

CBI GATHERS EVIDENCE; 83 BODIES YET TO BE CLAIMED



Spot study: CBI officials at the accident site near the Bahanaga Bazaar railway station in Balasore district of Odisha on Tuesday. PTI Team visits Bahanaga Bazaar and Balasore railway stations, inquires about signalling system; four days after the deadly accident, authorities plan DNA sampling to help relatives identify kin

A Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) team, accompanied by forensic experts, on Tuesday examined the site of the June 2 accident involving the Coromandel Express, the Yeshwantpur-Howrah Express and a freight train at Bahanaga Bazaar in Odisha, which claimed 288 lives and left more than 1,200 injured.

Following a reference from the Railway Ministry and the State government's consent, the CBI re-registered the case on Tuesday.

Sections 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others), 338 (causing grievous hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others), 304 A (causing death by negligence), and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the Indian Penal Code, besides the associated Railways Act provisions, have been invoked.

Four days after the collision, 83 unidentified bodies are lying unclaimed

in different facilities in Odisha's capital. "We are following due medico-legal process such as examining DNA samples," Odisha Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena said.

"We are doing DNA samplings. If anyone comes at a later stage, he or she has to submit DNA samples and if samples match, the body will be handed over," he added.

The officials inspected the damaged coaches of the two passenger trains and inquired about the signalling system at the Bahanaga Bazaar railway station, given that preliminary findings have indicated that a signalling error may have been the cause of the collision. They sought the relevant documents and asked for data-logger records.

In Delhi, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw held multiple meetings with senior officials to review the rail safety measures being taken across the country. By Tuesday evening, more than 70 trains had passed through the tracks at the Bahanaga Bazaar station that were restored on Sunday night, under his personal supervision.

Earlier, based on a complaint from Sub-Inspector of Police Papu Kumar Naik, the First Information Report was registered at the Balasore Government Railway police station alleging that "negligence" led to the incident. "At present, culpability of specific railway employees is not ascertained, which will be unearthed during investigation," it said.

In the midst of the chaos, there have already been allegations of remains being wrongly identified or handed over. In some cases, there has allegedly been a mismatch between the number assigned to bodies and the photographs maintained by the State government. In other cases, there have been multiple claimants for a single body, or even bodies being handed over before the arrival of the rightful claimant. On Monday, four people staked their claim on one body at the AMRI Hospital. Two claimants later backed out, saying that they had made a mistake in identifying the photo, but two others submitted their DNA samples to see which of them had successfully found the remains of their departed kin. They are yet to receive the results.

Revised death toll

"After reconciling all these records, the district administration has submitted its final report pegging the death figure at 288. Of the 288 bodies, 95 bodies have been identified and handed over to kin. As many as 193 bodies have been sent to different mortuaries in Bhubaneswar. Out of 193, as many as 110 bodies have been identified at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar and other facilities, leaving 83 bodies to be handed over or identified," Mr. Jena added.

USEFUL FIRST STEP

Issues behind violence in Manipur are knotty but truth-telling should help

The setting up of a three-member panel by the Union government to probe the ethnic violence in Manipur, that has claimed nearly 100 lives and displaced over 35,000 people, must be welcomed. Its terms of reference are clear — an inquiry into the causes and the spread of the violence and whether there was any dereliction of duty by the authorities. This has the potential to set a process of truth-telling in motion that could nudge the possibility of reconciliation between the wounded ethnic communities. Riots and ethnic violence in particular rarely occur without driving forces — the fact that this occurred in Manipur with the help of looted weapons from police armouries only underlines this. Affixing responsibility for the violent actions to key actors and holding them accountable are the first steps in building trust in those responsible for governance. That arson and violence continue in the State even after the Union Home Minister visited affected areas and only 18% of the looted weapons returned to the armouries suggest that distrust among the two ethnic communities, the Meiteis and Kukis, remains intact, besides indicating the inability of the State government to act as a catalyst for a return to lasting peace. The paramilitary forces that have created a security grid and are patrolling "buffer areas" between the Imphal valley and adjoining hill areas, where the Kuki people live, to prevent any violence, can only be of limited help. The political

