledge emerges, and that it is in keeping with our tradition to admit that when we are wrong and to use this experience to refine our methods. Above all, we must be cautious when recommending any policy actions to ensure they always take into account the perspectives of the vulnerable who will be most seriously affected.

Patel is the Pershing Square Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School



ANIRUDH BURMAN

INDIA IS INCREASINGLY rushing into a licence-permit raj for the data economy. Even as the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, is being considered by Parliament, the government's Committee of Experts on Non-Personal Data Governance Framework has sought comments on a draft report for regulating non-personal data. If accepted in its current form, the report is likely to seriously erode, if not end, India's competitive advantage in information technology.

Unlike personal data, there is no clear rationale for why the use of non-personal data needs regulation. Most governments regulate personal data for the possibility of misuse against individuals. Non-personal data is by definition data unrelated to individuals, and no country has so far announced any concrete plans to regulate it. Since India is likely to be an exception, one would have expected a strong, evidence-based case for regulating non-personal data. Worryingly, the draft report adduces hardly any evidence.

The draft report argues first, that companies that have a first-mover advantage in data-related businesses have an enormous competitive advantage. It states that since this advantage is hard to overcome through market forces, there is a need for regulating their use of data. It does not answer why competition law and India's Competition Commission are inadequate.

LICENCE RAJ FOR DATA

Regulations proposed by draft report on non-personal data need a relook

are inadequate, or how non-personal data regulation would be a better method for promoting competitiveness. Second, it provides only hypothetical examples of how anonymised non-personal data could be anonymised to target individuals or groups. However, since such de-anonymised data would become personal data, the use of such data should be governed by personal data regulation under the Personal Data Protection Bill. The report argues, again without evidence, that the mandated sharing of non-personal data will lead to higher innovation. This, despite overwhelming evidence highlighting how the expropriation of private property discourages innovation and growth.

On these shaky foundations, the draft report proposes an expansive regulatory regime that would mandate data-sharing by anyone collecting data above a certain threshold, and require registration with another new data regulatory body for anyone collecting or deriving benefits from non-personal data. Also, it proposes state "beneficial ownership" of certain categories of non-personal data. For this, the report makes a specious argument — that useful data created by a business should no longer be considered property owned by it: "The term 'ownership' holds full meaning only in terms of physical assets." It says that the government should be the beneficial owner

of what it calls "community non-personal data", which is still data collected and generated by the private sector. Not only does this open India's existing regime for intellectual property, it also goes contrary to global property rights protections India has signed up to.

Implemented, this is likely to have deleterious effects on innovation not just in the IT sector but across an industry that uses data. The volume-based threshold for compliance is likely to have the same results that such frameworks have had in India's manufacturing sector, where firms stay small to avoid compliance.

Over decades, India has learnt hard lessons regarding the interaction between state regulation and private enterprise. The rollback of the state has led to an astonishing proportion of India's population escaping poverty in the last three decades. State regulation must identify concrete problems, not create interventionist bureaucracies based on potential ones. These lessons have made India one of the world's largest economies and enabled the present government to seek "atmanirbharta".

By ignoring these lessons, the report proposes to replicate the failures of regulation in the industrial sector in the digital economy.

The writer is associate fellow at Carnegie India. Views are personal

JULY 30, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM FORMULA OFFICIAL LEVEL DISCUSSIONS will begin in a day or two to give shape to the final "formula" which emerged during the negotiations held by Manipur Chief Minister Dorendra Singh with leaders of the Assam movement to find a solution to the problem of foreign nationals. After the proposals are given concrete shape they will be placed before the Prime Minister for her approval. This was indicated by the Congress 11 General Secretary S S Mahapatra, shortly after CM Singh had met the PM and Home Minister. Mahapatra was present at both meetings. Mahapatra, who heads the Northeast region cell in the ACCI was highly optimistic about

the outcome of the effort initiated by Dorendra Singh. "If everything goes well in a day or two we will return to Assam" before the coming Independence day, he told reporters at an informal briefing.

