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THE IDEAS PAGE

A poll-proof relationship

The 2+2 dialogue comes in the backdrop of a structural shift in great power politics and turbulence in the global economic order. Incentives to advance India-US partnership are stronger than ever before



BY C RAJA MOHAN

COMING AMIDST CHINA'S continuing aggression on the Ladakh frontier, the 2+2 dialogue between the defence and foreign ministers of India and the United States in Delhi this week marks an important moment in bilateral relations. It also takes place amidst a profound structural shift in great power politics as well as turbulence in the international economic order intensified by the coronavirus pandemic.

The four ministers, Rajnath Singh and Subrahmanya Jaishankar, Mike Pompeo and Mark Esper, would want to reflect on and consolidate the wide-ranging progress of the strategic partnership in the last four years. They should also set the stage for the elevation of the partnership to a higher level under the next administration, whether headed by Donald Trump or Joe Biden.

The 2+2 dialogue comes just three weeks after the foreign ministers of the Quad — or the Quadrilateral Security Framework — met in Tokyo. The dialogue follows India's first-ever participation, earlier this month, in a meeting of the exclusive Five Eyes grouping that facilitates intelligence-sharing among the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand. The Five Eyes meeting in Tokyo was about addressing the tension between the imperatives of law enforcement and the encryption policies of technology companies like Apple and Facebook. A few days ago, Delhi announced the much-awaited expansion of the annual Malabar exercises with the US and Japan to include Australia.

This is not the first time we are seeing an acceleration of the engagement between Delhi and Washington. There was a similar moment in the UPA era, but Delhi's self-doubt and political timidity let the opportunity slip. Recall, for a moment, the few weeks in the spring and summer of 2005.

In March, the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice came to Delhi to explore the outlines of the historic civil nuclear initiative that would end India's prolonged atomic isolation in the world and a broader framework for security cooperation. The visits to Washington by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee in June and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in July saw the translation of those ideas into concrete frameworks.

Delhi, however, made heavy weather of that extraordinary moment, thanks to the deep divisions within the national security establishment, the Congress leadership and the UPA coalition. In fact, the coalition broke up when the Left parties withdrew supporting opposition to the deepening strategic partnership with the US. The Congress leadership, which was desperate to avoid the rupture with the Left, was prepared to abandon the new possibilities with the US. It was Manmohan Singh's threat to resign that rescued the civil nuclear deal.

The UPA returned to power without the Left, but with little political enthusiasm for deepening ties with the US. The focus was on keeping visible distance from the US in the

name of non-alignment, strategic autonomy, and the quest for a multipolar world. The relationship survived those years, thanks to the US's perseverance.

There is one similarity and many differences when we compare the current moment in India-US relations with that during the UPA years. When Manmohan Singh got the green light from the Congress leadership to wrap up the nuclear deal, there was a rush at the end of 2008 to complete a whole range of formalities in the waning months of the George W Bush presidency.

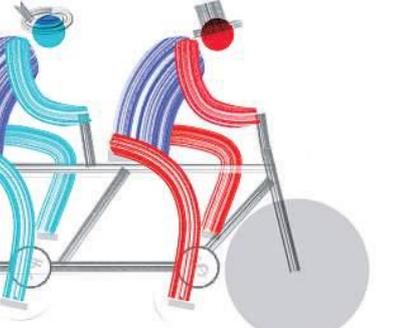
Unlike Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not have to deal with backseat driving from the party. Like Manmohan Singh, Modi sees the advantages of building a strong partnership and has been able to advance ties at a much faster and deliberate pace than in the UPA years. The quickening diplomatic dance of the last few weeks is also a consequence of the special circumstances that confront India and the US today.

That brings to the three differences that stand out. First is the huge military crisis on the northern borders with China that is well into the sixth month. During the UPA years, Delhi avoided closer security ties with the US in deference to Beijing's sensitivities. In contrast, the Modi government has refused to cede a veto to China over its policy on security cooperation with the US — whether bilateral or in multilateral formats such as the Quad.

Second is the pandemic. The coronavirus has sharpened the US debate on the dangers of excessive economic interdependence on China. Meanwhile, Delhi has begun to reduce its commercial ties to Beijing in response to the PLA's Ladakh aggression. This has created the conditions for a new conversation between India and the US on reorganising global supply chains away from China in the so-called Quad Plus conversations that have variously drawn in Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam.

Although Delhi and Washington continue to have many differences over bilateral trade, they both see the need for rethinking the current global economic institutions that China has taken to its own advantage.

Third is the focus on critical technologies like artificial intelligence that promise to transform most aspects of modern life — including security, political economy and social order.



C R Sasikumar

Two decades ago, Delhi and Washington focused on resolving the legacy issues surrounding the mid-20th century technologies relating to nuclear weapons and missiles.

Thanks to the civil nuclear initiative, those issues are behind us. Delhi and Washington are now focused on finding ways to collaborate on the critical technologies of the 21st century and work with their partners in setting new global rules for managing them.

Questions have been raised about the merits of holding the current round of engagement in the last weeks of the Trump Administration's current tenure. An American president is elected for a full four-year term, and he has the power to advance on a broad range of issues until the last day in office.

The real question is not about the calendar, but the extent of bipartisan political support that India enjoys. To be sure, there are many issues of contention amidst the current sharp polarisation between the Republicans and Democrats. But the US strategic partnership with India is not one of them. If Joe Biden wins the election, there will certainly be some new issues and new possibilities.

The overarching framework that has emerged across different administrations in the last two decades helps manage potential difficulties and take advantage of new opportunities. Recall, for example, that Senator Barack Obama was among the critics of the India-US nuclear deal but had no hesitation advancing its implementation when he became the president in 2008.

Modi and his advisers have dealt with the Obama-Biden team during 2014-16 and are well placed to deal with a Democratic victory. But, for now, and until the third week of January 2021, Trump's current team is in charge. Delhi needs to stay fully engaged with it.

Both Delhi and Washington have benefited much from the recent political investments in the relationship. As the regional and global order faces multiple transitions, the incentives for Delhi and Washington to sustain and advance India-US partnership are stronger than ever before and will continue into the next administration.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The final verdict is that the longer the pandemic continues, the more difficult it becomes for the government to treat it as a temporary, though immense, problem. The reality is that the pandemic is reshaping everything."

— THE GUARDIAN

Book of Unfreedom

The movement against 'Manusmriti' must be robustly feminist and unconditionally assert women's autonomy



KAVITA KRISHNAN

IN A WEBINAR on "Patriarchy and feminism", Thol. Thirumavalavan, president of the Viduthalaai Chiruthalagai Katchi (VCK), quoted Periyar on Manusmriti, to say that the "Manu Dharma" demeans women, holding them to be prostitutes by nature. In her newfound avatar as a BJP acolyte, actor — and a Hindu nationalist — claims Thirumavalavan's words insulted women. On cue, a case was filed against the VCK leader in Chennai.

It is the Manusmriti that insults women: Thirumavalavan merely quoted from it. What Khushbu and her party know, but cannot admit, is that they are outraged on behalf of the Manusmriti and not on behalf of women. That is why Khushbu claims that the Manusmriti has "not a single word that demeans women."