representatives of the two communities — MLAs in particular who share party affiliations but differ in their ethnicities — must act as the bearers of peace and reconciliation. The underlying differences between the groups require a longer political dialogue and rumination as they are not easy to solve. Many among the Kukis (and the Nagas) claim that the demand for Scheduled Tribe status for Meiteis — opposed by a section among them — is unjustified, while Meitei sections resent the benefits of affirmative action for "hill-tribes". The Meiteis also have the grievance that they lack the explicit privilege of owning land in hill areas, unlike the rights that anyone can have in the Imphal valley. Historical patterns of land ownership and dwelling by the Kukis have also made them susceptible to claims that they have encroached on reserved forests, and the steps taken by the government to clear such areas have created an impression of siege mentality among them. A process of reconciliation cannot succeed unless these knotty issues are tackled; for this to happen, representatives of these communities must rise above their narrow sectarianism and look for constitutional solutions. A beginning has to be made to tamp down on the violence, return the displaced to their homes, secure their lives, and isolate those responsible for wanton violence and bring them to justice. Thus, much depends on the commission's work in this regard.

WHY IS THERE TROUBLE IN KOSOVO AGAIN?



Tensions remain high: Hundreds of ethnic Serbs carry a giant Serbian flag through the town of Zvecan, in northern Kosovo, on May 31. AFP

Where do the roots of tensions between Kosovo and Serbia lie? What happened after Kosovo declared independence in 2008? What triggered the recent clashes? Where do the EU-brokered resolution talks stand? What role does Russia, NATO and the EU play in the conflict?

In the aftermath of one of the worst escalation of tensions between Kosovo and Serbia in at least a decade, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) last week sent 700 more of its peacekeeping troops to Kosovo. Clashes broke out on May 29 between Serbs protesting in North Kosovo and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFor), leaving about 30 NATO soldiers and 50 Serbs injured. Since then, the Presidents of Serbia and Kosovo have met once on June 1 under pressure from the European Union (EU) in the presence of French and German leaders. However, a resolution to the long-standing conflict remains uncertain.

What are the roots of the conflict?

Both Kosovo and Serbia lie in the Balkans, a region of Europe made up of countries that were once a part of the erstwhile Republic of Yugoslavia. Kosovo, a former province of Serbia, unilaterally declared Independence in 2008 and is recognised as a country by about 100 nations including the U.S. and a number of EU-member countries.

Serbia, however, does not recognise Kosovo's sovereignty and continues to consider it as a part of itself despite having no administrative control over it. Serbia sees historic significance in Kosovo. The Serbian Empire had gained control of Kosovo in the 12th century, and the latter went on to become the heart of the kingdom with several Serb Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries of significance being built in Kosovo.

Serbia lost Kosovo for 500 years to the Ottoman Empire in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. During the Ottoman Rule, the ethnic and religious balance shifted in Kosovo, leading it to become a majority ethnic Albanian region with Muslims. After five centuries of Ottoman rule, Kosovo became part of Serbia in the early 20th century and post the Second World War, it was eventually made a province (with autonomy) of Serbia, which was then one of the six republics of Yugoslavia. Serbia considered this the rightful return of Kosovo, but the ethnic Albanians, who currently make up 90% of Kosovo's population considered it unfair. In the 1980s, Kosovo Albanians increasingly mobilised and sought separation from Serbia. In 1989, Serbia's autocratic leader Slobodan Milošević leveraged Serbian nationalism to consolidate power and stripped Kosovo of its autonomy.

In the late 1990s, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), consisting mainly Kosovo Albanians, led an insurgency against the Serbian rule of Kosovo. Serbia responded by cracking down on the rebellion by deploying heavy forces in 1998 and 1999. Nearly 13,000 lives, mainly of ethnic Albanians, were lost during this period. However, in 1999, NATO intervened by carrying out air raids and bombardment of Serb targets, forcing Serbia to end hostilities and pull out of

Kosovo. Subsequently, NATO deployed 50,000 peacekeepers and through the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1244, a transitional UN-led administration began to head Kosovo. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. While Serbia challenged Kosovo's actions before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the ICJ was of the opinion that Kosovo's declaration was not against international law.

What has happened since 2008?

