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'Secular, socialist' are an inalienable part of the Constitution, to stay in Preamble, orders SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

"The word 'secular' denotes a Republic that upholds equal respect for all religions. 'Socialist' represents a Republic dedicated to eliminating all forms of exploitation—whether social, political, or economic," a Bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar interpreted.

The order was based on a batch of petitions filed in 2020, challenging the validity of the inclusion of 'socialist' and 'secular' in the Preamble through the 42nd Constitution Amendment in 1976. The petitioners, who included BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, argued that the insertions made with retrospective effect, that is from the date of adoption of the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly on November 26,

1949, amounted to a fraud on the Constitution. Besides, they argued that the word 'secular' was deliberately eschewed by the Constituent Assembly and the word 'socialist' fettered the economic policy choice of the elected government, which represents the will of the people.

The apex court, in its seven-page order, said the case was not worth a detailed adjudication as the flaws in the petitioners' arguments were manifest. Besides, the court found the motives of the petitions, filed nearly 44 years after such an insertion, "questionable".

The court held that the Preamble was an inalienable part of the Constitution. Parliament had an unquestionable power to amend the Constitution under Article 368.

Its amending extended to the Preamble. The court



confirmed the retrospective amendment to the Preamble, saying the date of adoption would not curtail the power under Article 368.

The court explained that the Constitution was a 'living document', and open to changes according to the needs of the time.

Though the Constituent Assembly was not sure about what 'secularism' should entail in India, the court said, over time, the nation has developed its own interpretation of the

term, which has become a basic feature of the Constitution.

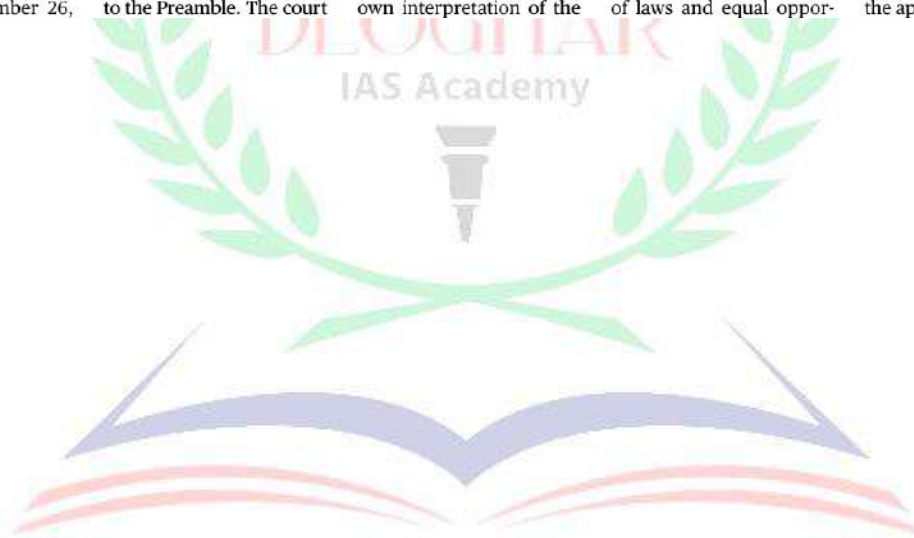
"Over time, India has developed its own interpretation of secularism, wherein the State neither supports any religion nor penalises the profession and practice of any faith. This principle is enshrined in Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution, which prohibit discrimination against citizens on religious grounds while guaranteeing equal protection of laws and equal oppor-

tunity in public employment," the Supreme Court observed.

The court said the Preamble's original tenets of equality of status and opportunity, fraternity, dignity and liberty reflect the secular ethos of the Constitution.

The apex court clarified that 'socialism' in the Indian context meant the commitment to function as a welfare state.

"Neither the Constitution nor the Preamble mandates a specific economic policy or structure, whether left or right. Rather, 'socialist' denotes the state's commitment to be a welfare state and its commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity. India has consistently embraced a mixed economy model, where the private sector has flourished, expanded, and grown over the years," the apex court highlighted.



Rohingya in Bangladesh mobilise to fight alongside Myanmar's military

Thousands of Rohingya insurgents have emerged from camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where recruitment and violence have surged this year; many have joined groups loosely allied with their former military persecutors to fight the Arakan Army that has seized much of the State of Rakhine

Reuters
COX'S BAZAR

One day in July, Rafiq, who spoke on the condition that only his first name be used, slipped out of the world's largest refugee settlement in southern Bangladesh and crossed the border into Myanmar on a small boat. His destination: a ruinous civil war in a nation that he had fled in 2017.

Thousands of Rohingya insurgents, like 32-year-old Rafiq, have emerged from camps housing over a million refugees in Cox's Bazar, where militant recruitment and violence have surged this year, according to four people familiar with the conflict and two internal aid agency reports.

"We need to fight to take back our lands," said Rafiq, a lean and bearded man in a Muslim prayer cap who spent weeks fighting in Myanmar before returning after he was shot in the leg.

"There is no other way." The Rohingya, a mainly Muslim group that is the world's largest stateless population, started fleeing in droves to Bangladesh in 2016 to escape what the UN has called a genocide at the hands of Buddhist-majority Myanmar's military.

A long-running rebellion in Myanmar has gained ground since the military staged a coup in 2021. It involves a complex array of armed groups –



The homeless: Rohingya children play inside a refugee camp, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. REUTERS

with Rohingya fighters now entering the fray. Many have joined groups loosely allied with their former military persecutors to fight the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic militia that has seized much of the western Myanmar State of Rakhine, from which many Rohingya fled.

Basic protection

The junta in Myanmar denied in a statement that it had conscripted any "Muslims." "Muslim residents requested protection. So, basic military training was provided in order to help them defend their own villages and regions," it said.

The two largest Rohingya militant groups – the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) – do not appear

to have mass support in the camps in Cox's Bazar, said Shahab Enam Khan, an international relations professor at Bangladesh's Jahangirnagar University.

But the emergence of trained Rohingya fighters and weapons in and around the camps is regarded as a ticking time bomb by Bangladesh, one security source said.

Disillusioned refugees could be drawn by non-state actors into militant activities and pushed further into criminal enterprises, said Mr. Khan. "This will then suck in regional countries, too."

After a boat-ride from near the camps to the western Myanmar town of Maungdaw around the mid-year monsoon, Rohingya insurgent Abu Afna said he was housed and armed by

junta troops.

The AA is backed by the majority Buddhist ethnic Rakhine community that includes people who joined the military in purging the Rohingya.

"Our main enemy is not the Myanmar government, but the Rakhine community," Mr. Afna said.

Citizenship in return

The military provided Rohingya with weapons, training and cash, according to Mr. Afna, as well as a Bangladesh source and a second Rohingya man who said he was forcibly recruited by the junta.

The junta also offered the Rohingya a card certifying Myanmar citizenship.