At public functions in India, it is common to hear people sentimentally cite the Manusmriti. The idea of women as sexual tempters, corrupters or gateways to hell is not unique to Manu. The Christian, Islamic and Buddhist texts also warn against women, portraying them as sexually promiscuous, secretive, shy and out to entrap men.

Saying that the Manusmriti "treats women as prostitutes" is misleading. Such a description of the Manusmriti implies that the harm it causes is because it refers to women as sexually "loose" and, thus, insults women. But, in fact, the Manusmriti lies in its prescriptions of tight control of women's autonomy. Manu says, "A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in (her own) house. In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead, under her sons."

Our critique of the Manusmriti should take care to challenge rather than reinforce the notion that the worst thing one can say of a woman is that she is sexually "loose" or a "prostitute". It is important to recognise that the harm of the Manusmriti lies not in the fact that it asks us to treat women as "prostitutes", but that it asks us to treat women as daughters, wives, mothers who must be tightly controlled by fathers, husbands and sons. In fact, Manu encourages us to see this control as "reverence" and "protection" rather than as repression and oppression.

This obsessive control over women is

needed to prevent a breakdown of caste hierarchies and caste apartheid. The Manusmriti lays down the law that a woman who makes love to a man of a higher caste incurs no punishment; a woman who makes love to a man of a "lower" caste than hers must be isolated and kept in confinement. If a man from a subordinate caste makes love to a woman of the highest caste, he must be put to death.

But, some ask, does anyone really read the Manusmriti in India, let alone obey it? The facts show that the spirit of Manu's laws continue to inform and shape modern society, as well as modern politics in India. The National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4) found that just 41 per cent of Indian women aged between 15 and 49 are allowed to go alone to the market, to the health centre, and outside the community (NFHS-4, table 15.13). Startlingly, 40 per cent of "what is classified as rape" is actually parental criminalisation of caste and gender that are hard-wired into our societies and selves. In every household where women are surveilled, their movements restricted; in every opposition to inter-caste, inter-faith marriage, in every attack on Dalits' villages after a Dalit man has married a non-Dalit woman, in the Sangh's campaign to brand love between Hindu women and Muslim men as "love jihad" — it is the Manusmriti that you see in action.

Today, Khushbu Sundar on behalf of the BJP is leading the pack in attacking Thirumavalavan for his remarks on the Manusmriti, which they come as an insult to Indian womanhood. In 2005, Khushbu herself had been at the receiving end of similar patriarchal moral outrage. She had been accused of pre-marital sex was cool as long as it was safe sex — for this, 22 cases were filed against her accusing her of "defaming Tamil womanhood and chastity". The attack on Khushbu was led by the Pattali Mahal Katchi (PMK), a party now known for its violent campaign against marriages between Dalit men and women of intermediate castes. And at the time, Thol. Thirumavalavan and his organisation, too, had joined the fray, with Thirumavalavan saying that her remarks were "against public order". It would strengthen the movement against the Manusmriti today, if he were to acknowledge how his 2005 remarks reinforced the same Brahminical patriarchal notions of female purity and chastity that he, and we, are fighting today.

One cannot be a feminist in India if you are not fighting the Manusmriti — and one cannot fight the Manusmriti without being robustly feminist, and asserting women's unconditional autonomy.

The writer is secretary, All India Progressive Women's Association and politburo member, CPI(M/L)



RISHIKESH BS

Make board exams irrelevant

NEP 2020 has the answer to the question of impossibly high cut-offs

WHEN DELHI UNIVERSITY announced the first list of admission into undergraduate programmes in its 50 colleges earlier this month, the cut-offs reached 100 per cent mark in some courses offered by a few colleges. But this is neither surprising nor unexpected. According to the most recent All India Survey of Higher Education (AI-SHE 2018-19), Delhi's gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 46.3 per cent (the national GER is 26.3 per cent). This means that almost every second youth in Delhi between the age of 18 and 23 is enrolled in a higher education programme. But the aspirations of Delhi's youth are not met by adequate high-quality Higher Education Institutions (HEIs, including universities and standalone institutions), leading to unreasonably high cut-offs. In some HEIs, for courses such as computer science or English literature, the cutoff is in the high 90s, even for aspirants from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

What we have been seeing in Delhi for more than a decade is also seen in a few other states, where the GER is close to 50 per cent. Today, it is a handful of states, and tomorrow it will be the entire country. According to India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 and the National Education Policy 2020 target, we are aiming to ensure 100 per cent enrollment across our school stages, from pre-primary to the secondary stage. As we move towards this

target, there will be a further rise in applications for higher education programmes for which the NEP 2020 has set a target of 50 per cent by 2035 which would mean an additional 35 million seats to be created in HEIs across the country. If the cut-off marks are already at unreasonable levels, we can imagine the scenario with a doubling of prospective students. Unless something transformative is done, we are headed towards a rise in the number of unemployed graduates (due to poor quality education) and a generation of disenfranchised youth (due to the systemic failure in equipping them with required skill sets).

We have nearly 1,000 universities and almost 40,000 colleges spread across the country. Many of the universities affiliate more than 1,000 colleges. If such large affiliations indicate the unreasonable number of colleges that universities are trying to manage, 16.3 per cent of the colleges have an enrolment of fewer than 100 students.

NEP 2020 recommends moving into a higher education ecosystem that consists of large multi-disciplinary universities and large multi-disciplinary HEIs, offering undergraduate and graduate programmes, one in every or nearly every district, in the country. These will be multi-disciplinary universities and colleges, with the latter moving away from affiliation to a degree-granting HEI or a constituent college of the university. Each such institute will aim to have 3,000 or more

students. Currently, only 4 per cent colleges have an enrolment over 3,000. By modelling this across the higher education ecosystem, not only will access improve, but it will also make HEIs viable, with all resources in place as seen in most parts of the developed world. Only half the number of HEIs that currently exist, we will be able to provide access to 70 million students expected in higher education once the country reaches a GER of 50 per cent. This will also allow for closing down of thousands of poor quality HEIs, which snare unsuspecting students, leading to a large number of non-entrepreneurial, unskilled and unemployable graduates.

For the problem of unreasonable cut-offs to be rooted out, the assessment reforms that NEP envisages, for both school-leaving and higher education entrance, is critical. Both of these reforms have to take place simultaneously. In the last decade, when the CBSE experimented on a progressive reform by making Class X board exams optional, very few parents allowed their wards to take that option. Until the school and higher education systems are aligned to ensure a paradigm shift, students, parents and the entire country will continue to operate in this vicious cycle.

Using school-leaving marks to create cut-offs is a lazy option employed by the HEIs to reduce the number of applicants, before launching their admission process. School

percentages are not good markers of an individual's readiness to do higher education — and given the serious drawbacks of standardised assessments in our board exams, it's best to get rid of them at the earliest. Instead, the school-leaving certificates will have to be based on an array of assessments, including a student's performance across the secondary level — Classes X to XII. They will factor in class assignments and tests, leading to the development of students' portfolios. Post that, admission to higher education is an entirely different set of activities. It may use the portfolio of school assessments as the base, but the admission process ought to assess whether the prospective student has developed the attributes for pursuing higher education.