Currently, an ethnic Serb minority of more than 50,000 resides in multiple municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo bordering Serbia, making up about 5.3% of the country's population. The Kosovo Serbs do not recognise Kosovo state institutions, receive pay and benefits from Serbia's budget, and pay no taxes either to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo or Belgrade, the Serbian Capital.

Since 2008, clashes have broken out on and off in Kosovo's northern region, either when Serbs have clashed with Kosovo's police or due to the larger issue of Serbia not recognising Kosovo's independent status. Meanwhile, Kosovo cannot become a member country of the UN without Serbia's approval as it has its diplomatic allies in Russia and China who would veto such a decision.

In 2011, EU, backed by the U.S, initiated talks to resolve the conflict between the two countries, offering the prospect that the two could only become a part of the EU if they bilaterally normalised relations. In 2013, the two reached the Brussels Agreement brokered by the EU, which included measures to dismantle Serbia-backed parallel structures in Kosovo's north and the creation of the Association of Serb Municipalities to administratively link Kosovo's 10 Serb-majority municipalities. While the agreement was not fully implemented on the ground, the participation of Serbs in elections was facilitated.

In July 2022, violent clashes broke out in the northern region over the issue of Kosovo asking Serbians drivers to use temporary Kosovo number plates for their vehicles when in the country, just like Serbia requires Kosovo vehicles to change number plates when they pass through or travel in Serbia. The ethnic Serbs in the north then staged protests and put up blockades at the two border entry points between Serbia and Kosovo. These are the only points through which Kosovo citizens can travel to Western Europe and engage in trade. Clashes once again escalated in December last year with the Kosovo Serbs putting up more barricades and Serbia warning that it was ready near the border with its combat troops.

What prompted the recent clashes?

In April this year, Kosovo held mayoral elections in municipalities. These elections were boycotted by ethnic Serbs in the northern municipalities and saw only about a 3% turnout, as a result of which ethnic Albanian mayors got elected in these municipalities. Notably, protesting the July 2023 move by Kosovo asking for a change of number plates, ethnic Serb mayors in northern municipalities, along with local judges and 600 police officers had resigned in November and opposed fresh elections to their posts.

Over a week ago, with the support of the Kosovo police, ethnic Albanian mayors took office in northern Kosovo's Serb-majority area and faced protests by Serbs. The move by Kosovo to install Albanian members led the U.S. and its allies to rebuke Pristina, as it triggered clashes. Then on May 29, violent clashes took place between NATO soldiers and Serb protesters.

Where do the resolution talks stand?

So far, the dialogue has produced over 30 mostly technical and some political agreements, between Serbia and Kosovo. Since late 2015, there has been little progress in reaching new agreements or implementing existing ones. In 2018, former Kosovo President Thaçi and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić had proposed redrawing borders and swapping some territories between the two countries as a way of normalising ties but the EU rejected it saying it would open the Pandora's box of territorial claims in parts of Europe.

The talks were suspended in 2018 due to Kosovo's imposition of 100% tariffs on Serbian goods in response to the latter's campaign to block Kosovo's Interpol membership bid.

In March this year, both Serbia and Kosovo tentatively agreed to EU's plan which proposed that Belgrade should stop lobbying against Kosovo's candidature in international organisations including the United Nations. In turn, Kosovo was to form an association of Serb-majority municipalities. Additionally, both sides were to also open representative offices in each other's capital to help resolve outstanding disputes. However, the two parties eventually walked out of singing the deal as Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti faced nationalist opposition for not being assertive enough while Serbia's populist leader Mr. Vučić

was criticised back home for engaging in a compromise. Talks have also stalled because both sides now doubt the EU's seriousness about granting them membership as many of the EU countries, including France, are against the bloc's further expansion.

What about Serbia's ties with Russia?

Kosovo's current leader and the West are also concerned about Serbia's strong historic and military ties with Moscow and its political closeness with President Vladimir Putin who has maintained support for the Serbian claim. The concerns have intensified after the start of the Ukraine conflict and Mr. Kurti has warned of a spillover in the Balkans backed by Russia. Besides, Serbia's

dependence on Russia for diplomatic support to counter Kosovo's bids at the UN puts Moscow in a position of influence. The Carnegie Endowment paper on the issue points out that Kremlin also "fears that ending the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo will diminish Russia's stature in Serbia and severely undermine its clout in the Balkans".