For some, it was a powerful lure. Rohingya have long been denied citizenship despite generations

living in Myanmar and are now confined to refugee camps where Bangladesh bans them from seeking formal employment.

"We did not go for the money," Mr. Afna said. "We wanted the card, nationality."

About 2,000 people were recruited from the refugee camps between March and May through drives employing "ideological, nationalist, and financial inducements, coupled with false promises, threats, and coercion," according to a June aid agency briefing, which was shared on condition the authors not be named because it was not public.

Many of those brought to fight were taken by force, including children as young as 13, according to a UN official and two Rohingya fighters.

Cash-strapped Bangladesh is increasingly reluctant to take in Rohingya refugees and a person familiar with the matter said some Bangladesh officials believed armed struggle was the only way the Rohingya would return to Myanmar. They also believed that backing a rebel group would give Dhaka more sway, the person said.

Bangladesh retired Brig. Gen. Md. Manzur Qader, who has visited the camps, said his country's government should back the Rohingya in their armed struggle, which he said would

push the junta and AA to negotiate and facilitate the Rohingya's return.

Under the previous Bangladesh government, some intelligence officials supported armed groups but with little coordination because there was no overall directive, Brig. Gen. Qader said.

Near the camps in Cox's Bazar, where many roads are monitored by security checkpoints, dozens of Rohingya were taken earlier this year by Bangladesh officials to a jetty overlooking Maungdaw and sent across the border by boat, said Mr. Afna, who was part of the group.

"It is your country, you go and take it back," he recalled one official telling them.

In Rakhine State, insurgents struggled to push back the heavily-armed and better drilled AA. But the battle for Maungdaw has stretched on for six months and Rohingya fighters said tactics including ambushes have slowed the rebel offensive.

Dhaka is increasingly frustrated by the AA's strategy of attacking Rohingya settlements, the two people said, with the violence complicating efforts to repatriate refugees to Rakhine.

The AA has denied targeting Rohingya settlements and said it helps civilians without discriminating on the basis of religion.



Business seeks details in face of mixed COP29 messages

Reuters
BAKU

COP29 deals on finance and carbon markets could lead to billions more dollars flowing around the business world if countries next year can deliver climate plans with clear policies for markets and investment.

Those plans, which are due to the climate body of the United Nations before the next U.N. climate summit in Brazil, need to describe steps for making projects realistic—and less risky. Yet questions remain on the pace of transition after some countries sought to slow down the world's shift from fossil fuels, giving boards already wrestling with the implications of Donald Trump return-

ing to the U.S. presidency even more tough questions to ponder.

Two weeks of acrimonious negotiations in Azerbaijan's capital Baku resulted in a deal for \$300 billion in annual climate finance by 2035. Many developing countries said the pledge would not be enough to help them deliver robust national climate plans. While private sector investment was teased throughout the summit—including in a multilateral development bank pledge to mobilise \$65 billion of it each year—the devil will be in the details.

Some of those details could come up in discussions between countries in the run-up to next year's COP30 summit, where they will be mapping out



Doubts galore: Questions remain on the pace of transition as some countries sought to slow down the shift from fossil fuels. GETTY IMAGES

their next set of emissions-cutting plans.

Countries are meant to submit their national climate plans in February, but many have said they

will miss the deadline.

Businesses have called for those plans to include projects and efforts that are "investment ready"—and with as much specificity

as possible—to help investors gauge their long-term commitments and risks.

Money will start flowing only after the shared goals

agreed at events like COP29 are translated into "regulation, legislation and other policy measures", said Thomas Tayler, head of climate finance at asset manager Aviva Investors.

Equally important will be showing commitment to implementing these policies and rules and reporting on their progress, Mr. Tayler said.

Mixed messages

While climate negotiations are hard going even at the best of times, the latest round began in Baku only a week after Mr. Trump, a climate denier, won the Nov. 5 U.S. presidential election. Few expect Mr. Trump to deliver climate finance from the world's biggest economy or to protect U.S. policies friendly for

climate investment.

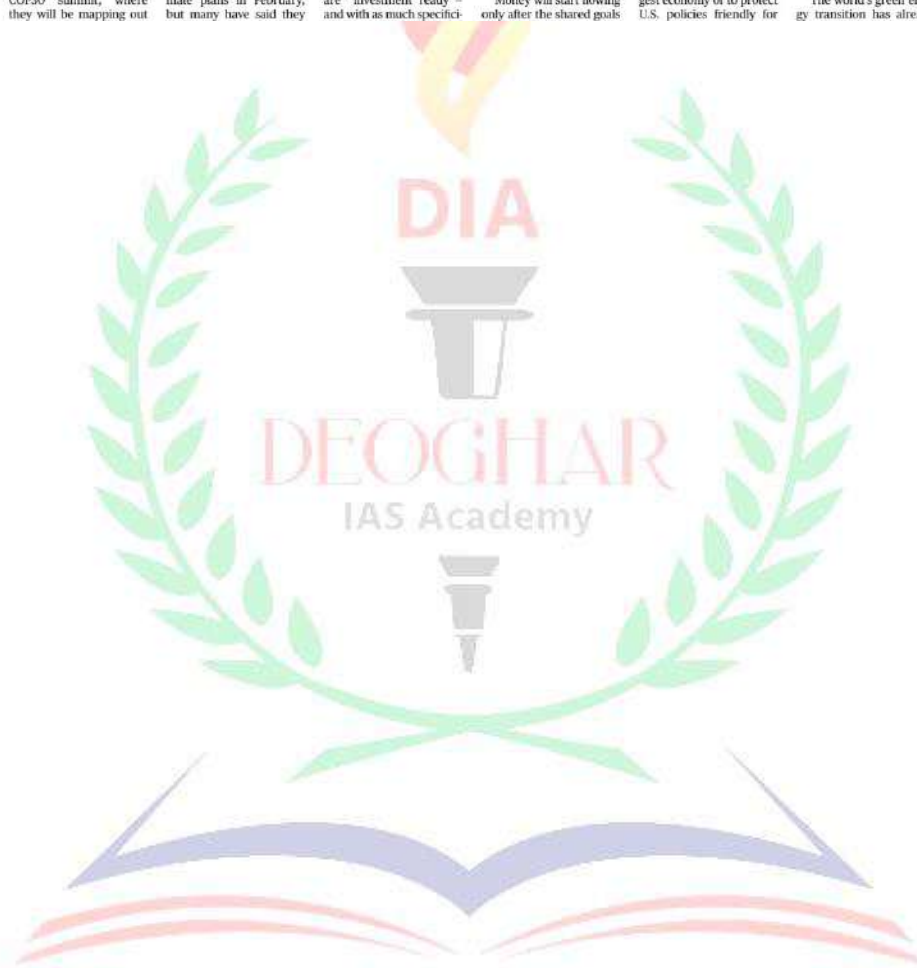
While countries at COP29 set the new \$300 billion climate finance target, they guaranteed the sum only by 2035, though they pledged to prioritize the most vulnerable nations for those funds. They also have begun discussing new potential revenue streams such as global taxes—on polluting industries such as aviation and cargo shipping, on oil and gas trades, on financial transactions and on super-wealthy people. While these efforts could help to make infrastructure projects more appealing in riskier parts of the world, the work of attracting profit-focused investors is still in progress.