INDIA WINS GOLD INDIA REGAINED the Olympic hockey gold medal after a lapse of 16 years with an exciting 4-3 victory over Spain in Moscow. Surinder Singh Sodhi gave India a 2-0 half time lead in the second half. M K Kaushik and Mohammad Shaheed added two more to the tally. In between, Spain's veteran full-back Juan Amat scored a hat-trick by converting three of the five penalty corners

earned by his team in the second half. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has congratulated the Indian team for its return to Assam "as the most creditable victory". Union Education Minister B Shankaranand, also congratulated the Indian team on its splendid victory.

BUND BREACHED THE BREACH IN the Bihar bund over the river Gandak in Deoria district widened from 700 metres to 1,500 metres. As SOS has been sent to the Bihar Government, which maintains this bund to immediately take steps for plugging the breach and protecting the UP population from a deluge.



OPINION

To America, From a Worried European Friend

By Daniel Schwammthal

History and evolutionary biology teach us that the normal course of human affairs is tribalism, oppression and poverty. The emergence of liberal democracies isn't the inevitable endpoint of supposedly linear Western progress but an aberration—and a rather fragile one at that.

This is why the rising illiberalism in the U.S. is so worrisome for those who seem to understand George Orwell's "1984" not as a warning but as a manual see free speech—the lifeblood of democracy and human betterment—as a fascist tool of oppression. Other classical liberal ideals—a colorblind society, rational discourse, the scientific method—suffer the same fate.

A country convinced that it is irredeemably racist can't lead the world as the "indispensable nation."

These unenlightened views have spread with lightning speed. Once confined to the campuses of the nation's elite universities, they have moved into the mainstream of public discourse. America's cultural wars have been spoon-fed two theories born of Marxism. One is postmodernism, so called because it rejects the liberal ideas of modernity and the very notion of objective truth. The other is critical theory, which is preoccupied with uncovering hidden power structures that have supposedly stood in the way of a communist revolution.

These once-fringe theories have given rise to quasireligious dogmas that divert attention from the oppressor and oppressed, setting the stage for eternal social strife. In this new cult, dissent or insufficient fervor is treated both as validation of the doctrine of ubiquitous racism and a punishable thought crime. As in medieval witch hunts, both denial and forced confessions prove the defendant's guilt.

On the other end of the political spectrum we find right-wing populism, which imagines "true" people taking on a corrupt elite, and of course the far right, with its Nazi infatuation. The wide availability of guns in the U.S. isn't only a subject of dispute in the unfolding culture war but could help turn it deadly. Witness the recent synagogue shootings by real white supremacists. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are obsessions shared by the far left and the far right. America is headed for unprecedented polarization and possibly civil unrest.

But why am I, a German Jew living in Brussels, so worried about U.S. domestic affairs? As the adage goes, when America sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold. Right now America has pneumonia.

I learned to cherish the U.S. long before I had the privilege to live and study there. History can be very personal. What Madeleine Albright called the "indispensable nation" meant the difference between life and death for my family. I was brought up in the firm knowledge that had it not been for those unimaginably brave American boys storming the beaches of Normandy, I wouldn't have been born, and my parents and the rest of my people would have been extinguished. No doubt I'm leaving out entire libraries of nuance, but that is the quintessential truth.

America today is what it has always been: a flawed society, like all others, but also a unique force for good in the world. No other multiethnic, multireligious society can credibly claim to be more democratic, more prosperous and more just than the U.S.

But America can't remain the leader of the free world if it is itself no longer free. To be the guarantor of Western security requires military and economic power, but also a sense of mission. And right now Americans are committing mass character suicide. If the country goes beyond acknowledging that racism and inequality persist and must be fought, and instead convinces itself that it's inherently and irredeemably racist, it can't possibly continue to believe that it has any right to lead. Such an America would reject the notion that the West is worth defending and regard Europe as also inherently oppressive. We know

who will fill the vacuum left by an America in retreat and at war with itself. As they watch America's self-immolation, leaders in Moscow, Beijing and Tehran surely can't believe their luck.