What next?

Since the Presidents of both sides met on June 1, Kosovo has indicated that a solution for de-escalation is close and it is open to holding fresh elections in Serb dominant municipalities, provided they are held in a free and fair manner, without Belgrade pressuring ethnic Serbs to boycott the vote.

HECTIC PREPARATIONS ON FOR PM'S U.S. VISIT

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will visit India next week, for meetings with his Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval, and other officials, as part of a number of high-level meetings ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. later this month, sources confirmed.

The visit by Mr. Sullivan, seen as one of U.S. President Joseph Biden's key foreign policy point-persons, follows U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's visit to Delhi on Monday, and Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra's visit to Washington on Tuesday, where he met with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland. The two sides are expected to finalise the agenda for Mr. Modi's visit from June 21 to 24, as well as key strategic and defence agreements they hope to sign or announce during the State visit.

According to the sources, Mr. Sullivan will be in Delhi on July 13 and 14. Among the deals expected to see progress during Mr. Modi's visit are a major technology partnership for GE-414 jet engines to be assembled in India and other co-development plans under the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET). Mr. Doval had launched the iCET talks along with Mr. Sullivan in January, during a visit to the U.S. where the invitation for Mr. Modi's State visit was handed over to him.

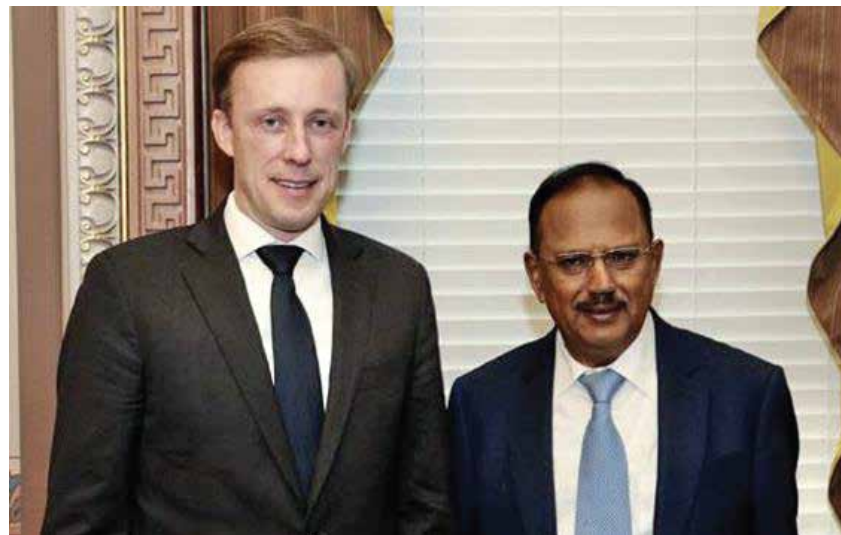
The flurry of meetings included an unusual visit by the Prime Minister's close aide and Principal Secretary P.K. Mishra last month, who met with U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and USAID Administrator Samantha Power. The meetings indicated possible movement on trade issues between the two countries that had reached an impasse over the Donald Trump administration's decision to withdraw India's GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) special export status in 2019, and the shelved plans for Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks after Mr. Biden came to power.

However, the two sides have been hopeful of resolving tariff issues, and price caps on medical devices. In addition, they are likely to announce a number of "third country partnerships" to be headed by India and U.S. development agencies, possibly under the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

On Monday, the U.S. State Department smoothed over any concerns that Mr. Modi would have to face questions over the state of democracy in India after an extremely critical State Department report on religious freedom was released last month. A spokesperson for the administration, John Kirby, called India a "vibrant democracy". "Anybody that ... happens to go to New Delhi can see that for themselves," Mr. Kirby said, adding that there would likely be discussions on the health of democratic institutions during the visit as take place between "friends".

'Stronger friendship'

Mr. Kirby added that Mr. Modi's visit was "really about advancing what is now and what we hope will be a deeper, stronger partnership and friendship going forward", and that India "matters" not just bilaterally to the U.S. but also multilaterally.