NEP 2020 envisages assessment reform at the school level, which would make the board exams redundant, and also a common entrance for the liberal arts-based higher education system, which only assesses an applicant's preparedness to pursue a university education. We need to usher in these reforms at the earliest. If not, the country is at the risk of generating graduates in tens of millions, who will neither have the capacity to generate employment for themselves nor the capability to be employed anywhere.

The writer is associate professor, Azim Premji University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NOT A PAWN
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The China factor' (IE, October 26). Viewing the India-China equation through the prism of the US president's personality could be misleading. China has challenged the US for the world leadership and a US president is bound to deploy all the weapons available to him in thwarting China. India, by virtue of its geographical location, size, market and military strength, is an ideal weapon for the US in this contest. India therefore, will be in a better position to achieve her national objectives and must never lose sight of it while playing the American game on China.

B. Shubhada, via email

REGAIN CREDIBILITY
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Central CBI case' (IE, October 24). Maharashtra is the fifth state to withdraw general consent for CBI operations within its territory, after the central agency took over a Lucknow police FIR to investigate alleged BJP manipulation by TV channels when Mumbai police is already probing the matter. CBI should work independently without any interference from the political class. This will help in maintaining its credibility and accountability and curtail crime in a neutral manner.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

NOT MEDIA
THIS REFERS TO the editorial,

IDEAS ONLINE
● DECONSTRUCTING THE DECLINE
MILIND SOHONI, NIKHIL TIKEKAR, ALAKHYA DESHMUKH
● DEEP FROM STUBBLE: WALKAP GUPTA AND K KRISHNAN
www.indianexpress.com

"Reporting the news" (IE, October 26). That the Mumbai Police appears deeply politicised by framing charges about Republic TV is without question. But is the media not politicised too? Channels which call for public trials, label students anti-national and equivocate on lynchings and crimes against Dalits and women have helped destroy many an institution. This will help in maintaining its credibility and accountability and curtail crime in a neutral manner. Shantanu Ray, Meerut

The many lessons from COVID-19

What we have done so far, and what all remains to be done



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

The global pandemic is marching on. As I had said at the JRD Tata Orator, hosted by the Population Foundation of India on its 50th anniversary, of the lessons I have learned over the last nine or 10 months, the most important one is the significance of investing in public health and primary healthcare. Countries that invested in primary healthcare over the past decade or two are reaping the benefits now. Another lesson is the positive role of science and scientists. The global collaboration between scientists to take forward advances in knowledge so that science is continuously informing our response to the pandemic has been encouraging.

Gendered impact
In India, the pandemic has had a differential impact on women. Despite gaps, India had seen progress in maternal mortality. There has been significant gains in infant mortality, institutional births and replacement level fertility. However, there is still a high unmet need for family planning and improved access is required to contraceptive services and safe abortion. A recent modelling study showed that because of restrictions in coverage of essential services, the prevalence of wasting in children could increase by 10% to 50%. There could also be 60% more maternal deaths because interventions like the administration of tetanus toxoids, antibiotics, and clean birth environments, are no longer available.

COVID-19 has also disrupted the education system. It has also adversely affected access to nutritious food as a huge number of children depend on school meals.

Another worrying development is the surge in domestic violence. In India, a third of women said that they had previously experienced domestic violence, but less than 1% sought help from the police. Governments can include response to violence against women in the package of essential services.

Many women have lost their work and livelihoods. More women than



NEW YORK TIMES

men work in the informal economy. Therefore their income fell by over 60% during the first month of the pandemic. In India, the number of women and girls living in extreme poverty is expected to increase from 87 million to 100 million.

For a month ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasised the importance of gender analysis and gender-responsive public health policies. One of the major issues is the lack of availability of data that is disaggregated by sex and age. We also do not have data on violence against women and children. We have urged WHO Member States to collect data, report and analyse it. The administration of tetanus toxoids and response to violence against women as an essential service.

Over 70% of countries reported partial or complete disruption of immunisation services. Other services disrupted include diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases, cancer diagnosis and treatment, family planning, contraception, antenatal care, malaria and TB case detection, treatment facility-based births, and urgent blood transfusions, as well as emergency surgery. This will have a huge impact.

On the one hand, essential services have to be provided; on the other hand, we must ensure financial protection. This can be guaranteed only if there is either a health coverage scheme, like Aayushman Bharat, or through private health insurance.

Out-of-pocket payments cause about 100 million to fall into extreme poverty every year, and 800 million globally spend more than 10% of their household budget on healthcare. The World Health Organization has been urging countries to ensure financial protection and effective

coverage of health services.

The effective coverage index is a useful measure of the quality of the provision and efficacy of services in terms of health outcomes. This metric suggests that 3.1 billion people worldwide would still not be covered if we continue to do what we're doing. The index enables us to move away from just measuring process towards measuring outcomes. Many countries do that people could not meet physical-ly. Platforms like ECHO have been used in many states to train health-care workers and the government's e-Sanjeevani platform is enabling telemedicine appointments.

We now have a national digital health blueprint and a road map. We want to move towards electronic and portable health records. It is important to think about not only data governance principles, but also new ways of collecting, using and sharing data, enabling local, contextualised decision-making.

We also need to think about working with the private sector, which is already playing a very big role in technology. But we need to think about technologies that are considered public health goods. At the Aravind Eye Hospital in Puducherry, for example, they did an experiment with shared medical appointments. This seemed to result in better health

outcomes as well as higher productivity, apart from reducing costs and saving a lot of time for doctors.

We need to further integrate social protection systems, food systems and health systems in order to really have an impact on nutrition. India has done much to ensure these services, but it needs to expand these to protect its most vulnerable population groups. We must ensure that the pandemic does not further increase food insecurity.

False or misleading information leads to harmful behaviours, and mistrust in governments and the public health response. In the last eight months we have done an incredible amount of work with many tech companies. But infodemic management is not straightforward; it is linked to people's beliefs and behaviour. Therefore, we've set up a behavioural insights group to provide advice on behaviour change.

We often think about health as purely as delivery of services to take care of the sick. The risk factors and the social and environmental determinants of health, such as the quality of water and air impact our health. But investments here are much more difficult as they lie outside the health sector. It is a question of all arms of the government looking at the impact of their policies on health.

Empowering our frontline health workers will yield rich dividends. We need to invest in them to ensure that they have the tools they need, receive regular training and mentoring, and are well paid.

We need to invest in strong institutional mechanisms and capacities in our regulatory bodies, research centres and public health institutions. We have seen so much fear, stigma and discrimination circulated on social media. This must be countered by health literacy.

India is on the path to investing in Universal Health Coverage. Financial resources are very important for this, but we also need investment in human resources and to engage and empower communities. A health system cannot only be about the supply side. It has to keep in mind how to involve citizens and the people it is trying to serve and have them involved in developing the services that we are bringing to them.