The world's green energy transition has already

been slowed by war in Ukraine and a resulting energy crisis, with governments slowing green reforms and companies like BP and Unilever rowing back on their efforts.

On that point, COP29 did not help. Amid lobbying by countries including Saudi Arabia, according to several country sources at COP29, the summit failed to offer any steps for furthering last year's COP28 pledges to shift away from fossil fuels and to triple their renewable capacity by 2030.

"The influence of fossil fuel lobbies remains an obstacle that must be addressed ahead of COP30 if it is to deliver meaningful progress," said David King, chair of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group.



The Constitution has always been secular both in spirit and in letter

Many, such as former Home Minister Rajnath Singh, have cited that the original text of 1949 did not have the word 'secularism' in it, but the principle has been implicit in the constitutional framework since the start, though it was officially introduced only through the 42nd Amendment in 1977



A child pays tribute to B.R. Ambedkar during the Constitution Day celebrations organised by the TDP in Mangalagiri. THE HINDU

Sanjay Hegde

In light of the Supreme Court judgement affirming secularism and socialism in the Preamble of the Constitution, here is an Op-Ed piece published in *The Hindu* in 2016 that dealt with the role of secularism throughout the history of the Constitution and the Constituent Assembly.

In November 26, Constitution Day, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh bemoaned in Parliament that secularism was the "most misused" term in the country. "The framers of the Constitution did not include the words 'secular' and 'socialist' because these values were (already) part of Indian civilisation," said Mr. Singh. He was essentially voicing a belief that secularism was alien to the Constitution, and that it was only during the Emergency that secularism stealthily crept into the Constitution. That belief, though popular, is not quite right.

The framers of the Constitution worked against the backdrop of two great instances of human carnage – World War II and the Partition of India. Both were the result of an insistence on distinctiveness of group identities and their consequent territorial demarcations, which excluded those who did not fall within the dominant group. Simultaneously, the process of integration of princely states meant that people not exposed to even limited democracy became voters of a republic that promised justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all. In a nascent republic, where power had for the first time been vested in the diverse, heterogeneous people of the subcontinent, the Constituent Assembly became a trustee and demarcator of the extent of that power. The document that they produced after two years of intense debate and labour had words of comfort for everyone.

A constitutional value

Secularism is implicit in the entire constitutional framework. What does secularism in the Indian Constitution mean? The question admits of no easy answer and cannot be restricted to textual interpretation alone. It is a

constitutional value that seeks to manage India's diverse and plural society, in an atmosphere of cohesiveness of national purpose.

The guarantee of equality in Article 14; the promise of non-discrimination in Articles 15 and 16; protection from religious taxes and religious instruction in state-funded institutions set in Articles 27 and 28; the permission of educational institutions of choice to linguistic and religious minorities in Articles 29 and 30; the promise of equal ballots devoid of sectional preferences in Article 325 – all make for a constitutional architecture which is devoid of any religious preference whatsoever. God is significantly absent throughout the Constitution.

There are however provisions which seek to enforce equality within the Hindu religion in Articles 17 and 25(2)(b). Deference to Hindu sentiments on cow slaughter is also provided for in Article 48, as is the pious hope for a uniform civil code in Article 44. Taken as a whole package, the constitutional vision of secularism is one of principled equidistance from all religious matters, while at the same time regulating its practice in a manner consistent with the demands of a modern society. Crucially, in Article 25(2)(a), we can find constitutional permission for the state to regulate or restrict "any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice".

Debate over amendment

Thus, it is fallacious to argue that the original Constitution as adopted, enacted and given to ourselves on November 26, 1949, was not a secular document. The inclusion in the Preamble of the words "socialist" and "secular" by the 42nd Amendment on January 3, 1977, only headlined what was already present in the original text of the Constitution. We must also remember that the Preamble itself was drafted only after the Constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly. The Preamble thus became a one-page mission statement of the republic's intent.

In fact, there is an illuminating discussion in the Constituent Assembly debates of November 15, 1949, when Professor K.T. Shah wanted to include the words "secular, federal, socialist" in Article 1 of the Constitution, the article that now reads, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States..."

Prof. Shah said, "As regards the secular character of the state, we have been told time and again from every platform that ours is a secular state. If that is true, if that holds good, I do not see why the term could not be added or inserted in the Constitution itself, once again, to guard against any possibility of misunderstanding or misapprehension... The secularity of the state must be stressed in view not only of the unhappy experiences we had last year and in the years before and the excesses to which, in the name of religion, communalism or sectarianism can go, but I intend also to emphasise by this description the character and nature of the state which we are constituting today..."

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in reply, said, "Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I regret that I cannot accept the amendment of Prof. K.T. Shah. My objections, stated briefly, are two. In the first place the Constitution, as I stated in my opening speech in support of the motion I made before the House, is merely a mechanism for the purpose of regulating the work of the various organs of the state. It is not a mechanism whereby particular members or particular parties are installed in office. What should be the policy of the state, how the society should be organised in its social and economic side, are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organisation of the state shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgment, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organisation in which they wish to live. It is perfectly possible today for the majority people to hold that the socialist organisation of society is better than the

capitalist organisation of society. But it would be perfectly possible for thinking people to devise some other form of social organisation which might be better than the socialist organisation of today or of tomorrow. I do not see therefore why the Constitution should tie down the people to live in a particular form and not leave it to the people to decide it for themselves. This is one reason why the amendment should be opposed. The second reason is that the amendment is purely superfluous. My honourable friend, Professor Shah, does not seem to have taken into account the fact that apart from the Fundamental Rights, which we have embodied in the Constitution, we have also introduced other sections which deal with Directive Principles of State Policy... What I would like to ask Professor Shah is this: If these directive principles to which I have drawn attention are not socialistic in their direction and in their content, I fail to understand what more socialism can be. Therefore my submission is that these socialist principles are already embodied in our Constitution and it is unnecessary to accept this amendment."

Prof. Shah's amendment was defeated but two things stand out in this exchange. First, the economist in Dr. Ambedkar dominated his exchange with Prof. Shah. He only discussed the economic philosophy of the Constitution and did not deal with the questions of secularism and federalism. Second, he felt that what was already explicit in the Constitution need not be reiterated.