Reaffirming ties: India's National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval with his U.S. counterpart Jake Sullivan. File photo

Jake Sullivan arriving in New Delhi amid a flurry of meetings ahead of Narendra Modi's visit to New York and Washington later this month; the two sides are expected to finalise the agenda for the Prime Minister's trip, as well as the strategic and defence agreements they hope to sign or announce

Plans for Mr. Modi's visit are still being finalised, but a large part of his itinerary is now falling into place, officials said. Mr. Modi will travel to New York first, to participate in a function for International Yoga Day on the lawns of the United Nations on June 21. He will fly to Washington that afternoon. On June 22, Mr. Modi will be given a ceremonial welcome at the White House in the morning, followed by a bilateral meeting. In the afternoon, he will address the joint session of the U.S. Congress, which he had also addressed in 2016.

"We are proud of our Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with the U.S., built upon the foundation of shared democratic values, strong people-to-people ties, and an unwavering commitment to global peace and prosperity," Mr. Modi tweeted on Monday, accepting the invitation to address the U.S. Congress.

In the evening of June 22, he will attend the State banquet hosted by Mr. Biden and his wife Jill Biden.

On June 23, Mr. Modi is expected to address a large gathering of the Indian diaspora at Washington's Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts. The two sides have also discussed the possibility of a short trip together outside Washington, possibly to Camp David, the U.S. President's official retreat.

CLIMAX AT THE SUMMIT

India will have to hold its nerve in the WTC final to come out on top

Away from the adrenaline-sprinkled nights of the recent Indian Premier League, it is time for Rohit Sharma's men to congregate together in their Test whites. The Twenty20 bash may have its share of thrills but for the connoisseur, Test cricket spread over five days is the ultimate yardstick to judge both the singular — the player — and the collective — the team. And the prize cannot be bigger than the World Test Championship (WTC) title on offer as India take on Australia in the final commencing at London's Oval on Wednesday. In a part of London where a large number of Asians, Africans and the West Indians reside, India will not be short of support. It may be an away game but Rohit's men will feel at home looking at the stands that will have a large Indian presence. India prospered in its recent exchanges against Australia, be it at home or Down

Under, in what is proving to be an exhilarating rivalry, but summit clashes are loaded with extra pressure and both units will step onto the turf as equals. It is a sobering reality that India last won an ICC silverware during the 2013 ICC Champions Trophy in England and this is a historical vacuum that Rohit and company will feel a need to address.

In the previous WTC cycle which culminated in the 2021 final at Southampton, India lost to Kane Williamson's New Zealand. For the senior group of skipper Rohit, Virat Kohli, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, the Oval contest offers another shot at ICC glory. India will miss its injured duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant, but in Shubman Gill, has a batter seemingly destined for greatness. And the old cliché

RETAIL INFLATION LIKELY EASED IN MAY

Easing inflation

Retail inflation in May likely moderated further from the 18-month low of 4.7% in April despite the rise in milk and pulse prices as food prices dipped significantly



- The price of a veg thali dropped by 9% year-on-year in May on declining vegetable and cooking oil prices
- Retail inflation may have risen on a sequential basis, though, as compared with a slight decline in prices in April
- Economists expect the RBI to pause its rate hike cycle and begin cutting rates amid easing inflation

Economists estimate that consumer inflation may have eased further last month due to moderation in food prices; on a sequential basis, however, retail inflation is expected to have inched up 0.4% in May compared with a 0.2% decline in April

'AI CAN'T CURTAIL OTHER AIRLINES' RIGHTS IF IT WANTS TO EXPAND'

Air India ought to respect the rights of airlines from other countries to add seats into India if it wants to expand its presence in those countries, cautioned Tim Clark, president of Dubai-based Emirates airline.

"If Air India wants to expand, it can't curtail the rights of foreign carriers from the countries that it wishes to expand into," Mr. Clark said on the sidelines of the IATA World Air Transport Summit in Istanbul.

The Emirates executive's remarks were in response to Air India CEO Campbell Wilson's comments to The Hindu on April 20 that "India must not open the floodgates" for foreign carriers as it was in its "national interest" to allow the Tata Sons-owned airline to provide non-stop flights on long-haul international routes. Dubai has demanded a revision of the air service agreement signed with India in 2014 such that the 66,000 seats permitted to the airlines of the two jurisdictions be topped up by another 50,000 seats. But India has indicated that it has no intent yet to accede to this demand.