Any functioning society must extend tribal loyalty beyond the ties of blood. Ethnicity and Christianity were the glue that helped hold the more homogeneous European nation states together. America's Founding Fathers laid the foundation of a society worthy of the motto "e pluribus unum"—out of many, one—by replacing ethnic and religious loyalties with liberal ideas and deist ideals. A shared loyalty to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution allows Americans to see each other not as strangers but as fellow citizens.

Yes, the U.S. has not always lived up to its ideals. But to claim that the Founding's "promissory note" was never anything but a scam to maintain a system of white oppression is ahistorical revisionism that will erode the country's foundation.

European anti-Americanism constantly imagines the rise of fascism in the very country that defeated the empire and constantly predicts the end of liberty in the world's oldest democracy. I have always proudly opposed this view. But I am reminded now of Benjamin Franklin's famous line: "A Republic, if you can keep it." For the first time I have terrifying doubts.

Mr. Schwammthal is director of the A.J.C. Transatlantic Institute.



A July 25 protest in Oakland, Calif.

After Mrs. Clinton underestimated Mr. Trump, demeaned his supporters, and took her own for granted. Mr. Biden will try to avoid those mistakes. He has all the makings as gaffe-prone as anyone who has run for president. Two hurdles he has yet to clear are choosing a running mate who won't fracture the Democratic coalition and putting in a strong debate performance against an incumbent who has regularly shown more mental sharpness. Neither one is a given.

White House officials agree that a new re-election strategy is necessary now, but moving in a different direction, with an openly undisciplined candidate and a hostile, pro-Biden media lying in wait is another matter. Revising the coronavirus briefings with Mr. Trump is an effort to improve his poll numbers, and making them shorter and more congenial is a welcome change. Yet this week the president was back to undermining his own health-care experts in late-night tweets, which probably isn't part of the reboot.

Similarly, the Trump administration seems intent to push a "law and order" message to voters by cracking down on antipolice mayhem that has become commonplace in several U.S. cities. Mr. Trump's frustration at what he sees playing out on television night after night is understandable. But it isn't clear that sending federal agents where they aren't wanted is a smart political move, even if the president has the authority to do it. The reality is that the protesters are more popular than the president. The unrest has been fueled by a false narrative indulged in the media, but polling shows that the protesters have found sympathy with a majority of Americans, including the white suburbanites Mr. Trump hopes to win over with his crackdowns.

The reason Mr. Trump was headed for re-election before the pandemic was the economy. If he wants a second term, he would do better to focus on responsibly reopening businesses, returning kids to school, and assuring voters that the best person to lead the current recovery is the person who oversaw the last one.

It's Getting Late Early for the Trump Re-Election Effort

Trump supporters don't like to hear this, but with just over three months to go before Election Day, their gaffe is playing catch-up.

Yes, some polls show Mr. Trump with a lead over Mrs. Clinton, but that merely confirms

that polls (and pundits) are fallible, not that they're always wrong and should be ignored. The president often derides polls that show him trailing, but if he didn't take them seriously, he wouldn't have replaced his campaign manager earlier this month.

Mr. Trump preferred to run against a Democrat from the progressive wing of the party. But Joe Biden spoiled those plans, and the Covid-19 response stamped out the president's best argument for re-election: a growing economy with low unemployment and rising wages among broad swaths of workers. What's left is a White House in search of a consistent campaign message.

Mr. Trump's biggest problem is that Mr. Biden isn't Hillary Clinton, and it can't be overstated how much the president benefited four years ago. Back in 2016, voters who said they didn't like either candidate went with Mr. Trump over Mrs. Clinton, 77% to 20%, and he landed him over the top in swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

This year, voters with a negative opinion of both Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden say they favor the former vice president by 60% to 10%, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll released in April.

Four years ago Mr. Trump bested Mrs. Clinton among suburbanites, seniors and college-educated white men. Current surveys show him trailing in those categories. To get a sense of how deep Mr. Biden has ventured into the GOP's demographic strongholds, consider that no Democratic candidate for president has run competitive with voters 65 and older since Al Gore 20 years ago.

