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Daily News Feed

D.N.F

10.01.2025

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Emissions rise from the smokestacks at the Jeffrey Energy Center coal power plant in Kansas, U.S. FILE PHOTO

U.S. emissions stall in 2024, challenges its climate targets

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. greenhouse gas emissions barely decreased in 2024, leaving the world's largest economy off track to achieve its climate goals, according to an analysis released on Thursday, as the incoming Trump administration looks set to double down on fossil fuels.

The preliminary estimate by the Rhodium Group, an independent research organisation, found a net fall of just 0.2% in economy-wide emissions. Lower manufacturing output drove the modest decline, but it was undercut by increased air and road travel and higher electricity demand.

Study co-author Ben King said the small drop came despite the U.S. economy expanding last year by 2.7%, "a continuation of a trend that we've seen where there's a decoupling between economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions."

Overall, emissions remain below pre-pandemic levels and about 20% below 2005 levels, the benchmark year for U.S. commitments under the Paris Agreement.

The accord aims to limit global warming to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, to avert the worst catastrophes of planet-wide heating. But with 2024 effectively static, decarbonisation must accelerate across all sectors. "To meet its Paris Agreement target of a 50-52% reduction in emissions by 2030, the U.S. must sustain an ambitious 7.6% annual drop in emissions from 2025 to 2030," the report said.

Positives in the report include a bigger share of green energy in the grid and a drop in methane emissions from reduced coal use.



Trump's shift from 'America First' to imperialist ambitions threatens allies

Since winning a second term, the President-elect has been threatening to seize the Panama Canal and Greenland; analysts warn it could embolden America's enemies, suggesting the U.S. might accept forceful border changes, particularly amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's threats to Taiwan

Associated Press
NEW YORK

Donald Trump ran on a return to his "America First" foreign policy platform. The U.S., he said, could no longer afford to be the world's policeman. On his watch, he pledged, there would be no new wars.

But since winning a second term, the President-elect has been embracing a new imperialist agenda, threatening to seize the Panama Canal and Greenland – perhaps by military force – and saying he will use economic coercion to pressure Canada to become the nation's 51st state.

"Canada and the United States, that would really be something. You get rid of that artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like and it would also be much better for national security," Mr. Trump said of the world's longest international border and the U.S.'s second-largest trade partner.

Departure from norms
Such talk of undermining sovereign borders and using military force against allies and fellow NATO members – even if said lightly – marks a stunning departure from decades-old norms about territorial integrity. And it is rhetoric that analysts say could embolden America's enemies by suggesting the U.S. is



Alarming voice: U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. He said he will use economic coercion to pressure Canada, second-largest trade partner of the U.S., to become the nation's 51st state. REUTERS

now OK with countries using force to redraw borders at a time when Russia is pressing forward with its invasion of Ukraine and China is threatening Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory.

"If I'm Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping, this is music to my ears," said John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser-turned-critic, who also served as ambassador to the United Nations.

Mr. Trump's language, reflecting a 19th-century worldview that defined European colonial powers, comes as international allies were already grappling with the implications of his return to the world stage.

Gerald Butts, outgoing Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau's former top adviser and a longtime close friend, said Mr. Trump seems more emboldened than when he first took office in 2017.

"I think he's feeling a lot less unencumbered than he was the last time. There are no restraints. This is maximum Trump," he said.

Mr. Butts is part of a WhatsApp group with others who staffed heads of state and government during the first Trump term. "Someone joked that the big fear the last time was that he didn't know what he was doing and the big fear this time is that he does," he recounted.

Mr. Trump's swaggering rhetoric also marks a continuation of the kind of testosterone-heavy energy

that was a signature of his campaign, particularly as he worked to win over younger male voters with appearances on popular podcasts.

Charlie Kirk, a key Trump ally who joined Mr. Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., on a trip to Greenland this week, argued that it was imperative for the U.S. to control Greenland. The island is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a longtime U.S. ally and a founding NATO member. Beyond the country's strategic location in the Arctic and its rich resources, Mr. Kirk said, "It makes America dream again, that we're not just this sad, low-testosterone, beta male slouching in our

chair, allowing the world to run over us."

"It is the resurrection of masculine American energy. It is the return of Manifest Destiny," said Mr. Kirk, whose Turning Point group helped with Mr. Trump's get-out-the-vote effort.

Negotiating tactics

Mr. Trump allies have long argued that his bluster and most audacious statements are all part of his complex negotiating tactics. Aides note that nearly half of U.S. shipping containers travel through the Panama Canal and that key canal ports are controlled by a Hong Kong-based firm.

Greenland is home to the Pituffik Space Base, the northernmost U.S. post, which plays a key role in missile warnings and space surveillance. And China and Russia have been making their own investments in the Arctic at a time when new potential shipping routes are opening as ice caps melt.

Canada, Mr. Trump's team notes, spends far less on defence than its southern neighbour.

"Every decision President Trump makes is in the best interest of the U.S. and the American people. That's why President Trump has called attention to legitimate national security and economic concerns regarding Canada, Greenland and Panama,"

said Trump-Vance Transition spokesperson Karoline Leavitt.

But Michael McFaul, the Obama-era ambassador to Russia, said Trump's language is counterproductive to U.S. national security interests.

"President Trump is about to take over at one of the most dangerous times in American history," he said.

Canadian officials have responded with increasing anger. "The joke is over," Dominic LeBlanc, the country's Finance Minister and point person for U.S.-Canada relations, said.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum responded with sarcasm Wednesday to another Trump proposal: to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America." Standing before an old map, she quipped that North America should be renamed "América Mexicana," or "Mexican America," because a founding document dating from 1814 that preceded Mexico's constitution referred to it that way.