Basic structure

On April 24, 1973, the Supreme Court, with its then full strength of 13 judges, ruled in the Kesavananda Bharati case that secularism was part of the basic structure of the Constitution. It also held that elements constituting the basic structure were beyond Parliament's power to amend the Constitution. The court reiterated this principle in 1994 in the S.R. Bommai case when dealing with the challenge to the dismissal of four Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled State governments after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

Despite the Constitution's secular nature being held to be part of its basic structure, matters did not rest. During the Emergency came the 42nd Amendment on January 3, 1977. Apart from many significant changes otherwise, it resurrected Prof. Shah's cosmetic suggestion and inserted the word "secular" in the Preamble. After the Emergency, the 44th Amendment by the Janata government undid most of the substantial damage achieved by the 42nd Amendment. But it, too, chose to preserve the addition of the words "socialist" and "secular" to the Preamble.

The Law Minister who piloted the 44th Amendment was Shanti Bhushan. His colleagues in the ministry were L.K. Advani and A.B. Vajpayee. Their inheritors today cannot presume to forget constitutional history, and assume that constitutional values such as secularism are just meaningless words to be redacted from a document. Secularism is inherent in the basic structure of the national book, and is beyond the power of any transient parliamentary majority to efface or abridge.

(Sanjay Hegde is a Supreme Court lawyer.)

On stubble burning and satellite data

How are satellites used to track farm fires resulting from the stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana? What are the satellites used and how effective are they? Have the farmers worked their way around the tracking methodology?

EXPLAINER

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

The air quality in the national capital has been struggling to recover from the lows to which it dropped right after Deepavali despite the implementation of GRAP stage IV measures, the active intervention of the Supreme Court, and stop-gap measures by the Delhi government. Many fingers are currently pointed at the farm fires in the surrounding States, where farmers are burning paddy stubble in time for the wheat-sowing season. While these fires are not solely responsible for Delhi's plight, a controversy over measuring their prevalence illustrates the amount of attention they are receiving.

How are the fires counted?

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana sow rice in the kharif season and harvest it in November, using the summer monsoons to quench the crop's high water demand. After the rice is harvested, they need to clear the leftover organic material – called paddy stubble – in order to make way for the next sowing season. For reasons of time and cost, they have traditionally preferred to burn the stubble. But thanks to the winds at this time of the year over the National Capital Region, the toxic particulate matter from the fires is floated to and hangs over New Delhi, dragging its air quality down.

Because of the large area over which farmers light the fires, officials have said satellites are the best way to track the fires. The Indian government currently procures this data from two NASA satellites called Aqua and Suomi-NPP.

NASA launched Aqua in 2002 and it is currently in the twilight stage of its designed lifespan. Its Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) instrument was built to track changes in the lower atmosphere, especially over land, through time. MODIS's technical successor is the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) instrument onboard Suomi-NPP, which NASA launched in 2011. Both satellites are part of NASA's 'Earth Observing System'.

Aqua's and Suomi-NPP's overpass at each location happens at 1:30 p.m. local time in the day and at 1:30 a.m. local time at night. Their MODIS and VIIRS instruments collect visible and infrared images of the earth at around these intervals and are capable of spotting fires and smoke in a small window centred on the overpass time. The Ozone Mapping and Profiler Suite onboard Suomi-NPP can also identify aerosol loads in the atmosphere, which is useful to track smoke from fires and their eventual contribution to air pollution.

What is the new controversy?

On October 2, a senior scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre named Hiren Jethva wrote on X (Twitter) that there were 40% fewer farm fires than predicted in 2023 and expressed hope for the trend to continue this year. On October 24, Mr. Jethva wrote in the same thread that the number of fires in 2024 seemed to be the "lowest in [the] last decade", and added that either "ground efforts to curb residue-burning appear to be working or burning activities [are] taking place after satellite overpass time, but it needs ground-truthing".

His post implied farmers were burning paddy stubble after the Aqua and



Billowing trouble: Stubble being burnt at a paddy field on the outskirts of Amritsar in Punjab earlier this month. PTI

Suomi-NPP satellites had completed their overpass at around 1.30 pm.

The next day Jethva followed up by comparing data from Aqua and Suomi-NPP with data from the GEO-KOMPSAT 2A satellite. South Korea launched this satellite, also called Cheollian 2A, in 2018 as a "dedicated geostationary weather satellite"; it's currently stationed at 128.2° E and has a planned mission life of at least a decade.

In the visuals Mr. Jethva collected and presented from the three satellites, the smoke cover over cropland in Punjab and Haryana seemed to thicken after Aqua and Suomi-NPP had completed their overpass, as if farmers were lighting more fires later in the day than before.

The senior scientist also wrote that the quantity of aerosols in the air was roughly the same as in previous years whereas it should have been lower given Aqua and Suomi-NPP indicated there were fewer fires.

Is the discrepancy real?

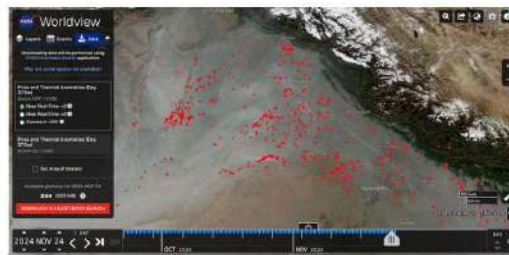
In 2020, the Indian government created the Commission for Air Quality Management in the NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM for short) by ordinance and a subsequent Act of Parliament in 2021. Its mandate was to study, identify, and resolve issues relevant to improving air quality in its jurisdiction.

On Saturday, *The Hindu* reported based on multiple sources and documents that the CAQM was aware farmers were burning paddy stubble after the NASA satellites had completed their overpass to avoid being detected. However the CAQM has continued to insist in the public that the number of farm fires has dropped, defending its conclusion in the face of contrary evidence by claiming it used different formulae.

That farmers were aware of the overpass timings is recorded in the minutes of a March 7, 2024, meeting, where director of Haryana Space Applications Centre Sultan Singh and National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) scientist Bhavana Sahay alleged as much. Farmers on the ground also told *The Hindu* a government official had asked them to light fires after 4 p.m.

(The alleged advice echoes Goodhart's law: "when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.")

The CAQM has also come under the



pump from a second angle: in affidavits to the Supreme Court, it has said the burnt area in Punjab shrank 26.5% between 2022 and 2023 whereas data from the Government of Punjab and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, which is funded by the Centre, says it increased 24% and 15% respectively.

How is the government responding?

The Centre had originally created the CAQM to replace the Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA), which the Supreme Court had created in 1998. EPCA was a non-statutory body and lacked the instruments to sanction non-compliant actors. CAQM was designed to have teeth in the 2021 Act – and which it has since been accused of not wielding.

The Supreme Court in particular has upbraided the CAQM for failing to mitigate air pollution resulting from the fires over the years. The body was expected to respond on November 25 to the Supreme Court to allegations that it was aware farmers were delaying burns to after the satellites' overpass. The Indian government is also on the back foot after Union Agriculture Minister Shriharaj Singh Choudhary said on October 26 that the number of stubble-burning incidents have dropped this year.