Mr. Clark's comments echo those of the IATA Director General Willie Walsh, who had said that Indian airlines that want to expand abroad may suffer as "other countries may restrict capacity as well."

(The writer was in Istanbul at IATA's invitation)

Tim Clark

India's consumer inflation could moderate further from April's 18-month low of 4.7%, with food price rise likely to have cooled further in May even as prices of some items like milk, rice and pulses moved up on a month-on-month basis, economists reckoned.

The National Statistical Office will release the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for May next Monday. Rice and Wheat prices increased 10% and 8% in May, compared with a year ago, as per a Crisil Market Intelligence report estimating costs of food plates which found expenses on both vegetarian and non-vegetarian Thalīs increased sequentially for the first time in seven months. Cheaper 'thalīs'

"The cost of veg and non-veg thalis declined 9% and 4% on-year, respectively, in May due to steep decline in prices of vegetables and cooking oil, which account for ~25% of the total cost of a veg thali, but increase in prices of cereals, pulses, chicken, and eggs capped the reduction," the report said.

The Bank of Baroda Essential Commodity Index, which covers 23% of the CPI and 58% of the Consumer Food Price Index, slowed to 1.4% in May from 2.8% in April.

"We expect CPI to further edge down to 4.5% in May from 4.7% in April," the bank's economist Dipanwita Mazumdar said in a note.

However, on a sequential basis, the index inched up to 0.4% in May compared to a 0.2% decline in the month before.

"Milk is still stubbornly high at 10.9% amidst reports of difficulty in procuring feed and also lumpy skin disease in cattle.



THE INDIAN POLITY, A DEMOCRATIC DIAGNOSIS

Hamid Ansari was the Vice-President of India (2007-2017)

An opinion article, last month, in one of India's main English dailies, summed up the emerging prospects succinctly: 'A parliamentary majority is being used as a bulldozer to fashion an autocracy, the new India version of a presidential form of governance... The replacement, at the forthcoming inaugural [of the new Parliament building], of the real president of the Indian republic by the prime minister may symbolise more than the ego of an individual'.

I had, some years ago, read and put away Levitsky and Ziblatt's book on the fate of democracies, happy in the thought that India did not find a mention in it. Little had I visualised a time when dexterous devices would be used in quest of the desired objective.

Our parliamentary system, crafted with some care, was sought to achieve law-making; accountability of the executive; approval of taxation proposals and control of national finances, and discussion of matters of public interest and

concern. India, it said, 'shall be a Union of States' and the provisions of Part XI of the Constitution would govern the relations between the Union and the States.

B.R. Ambedkar had emphasised that the eventual objective of social democracy is a trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity, best achieved through the effective functioning of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. These foundational principles were spelt out in the Preamble of the Constitution and were reinforced by the Supreme Court of India in the Basic Structure doctrine. A decline

The challenge was in effective functioning of the principal ingredients, beginning with the first. Available data make evident a progressive decline in its functioning year-wise, session-wise and decade-wise. It is clear that Parliament has lost its effectiveness as an instrument of scrutiny, accountability and

oversight. Instead, devices of disruption crafted in opposition and innocently disowned in government, are sought to be legitimised. Above all, the leadership of the day endorses it by a studied silence or lack of attendance, or both and with a noticeable tardiness towards the functioning of the standing committees. The end result is a declining process of scrutiny, debate and dissent. Periodic elections apart, informed opinion is concerned about its derailment and the resultant consequences. The emergence of social media, a rival claimant to representative in civil society, has emerged as both complementary and antithetical to question or supplement the representativeness of Parliament. It has manifested itself in both forms in our polity. So, as a political scientist put it, 'while Parliament has become increasingly representative in descriptive terms, it also simultaneously become[s] unresponsive in terms of legislation and governance and has tended to avoid accountability by closing ranks'. An element of ideological orientation in the shape of dharmic sanctification, as in the Parliament ceremony, was used to reinforce it.