Denmark and Panama have responded similarly, with Panama's Foreign Minister, Javier Martínez-Acha, saying, "The sovereignty of our canal," which the country has controlled for more than 25 years, "is not negotiable and is part of our history of struggle and an irreversible conquest."



Bangladesh garment sector rebounds, but workers say little has changed

Owners say business has bounced back after the revolution that toppled the government last year despite a 5% wage hike following protests; frustrated workers, however, say that hard-won concessions have done little to change their circumstances, and life remains as hard as ever

NEWS ANALYSIS

Agence France-Presse
DHAKA

In a vast Bangladeshi factory hall thrumming with sewing machines, garment workers churn out seemingly endless pairs of mountain hiking trousers for customers in Europe and America.

Bangladesh's key clothing manufacturing industry supplying global brands was crippled by a revolution that toppled the government last year, in which garment sector protesters played an important role. While owners say business has bounced back, frustrated workers say hard-won concessions have done little to change their circumstances, and life remains as hard as ever.

"It is the same kind of exploitation," said garment worker Khatun, 24, asking that only her first name be used as speaking out would jeopardise her job.

Production in the world's second-largest garment manufacturer was repeatedly stalled by the months-long violence, before protesters forced long-time autocrat Sheikh Hasina to flee in August.

An interim government, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, took over.

Protests, however, continued in a string of gar-



Bad to worse: Employees say some opened factories offer conditions far worse than before. AFP

ment factories for better conditions and more pay, with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association warning in October of \$400 million in losses.

Scores of factories closed and tens of thousands lost their jobs.

But after a 5% wage hike was agreed in September, the industry rebounded.

"We are doing well," said garment producer factory owner S.M. Khaled, who heads the Snowtex company, employing 22,000 workers.

The South Asian nation produces garments for global brands—ranging from Japan's Uniqlo, Ireland's Primark, Sweden's H&M and Spain's Zara.

The apparel industry ac-



Garment (factory) owners need to take more responsibility and learn to negotiate better with international buyers

TASLIMA AKHTER
Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity group

counts for about 80% of Bangladesh's exports, earning \$36 billion last year, dropping little despite the unrest from the \$38 billion exported the previous year.

"I am working with at least 15 international brands, and our products will be available in 50 countries," Mr. Khaled

said. "Almost all garment factories are operating at full swing after waves of unrest. We are on the growth side."

Despite challenges with a cooling of demand, Anwar Hossain, the government-appointed administrator of BGMEA, said the industry was returning to strength. "The largest contributor to exports was the apparel sector," he said.

The garment industry recorded a 13% increase from July-December 2024—the period after the revolution—compared with the same period the year before, he said.

'Half my basic wage'
Workers tell a different story. Ms. Khatun welcomed the wage rise but said fac-

tory managers then hiked already onerous demands for "nearly unachievable production targets".

Scraping by in the capital Dhaka's gritty industrial suburb of Ashulia, she earns \$140 a month including overtime and benefits to support a family of four.

Miserly raise

The wage increase of \$8.25 a month seems a miserly addition.

Opening her fist, she showed a 500-taka note, just over four dollars, all she had left after paying rent and other expenses.

"We have good facilities inside the factory, like toilets, a canteen, and water fountains," she said. "But we don't get even a 10-minute break while trying to meet the targets". Many factory owners were close to the former ruling party.

In the immediate days after Ms. Hasina was toppled, several factories were damaged in retaliatory attacks. Some owners were arrested and accused of supporting Ms. Hasina, who is herself in exile in India skipping an arrest warrant for "massacres... and crimes against humanity".

Most factories are now back in operation, but employees say some offer conditions worse than before.

"We weren't receiving salaries on time after the owner was arrested," said worker Rana, also asking not to be identified.

"Now, they've offered me half my basic wage, around \$60 to \$70. I have a six-month-old child, a wife, and elderly parents to support", he added.

Mr. Hussain, who lost his job in the unrest, tells a common tale.

While he has since found work packing clothes, the new job means he "doesn't benefit from the increment" deal, while living costs have risen.

"House rents have shot up with the news of the pay rise," he said.

Taslina Akhter, from the Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity group, a labour rights organisation, said that "workers are struggling to maintain a minimum standard of living".

'Maximising profits'

Ms. Akhter said factory bosses must push back against purchasers wanting to maximise profits at the expense of a living wage.

"Garment (factory) owners need to take more responsibility and learn to negotiate better with international buyers," she said. "This industry is not new, and problems are not impossible to solve."

Despite the industry's apparent fiscal success, Abdullah Hil Raquib, a former BGMEA director, warned it was on fragile ground. "The stability in the garment sector we see now is only on the surface," he said.



Decoding India's growth slowdown

The official diminution of India's projected GDP growth rate may still be an underestimation of the extent of economic slowdown. The revenue mobilisation strategy needs to be reworked to enhance taxation on wealth and profits in order to enhance capex and welfare spending

ECONOMIC NOTES

Prasenjit Bose
Soumyadeep Biswas

The first advance estimates of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024-25, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) this week, shows a decline in the real GDP growth rate to 6.4% from 8.2% registered in 2023-24. This is lower than the 6.5 to 7% range projected by the Economic Survey in July 2024. The growth rate of nominal GDP, which is the sum of the real GDP growth rate and the overall inflation rate, is estimated at 9.7% in 2024-25 – significantly lower than the 10.5% growth rate projected in the last Union Budget.