Even among groups Mr. Trump carried in 2016—African-Americans and white women without a college de-

gree, for example—the lead has shrunk. A Fox News poll last week showed Mr. Biden comfortably ahead in Minnesota, Michigan and Pennsylvania. But he lost those states were decided by less than 2 points in the last presidential election. That comes on the heels of a Quinnipiac survey that shows Mr. Biden with a

If he wants a second term, he needs to convince voters that he's the best choice to oversee the recovery.

double-digit lead in Florida. Mr. Trump lost the popular vote by about 2 points the first time he ran. A year ago, there was speculation that he could lose the popular vote this year by a slightly larger amount and still be re-elected, but Real Clear Politics now has Mr. Trump behind nationally by 9 points.

If Democrats are ahead at this juncture, there's no reason to assume that the lead is insurmountable.

able. Mrs. Clinton underestimated Mr. Trump, demeaned his supporters, and took her own for granted. Mr. Biden will try to avoid those mistakes. He has all the makings as gaffe-prone as anyone who has run for president. Two hurdles he has yet to clear are choosing a running mate who won't fracture the Democratic coalition and putting in a strong debate performance against an incumbent who has regularly shown more mental sharpness. Neither one is a given.

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How to Hold Beijing Accountable for the Coronavirus

By Jamie Metzler

If a country accidentally launched a nuclear missile killing more than 650,000 people, world leaders would at least demand a comprehensive and immediate investigation into what happened to make sure it didn't occur again. But as evidence grows that the equally deadly Covid-19 pandemic may stem from a Wuhan virology lab's accidental leak followed by a Chinese government cover-up, most politicians across the globe have been strangely silent. Unless policy makers understand the novel coronavirus's origins, the world remains vulnerable to an even deadlier pandemic in the future.

The closest known relative to SARS-CoV-2 is a virus sampled by Chinese researchers from six miners infected while working in a bat-infested cave in southern China in 2012. These miners developed symptoms we now associate with Covid-19. Half of them died. These viral samples were then taken to the Wuhan Institute of Virology—the only facility in China that's a biosafety Level 4 laboratory—the highest possible

safety designation. The Level 4 designation is reserved for facilities dealing with the most dangerous pathogens. Wuhan is more than 1,000 miles north of Yunnan province, world health organizations and investigators from entering the country while samples were destroyed.

When a courageous Chinese biologist posted the sequenced genome of the virus online, his lab was immediately shut "for rectification." The Chinese government has forbidden scientists to discuss publicly the origins of the pandemic. Citizen journalists investigating the issue have disappeared. In the words of a European Union report that were controversially later removed from the final version, "China has continued to run a global disinformation campaign to deflect blame for the outbreak of the pandemic."

In May, 120 countries represented in the World Health Assembly agreed to an "impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation" to "review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19."

Above all, China's extensive cover-up raises red flags. In the critical first weeks after the initial outbreak, Beijing actively suppressed essential information and prevented World Health Organization investigators from entering the country while samples were destroyed.

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This strange and potentially restrictive approach represented a compromise allowing Beijing enough wiggle room to avoid any serious investigation. Chinese President Xi Jinping made this intransigence even clearer by stating the investigation should only begin after the pandemic

Why did China cover up the epidemic? The most plausible explanation involves a Wuhan lab.

is contained. Although a WHO advance-planning team left for China on July 10, it is highly likely that any international investigation will be significantly curtailed by the Chinese government.

It's easy to understand why Beijing would not be thrilled about a deep investigation into the origins of the pandemic. If the deaths of so many people around the world were traced to a lab accident and coverup, the consequences within China and

globally would be monumental. It is hard to overstate just how many people outside China are stepping so gingerly.

Part of this can be explained by China's outside global influence. When Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison suggested an investigation, Beijing immediately punished him with a reduction in trade. With China's economy rebounding while the U.S. is struggling, many countries fear upsetting the Chinese government could endanger their economic future or make it harder to source critical medical supplies.

Many progressives also seem to be censoring themselves for fear of legitimizing what they see as President Trump's effort to blame China and the WHO to deflect criticism of America's own failures.