Soumya Swaminathan is Chief Scientist at WHO

The magic of mythmaking

If we meekly allow advertisements to be withdrawn, we will foreclose for good the possibility of our cultural reinvention



VAISHNA ROY

Social historian Daniel Boorstin, writing in the 1960s, called advertising "the most characteristic and remunerative form of American literature". Writing about the same time, Marshall McLuhan ranked advertising among the 20th century's greatest art forms.

As it has played out, neither man was exaggerating. The 'persuasion industry' is well entrenched today, and it is hardly surprising that the 45-second commercial created by jewellery brand Tanishq should have taken up so much mindscape these past few weeks.

We are no strangers to religious controversy nor has fanaticism been the preserve of any one community. From the exile of M.F. Husain to the blacklisting of Taslima Nasreen to regular book burnings and film bans, the fanatics excel at outrage. But this time they outdid themselves. The ad that was trolled showed a Muslim mother-in-law celebrating her Hindu daughter-in-law's pregnancy with Hindu rituals. In other words, they were offended not by intolerance but by tolerance.

A tenuous argument

Besides the usual commentariat on either side of the debate, a third stream emerged asking if brands need ideology. This argument is tenuous. Through the 20th century, as advertising took upon itself the role of shaping the aspirations and desires of entire societies, its function expanded vastly beyond the mere selling of products to selling a way of life. The streaming images – beautiful woman, muscular man, uniformed chauffeur – point not just to a car but to mindsets and life choices that can make that car come true. That's why Roland Barthes called advertising the supreme mythmaker of our age and ads the closest modern approximation to ancient myths. When Nike uses Serena Williams to relate the story of women in sports, it isn't just selling sports shoes, it is selling the myth of women's empowerment – the social condition that lets women play sports and buy sports shoes.

By 'selling' at this subliminal level, advertising insinuates itself into everyday customs and practices, and becomes popular culture. It defines social constructs, such as 'modernity' or 'success' – 'modern' men load washing machines; 'successful' women use food delivery apps. And via these definitions, advertising is able to construct new social mores – where men aren't ridiculed for washing clothes, nor women for not cook-

ing. The motive might be commercial, but that advertising is constantly moulding and reflecting society is indubitable.

Creating desirable myths

Less than 3% of marriages in India are inter-religious, and this figure is unlikely to change dramatically anytime soon. A majority of Indians will continue to marry within their own religion and community, just as a majority of women will continue doing the household chores. But by depicting an inter-religious marriage, advertising creates a certain desirable myth – not of a society where such marriage is a norm but one that accepts it when it happens. When online portal 'Mynta' featured a lesbian couple in its 2015 ad, it essentially conjured up a society that accepts a non-heterosexual relationship. By placing them within conventional tropes of shopping, clothes and parents, it erased the taboos and ostracism such couples face in real life. It allowed them social sanction.

As society gets more secularised and modernised, we begin to seek our moral markers from places other than religion. Cultural studies scholar Judith Williamson said, "Advertising has a function which I believe in many ways replaces that traditionally fulfilled by art or religion – it creates meaning." This meaning-making is not optional but intrinsic to advertising. The Anmol girl doesn't just innocently sell butter – she sells an image of the nation, reflected through sporting triumphs, national tragedies, election results or, increasingly, even Rafale plane deals. As we consume, we subconsciously also seek such reflections that let us reimagine ourselves and the world we inhabit through the lens of the ad.

Whether the Tanishq commercial or the Surf Excel ad last year that showed a Hindu girl protecting a Muslim boy from being splashed with Holi colours on his way to namaz, both propose a myth of harmonious co-existence – of the kind an *Amor Akbar Anthony* created – which could well be self-fulfilling in the long run. (Just as men who load washing machines are no longer uncool.) These myths reflect not just who we are but who we want to be. The trolls shut down these stories not because they are real but because they could become real. It might no longer be possible to eradicate trolls in this hyper-malevolent era, but we need to cling at least to our myths. If we meekly let ourselves be destroyed, the factories shut down, we will foreclose for good the possibility of our cultural reinvention. And that will signal our final bankruptcy of imagination. Yet, it's more clear than ever now that imagination, after all, is also a nation.

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Women at the heart of recovery

India has an opportunity to build climate resilience and address gender equality issues

SHIKHO NODA & ATUL BAGAI

India's fight against COVID-19 is at a critical juncture. Against the backdrop of recent economic reforms by the government, and significant stimulus packages, recovery measures are poised to lift millions from this unprecedented economic and health crisis and tackle widening inequalities. The recovery is offering India two golden opportunities: one, to build climate resilience for the most vulnerable by ensuring that stimulus measures are green; and two, to meaningfully address long-standing gender equality issues.

The pandemic has exacted a heavy toll. Fragile health systems and frontline health workers are overburdened and lives and livelihoods impacted. The poor, and migrants, informal workers, sexual minorities, people with disabilities and women all face a greater burden than most. Beyond this, the causes and effects of climate change – stressed agriculture, food insecurity, unplanned urban growth, thinning forest covers, rising temperatures and shrinking water resources – have also hit vulnerable groups disproportionately.

Vulnerable group
Women in particular have their work cut out for them. Greater demands of unpaid care work during the pandemic and rising rates of domestic violence are a stark reminder of the work that remains to be done. According to the India Voluntary National Review 2020, female labour force participation rate for the 15-59 age group is showing a declining trend and stands at 25.3%. This is one of the lowest rates in the world.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27%. The Indian government has invested nearly \$2.5 billion in COVID-19 recovery. Strengthening social protection using targeted and appropriate fiscal and policy measures is a good start. Aligning these recovery packages with India's commitments on climate change by investing in green jobs will improve lives and make our planet healthier. These green investments ought to be re-

flected across agriculture, urban planning, energy and the health sectors and in climate-resilient civil works, including under MGNREGA.

Women, particularly those from indigenous and marginalised communities, play a significant yet unsung role in various sectors. Comprising more than 50% of the agricultural labour force, and nearly 14% of all entrepreneurs, women's relationship with the environment and the informal economy can be a useful lever of action to transform the lives and livelihoods of their families and communities.

Equipping women with skills

Disha, a UNDP initiative supported by the IKEA Foundation, has reached one million women and girls with skills and livelihood opportunities. This initiative has shown the benefits of investing in local jobs for women and vulnerable communities. These investments energise local economies, reduce carbon emissions, enhance climate resilience and disrupt social norms and behaviours that restrict women's participation in the workforce. Another example comes from an initiative by the Self-Employed Women's Association and the Electronics Sector Skills Council of India, and supported by the UN Environment Programme. By training young rural women to develop a cadre of 15,000 solar technicians for the maintenance of solar pumps in remote locations, the initiative will not only introduce clean energy options but also reduce production costs. Accelerating the transition to renewable energy will lower carbon footprints and can help provide sustainable livelihoods to poor women.