But the CAQM has also maintained that its efforts have lowered the prevalence of fires by 78% in Punjab and 44% in Haryana between 2020 and 2024, and has objected to the idea of a group of retired judges overseeing the fight against stubble-burning.

The CAQM also said it wrote to the NRSC – a body under the Indian Space

Research Organisation (ISRO) – asking it to develop a standard protocol to measure burnt area in January 2024. At present, burnt area data is available once every five days from the Sentinel II satellites of the European Space Agency.

Can Indian satellites help?

In an affidavit to the Supreme Court on November 21, the CAQM said ISRO plans to evaluate the usability of data from various satellites to identify farm fires. According to the affidavit, ISRO experts are of the view that data from INSAT-3DR (by India), GEO-KOMPSAT 2 AMI (South Korea), Meteosat-9, Feng Yun-4A/4B (China), and HIMAWARI-8 (Japan) cannot provide accurate fire counts – although their assessments will not be complete for at least another month.

The problem with INSAT-3DR is that its data is too coarse: of 1 km in visible and short-wave infrared radiation, of 4 km in middle and thermal infrared, and of 8 km for water vapour. In August 2021, ISRO had launched another satellite that could have been useful in this context, GISAT-1, but the GSV-F10 mission carrying it failed after the rocket's upper stage failed to fire.

ISRO also operates the three RESOURCESAT satellites, launched in 2003, 2011, and 2016, with similar payloads. Those in RESOURCESAT 2A have better features, however. The Linear Imaging Self Scanner (LISS) cameras 3 and 4, both of which 'see' in visible and near-infrared radiation; LISS-4 has a spatial resolution of 5.8 m and LISS-3, of 23.5 m. The Advanced Wide Field Sensor (AWIFS) camera detects similar radiation at an even lower resolution of 56 m.

THE GIST

Because of the large area over which farmers light the fires, officials have said satellites are the best way to track the fires. The Indian government currently procures this data from two NASA satellites called Aqua and Suomi-NPP.

While satellite data showed that there was a reduction in farm fires, the smoke cover over cropland in Punjab and Haryana seemed to thicken after the satellites had completed their overpass and the quantity of aerosols in the air was roughly the same as in previous years.

The Commission for Air Quality Management in the NCR and Adjoining Areas was expected to respond on November 25 to the Supreme Court to allegations that it was aware farmers were delaying burns to after the satellites' overpass.



COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev speaks at the meeting in Baku on November 24. REUTERS

'Toxic chalice' awaits in 2025 after COP29 anticlimax

Reuters

When COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev stepped up to the podium at the close of the climate talks on Sunday, he carried with him two speeches. One was crafted around a deal being struck while the other for the possibility of a summit-collapsing impasse, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

In the end, Mr. Babayev managed to gavel through the \$300 billion finance plan to help developing nations cope with the soaring costs of global warming over the next decade before critics had time to object, allowing him to read the more positive speech.

He praised the agreement as a breakthrough even as many of the climate deal's intended recipients slammed it as woefully inadequate.

Expectations for a deal were depressed by worries of a looming U.S. withdrawal from global climate cooperation, geopolitical turmoil, and a rise of isolationist politics that had shunted climate change off much of the world's top priorities list.

Those obstacles loomed large in Baku

The unwillingness of wealthy countries to offer more money for climate finance has become a major source of frustration

and will continue to overshadow global climate efforts in the months ahead as Brazil prepares for next year's much broader conference in the Amazonian city of Belem.

Among the biggest factors clouding negotiations was the looming return of Donald Trump as President of the U.S., the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases and top producer of oil and gas. Mr. Trump, who takes office in January, has pledged to withdraw the U.S. from the global Paris Agreement on climate change and has called climate change a 'hoax'.

The war in Ukraine and rising conflict in West Asia have also diverted global attention to security and energy availability, leading many governments to tighten their purse strings, experts said.

The agreement to provide \$300 billion annually by 2035 would theoretically triple rich countries' previous commitments. That earlier goal was reached in full only in 2022 and expires in 2025.

The unwillingness of wealthy countries to offer more money and the pressure to conclude even a weak deal ahead of more political turbulence has become a major source of frustration.

"We came in good faith, with the safety of our communities and the well-being of the world at heart," Tina Stege, the climate envoy for the Marshall Islands, said at the closing plenary. "Yet we have seen the very worst of political opportunism here at this COP, playing games with the lives of the world's most vulnerable people."

Climate advocates said that while the deal is better than an outright impasse, rifts exposed by the conference and the loss of trust in the process among poorer countries will pose a problem for Brazil as it prepares for COP30.

"I think this is a toxic chalice for Belem, and it's going to be up to Brazil how they're going to restore the trust," said Oscar Sorria, director of the Common Initiative, a think tank focused on global financial reform.



MACE in Ladakh opens its one-of-a-kind eye to cosmic gamma rays

MACE's main goal is to study gamma rays with more than 20 billion eV of energy; the telescope can examine gamma rays emitted from beyond the Milky Way; other potential targets include pulsars and blazars; it will also be used to explore a class of hypothetical dark-matter particles

Shreejaya Karantha

The Major Atmospheric Cherenkov Experiment (MACE) telescope is a state-of-the-art ground-based gamma-ray telescope inaugurated in Hanle, Ladakh, on October 4. Located at around 4.3 km above sea level, it is the highest imaging Cherenkov telescope in the world. It boasts of a 21-metre-wide dish, the largest of its kind in Asia and second-largest in the world.

The facility was built by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd., and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

Light comes in a wide range of wavelengths but humans can only see a small portion. In the electromagnetic spectrum, gamma rays have the shortest wavelength and the highest energy, with each light-particle possessing more than 100,000 electron volts. (Visible-light photons have around 1.63-3.26 eV each.)

A strange blue light

Gamma rays are produced by exotic energetic objects in the cosmos, including rapidly spinning pulsars, supernova explosions, hot whirlpools of matter around black holes, and gamma-ray bursts. Because of their high energy, gamma rays are a health hazard. They can damage living cells and may even trigger deleterious mutations in DNA. Fortunately, the earth's atmosphere blocks gamma rays from reaching the ground. Thus, astronomers who want to study objects that emit gamma rays prefer using space observatories – although there are indirect techniques to detect gamma rays with very high energies from the ground.

When a gamma ray from a cosmic source enters the atmosphere, it interacts with molecules in the air to produce a copious shower of electron-positron pairs. As these charged particles travel through the atmosphere at speeds greater than the speed of light in air, they emit a faint blue light, called Cherenkov radiation. This radiation has wavelengths typical of violet and blue light of the visible spectrum and of the ultraviolet wavelength range.

The light is emitted in about a fraction of a second, and the light particles spread out evenly over a vast region on the earth's surface. This region is a suitable place to locate a detector that can collect the photons and study them to indirectly understand the gamma rays. Instruments used for this kind of detection are called imaging atmospheric Cherenkov telescopes (IACTs). The MACE telescope is an IACT.