But not getting to the bottom of this crisis would be the height of absurdity. Too much is at stake.

To ensure everyone's safety, the WHO and outside investigators must be empowered to explore all relevant questions about the origins of the pandemic without limits. This comprehensive forensic investigation must include full access to all of the scientists, biological samples, laboratory records and other materials from the Wuhan virology institutes and other relevant Chinese organizations.

Denying that access should be considered an admission of guilt by Beijing.

But there is an even better way forward. By working together to fully understand the origins of the pandemic, how we failed to respond appropriately, and what we must do to prevent the next crisis, we can build a safer world for everyone.

Mr. Metzler served in the National Security Council and State Department in the Clinton administration. He is a senior fellow of the Atlantic Council, a member of the WHO international advisory committee on human genome editing, and author of "Hacking Biotech: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humanity."

Notable & Quotable: Seattle

Carmen Best, chief of the Seattle Police Department, in a July 23 letter to the City Council:

SPD has confirmed with the City Attorney's Office that the City Council ordinance banning the use of less lethal tools—including pepper spray—commonly used to disperse crowds that have turned violent, will go into effect this weekend.

It is a fact that there are groups and individuals who are intent on destruction in our City. Yes, we also have seen weeks of peaceful demonstrations, but two recent events (Sunday, July 19th and Wednesday, July 22nd) have included wide-scale property destruction and attacks on officers, injuring more than a dozen, some significantly. . . .

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OPINION

Timothy C. Dwyer, President and Publisher
Paul Choiniere, Editorial Page Editor
Timothy J. Cotter, Managing Editor
Erikson E. Larralde, Deputy Managing Editor



'The newspaper should be more than a business enterprise. It should also be the champion and protector of the public interest and defender of the people's rights.'
As written by Theodore Bodenwein in his will establishing The Day Trust.

THE DAY EDITORIALS

As school year nears, no normal in sight

It is painfully clear that public education will not remotely return to anything resembling normal until a reliable vaccine has been developed, made widely available and is broadly used to suppress the COVID-19 virus. It is difficult to calculate the damage that is being done to long-term learning for the students deprived since March of a traditional classroom education. For many it will be profound. And it is the students in the lowest-performing districts who are being hurt the most, the achievement gap between them and their counterparts in the adjoining suburbs growing.

But on Friday, school districts across Connecticut submitted their plans to state education officials, as required, and the formidable challenges became clear. Unions representing teachers have expressed deep concerns about exposure to the virus, which has killed or contributed to the deaths of 148,000 Americans. On Monday, Lamont changed his demeanor, no longer stressing returning as many students as possible but instead a willingness to give school districts flexibility to mix in-school instruction and online classes as they see necessary to balance safety and education. Parents will have the option to keep their children home, whatever a district decides. The governor has been consistent on that point. Flexibility is the only reasonable choice. A strongarm attempt to force children back to schools, being seen in other states, could be disastrous if the pandemic again spikes. Evidence suggests younger children are less vulnerable than their older counter-

parts, which could factor into the policy decisions about who goes back, who doesn't, and how often. Whether it is in schools — with children masked all day (talk about challenges), the focus of teachers distracted from education to maintaining epidemic protocols, and all manner of routines disrupted — or it is at home — with parents balancing work demands and trying to keep their kids focused — few students will be learning as well as they would in normal times. While it is unclear how many students will be expected to continue to learn remotely, school districts have to do a better job of it than was the case last school year, when plans had to be developed on the fly. A state survey of local school districts found 137,000 children participated only minimally in remote learning, at times going more than a week without contact, or did not take part at all. That is about one in four students. Students in the 10 lowest-perform-