Creating the right financial incentives, fostering sustainable public-private partnerships, and enabling women entrepreneurs to access markets, training and mentoring will be critical in scaling up these approaches. The Asian Development Bank projects that India's GDP growth rate will rebound to 8% in 2022-22. Putting women at the heart of this recovery will make it faster, just and inclusive.

Shikho Noda is UNDP Resident Representative in India. Atul Bagai is Head, UN Environment Country Office, India.



DATA POINT

Rural-urban divide in Bihar polls

In the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections, the NDA has chosen to field candidates from the BJP in more than 80% of the urban seats. In contrast, in rural areas, the JD(U) has the upper hand. The BJP's strong show in the urban seats in the recent polls, where the JD(U) is relatively weaker, may have influenced such a seat-sharing pact. In contrast, both the RJD and the Congress have maintained similar vote shares across the rural-urban divide in the recent polls. And so, for the 2020 polls, the RJD's and the Congress' candidates are equally spread across all the areas. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Naresh Singaravelu

1. NDA's rural-urban divide | The BJP won more than 45% of the urban votes it contested in the 2015 Assembly election, at least 7% points higher than its contested vote share in all other areas. On the other hand, in 2015, JD(U) won only 37% of the urban votes it contested. Notably, after joining the NDA for the 2015 LS elections, the JD(U)'s urban performance dramatically improved. The table lists contested vote share (a party's votes divided by total votes polled) in seats contested by the party.

Seat type*	BJP		JD(U)	
	2015 (%)	2019 (%)	2015 (%)	2019 (%)
Urban	45.2%	60.1%	37.7%	58.4%
Semi urban	37.8%	56.3%	40.3%	53.9%
Semi rural	35.3%	57.6%	42.2%	51.1%
Rural	36.4%	54.5%	39.7%	50.9%

2. No clear divide | There is no significant rural-urban skew for the parties in the 'grand alliance'. In 2015, when the alliance won JD(U) was part of it in 2015), support was drawn equally from all the areas. When they lost in 2019, support was withdrawn equally from all areas. The table lists contested vote shares across rural-urban areas.

Seat type	RJD		Congress	
	2015 (%)	2019 (%)	2015 (%)	2019 (%)
Urban	43.9%	36.1%	36.5%	31.5%
Semi urban	47.6%	31.7%	46.7%	38.5%
Semi rural	43.5%	33.0%	36.5%	34.6%
Rural	42.3%	32.5%	40.4%	31.6%

*Total seats: 243 Urban; 21 seats; semi urban: 42; rural: 99

3. Seat-sharing | The rural-urban divide in the NDA's seat-sharing deal is evident. The BJP is contesting in 80% of the urban seats and the JD(U) in 14.3%. In contrast, the choice of seats in the 'grand alliance' exhibits no clear divide. The table lists all of seats contested out of the total urban/rural seats

Seat type	BJP		JD(U)	
	2015 (%)	2019 (%)	2015 (%)	2019 (%)
Urban	81.0%	14.3%		
Semi urban	50.0%	42.9%		
Semi rural	39.5%	55.6%		
Rural	40.4%	49.5%		

Grand alliance

Seat type	RJD		INC	
	2015 (%)	2019 (%)	2015 (%)	2019 (%)
Urban	57.1%	28.5%		
Semi urban	64.3%	26.2%		
Semi rural	54.3%	32.4%		
Rural	61.6%	27.3%		

The rural-urban seats were segregated based on night lights data from the SHRUG database which is used as a proxy for electrification or economic activity, which in turn differentiates a rural seat from an urban seat. The data for the 2019 elections is calculated based on leads secured in the Assembly segments

The Hindia

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 27, 1970

Sober's tenders apology

West Indies cricket captain G. S. Sober has apologised to West Indian cricket administrators for any embarrassment caused by playing cricket in the white-minority ruled, Rhodesia. Sober said last night (October 25, Bridgetown (Barbados)) he accepted the invitation to play in a single-wicket competition in Rhodesia because he had been assured there was no racial discrimination in that country. He added, however, that he had not been made aware of the deep feelings of West Indian people on the issues involved. Sober's apology was contained in a letter to Mr. Noel Pierce, President of the West Indies Cricket Board of Control. Sober said that since his visit to Rhodesia last month, when he was greeted by Premier Ian Smith, he had learnt of the feeling of the West Indian people and the wider international issues involved. He added: "I therefore wish to convey to you and the members of the Board my sincere regrets for any embarrassment which my action may have caused and to assure you of my unqualified dedication whenever I may be called upon to represent my country – the West Indies – and my people."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 27, 1920

The Victoria Institute

A proposal was made at the time of the Women's Work Exhibition which was held in Madras in the cold weather of 1919, that efforts should be made to establish a permanent organisation for the sale of women's work in the city. The matter had been under discussion since, and as a result the Committee of the Victoria Technical Institute, of which H. E. Lady Willington is the President has offered to attach to the Institute a small Women's Sub-Committee (which Her Excellency is the President) and to give it accommodation for showing women's work on the Institute premises. It is proposed that this Sub-Committee should try to encourage the sale of face, embroidery and other work and should help the workers with information as to the classes of work for which there is a demand and price patterns that can be copied and stocks of materials, which would be bought wholesale and issued to workers in small quantities at the wholesale rate. The Sub-Committee proposes to work on the same line as the Victoria Institute, i.e. either to buy the work outright for resale or to take it on commission sale.

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | BARE TALK



The worsening gender skew of our workforce

Along downtrend observed in the proportion of job-holders among Indian women should worry us. But simply raising the minimum age of female marriage won't solve the problem

When India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a \$5-trillion economy by 2024 as a national goal soon after his re-election last year, he could not have foreseen the covid-19 pandemic. That the viral outbreak has exacted a heavy toll and thwarted our chance of achieving that ambitious target is undeniable. But what is less talked about is the opportunity cost we bear from having too low a proportion of women at work. It was never high to begin with, but our female labour force participation rate—or the proportion of women aged 15 and above who are either seeking or working at paid jobs—appears to have declined sharply over the past decade-and-a-half. According to World Bank data, that rate hovered above 30% after India's economy opened up in 1991 and then peaked at 31.8% in 2005, before slipping to 20.3% this year—among the lowest in the world. While why this has happened remains a matter of debate, its implied loss was quantified by a McKinsey Global Institute report in 2018, which said that India would gain \$70 billion in output by 2025 if women had the same opportunities to work as men.

The poor participation of women in the country's workforce defies economic logic, and much of it could perhaps be explained by socio-cultural attitudes that prevail among families that are not given to modern ways of thought. India is still largely a poor country where women go out to work out of financial necessity, and rising family incomes often result in their dropping out. In this narrative, Indian households being better off would explain the decline. Though there has been the

odd report of a trend reversal in recent years and months, attributable to a broad crunch in job availability since 2017 and worsened by our covid crisis, there is no getting away from the need to intervene in favour of raising female participation in the economy. Tax incentives do exist for women employed in formal salaries roles, but what we need is an attitudinal shift among our multitudes—especially men. It is the hold of patriarchy on society that keeps women homebound and denies them space to exercise their agency on the issue of securing pay cheques of their own. Given the country's high levels of gender violence, safety concerns also tilt decisions against venturing out.