Data discrepancies

The official diminution of India's projected GDP growth rate may still be an underestimation of the extent of economic slowdown. Academics and institutional experts have consistently pointed out serious defects in the official GDP estimates, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommending an upgrade of the real sector statistics, an "Informational Annex" to the 2023 IMF Staff consultation report on India had inter alia noted that, "...the compilation of constant price GDP deviate from the conceptual requirements of the national accounts, in part due to the use of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a deflator for many economic activities. The appropriate price to deflate GDP by type of activity is the Producer Price Index (PPI), which is under development. Large revisions to historical series, the relatively short time span of the revised series, major discrepancies between GDP by activity and GDP by expenditure, and the lack of official seasonally-adjusted quarterly GDP series complicate analysis. Together, these weaknesses make it challenging to monitor high frequency trends in India's economy through official statistics, particularly from the demand side." The estimation of real or constant price GDP requires the use of a GDP deflator to estimate values of GDP components in constant prices. The GDP deflator being used in India's official estimates is a weighted average of wholesale and retail price indices. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI), 2011-12 series has shown high volatility over the past decade, leading to inexplicably large divergences between the WPI and CPI inflation rates (Chart 1). This has had serious implications for the accuracy of the GDP deflator and real GDP estimates.

For instance, the nominal GDP growth rate was estimated at 14.2% in 2022-23 and 9.6% in 2023-24, which indicated a sharp decline in growth. However, the real GDP growth rate was estimated to have grown from 7.0% to 8.2%, indicating growth acceleration. This implied that the GDP deflator was only 1.4% in 2023-24, even as retail inflation was at 5.4%, because the WPI inflation rate was estimated to have fallen from a high of 9.4% in 2022-23 to a negative of -0.7% in 2023-24. In short, because of high volatility in the WPI, the nominal GDP estimate showed a growth deceleration in 2023-24 but the real GDP estimate reflected growth acceleration. Such anomalous and confounding data on macroeconomic fundamentals invariably lead to delusions and policy errors.

Elusive private investment

Tabled a day ahead of the Union Budget last July, the Economic Survey 2023-24 had taken comfort in the 8.2% growth in

Economic blues

From 2022-23 to 2024-25, real GDP and investment have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2% each and private consumption at 6%. Post-pandemic, there has been one percentage point increase in the annual average growth rate of real investment. Therefore, there is absolutely no indication of any structural break in the investment behaviour of the private corporate sector so far under the 11 years of NDA rule

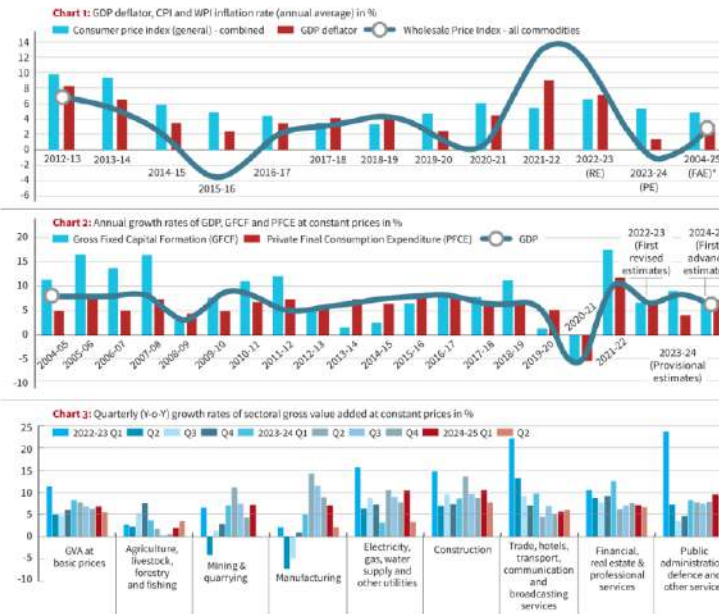


Table 1: Union Government's accounts: revenue and expenditure heads at the end of November 2023 and 2024

	Centre's net tax revenue	Centre's non-tax revenue	Capital expenditure	Revenue expenditure
	2023-24	2023-24	2023-24	2023-24
Budget estimates (RE) (₹ crore)	23,30,631	25,83,499	3,01,650	5,45,701
April to November (₹ crore)	14,35,755	14,43,435	2,84,365	4,27,020
% of Budget estimate (April to November)	61.6	55.9	94.3	78.3
	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25
Budget estimates (RE) (₹ crore)	23,30,631	25,83,499	3,01,650	5,45,701
April to November (₹ crore)	14,35,755	14,43,435	2,84,365	4,27,020
% of Budget estimate (April to November)	61.6	55.9	94.3	78.3
% of Budget estimate (April to March)	99.8	n.a.	133.2	n.a.

Source: Source: Controller General of Accounts (CGA), Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, Government of India; NSO, MoSE, GoI; DFIT, MoC&I, National Accounts Statistics 2024: First Advance Estimates of GDP for 2024-25.

real GDP and indicated a vigorous expansion of investment by the private-sector. Yet, the Chief Economic Advisor had asked whether the corporate sector responded positively to the tax cuts of September 2019, and complained about sluggish corporate investments in machinery and equipment and intellectual property products. He criticised the disproportionate allocation of gross fixed capital formation (investment) in the private sector to "dwellings, other buildings and structures" as an unhealthy mix.