ing districts, which includes New London and Norwich, were more than five times less likely to have a device, or adequate device, to learn remotely; three times less likely to have internet access; and 2.5 times more likely to have obstacles at home making remote learning difficult, such as no quiet place to study. In these struggling, economically and fiscally disadvantaged urban districts, about 48% of students regularly took part in distance learning, while about 1 in 10 did not participate at all. In the suburbs, the participation rate was 84%, with only 1 in 50 not taking part at all, the state found. Indicative of the gap were some local remote learning participation rates — New London 56% and Norwich, which worked aggressively to provide students with necessary technology, 67%; while Waterford saw participation of 95% and East Lyme 90%. Tuesday afternoon Lamont announced the 'Everybody Learns' initiative: a \$43.5 million investment in remote learning to close the digital divide. That's welcome news and we look forward to evaluating the details. Educating during a pandemic is expensive, with school systems telling the state they collectively expect to spend \$420 million more for protective equipment, cleaning supplies, protective barriers, technology upgrades, and increased staffing to provide remote and in-school learning. Norwich expects spending \$11.2 million more; New London, \$3 million; Groton, \$3.6 million; Stonington, \$4.1 million; Waterford, \$3 million; and Montville, \$2.25 million. For now, the struggle must focus on getting through this, minimizing the educational damage and reaching those students who are falling further behind. Post-pandemic, educators will have to recognize that many students will not be ready to just pick up and move on. They will have to catch up. In other words, the educational sickness caused by the pandemic will continue long after it subsides.

U.S. acting like loser in policy dating game

BY RACHEL MARSDEN
The U.S. won over the hearts and minds of other nations in the Cold War era because they looked America up and down and decided they wanted a piece of that mess, on offer — namely, its wallet, or, "values." But now, as the U.S. resorts to threatening allies to maintain the status quo in its relationships, it should ask why it lost its mojo to the benefit of a new cash-flashing suitor, China, and how it might get back to winning hearts and minds in the geopolitical dating game. Imagine being a European country straddled between two potential suitors: China and America. You open the door to find U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who swung through Europe earlier this month on a clear mission) standing there ranting about the other guy (China) and threatening you not to buy his 5G technology or make any big economic commitments to him or to his main wingman, Russia. Pompeo threatens to make you pay for playing economic footsie with Russia, who's helping you complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that would serve as your Amazon Prime of gas delivery — cheap and accessible. You're annoyed that this America guy is pretending to be some kind of white knight, wanting to save you from Chinese spying when you know he's been tracking your every move for years through his own spying operation. You think that he's a hypocrite for unapologetically continuing to spy on you under the guise of protecting you, all while warning you about China's potential to do the same. Then he threatens to stop talking to you — or at least to stop sharing intelligence and information with you — if you insist on diversifying your relationships outside of those he approves. You ease him out the door and hope that he doesn't decide to spite you for your lack of subservience by enacting what he calls his "maximum pressure" diplomatic strategy, which involves sanctions or tariffs. Upon arriving home from what should have been called his Europe-an Insecurity Tour, Pompeo was still prattling on about China. "The kind of engagement we have been pursuing has not brought the kind of change inside of China that President Nixon had hoped to induce," Pompeo said. News flash: China is open for business with the entire world — which is exactly what Nixon wanted. "Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors," Nixon wrote in a 1967 article titled, "Asia after Viet Nam."

When you have an angry suitor (U.S.) ranting on your lawn, one solution is to befriend a big dude (China) who can tell the nut job in your front yard to take a hike. Don't hate the player, hate the game. But of course, the U.S. established the global rules of that game. As America's dominance in the global dating game has waned, it has shifted from seduction to threats. When you have an angry suitor ranting on your lawn about burning down your house, one solution is to befriend a big dude who can tell the nut job in your front yard to take a hike. That's the role China is now playing for countries on the U.S. hit list, such as Iran and Venezuela, who are only incurring America's ire because regime-change attempts haven't been as successful as they've just a decade or two ago. Instead of complaining, the U.S. should be determining what China is doing right and what can be learned from Chinese success in forging new relationships. "What does this guy have that I don't?" should be the crux of U.S. soul-searching. A favorite refrain of jilted lovers is, "You're going to regret leaving me for that guy. It's going to end in heartbreak." That has been the U.S. warning to countries getting involved with China. America claims there's a hidden cost that will eventually come due. Perhaps. But China is fulfilling the role of Mr. Right-for-Right-Now. The best-case scenario for every nation is the international relationship dynamic favored by former French President General Charles de Gaulle: a geopolitical open relationship that ensures long-term independence from any one suitor. Keep them all competing for your attention. Refuse to let the door on any of them, but never commit entirely to any of their agendas. China seems willing to play that game, while the U.S. isn't. "My way or the highway" isn't going to work in an era where you're no longer the only player. The era of multipolarity is here, and a gal-er, country — has far more options than she did back in the latter part of the 20th century, when it was just America vs. that Soviet guy whose checks kept bouncing.