Strength in numbers

Every IACT has a light collector and a camera. The size of the light collector determines the minimum energy of gamma rays it can detect. MACE's light collector has 356 mirror panels. Each panel consists of four smaller mirrors arranged in a honeycomb structure. These honeycomb arrangements have been shown to be lighter yet more stable than solid mirrors because they reduce the empty space between segments and increase the total reflective area. The James Webb Space Telescope uses honeycomb-segmented mirrors for this reason.

To ensure it can detect gamma rays in the required energy range, MACE's



The blue spot at the centre of the red ring is an isolated neutron star in the Small Magellanic Cloud. Neutron stars are formed after heavy stars go supernova, in the process emitting gamma rays alongside radiation at other energies. ESA/NASA

construction and its geographical station were carefully planned. The high-altitude location puts the telescope above disturbances in the lower reaches of the troposphere. MACE is also not housed in a dome because of its large size, leaving its mirrors continuously exposed to the environment. Each mirror is coated with a thin layer of silicon dioxide for protection.

The mirrors are aligned to collect and focus the Cherenkov radiation into the high-resolution camera, which is made up of 1,088 photomultiplier tubes that detect the faint signals and amplify them. All the necessary electronic components for processing and recording data are placed within the camera, including a specialised device that continuously converts signals from photomultiplier tubes into digital data, allowing computers to perform real-time analysis.

The telescope has a moving weight of 180 tonnes. It stands on a base with six wheels that roll along a 27-metre-wide curved track. The drive system that moves the telescope uses an altitude-azimuth mount, meaning the telescope can shift its gaze both vertically and horizontally, to observe all patches of the sky.

MACE's main goal is to study gamma rays with more than 20 billion eV of

Gamma rays are produced by exotic energetic objects in the cosmos, including rapidly spinning pulsars, supernova explosions, hot whirlpools of matter around black holes, and gamma-ray bursts

energy. The telescope can examine high-energy gamma rays emitted from near black holes beyond the Milky Way and which are digesting large volumes of matter. Other potential astrophysical targets include gamma-ray pulsars, blazars, and gamma-ray bursts.

One important goal is to find dark matter particles. Dark matter is a type of matter believed to make up more than 85% of the total mass in our universe. It is a fundamental part of the standard model of cosmology – but scientists don't know what subatomic particles it could be made of.

One of the proposed particle constituents of dark matter is weakly interacting massive particles (WIMPs). Scientists have predicted that these particles can produce high-energy gamma rays when they collide into and destroy each other.

These gamma rays could be produced

in large galaxy clusters, small galaxies, and/or the centre of large galaxies, including the Milky Way.

India's MACE is the next step

Previous studies have shown that the MACE telescope can help find and measure the high-energy gamma rays produced by WIMPs. This will allow astronomers to learn more about dark matter and the behaviour of WIMPs. But just as likely, MACE could help verify whether WIMPs actually exist and make up dark matter or whether this hypothesis is flawed.

India has been active in gamma-ray astronomy for more than five decades now. The unveiling of the MACE telescope marked a significant step towards further technological and scientific advancements in the field. Most of MACE's subsystems were also built and designed within the country.

With its advanced capabilities, MACE could play an important role in addressing fundamental open questions in the field of high-energy astrophysics and particle physics, and pave the way for cutting-edge research.

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CAQM eases norms for Delhi schools and colleges after SC order, permits 'hybrid' mode

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to immediately take a call on relaxing Graded Response Action Plan stage-IV (GRAP-IV) restrictions to allow resumption of physical classes in schools and colleges in Delhi and other parts of the National Capital Region (NCR).

Pursuant to the court order, the CAQM told the State governments in the NCR to ensure that all classes up to 12 in schools and those in colleges and other educational institutions are conducted in "hybrid" mode – both in "physical" and "online" mode, wherever online mode is feasible.



Earlier, a Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Augustine George Masih ordered the CAQM to consider and take a decision by Monday evening or latest by Tuesday morning.

The court said various factors had led it to pass the order. These include the fact that many students in primary classes and anganwadis were deprived of midday meals at their

schools. Besides, a large number of these small children did not have the facility to attend online classes at home. Many of them did not have air purifiers at home. Hence, staying at home made no difference.

"We are leaving it to the CAQM to decide if norms of GRAP III and IV can be relaxed, and exceptions could be carved, by today or by tomorrow morning," the court said.

The court, noting that the Air Quality Index in Delhi (not the NCR) ranged between 318 and 419 between November 20 and 24, directed the CAQM to place updated data on the next date of hearing on November 29. The updated data would be perused to consider and pass further orders on other GRAP IV measures.

Bhutan pitches Gelephu as biggest cooperative project

Narendra Modi inaugurates the first International Global Cooperative Conference in Delhi, says the current situation in the world can be a big opportunity for cooperative movement

Suhasini Haidar

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

Pitching the upcoming Gelephu Mindfulness City as the biggest “cooperative project” in Bhutan, its Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay, said here on Monday that he was grateful for India’s support for the 2,500-sq. km “Zero Carbon” city being developed.

Mr. Tobgay was speaking at the first “Global Conference of the International Cooperative Alliance”, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In his comments, Mr. Modi referred to Mr. Tobgay as his “younger brother”, while Mr. Tobgay, speaking in Hindi for parts of his speech, referred to Mr. Modi as his “elder brother” and “mentor”, and thanked him for his “guidance and support in the development of this unique city”.

Nearly 3,000 delegates, including 1,000 representatives from 100 countries, are attending the five-day event being held in Delhi, hosted by Union Home Minister and Minister of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bhutan PM Tshering Tobgay at the inauguration of the Global Cooperative Conference. ANI

Cooperation Amit Shah.

Mr. Modi said India today had more than eight lakh cooperatives formed in every part of the country, and it was necessary to create big global financial institutions that would finance cooperatives all over the world.

Circular economy

“The current situation in the world can be a big opportunity for the cooperative movement,” Mr. Modi told those gathered at Delhi’s Bharat Mandapam complex.

“For this, we will have to innovate and strategise our

policies. To make cooperatives climate resilient, they should be linked to circular economy. It is also necessary to discuss how we can promote start-ups in cooperatives,” he said.

In his speech, Mr. Shah said that the government had opened the way to prosperity for lakhs of villages, crores of women and farmers through its motto of “Prosperity through cooperation”. He said that in three years, through two lakh new Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), there would not be a “single village panchayat” in India without a

cooperative society. He said many steps had also been taken to make the PACS modern, tech-enabled and economically viable.

Cooperative spirit

“The Gelephu Mindfulness City is designed to be a hub of knowledge, technology, and finance, grounded in the values of mindfulness, sustainability and harmony,” the Bhutanese Prime Minister said, adding that it “embodies the cooperative spirit, as every citizen of Bhutan is both a shareholder and a stakeholder, actively participating in this significant initiative”.