Throwing such caution to the wind, the Union Budget relied entirely on a revival of the private corporate capex cycle to announce the "Prime Minister's Package for Employment and Skill" with an outlay of ₹2 trillion, aimed at benefiting 41 million youth over a five-year period. The employment linked incentive/subsidy scheme and the internship programme for one crore youth in five years, were premised on the expectation of massive job creation, consequent to an acceleration of private corporate

investment. The fiscal consolidation roadmap, whereby the fiscal deficit was projected to decline from 5.6% of GDP in 2023-24, to 4.9% in 2024-25 and 4.3% in 2025-26, was also announced with the budgetary expectation of the private sector taking a lead in the capital formation process. However, the latest GDP estimates have shown a significant decline in the growth of real gross fixed capital formation from 9% in 2023-24 to 6.4% in 2024-25. A longer view of India's growth trajectory over the past decade, even on the basis of exaggerated official national account estimates, shows the irrationality of official expectations.

During the 10 years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule, between 2004-05 and 2013-14, the average annual growth of real GDP was at 6.8%, investment 10% and private consumption 6% (Chart 2). Between the onset of the present regime till the outbreak of the pandemic, that is, between 2014-15 and 2019-20, real GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.8% (exactly similar to UPA), but real investment growth fell to

6.3% while private consumption growth increased to 6.8%. Thus, economic growth under NDA was not investment led, as was the case under UPA.

Moreover, during the UPA period, real growth in private investment was over 10%, above the growth of public sector investment at around 9% (Chart 2). Under NDA rule, till the pandemic, public investment in real terms grew faster at an average of 6.6% per year, than private investment which grew by 6.3%.

Investment, consumption and output had collapsed in 2020-21 owing to the lockdown induced recession. The recovery in 2021-22 was indeed led by private investment, but the spikes in the growth rates of investment, consumption and output were on account of base effect – it was simply a return to normalcy after the collapse in the preceding year. From 2022-23 to 2024-25, real GDP and investment have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2% each and private consumption at 6%. Post-pandemic there has been one percentage point increase in the annual average growth rate of real

investment, and 0.8 percentage point decline in the annual average growth rate of private consumption.

Therefore, there is absolutely no indication of any structural break in the investment behaviour of the private corporate sector so far under the 11 years of NDA rule. The deep corporate tax cuts in September 2019 have failed to spur capital formation and real economic activity; rather it has only helped a short lived spurt in corporate earnings and fuelled a post-pandemic bubble in the equity market. In contrast, the advent of the UPA regime had led to a real investment and exports boom between 2004-05 till the financial crisis and global recession of 2008-09, which was facilitated both by a massive increase in industrial bank credit and significant foreign capital inflows. A similar private investment led boom has remained elusive under the NDA regime.

This restifies to the forgotten truth of political economy, that supposedly business friendly governments can deliver much wealth and profits for their cronies but are incapable of bringing about economy wide structural changes and common prosperity.

Fiscal strains

The more reliable supply side data on the Indian economy reflects a more sober picture of economic recovery since the pandemic and the nature of the slowdown that has set in. Quarterly Gross Value Added (GVA) growth on a year-on-year basis has been on a downward slide since 2023-24 (Chart 3). The agriculture sector continues to show cyclical fluctuations. After showing double-digit growth in the two quarters of 2023-24, the growth rate of manufacturing GVA has been on a downward slide. Slowdown is visible not only in the mining, power and construction sectors but also in services like retail trade, transport, communications, finance and real estate.

The only sector where GVA is projected to grow at a higher pace in 2024-25 than the previous year is public administration, defence and other services. This shows the crucial role of public spending in sustaining economic growth in the Indian economy. In this context, the monthly accounts of the Union Government further indicate that crucial revenue and expenditure targets set in the last Union Budget are likely to remain unachieved. While the windfall of a ₹2.11 trillion surplus transfer from the Reserve Bank of India has enabled the Union Government to mobilise over 78% of its non-tax revenue target for 2024-25 by November 2024, mobilisation of the Centre's net tax revenues between April to November 2024 is only 56% of the budgetary target of ₹25.83 trillion (Table 1). This has led to spending less than half of the ₹11.1 trillion, budgeted as capex for 2024-25 till November 2024.

It is clear that economic slowdown has disrupted budgetary plans by slowing down tax revenue growth. Adhering to the fiscal consolidation path would imply a squeeze on public spending, including capital expenditure, which in turn would further aggravate the slowdown. Jettisoning fiscal rectitude altogether is also not feasible, given the already elevated levels of public debt and interest payments. The only way out appears to be a reworking of the revenue mobilisation strategy by enhancing taxation on wealth and profits in order to enhance capex and welfare spending.

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Is India open to the idea of dual citizenship?



Vivek Katju
Former diplomat



Amitabh Mattoo
Dean of the School of International Studies at the Jawaharal Nehru University

PARLEY

At an event in December, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said there are a lot of challenges in providing dual citizenship to Indians settled abroad. He pointed out that the Overseas Citizenship of India drive is a step towards meeting the demand and added that the debate on dual citizenship is "still alive". Is India open to the idea of dual citizenship? Amitabh Mattoo and Vivek Katju discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Kallol Bhattacharjee. **Edited excerpts**

Do you think dual citizenship for diasporic Indians could become a reality?

Vivek Katju: First, let me distinguish between NRIs living abroad and People of Indian Origin (PIO). NRIs, or Non-Resident Indians, are Indian nationals who hold Indian passports. They have all the rights that accrue to Indian nationals. The only thing they cannot exercise abroad is the right to vote, though I believe arrangements were made in some stage for NRIs to register themselves in the missions so they could vote in their place of entitlement. PIOs are not Indian nationals, quite clearly, and therefore they do not have political rights. At one stage, the government had given expanded economic facilities to PIOs, and later, what was called a PIO card was converted into an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card. Now, I never understood the reason for this change in designation, as the OCI card does not confer on any person of Indian origin, any additional facilities, or any rights which the PIO card did not already possess. Citizenship essentially has political attributes. If you are a citizen, you have the full right to participate in the political process of the country. A non-citizen does not have that right. So, the word "citizen" is extremely confusing and, in my opinion, it should be avoided as it creates a misleading impression.