Rachel Marsden is a columnist, political strategist and host of an independently produced French-language program that airs on Sputnik France. Her column is distributed by Tribune Content Agency.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Who has a clue? Is it Trump? Is it Putin?

I am in total agreement with Trump to the editor 'Trump Coddles Russia' July 28. Also, the next time a picture of Presidents Trump and Putin is shown on TV, ask yourself which one of these

two knows what is happening and which one has no clue?
R.V. DeCarolis
North Franklin

He knows how well McFee gets job done

I write to endorse Dana McFee as the Republican registrar of voters. I have served as his deputy for the past five years and know firsthand how well he does his job; any claim to the contrary would be just plain nonsense. I am proud to be a member of this election team along with Democratic registrar Robin Marquand, her deputy Michelle De-Shong Cure and all those great poll workers who make our elections run like a well-oiled machine. I urge all Montville Republicans to vote for Dana McFee in the Aug. 11 primary.
Elmer "Al" Wittkofske
Republican Deputy Registrar of Voters
Montville

Constant Day arrival in uncertain world

In today's uncertain world, a dependable constant seems like a good thing. And certain select readers of The Day have just such a thing. To have a nice hot cup of coffee while reading The Day early in the morning is an enjoyable event for me. I have this pleasure each and every morning, thanks to the most constant delivery person on the planet! Andy Hicks gets the Day to us early each and every morning and has done so for 365 days a year without fail — for years! I feel that such dedication deserves a recognition. So "Here's to you" Andy!
Jean Russell
Waterford

This Democrat urges GOP to 'vote McFee'

Responding to several recent endorsements of Dana McFee for Montville Registrar of Voters, I am a registered Democrat and have worked for several years as a poll worker for the Town of Montville for all of our elections. Although he is representing the Republicans in town and not my own affiliation, Dana is a wonderful representative of Montville in his capacity, very knowledgeable and resourceful, always helpful, and easy to work for. I strongly urge all Montville Republicans to vote for him again on primary day, and not his opponent Jeff Rodgers.
Michelle De-Shong Cure
Montville

Most people can safely vote in person

Paul (Choiniere, editor), you say 167% of voters prefer mail-in or drop-off ballots, "Fighting a losing and foolish battle" (July 26). I am sorry, when you have dead pets by 12 years (article in The Day), receiving absentee ballots to vote, I have no faith in the "mail-in system." Do you know how long it will take to verify these mail-in ballots? I realize the Republican Party in Connecticut is not the dominant party, but we are asking about a society that has been known to embrace the challenge of infiltrating and delegitimizing the system at every opportunity. If we can stand six feet apart for a carton of eggs at the grocery store or a new game for our kids at Walmart, we can stand six feet apart at the town hall to vote. All elections are important, but this year's political campaigns do not necessarily seem to be between two parties but two opposing ideologies. Obviously, high-risk individuals should stay home and mail in and that is covered by the law.
Skivea Nieves
Waterford

HOW TO WRITE LETTERS TO THE DAY

The Day welcomes original letters not sent to other publications. Letter length is limited to 200 words and writers are limited to one submission every 15 days. The Day will edit letters for clarity, length, grammar, style and taste. Writers are urged to cite the source of factual claims. The Day does not publish eulogies to the dead, poetry, thank-you notes, letters of dispute with businesses or anonymous letters. Letters must include name, address and phone number.

E-mail letters to: letters@theday.com
Mail letters to: The Day, P.O. Box 1231, New London, CT 06320