As our government weighs a proposal to raise the age after which women can legally marry from 18 to 21, it is tempting to view such a move as a spur for greater female work participation through extended education and an associated delay in child-bearing. Yet, even the current age law is weakly followed. At least one study suggests that every fourth Indian woman was wedded by 18. According to Unicef, with over 100 million females who got married before turning 18, India has more children in wedlock than any other nation. So, while longer educational exposure afforded by an upward age revision could help the cause, we also need an effective social campaign that directly addresses hold-backs. Without a shift in India's observable preference for male offspring, for example, raising women's minimum age of marriage might paradoxically also raise the perceived "burden" of a girl child among some families, pushing them to either opt for pre-natal sex selection or flout India's marital age bar. Social reforms and better law enforcement have far bigger roles to play.

It's Beijing that will eventually rescue the world from China

The regime's overreach has exposed a web of deceit and corruption that it tries to ensnare others in



V. ANANTHA NAGESWARAN is a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister.

The Zhengzhou Information Science and Technology Institute, judging by the number of publications in which it is cited, is one of the world's leading centres of computer science and communications engineering. Its scientists have published over 900 papers in major science journals, at times in collaboration with American researchers. "Except that it isn't. The name is a cover for a university that trains China's military hackers and signals intelligence officers—the People's Liberation Army Information Engineering University—based in Zhengzhou. Many such priceless pieces of information make *The Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is Reshaping the World*, written by Clive Hamilton and Mariske Ohlberg, an invaluable read.

In India, a study that comes close to resembling the efforts undertaken in that book has been done by Ananth Krishnan. Following the Money, China's Growing Stake in India-China Relations, published by the Brookings Institution India Center in March 2020, is useful. His book, *India's China Challenge*, is on my reading list. He wrote, unsurprisingly, that Chinese companies had escaped the kind of scrutiny in India that their investments attracted in the West. That Sweden has closed Confucius Institutes and banned Huawei from its

business is blurry. Well, that qualifies as the understatement of the century, especially in the light of a recent Chinese government decision to embed party officials in all decisions made by a so-called "private sector" entity.

A speech by Ye Qing, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, on 17 September (translation available at <http://TheyreComingforthePrivateSector.blogspot.in/2020/09/17-September-2020-TheyreComingforthePrivateSector.html>) reminds us of what Professor Aaron Friedberg wrote: "In today's China, there is no such thing as a truly independent think tank, foundation, university, or company" (*An Answer to Aggression*, *Foreign Affairs* Sept/Oct 2020). That suggests a path for redemption for the rest of us, and for China too.

The pathology of global hegemony and dominance always reveals two underlying maladies: hubris and insecurity. They seal the fate of empires and hegemony. But for China's clashes with India in Ladakh this summer, India would not have woken up to the China challenge to the extent it has.

The Hidden Hand suggests that Canada has been ensnared in China's web, as has Sweden. Zhang Bin, a Chinese billionaire and Communist Party official, donated C\$20,000 to Montreal University for a statue of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's father, Pierre. For good measure, he threw in C\$200,000 for the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. But, the remarks of the Chinese ambassador to Canada on the safety of 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong has undone years of work in capturing mind, body and wallet.

The book reveals that Sweden's Beijing ambassador Anna Lindstedt was alleged to have added attempts to silence Angela Chan in January 2018. Angela's father, Gui Minhai, a Swedish citizen, was working as a bookseller in Hong Kong in 2015 when he was kidnapped by Chinese authorities in Thailand. Sweden has closed Confucius Institutes and banned Huawei from its

5G network. Similar is the story with Britain, which the authors contend had passed up a point of no return because of the CCP's influence network among British elites. Yet, a UK Parliamentary Committee has concluded that Huawei colluded with the Chinese state.

The Trump administration's stellar efforts to get the rest of the world to cast off the China spell has clearly paid dividends. However, Trump would not have succeeded without China's active "cooperation". He may also have to thank the Bush and Obama administrations, of course. Goldman Sachs

In 2006, Henry Paulson, chief executive officer of Goldman Sachs, became treasury secretary under George W. Bush. He visited China about 70 times during his tenure. Citing Paul Blustein, the book notes that "had he remained more forcefully to Beijing's currency manipulation, tight control of state-owned enterprises, mistreatment of US technology in China, and program of espionage that, then the conditions that led to the trade war might not have arisen". Try too hard and it backfires.

History reminds us that the best antidotes for excess and overreach are excess and overreach. That lesson has eluded many, including China. It's no surprise that it has led to Twitter and Facebook. Therein lies the hope.

Finally, America has paid the price for its hubris that the more closely it engaged China, the closer it would embrace American values, ignoring the possibility that China could ensnare its elites in a web of corruption. Zhiqiang, a Manchou mandarin, wrote after a visit to America in 1868 that the love of God was less than the love of profit there (John Pomfret: "What America Didn't Anticipate About China", *The Atlantic*). In summary, *The Hidden Hand* is not only American but also the Western love of profit bestowed by China.

There is no room for doubt left over what is at stake for America and the rest of the world on 3 November. *This is our author's personal view.*

MY VIEW | THE IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR

The economics of India's high prevalence of child brides

SHRUTI RAJAGOPALAN



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The government is considering raising the minimum legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21, to reduce the prevalence of child brides (below 18) in India. This, of course, well intentioned. If only the problem were so simple that it could be solved with the stroke of a pen.

The benefits of later marriage for women are well established. It is associated with higher nutrition levels for women and their children, lower maternal mortality, improved educational outcomes and greater financial independence.

The problem is particularly dire in India. According to Unicef, 650 million women alive today were married before they turned 18. India is home to 223 million or one in three of these child brides. Just under half that number, 102 million were married before they turned 16. Uttar Pradesh has the largest number of child brides, at 36 million, followed by Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The problem, however, is not the law. Even though there is a

minimum age for marriage for men, India doesn't have the same extent of this problem with child grooms. Only 4% of Indian boys/men were married before age 18. And 20% were married before the minimum legal age of 21 compared to the 27% of girls/women married before the age of 18. Raising the legal age of marriage displays a lack of understanding of the reasons for the low age of marriage for women in India, which have little to do with the law.

The real issue is that various long-persistent cultural factors have created a market for child brides in India. Society imposes a very high cost of raising girl/son parents, especially in poor Indian families, which, attempt to reduce those costs by marrying daughters off at a young age. If they prefer to invest in sons boy, their problem disappears. However, for poorer families, one solution is to marry these daughters off prematurely, thus creating a supply of child, even prepubescent, brides.

However, there is also demand for child brides. Between female foeticide skewing the sex ratio at birth and son-prefering couples investing fewer resources in the care of daughters than sons, more males survive to traditional marriage age than females in



JUST A THOUGHT

No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.

MICHELLE OBAMA

Rapid economic growth and education must fight this fallout of poverty and a preference for male children

India has one of the highest levels of female foeticide, where female foetuses are aborted through sex selection technology. This is banned in India, of course, but still prevalent. India's sex ratio at birth is 899 girls to 1000 boys. Female foeticide is the most dire step taken by families. For most people, female foeticide or infanticide is very undesirable and emotionally costly.