These moves suggest a design for centralisation and personalisation, and the creation of a 'Fuehrer or Zaeem-like' image not unknown in recent history. Alongside, administrative devices have been sought to be used to bring in line state institutions having an impact on the electoral process. Both contributed to the achievement of a transition from populism to electoral authoritarianism; both are violative of the spirit of the constitutional text.

One consequence of this trend, reflective of the unease generated by it, is a statement in the shape of a letter written to the President of India recently by a group of former civil servants expressing concern over attempts by the government to change the character of the civil service and its functioning, leading to the civil servants being 'torn between conflicting loyalties', thereby weakening their ability to be impartial. 'This has disturbed the federal balance and left civil servants torn between conflicting loyalties, thereby weakening their ability to be impartial'.

'Hindutva and development'

These trends in the changing character of the Indian polity have caused public concern and have not gone unnoticed by observers abroad. One editorial comment opined that 'Hindu nationalism in India is writing an epitaph for the country's experiment with multi-ethnic secular democracy'. In his tome published last year, Christophe Jaffrelot analysed the Hindutva ideology (laced with populism) based on Israeli scholar Sammy Smootha's theory of ethnic democracy — defined as the ideology of a group that considers itself bound by racial,

linguistic, religious or other cultural characteristics with a sense of superiority and rejection of the 'Other' generally perceived as a real or perceived threat to the survival and integrity of the ethnic nation.'

The conflation between nationalism and Hindutva has been the backbone of the new hegemony that has been of immense help to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in projecting a potent conjoint image of Hindutva and development. That, as Suhas Palshikar has pointed out, "is why the Bharatiya Janata Party has been so happy with intellectuals trying to problematise the nation. That particular intellectual initiative simultaneously places the BJP in a position of immense advantage and ensures that 'anti-BJP' would necessarily be equated with the anti-national. Independently, both ideas — Hindutva and development — are potent political discourses. By weaving them together with nationalism, Narendra Modi has bound them into an arsenal of his political offensive."

This carefully calibrated personality cult with an image of infallibility has been reinforced by the publicity associated with India's presidency of the G-20. The entire effort is to mesmerise the public, particularly the middle class, with the delusion of an image of India being the Vishvaguru at a time when the contrary is observed — in the falling standards in educational institutions, in rising unemployment and its impact on public welfare.

A new Parliament building, questions

The inauguration of the new building of Parliament was noticeably devoid of any suggestions to make its functioning more meaningful. The formal equality of the two Houses seems to have been done away with and the Leader of the Lok Sabha in his oration could have suggested (but did not), measures to increase the working days to 90-100 days as in the past, initiate the practice of having a Prime Minister's Question Hour each week in both Houses, and proposed more effective measuring for the functioning of the Committee system to enhance its effectiveness and public confidence. More working space for the Members of Parliament could thus be justified in practice. No such suggestions, however, were forthcoming.

So, will the new building contribute to a more functional and productive Parliament? Will it enhance the democratic process in the polity? Will it, as the Prime Minister said in his inaugural speech, 'awaken the sense of duty in every Indian' and include in it those who sit and work in the new structure and those who lead it in its primary duty? Would he recall to himself and his colleagues Ambedkar's December 1952 lecture, on 'Conditions Precedent for the Successful Working of Democracy'?

'INTERNET ECONOMY TO HIT \$1 TRILLION BY 2030'



India's Internet economy — B2C e-commerce firms, online service providers, ed-tech companies, and so on — will hit \$1 trillion in value by 2030, up from \$175 billion in 2022, according to a report by Google, Bain & Company and Temasek.

As per "The e-Economy of a Billion Connected Indians," the growth would be driven by more Indians starting to transact online and the overall expansion of digital businesses.

The key thrust would come from "Tier 2+ locations." The changes were expected to be the most pronounced in smaller towns and rural areas in terms of impact on the value of the Internet economy, as only 13% of the Indians lived in metro and tier 1 cities.

"HealthTech and InsurTech, both sized at or less than \$2 billion today, will demonstrate the largest expansion, said a release accompanying the report.