Since the announcement of plans for Gelephu city last December, situated to the south of Bhutan and bordering Assam, Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has visited India twice to discuss his plans for the city, and to seek investment and collaborations from the Indian private sector in infrastructure development, bringing projects in areas such as hotels and hospitality, educational institutions, IT and wellness centres.

Feminist ideology in India's constitutional discourse

In the Indian scenario, even calling the framers of the Constitution of India as 'founding fathers' is very patriarchal and paternalistic. The fact that the 'founding mothers' of the Indian Republic, the eminent women in the Constituent Assembly, too painstakingly co-authored the Constitution, has been spitefully hidden from the popular imagination. Achyut Chetan writes in his *Founding Mothers of the Indian Republic: Gender Politics of the Framing of the Constitution* (2022): "It is through the dynamics of will, consent, and, frequently enough, dissent, that women members carried the feminist movement through and beyond the Constituent Assembly. Each article of the Constitution, therefore, is a point of diffraction in the history of Indian feminism. The Constitution is drafted not just by the consent of women but also by their will."

However, Christine Keating in her *Framing the Postcolonial Sexual Contract: Democracy, Fraternalism, and State Authority in India* (2007) demonstrated how the 'founding fathers' constitutionally subjugated the woman: "The Constituent Assembly struggled to reconcile their commitment to an egalitarian polity with their efforts to build consent for the political authority of the new Indian state...the assembly settled on a compromise, what I call the postcolonial sexual contract, to resolve that dilemma: they established equality in the public sphere as a fundamental right for women yet sanctioned discriminatory personal laws that maintained women's subordination in the family in order to secure fraternal acquiescence to the centralized rule."

The beginnings

The founding mothers cobbled an intersectional alliance with B.R. Ambedkar for the realisation of social revolution. They shared his sceptical attitude towards the romantic celebration of Indian culture which is deeply anchored in the brahmanical patriarchy. Amrit Kaur, a prominent



Faisal C.K.

Deputy Law Secretary
to the Government
of Kerala

The fact that the 'founding mothers' of the Indian Republic too painstakingly co-authored the Constitution of India has been brushed over

founding mother of the Constitution, asserted in 1932 that the women of India were no longer willing to submit to standards, whether local, political, or ethical, which had been set for them by the male conscience of the community. The founding mothers laboured in and out of the Constituent Assembly to break the patriarchal ecosystem. But the nation has failed them deplorably.

Fight against a goliath

The founding mothers conceived the Fundamental Rights not just as injunctions against the state but also as a social charter that restores their inherent freedoms curtailed by the behemoths in the private sphere such as religion and family which enjoyed privileged insulation from political interventions. Hansa Mehta and Amrit Kaur demanded that a Uniform Civil Code capable of arresting the aggrandising social-patriarchal power must be included in the Fundamental Rights.

And when the Uniform Civil Code was relegated to the Directive Principles, they played a remarkable role in bringing a prelude to the Directive Principles, that they are 'fundamental in the governance of the country and the state has a duty to apply them in making laws'. This prelude, incorporated at the behest of the founding mothers, played a vital role in the ascendancy of the Directive Principles in the constitutional jurisprudence of India in the 1980s.

Begum Aizaz Rasul articulated that secularism was the most outstanding feature of the Constitution. In the Sub Committee on Fundamental Rights, Hansa Mehta tried to limit the right to religion as she believed that it would curtail women's right to equality and social reforms such as the abolition of child marriage. Hansa Mehta and Amrit Kaur demanded the term 'free practice of religion' be replaced by 'freedom of religious worship' as a constitutional carte blanche for religion would impede Indian

women's emancipation.

In Amrit Kaur's note of dissent on the 'Freedom of Religion', she vigorously underscored the anti-woman tendency of religious practices: "[unbridled freedom of religion] would not only bar the future legislation but would even invalidate past legislations such as the Widow Remarriage Act, the Sarda Act or even law abolishing sati. Everyone is aware how many evil practices which one would like to abolish, are carried on in the name of religion, for example, purdah, polygamy...dedication of girls to temples, to mention a few." A disheartening chapter in the life of the Indian Republic is that the man's right to religion conquered the woman's right to equality and dignity.

Still a struggle

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay believed that the Constitution heralded a new beginning for women in India as it guaranteed equality and justice for them. But this euphoria did not last for long. The Government of India's official report, 'Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India' (1974), concluded that the Indian Republic had failed to achieve equality for its womenfolk even after two decades of the promise made in the Preamble.

After the passing away of the 'founding mothers', Indian feminist constitutionalism has been affected. Despite strong women leaders in politics, India has not been blessed with a feminist stateswoman or jurist. Women's presence in the corridors of power remains abysmal. The Uniform Civil Code designed to dispel gender injustice has been a cheque drawn in favour of the Indian woman by the founding fathers and mothers. But it has been dishonoured by the Republic's political bankers despite sufficient jurisprudential funds at their disposal.

The views expressed are personal



Return to action

The world must move beyond empty rhetoric on climate change

After two extra nights of extended negotiations in Baku, countries finally gave up on bridging their differences and settled on a “roadmap” that has left nearly all developing countries frustrated, developed nations relieved and the planet, still on a perilous path. Officially, the CoP Presidency may claim progress. The text, which was passed early in the morning, included a commitment to triple public finance for developing countries, raising the goal from \$100 billion annually to \$300 billion by 2035. In addition, countries pledged to work to scale finance from public and private sources to \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035. In the world of international negotiations, it is common for countries to bring maximalist demands – asking for the most optimistic outcomes – only to settle for these being scaled back. However, in this case, the gap between what was demanded and agreed upon is striking: the \$300 billion figure represents just 20% of the original demand. While \$300 billion a year is no small sum, other meaningful concessions would have made its impact far greater. For example, if the funds were predominantly public finance, facilitating the affordable transfer of technology from developed to developing countries, or supporting investments in infrastructure that could help vulnerable populations in the Global South adapt to climate change. Unfortunately, none was included.

Despite decades of scientific progress in developed countries that have rigorously outlined the threat posed by rising carbon emissions, these nations have repeatedly backtracked on their responsibility to support meaningful climate solutions. Moreover, many have failed to discourage developing countries from pursuing fossil-fuel-based development. This shift is likely a reflection of broader geopolitical changes – such as the decline of the globalised world order – and a reduction in public support and political will in the West. As a result, climate action has increasingly been framed within the logic of market competition rather than global solidarity. The recent CoP talks revealed that climate negotiations are now entangled with trade conflicts. In this year’s talks, wordplay and political posturing often took precedence over meaningful action. It is possible that next year, there will be a repeat of the drama surrounding the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, especially with the impending return of a Trump presidency. Next year’s CoP, in Brazil, will be a symbolic return to the country that hosted the 1992 Earth Summit, where the world first recognised that action, not just talk, was needed to tackle global challenges. As the climate crisis grows more urgent, it is time for the world to revisit that commitment and move beyond empty promises to real, transformative action.