So, couples trying to have a son over multiple attempts may end up with more than their preferred number of daughters. If the family is rich and has the ability to raise multiple girls in order to produce a boy, their problem disappears. However, for poorer families, one solution is to marry these daughters off prematurely, thus creating a supply of child, even prepubescent, brides.

However, there is also demand for child brides. Between female foeticide skewing the sex ratio at birth and son-prefering couples investing fewer resources in the care of daughters than sons, more males survive to traditional marriage age than females in

India. To find brides in the face of this sex ratio imbalance is a struggle.

We know families in states like Haryana "import" and "buy" brides from poorer states. But another consequence is that in highly-endogamous sections of Indian society, where families prefer to find brides within their own caste group, marriage-aged men must look for younger female cohorts within their community.

In some groups, that means adult-age men are even matched with prepubescent girls, creating demand for prepubescent brides. Only relatively impoverished and son-prefering parents dispose of their unwanted daughters to afford the sons they seek.

Lesson and Suarez also point out that this affects the "quality" of potential grooms. When potential grooms are of variable quality, men whose inferior prospects of socio-economic status prevents them from competing successfully for the limited number of traditional-marriage age brides may end up looking for child brides.

While it doesn't solve the problem, policymakers should harm in increasing the age of marriage. But these laws have unintended consequences. Raising the cost of disposing unwanted daughters through marriage, and punishing families for violating the rule, could push families with a strong male preference towards sex selection and female foeticide, or trafficking and other ways of disposing unwanted daughters. In her 2017 paper, Paola Suarez finds that raising the female marriage age in such countries with high son preference and high poverty may have the unintended consequence of increasing the prevalence of female infanticide and sex-selective abortion.

To increase marriage age, not just de jure but de facto, requires India to evolve economically and culturally. Some of this has happened. As Indians have become more prosperous, and as extreme poverty levels have declined, we see a decline in child brides. In 1970, almost 75% of women were married before they turned 18, which has now decreased to 27%. Economic growth will save Indian girls from child marriage. Combined with educational and cultural awareness against a sex preference, which no doubt will take longer, economic success is our only lasting solution.

India should use this economic crisis to implement Reforms 3.0

We must be bold about our aspirations and use this chance to push ahead with tough reforms that could revive our economy



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The covid-19 pandemic has, by default, left India with a "good crisis". India's economic goose was being cooked on "slow boil" from late 2016 onwards, with demonetization, shoddy implementation of the goods and services tax, the Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services crisis, and erratic investment spending against a backdrop of a dysfunctional public banking system. The government correctly imposed a strict lockdown in late March that was well complied with, but appears to have lost both the public-health and economic plots since then. Today, India finds itself with the worst large-country economic performance of all.

Now is the time to both accelerate reforms and be bolder in the aspiration on change. Here is what the government should do:

Monitor the economy. The pandemic has fully demonstrated the need for transparent, fast, accurate and non-politicized data as the basis on which to make decisions. The country must initiate steps towards a non-partisan data gathering and dissemination body that could dramatically lift the quality and type of data gathered on the economy. We should begin with an independent Fiscal council tasked with putting out objective data on budget revenue, expenditure and taxes. We must gather high-frequency indicators for the economy, not only for economic activity, but also for labour markets. Our labour-market data is particularly poor and contributed at least in part to the shameful reverse migration of labour during the lockdown. The currently disempowered National Statistical Office (NSO) should become an independent authority reporting to Parliament. An apolitical, high-quality NSO with an independent fiscal council will serve as a strong foundation to go about necessary structural reforms.

Reform labour and education. This third generation of reforms would admittedly be more difficult to do than the first two because it must deal with factor reforms and "wicked" problems. The two major foundational pillars for job growth over the medium- and long-term are: 1) an industrial-strength apprentice and vocational training system in India; and 2) a quantum jump in the quality of our education. The government has made impressive strides on both counts with recent efforts to streamline legislation through four labour codes and with its National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). The consolidation of 20-hour legislations into four codes reduces both the time and cost of compliance for employers, and also aids the formalization of job contracts with employees. The code on wages modernizes provisions and rationalizes civil and criminal penalties, thereby making the system less susceptible to corruption. Building on this momentum, we must institute



reforms that allow straight-through compliance processing for all labour codes, rationalize penalties to make them more effective, and fully decentralize minimum wage setting to states. While the NEP is not fully binding on states, its thrust for foundational learning and regional language education until Class 5, its modular building of college credits, its multidisciplinary emphasis in higher education, and its vocational streaming from high school onwards deserve to be developed fully.

Turn over agricultural practices. The government has taken a step in the right direction by deregulating farm-to-market supply chains, reducing the number of commodities under the Essential Commodities Act, and letting farmers de-fragment their biggest asset, which is land. These reforms, if fully implemented, will dismantle the elaborate middle-man patronage structure that has evolved in various states. Much more action needs to be taken on improving the fundamental returns in farming through a new green revolution that emphasizes appropriate water-use based rotational cropping, the use of higher quality seeds, the sustainable and frugal use of fertilizers and the deployment of farm technology to improve yields and efficiency. We will need greater focus on production and the indirect implications of rural displacement of labour.

Fix the dysfunctional public banking system. Public sector banks are in desperate need of governance reform and equity capital. The government has been timid and unimaginative with solutions, and seems not to have understood that balance-sheet crises cannot be fixed incrementally. A weak banking system has gummed up a re-start on the economy. Unless we equitize, change governance and place bad assets in a "bad bank", India is likely to see a very patchy economic recovery.

Multiply infrastructure. While there has been a lot of discussion about fiscal stimulus packages, a debate on their multiplier impact on spending has been muted. The "fiscal multiplier" estimates the ratio of economic output to input. The effect of a direct-to-citizen fiscal stimulus can be estimated using the marginal propensity to consume, which will be greater for households whose livelihoods have been severely impacted by the crisis. The most effective method in the long-term for both employment and output generation is to use fiscal spending for capital infrastructure. It has knock-on multiplier effects on an entire supply chain. Also, properly conceived capital projects, once completed, inherently improve economic output.

P.S. "We cannot solve problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them," said Albert Einstein.



A nest of murder hornets that can sting and spit venom has been destroyed

A deadly threat gets neutralized in Washington

The first nest of Asian giant hornets found in the US has successfully been destroyed by scientists. The nest, in the state of Washington, was found by putting tracker devices on the hornets and it was sucked out of a tree using a vacuum hose. The invasive species insects, known as "murder hornets", have a powerful sting and can spit venom. They target honeybees, which pollinate crops, and can destroy a colony in just a matter of hours. The nest in Washington was found when entomologists, scientists that study insects, used dental floss to tie tracking devices to three hornets. The nest of around 200 insects was then discovered in the city of Blaine close to the Canadian border. On Saturday, a crew of scientists wearing protective suits vacuumed the insects from the tree, which will now be cut down.