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*I didn't fail the test,
I just found Hundred ways to do it wrong.*

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

A GLOBAL ORDER AS TECHNOLOGY'S MUCH NEEDED POLE STAR

Amar Patnaik is a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha from Odisha; a former CAG bureaucrat and an advocate

Ever since the Dot-com bubble burst in 2000, the rapid scale and pace of development of technology have, radically and disruptively transformed our societies and daily lives. While there is no denying that this has made life easier, it has also thrown up complex challenges that call for a revisit of some fundamental notions in polity and governance.

Challenges to notion of nation-state

First, as defined by political theorists, a nation-state is a territorially-bounded sovereign polity. However, this fundamental notion of a nation-state of a geographical unit in which citizens live is undergoing a massive change because of technology. While geographical boundaries are still essential to be safeguarded against physical aggression/invasion, there are now several externalities occurring across the borders of nation-states, i.e. cyber-attacks, which have a ripple effect on the physical boundaries to challenge their socio-economic and political existence. The advent of Web3, massive peer-to-peer networks and blockchains has allowed actors, both state and non-state, to influence areas such as trade, commerce, health and education even while remaining outside of financial and judicial scope.

Second, geography-based rules are no longer easily enforceable simply because of the declining significance of conventional geographical borders in the era of high technology. Now, any form of "virtual activity" is not confined to the realms of the borders of a country; data travel on the chain of the world wide web and spread across the world at speed hitherto unimaginable. More importantly, when such activities fall foul of the laws of a particular geographically-determined nation-state, it is extremely difficult in the absence of a globally-accepted norm, to enforce the law in that particular geography and book the recalcitrant actors under the laws of the nation-state. It is difficult to collect incontrovertible evidence without cooperation from other geographies. So, when the national sovereignty of countries is challenged by activities beyond their physical boundaries, their existing constitutionally set-up institutions comprising the executive, legislature and judiciary will prove inadequate in tackling them. Further, it is also difficult to establish applicability of any country-specific legislation due to the universal nature of technology, leading to problems in enforceability.

Third, the emergence of newer technologies has exposed the incapacity and inability of the government of the nation-state to administer and regulate these technologies. No longer is the nation-state the only conduit through which multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations and supranational organisations, both legitimate and illegitimate, state and non-state actors, need to operate. These entities have transcended physical boundaries to collaborate with the rest of the world, independent of traditional administrative and regulatory institutions. For instance, topographical maps, which used to be produced by

public and military institutions, are now available entirely by private non-state actors, such as Apple or Google Maps.

Governing complexities and technology

On the economic side, "with a valuation of more than \$4,100 billion, the five largest American tech companies (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft) have symbolically surpassed Germany's GDP (the world's fourth largest economy) in terms of valuation". One of the most important levers of these companies is data and their use.

This means that data "have become the most important raw material of our times, and only a handful of companies now hold unparalleled economic power and influence over it. These are the meta-platforms: their huge size allows them to constantly increase the amount of information they analyse and refine the algorithms they use to influence, if not control, us and our activities". Thus, as reiterated by India in the past at various international fora, "the borderless nature of technology, and, more importantly, anonymity of actors involved, have challenged the traditionally accepted concepts of sovereignty, jurisdiction/regulation, and privacy". In such a scenario, a principle-based global order for technology would help in streamlining the enforceability challenges in the adoption and diffusion of technology and providing guidance to emerging economies on how to deal with the evolving definitions of their sovereignty. Further, as we have seen in case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way forward in managing future global pandemics is probably by the adoption of digital health. But what will the meaning of this digital health framework be if we cannot have a data-sharing ecosystem based on privacy, free flow of data, and a global regulatory system trusted by all countries/nation-states, particularly developing countries? Therefore, India needs a data transfer and data privacy law. But these laws, in isolation, will only be able to do so much unless a global principle-based regulation architecture trusted by all countries facilitates it.

I espoused this approach in Parliament (on the need for a global order for the deep Web, crypto, or regulations for cross-border data flow). Even the Finance Minister while addressing a meeting with the International Monetary Fund on the guidelines of a G-20 event on virtual private digital assets, emphasised the need to have a globally-coordinated approach to the regulation of digital assets such as crypto-currencies, given the potential risks they pose to the world's financial ecosystem.

With India, as the current chair of the G-20, this is the perfect opportunity to take leadership in this as it has done earlier in green initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance or the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

The views expressed are personal



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