The Constitution still thrives, let it show India the way

This month marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption by the Constituent Assembly of the draft Constitution of India, on November 26, 1949. The Union government has announced that it intends to commemorate this momentous occasion with a special joint sitting of Parliament. There are bound to be several self-congratulatory speeches, from all sides of our fractious political divide. But the speech that should haunt us all is that of the principal draftsman of the Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, on the eve of the Constitution's adoption. On November 25, 1949, in his magisterial summation of the work of the Drafting Committee he chaired, and before commending its work to the Assembly, he pointedly observed: "however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot."

The working of the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar pointed out, depended on how the people and the political parties applied it. The drafters had made provision for relatively easy amendment, so as to permit the document to keep up with the needs of the times. But the rest depended on the way successive generations of its custodians chose to implement it.

The lacunae that B.R. Ambedkar identified Dr. Ambedkar highlighted the fact that "there is complete absence of two things in Indian society" – equality and fraternity. "On the 26th of January 1950," he declared, "we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?"

In calling for a social and not merely political democracy to emerge from the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar stressed the absence of fraternity as the second major ingredient that was missing in India. "Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians – of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life." But thanks to the caste system – the entire structure of caste, he averred,



Shashi Tharoor

a fourth-term Indian National Congress Member of the Lok Sabha for Thiruvananthapuram, and the award-winning author of 26 books, including 'The Battle of Belonging: On Nationalism, Patriotism and What it Means to be Indian' (2021). He is a member of the Congress Working Committee

But a speech that should haunt all Indians is that of its principal draftsman on the eve of the Constitution's adoption – on people and political parties making it work

was 'anti-national' – religious divisions and the absence of a common sense of nationhood among some Indians, fraternity had not yet been achieved. But it was indispensable, since liberty, equality and fraternity were all intertwined and could not flourish independently of one another. "Without equality," he pointed out, "liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them."

What has changed

Today, 75 years later, it is well worth asking what progress we have made to achieve the aims of the Constitution's drafters, and in particular to fill the lacunae that Dr. Ambedkar identified. Equality has advanced, no doubt, with the abolition of untouchability being accompanied by the world's oldest and farthest-reaching affirmative action programme, in the form of reservations, initially for Scheduled Castes and then for the Other Backward Classes (OBC). These reservations, which were initially intended to be temporary, have now been entrenched in our system and may be said to be politically unchallengeable. But the task of promoting social and economic equality, which Dr. Ambedkar pointed to, is far from complete. The clamour for further opportunities for those who believe that Indian society continues to deny them the equality of outcomes that the numbers warrant, continues to roil our politics. The escalating demand for a caste census is bound to have further implications for the evolution of India's constitutional practice.

As for fraternity, the mobilisation of votes in our contentious democracy in the name of caste, creed, region and language have ensured that the social and psychological sense of oneness that Dr. Ambedkar spoke about, is still, at best, a work in progress. But there is no doubt that the sense of nationhood that he felt had not yet come into existence has now become embedded across the country. One only needs to look at the crowds at a cricket match involving the Indian team, or the national outrage and mourning after an international conflict such as the Kargil war (1999) or the Galwan incident (2020), to be aware that there is a strong sense of nationhood despite the persistence of local or sectarian identities.

Yet, by reifying caste reservations, India has promoted equality but arguably undermined fraternity. Fraternity had a special place in Dr. Ambedkar's vision; the word was, in many ways, his distinctive contribution to India's constitutional discourse. It also had an economic dimension, with the implicit idea that the assets of the better-off would be used to uplift the untouchables and other unfortunates. Fraternity would both result from and lead to the erosion of social and caste hierarchies. But, as the sociologist Dipankar Gupta has argued, the extension of reservations to the OBCs saw caste as 'an important political resource to be plumbed in perpetuity'.

Professor Gupta avers that this 'is not in the spirit of enlarging fraternity, as the Ambedkar proposals are'; while Dr. Ambedkar's ultimate aim was the annihilation of caste from Indian society, for Mandal, caste was not to be "removed", but to be "represented". It entrenched caste rather than eliminating it from public life.

Highs and worrying lows

This debate may well go on. Still, we can be grateful that the ascent to power of the very elements of Indian politics who had initially rejected the Constitution has not resulted in its abandonment. There is a certain irony to a Bharatiya Janata Party government celebrating a document that its forebears in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Jana Sangh had found "un-Indian" and devoid of soul. That soul has evolved over 75 years and 106 amendments, and the Constitution still thrives. But the hollowing out of many of the institutions created by the Constitution, the diminishing of Parliament, pressures on the judiciary and the undermining of the democratic spirit – leading to the V-Dem Institute labelling India as an "electoral autocracy", policed by the "constable" Dr. Ambedkar warned against – mean that much still remains to be done by its custodians.

"Independence," Dr. Ambedkar said in concluding his memorable speech, "is no doubt a matter of joy. But let us not forget that this independence has thrown on us great responsibilities. By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame except ourselves." Seventy-five years later, let us vow to reduce the number of things we need to blame ourselves for – and let the Constitution show us the way.



Kerala girl takes taekwondo to Kilimanjaro, eyes world record

Sam Paul A.
ALAPPUZHA

What excites her most these days is reaching new heights. In a show of sheer determination, Anna Mary, a 13-year-old girl from Cherthala in Alappuzha, has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, reaching Stella Point (5,756 metres/18,885 ft), one of the summits of the highest free-standing mountain in the world and the tallest peak in Africa.

The girl, accompanied by her father Shine Varghese, completed the six-day trek via the Lemosho route, covering 46.5 km. According to the Mountain Climbing Certificate issued by the Tanzania National Parks Conservation Commissioner, she reached Stella Point on November 6 at 6.10 a.m. There she per-



Anna Mary performing taekwondo at Mount Kilimanjaro.

formed taekwondo poomsae and kicks, potentially setting a record. Ms. Anna has been learning the martial arts since the age of three.

‘Test of endurance’

Though Anna initially aimed to summit Uhuru Peak, the highest point on Mount Kilimanjaro (5,895 m/19,341 ft), she chose to stop at Stella Point due to

“exhaustion”. “We chose the Lemosho route for its scenic beauty and gradual ascent. Still, I faced a lot of challenges but enjoyed every moment. The summit day was a gruelling test of endurance. Starting at 12.30 a.m. we battled cold, dark, and windy conditions to reach Stella Point,” she recalls.

The girl, a Class 8 student at St. Mary’s Girls High School, Cherthala, found the ascent of the Barranco Wall, a natural towering rock face, one of the most thrilling parts of her expedition. “It tested my climbing skills. I have practised artificial wall climbing, which helped me navigate the steep incline,” she says. The return journey brought her total trekking distance to 68 km over seven days.