BBC

Survival lessons for cyclists on Bogota's streets

Andy Villalba, a tattooed and scrawny bicycle mechanic in Colombia's capital, has long been wise to the dangers of cycling in such a chaotic city. Now, amid a boom in both cycling and bike theft, he is giving workshops in road safety and self-defence. "Welcome to Bogota," said Villalba, who has lost count of the number of times he has been threatened for his bicycle. "The cycling capital of death." Cycling in Colombia is thriving. As in other cities around the world, the pandemic has prompted many commuters to forgo taxis or buses, and bike users up 40% since last year. More than 100km of bike paths were laid in Bogota during the lockdown... But as more people step into the saddle, bicycle thieves and homicidal drivers are forcing them to fight back with self-defence classes and weapons.

The Guardian

Dinosaurs literally tried to fly once upon a time

During a blip in time in the late Jurassic, a dinosaur that weighed no more than a chinchilla flung itself from tree to tree, spread its wings and tried to soar. In theory, it sounds beautiful—an early attempt at flight before birds figured out the blueprint. In practice, it was chaotic. The dinosaur, *Yixi*, only barely managed to glide, stretching out and shimmying its skin-flap, downy-feathered wings in a valiant attempt at flying. "It was rocketing from tree to tree, desperately trying not to slam into something," said Alex Dececchi, a paleontologist at Mount Marty University in South Dakota. "It wouldn't be something pleasant...". In a study published Thursday in the journal *Science*, Dececchi and other researchers analyzed how *Yixi* and the dinosaur *Amblypteryx* could have flown.

The New Zealand Herald

Our war on junk food has influencers in the way

Kid influencers on YouTube are marketing junk food and sugary beverages to their fellow kids, and they're racking up billions of page views, according to a new study published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*. The study demonstrates how advertisers are seeking to take advantage of new avenues to market their wares to children. "We should approach YouTube influencer videos with skepticism, even with videos that seem to be educational or kid-friendly," said senior author Marie Bragg, an assistant professor of public health nutrition with joint appointments at New York University's School of Global Public Health and Langone Medical Center. The researchers analyzed videos posted by the five most-watched kid influencers on YouTube in 2019.

CNN

An identity-preservation struggle in Armenia

Originally a religious minority from northern Iraq, Yazidis came to Armenia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The origins of the monotheistic religion are disputed because it does not have a book and its sacred songs are passed orally from generation to generation. In Armenia, Yazidis living in compact settlements preserved the secrets of their ageless religion, while developing a unique distinct culture and history. Over 300 people came to the cemetery on that day... But this event in Armenia may be among the last. "Every year, fewer people attend these ceremonies, because they live abroad," boasted village Temur Akmoyan. The question of how to preserve the community is being examined and related to Armenia's own social and political struggles.

The Independent

The thick alphabet soup that Google has found itself in

SIDDHARTH PAI



Siddharth Pai is founder of Sana Capital, a venture fund management company focused on deep science and tech in India

On Tuesday, 20 October, the US department of justice (DOJ) under attorney general William Barr filed a suit against Google, alleging anti-competitive behaviour under section 2 of America's Sherman Antitrust Act. Some observers point to the timing of this lawsuit, claiming that a decision to frame charges now is actually a politically-motivated move by Barr. In my view, Barr has made his politics apparent in many other fora and didn't need this lawsuit to prove his fealty to US President Donald Trump. The specifics of the DOJ's suit have been in the making for a long time. It's no surprise that Google's stock price has held up.

That said, it is important to understand the DOJ's suit. Google dominates many areas of technology and regulators have fined it billions of dollars before. A lay observer of events may think this is yet another repeat of the suits that have been filed in Europe, Australia, and even by America's 50 individual states.

But the old cases focus mainly on two facets of Google's operations. One, its Search Engine Results Pages (SERP), and the other its advertising business. The SERP case was investigated by the European Union. In 2017, the European Commission levied a record €2.42 billion fine on Google for having "abused its market dominance as a search engine by giving an illegal advantage to another Google product, its comparison-shopping service". The still-on-going suit by America's 50 states is focused on Google's advertising business.

In response to the new federal lawsuit, Google is likely to make a case that it has reached this level of market dominance simply by building a better product than others. It will point to one of the fallouts of an earlier case: the DOJ filed and won against Microsoft in the 1990s. This was around Microsoft building its own Explorer web browser at the cost of Netscape's Navigator along with its Windows operating system, which at the time was near ubiquitous. The actual result of the lawsuit, however, didn't change the status quo much. People continued to use Explorer until a better alternative came along. In this case Google's Chrome browser.

Past fines by the European Union, Australia and other jurisdictions have hardly

touch the behemoth—it maintains a \$120 billion cash hoard and more than prepared to take on the DOJ. Google will vigorously defend itself in the present case and has access to a battery of lawyers that its outsized cash balance can easily hire. A central tenet of its argument will be that the services that it provides users like you and me are free, and that users have benefited enormously from them. It will also claim that its market dominance is a "virtuous cycle" of ever-improving consumer experiences, and is, therefore, not a monopoly.

But this response would be a smokescreen. This time, the DOJ's focus is narrow: Google may have earned its position honestly, but it is maintaining it illegally, in large part by paying off distributors. For a general search engine, by the most effective means of distribution is to be the preset default general search engine for mobile and computer search access points. Even where users can change the default, they rarely do. This

leaves the preset default general search engine with de facto exclusivity. As Google itself has recognized, this is particularly true on mobile devices, where defaults are especially sticky."

For years, Google has struck exclusionary agreements and engaged in what clearly looks like anticompetitive conduct to lock up distribution channels and block its rivals.

Google pays billions of dollars each year to distributors, including device manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung, major US wireless carriers such as AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon, and browser developers such as Mozilla and Opera. This secures default status for its general search engine, and, in many cases, specifically prohibits these companies from dealing with Google's competitors. Some of these agreements also require distributors to accept a bundle of Google apps and feature them on devices in prime positions where consumers are most likely to start their internet searches.

For those of us who use Android devices, such ubiquity is normal. Some of us naively think that we have cut off Google by moving to a Mozilla or Opera browser. Well, we haven't. And if you think you have escaped Google's tight embrace by buying an Apple device, think again. Google pays Apple billions to be the off-the-shelf embedded search engine in Safari, the iPhone's web browser. To shift, one has to go deep into Safari's settings and then switch to another one like Duck-Duck-Go (which I recommend) or Microsoft's Bing. On an Android device, we would need to download Duck-Duck-Go or Bing from Google's Play Store, and then consciously avoid the big Google search bar each time we use our device.

Google's anticompetitive practices seem especially destructive because they deny rivals the seeds they need to compete effectively. By using distribution agreements to lock up scale for itself and deny it to others, Google unlawfully maintains its monopolies. This is the key nuance that the DOJ suit points out and is going after Google for.

Given that America's current law does not cover the true nature of digital monopolies, Google may even win in court. But this will hopefully lead to more nuanced regulation in the future. Here's looking at you, America.

Its growth may have been fair but deals that give its search tool default-use status are now under scrutiny