Minister Jaishankar's remarks have opened up an issue that has unresolved contours. Professor Mattoo, what are your thoughts about granting dual citizenship rights to people of Indian origin living abroad?

Amitabh Mattoo: I think Mr. Jaishankar must have made an off-the-cuff remark. It cannot be a serious question to be debated at this point in India that certain people or a class of people who are no longer Indian citizens, or who either gave up Indian citizenship or never were Indian citizens, will be given additional citizenship of India. If you look back at the Constitution of India, Part II deals with this section on



In the U.S., you cannot become a President unless you are born in the territory of the country. **REUTERS**

citizenship. Article 5 of the Constitution defines who is a citizen of India, either by birth, by parentage, or by acquiring it after having remained a resident in India. There is also a distinction between being a domicile and being a citizen. You may be domiciled in India and yet not be a citizen. This was determined by the Supreme Court in *J.P. Joshi v State of Madhya Bharat* in 1955. The only major amendment to the Citizenship Act came in 2019, with the Citizenship Amendment Act. Then there was a fast-track process for minorities from certain neighbourhood countries to be allowed to take Indian citizenship. I don't think it can really be a serious, substantive question to allow people to have citizenship of both India and another country because that would confer political rights. In other words, citizens of the U.S., U.K., or Australia, for example, would not only have political loyalty to those countries but also the right to vote in India. That, frankly, for me is an extremely dangerous idea. As an Indian citizen, I would not be willing to give political rights to anyone with divided loyalties. Because after all, dual citizenship means that you have divided loyalties.

We are not ready to have dual citizenship in this country after just 75 years. I am not xenophobic, I am a person who has grown up with an idea of global citizenship in a larger sense. But in terms of which political dispensation will govern India, I am not willing to share that right with anyone who has but 100% political loyalty to India. Personally, I had the option of acquiring Australian citizenship, and the only reason I did not take it was that it would mean relinquishing Indian citizenship.

The incoming Trump presidency has several Indian-origin people, as well as



I believe it is the democratic right of every Indian to choose the citizenship of another country and relinquish Indian citizenship. But they cannot say I will acquire the citizenship of another country, participate in its political process, and still hold on to political rights in India

VIVEK KATJU

first-generation Indian immigrants, who will hold public office. Do you think that for certain communities and certain kinds of workers who are employable globally, the idea of citizenship requires some degree of flexibility?

VK: No. You cannot have divided loyalties. You are either a citizen of India, which is in full rights, political rights, economic rights, etc, or you are not.

You mentioned that in the U.S., there are people of Indian origin who are holding, who have, and who will be holding the office. I think six persons of Indian origin have been elected to the House of Representatives this time. Let us not forget that they are American citizens. The Indian systems and law demand that the moment you acquire the nationality of another country, you relinquish India's nationality, which means that you do not have political rights anymore.

I believe it is the democratic right of every Indian to choose the citizenship of another country and relinquish Indian citizenship. But they cannot say I will acquire the citizenship of another country, participate in its political process, and still hold on to political rights in India. Now I know that some other countries allow that, but I must confess I have very orthodox views on this. The international system is a system of states.

AM: I completely endorse Mr. Katju's remarks. We cannot, for the sake of populism or to attract foreign investment, create what the Marxists used to call a "comprador" class – a class of people who will act as foreign agents in India. You give them the right to vote and to elect members of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies, that is a sure way of recolonising India.

But if you open this Pandora's box by allowing even a single citizen of another country to have dual citizenship in India, it would be deeply dangerous and subversive. There are situations where people who have decided to make India their home have relinquished earlier

citizenship and become citizens of India. Mirra Alfassa, known as The Mother, whose work inspired many and who founded the Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry, became an Indian citizen despite earlier campaigning for dual citizenship. Similarly, Mother Teresa became an Indian citizen, and economist Jean Drèze, I believe, relinquished his Belgian citizenship and became an Indian citizen. In the U.S., which might seem more flexible, the fact is that you cannot become a President unless you are born in the territory of the U.S. Even Elon Musk, despite all his championing of Donald Trump, can never aspire to be President because he was born in South Africa. So, some laws are much more rigid.

Is the issue being propped by populism?

AM: I hope not, because I have great regard for the External Affairs Minister, so I am sure he is not doing it for populist reasons. The diaspora has a great role to play but not as dual citizens. You have the diaspora playing a role in cementing bilateral relations with the U.S. The hugely successful Indian diaspora in the U.S. often acts as a rallying point for leaders' visits there, and similarly in other countries. The first Indian diaspora of indentured labourer that went into the Caribbean may not have been as successful in material terms as this new wave of diaspora. But, as I said, they can cement bilateral ties and help attract investment from abroad.

As in the case of Microsoft, Satya Nadella has promised investment in artificial intelligence. That is all for the good of the nation. However, the question really is whether this diaspora could become a Frankenstein monster. While its role may appear benign and a source of great good, you may suddenly empower it to the point where it decides who is going to be your next leader. That is where I think there has to be a *lakshman rekha*. You need to maintain a clear line between the useful role played by the diaspora and its crossing the boundaries. I am not willing to let any Satya Nadella or Vivek Ramaswamy or any person of Indian origin who may just acquire Indian citizenship for instrumental reasons while retaining their American or other citizenship decide my political future. I am an Indian citizen, and I vote for my future along with other Indian citizens who do not have any other loyalties to any other country.



To listen to the full interview scan the code or go to the link www.thehindu.com



Section 152 of BNS should not become a proxy for sedition

The Rajasthan High Court, in *Tejender Pal Singh v. State of Rajasthan* (2024), cautioned against using Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) as a tool to stifle legitimate dissent. In 2022, before the BNS was enacted, the Supreme Court had suspended pending criminal trials and court proceedings under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) until the government reconsidered the law. This was followed by a verbal proclamation by the Union Home Minister that 'sedition' would be repealed as an offence. Section 152 of the BNS criminalises any act exciting secession, armed rebellion, and subversive activities. It also criminalises acts encouraging feelings of separatism or endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India. While the BNS does not formally use the term 'sedition', the Rajasthan High Court's recent decision hints that the spectre of sedition still looms large in the BNS.

Problems with Section 152

First, Section 152 BNS criminalises 'acts endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India.' However, what constitutes such endangerment under Section 152 has not been defined in the statute. This renders the provision vague, and amenable to expansive interpretation by enforcement authorities. Accordingly, a speech criticising a prominent historical or political figure, or sympathising with a controversial public figure, may be construed as 'endangering' the 'unity and integrity of India' for initiating legal action against a person. In the current sociopolitical environment that appears increasingly fragmented, a stringent penal provision without inbuilt checks for abuse may be used to stifle dissent and criticism.



Pushkar Anand

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The lack of a statutory requirement to establish a causal linkage between the speech and its actual consequence before depriving the accused of personal liberty renders Section 152 amenable to abuse

Second, the term 'knowingly' in Section 152 substantially lowers the threshold for commission of the offence, especially in the context of social media. Even if a person does not have the malicious intent to incite activities or feelings prohibited under Section 152, they can still be considered liable for the offence if they share a post knowing it will reach a larger audience and may provoke such activities or feelings. This would be sufficient to arrest a person and prosecute them for commission of the offence under Section 152, which is cognisable and non-bailable. The lack of a statutory requirement to prima facie establish a causal linkage between the speech and its actual consequence before depriving the accused of personal liberty renders Section 152 amenable to abuse much like its predecessor, and has the potential to instill a chilling effect on free speech. The potential for abuse of the sedition-like provision is clearly borne out by data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) regarding Section 124A of the IPC. Out of 548 persons arrested between 2015 and 2020 for sedition, only 12 people were convicted in seven cases. More importantly, this was the situation when Section 124A IPC was relatively narrower and more specific in comparison to Section 152 of the BNS. Unfortunately, the NCRB data, and the benefit of hindsight regarding abuse of Section 124A, seem to have had no bearing in designing the contours of Section 152 of the BNS.

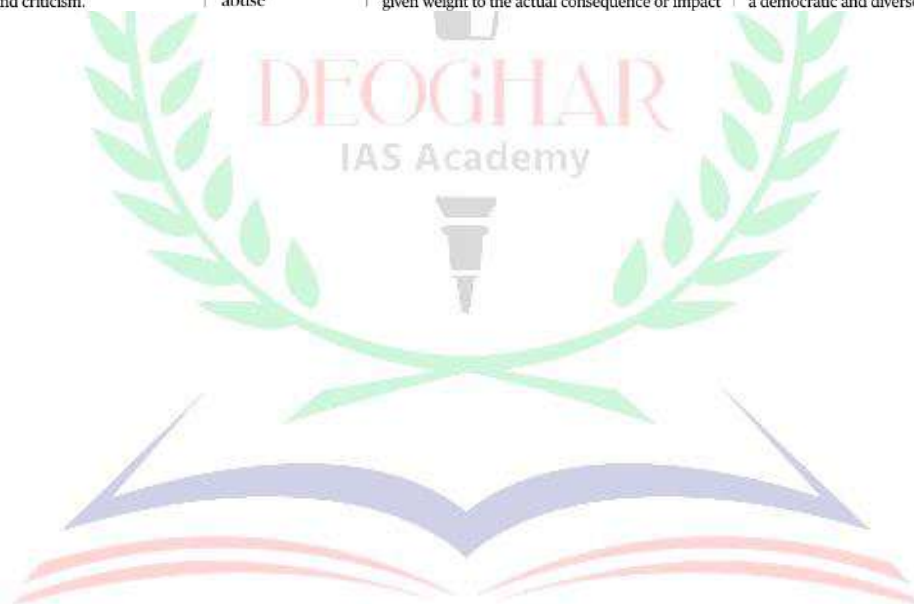
The way forward

In the past, the judiciary has consistently adopted a consequentialist interpretation to strike a careful balance between national interest and the freedom of expression. The Supreme Court has given weight to the actual consequence or impact

of free speech in determining the offence rather than considering the 'speech' on its own. For instance, in *Balwant Singh and Anr v. State of Punjab* (1995), the Court drew a line of demarcation between casual sloganeering and its repercussions or consequences, requiring a direct causal nexus between the act and its impact for it to amount to an offence of sedition. Further, in *Javed Ahmad Hazam v. State of Maharashtra and Ors* (2024), the Court said the "effect of the words must be judged from the standards of reasonable, strong-minded, firm and courageous men, and not those of weak and vacillating minds..." Moreover, in *Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar* (1962), the Court had differentiated 'disloyalty towards the government' from 'strongly worded criticism of the government and its policies'.

Given the lack of inbuilt safeguards in Section 152 to prevent its abuse, these interpretations should guide the enforcement authorities in applying this provision. Moreover, the Supreme Court should, when it gets the earliest opportunity, craft a set of guidelines for the enforcement authorities, demarcating the boundaries for the terms used under Section 152 BNS, as it did with respect to 'arrest' in *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal*. This will ensure that the provision does not become a proxy for the offence of sedition.

It is important to provide liberal space to thoughts, beliefs and expressions, and to subject them all to unimpeded criticisms, especially in the age of social media. We need to fall back on the concept of 'marketplace of ideas', as envisioned by Justice Holmes in *Abrams v. United States*, because the best test of truth will always be the potential of an idea to get itself accepted in a democratic and diverse society.



Damage control

Adherence to existing regulations can limit the impact of earthquakes

This week, an early-morning earthquake in Tibet of magnitude 7.1 and originating at a depth of 10 km has reportedly claimed at least 100 lives and damaged buildings and houses. The tremors from the quake were felt in Nepal as well as parts of Bihar and even New Delhi, thousands of kilometres away. The main earthquake was followed by at least two aftershocks. If the epicentre had been located closer to India, the damage could have been manifold. Earthquakes in the Himalayas evoke a special kind of dread in the country. Memories of two deadly quakes in Nepal in April and May of 2015 that killed at least 9,000 and caused incalculable damage still bubble up. The tectonic plates are the gigantic shards into which Earth is broken up. Layered on them are the continents and the seas. These plates are constantly in motion – colliding with, diverging with, or sliding past one another. The Indian plate collided with the Eurasian plate and the crust tilted upwards, creating the Himalayas. The fractured zones along which they interact create the fault lines where earthquakes occur. By studying these faults and the pattern of past earthquakes, seismologists can estimate how much latent energy at these fault lines, which can run thousands of miles, has been released and how much of it still resides in them.

Scientists have long warned of a massive, overdue earthquake in the Garhwal-Kumaon range because of what is known about the pattern of quakes in the region. The records of the last 300 years suggest that those that have occurred have not released all the pent-up energy and that is why there is a broad consensus among experts that an 8-magnitude temblor is overdue. Unfortunately, predicting the day and time is outside the ambit of current science. Thus, the best we can hope for is insulation against the projected damage. It is in this context that infrastructure development in the Himalayan region must be viewed. While several of these projects are intended to smooth the movement of people and goods, the recurrent landslides and glacial lake outbursts that wash away dams, hydropower projects, and roads serve as a constant reminder of the inherent fragility of the region. Every form of infrastructure in the region – power plant or dam – must take into account the imminence of a major earthquake and the associated costs factored into planning. Adhering to already existing building codes, not only in the Himalayas but in the surrounding Indo-Gangetic plains, can go a long way in limiting the inevitable damage.



We need accessibility rules that are based on principles

The Supreme Court, in *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India* (2024), held Rule 15 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Rules, 2017, violative of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

The Court reasoned that the Rule was drafted in a discretionary tone whereas the corresponding provisions (Sections 40, 44, 45, 46, 89) in the Act imposed a mandatory obligation for the government. This was significant as Rule 15 was a statutory provision under which the accessibility guidelines of respective departments and ministries were notified. Key examples include the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' guidelines for creating barrier-free environments, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' bus body code, and other accessibility standards established by the Ministries of Sports, Culture, and Information and Broadcasting.

The Court observed that these guidelines allowed discretion to the ministries and departments, which is antithetical to the mandatory language of the Act. Moreover, striking down Rule 15 also meant that the accessibility guidelines notified under the Rule lost their statutory authority. As a result, the Court gave the government three months to develop minimum mandatory accessibility requirements to govern all the sectors.

The judgment is a stark reminder of how accessibility guidelines have been created in silos without the identification of normative principles that will ensure universality and intersectionality to those guidelines. Thus, while formulating new guidelines, there needs to be a shift towards a principle-based framework on accessibility rules.

The idea of accessibility

The Court deliberated in detail on the difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation. Accessibility and reasonable accommodation both originate within the principles of substantive equality of the Constitution. Accessibility is now accepted as a right woven throughout the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Conversely, reasonable accommodation is a facilitator of substantive equality where specific challenges are dealt with in a specific context. Therefore, both concepts should be understood as interdependent and complementary to each other, where accessibility builds the edifice through standardised accessibility standards from the outset, while reasonable accommodation ensures tailored solutions for those individuals who might still face inaccessibility in a specific context.

The idea of accessibility is not static, and the conceptual contours and corresponding tools



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have evolved regularly. For instance, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things and their incorporation into social interactions, the understanding of digital accessibility has evolved simultaneously. This makes it necessary to modify the nature, extent, and type of digitally accessible tools that can ensure broader inclusivity.

The shifting threshold also needs to be understood in the context of phased realisation of accessibility. The Court in *Rajive Raturi* observed that the existing guidelines are framed in a way that establishes long-term goals of accessibility without setting the minimum standards requiring immediate implementation. Hence, the minimum accessibility threshold shall be envisaged on a sliding scale wherein the baseline moves forward at periodical intervals. Canada has developed a comprehensive road map to achieve full accessibility by 2040, focusing on harmonising standards across the country through two work streams, with periodic reviews every five years to adapt to changing needs.

The RPwD Act defines barriers in the broadest form possible, wherein intangible barriers such as attitudinal barriers are recognised in addition to tangible barriers such as infrastructure. This has modified how accessibility is viewed and understood within physical and digital ecosystems. Thus, it is necessary to evolve accessibility parameters in theory and practice to overcome tangible and intangible barriers. For instance, the evolving understanding of disability is an aspect that informs the attitude of society and, hence, directly relates to the attitudinal barrier. Thus, accessibility must also align with this evolution of disability understanding to be truly inclusive.

The understanding of universal design has also evolved over time. It is not just limited to persons with disabilities but also includes every vulnerable community, such as women, children, and the elderly. This reflects a tacit recognition of the universality of disability, which is not identified as an individual's incapacity to perform but rather the composition of the environment in which one operates. Disability may arise from a high cognitive workload causing an inability to focus and control emotions, temporarily broken limbs, unavailability of ramps to a pregnant mother, age-related complications, etc. Thus, the rules should be applicable across groups, providing accessibility in the general sense and not exclusive to persons with disabilities.

Compliance with social audit

Section 48 of the RPwD Act mandates the Central and State governments to regularly undertake social audits of all general schemes and programmes to ensure they do not have an

adverse impact on the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities. Social audits play a vital role in developing and strengthening the accountability of the government and service providers. For instance, regular social audits of schemes providing assistance technologies to persons with disabilities can assess the bottlenecks in the delivery of services, identify the changing needs of individuals, and provide better devices.

However, due to the lack of standardised guidelines under the RPwD Rules, there is no clarity on the scope and methodology of social audits. This might lead to inconsistencies among the Centre and the States, lack of awareness, and insufficient training for auditors. Therefore, clear guidelines and operationalisation of social audits at a larger scale will help identify the changing nature of disability-related challenges and make targeted interventions to enhance service delivery through concerned schemes and programmes.

Rules have to be understandable

The earlier accessibility rules across departments and ministries suffered from bureaucratic complexity regarding their mandate. There were too many technicalities and often contradictory accessibility mandates from multiple ministries that confused the complying entities. For instance, a sporting complex has multiple guidelines for accessibility from the Ministry of Urban Affairs and Housing, Sports, Transport, and others. This led to not just a failure to provide objective parameters but also increased the compliance cost for such establishments. During the proceeding under the redressal mechanism, the complex and overlapping guidelines also delayed the relief sought by persons with disabilities.

The new accessibility rules must be direct, understandable, and practical to ensure effective implementation. The ambiguity in department/ministry jurisdiction that plagued the earlier rules should also be addressed by having a nodal authority, ideally, the sector regulators, and in the absence of it, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment should adjudicate on rules.

The deadline for releasing the new accessibility guidelines is February, subject to extension. Thus, there is a necessity for diverse sectors, both private and public, beyond social services such as financial, technological, transport, to deliberate upon the minimum rules of accessibility. This isn't just warranted by the legislative mandate of the RPwD Act but also a market incentive to tap into the large population base by providing accessible products and services.

The new accessibility rules must be direct, understandable, and practical to ensure effective implementation



India releases compilation of 10,000 human genomes from 83 population groups

The 'Genome India' database will be available to researchers across the world; it will serve as a template for investigations into disease, drug therapy; PM says it will strengthen biotech economy

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India has completed and made available a year-long compilation of 10,000 human genomes representing 83 population groups, making up about 2% of the country's 4,600 population groups, as a database. This collection will serve as a template of future investigations into disease and drug therapy.

The 'Genome India' database, as it is known, will now be available to researchers across the world for investigation and is housed at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC), in Faridabad, Haryana.

A first analysis of the genomes estimates around 27 million low-frequency (or relatively rare) variants, with 7 million of them not found in similar reference databases around the world. Certain population groups show higher frequencies of alleles, or different versions of the same gene. Over the last two de-



A major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. GETTY IMAGES

acades, many countries have created databases of the genomes of their population – for a variety of purposes including estimating disease risks, adverse drug reactions, establishing genealogy and DNA-profiling databases.

However, a major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. "The discoveries from Genome India are not just scientific

– they hold the potential for targeted clinical interventions, advancing precision medicine for better healthcare," said Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh, at an event here to announce the project.

Researchers wishing to access the genomes must send in a proposal that will be perused by an independent panel with a commit-

ment that will adhere to data sharing and privacy policies. Though the database stores information on population groups, this data will not be classified by the names of castes or tribes but will be numerically coded, Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, told *The Hindu*.

Describing the project as "historic", Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a video address, said this paved the way for India strengthening the biotechnology economy as well as biotechnology-based manufacturing.

Experts said that while only a small fraction of India's population groups were studied, the door was open to expanding the database to a million genomes. "Though costs are a limiting factor, a million would dramatically scale insight into India's genetic diversity," said Kumaraswamy Thangaraj of the Centre for Cellular Microbiology, Hyderabad and one of the project leaders.

PM to open Z-Morh tunnel, a key part of Kashmir-Ladakh corridor

To be inaugurated on January 13, the tunnel, in Ganderbal district, is key to keeping the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year; it is touted as a milestone in building the strategic corridor between Kashmir and Ladakh

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Z-Morh tunnel is set to become the first major milestone in the effort to build a strategic corridor between Kashmir and Ladakh which is open all through the year, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi slated to inaugurate it on January 13.

The tunnel, in Ganderbal district, is key to keeping the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year. Earlier, snowfall and avalanches would cut off the tourist spot every winter.

This will be Mr. Modi's first visit to Kashmir since an elected government took over the reins in the Union Territory. A security assessment of the project was done on Thursday to set up foolproof security arrangements ahead of the PM's visit. Security across the Valley, especially in Srinagar, has been stepped up and additional checkpoints set up on the main roads.

Hoteliers are enthusiastic about the tunnel. "It was much needed to have Sonamarg on the winter tourism map of Kashmir.



A view of the Z-Morh tunnel that connects Gagangir and Sonamarg. FILE PHOTO

There is a need to open up new winter destinations in Kashmir given the growing footfall. It would be safe to drive to Sonamarg in winter now," said Sajid Majeed, a hotelier.

At present, most hotels remain closed because of unreliable road access and infrastructure problems.

Built under the mountain glacier of Thajiwas Glacier between Gagangir and Sonamarg, the tunnel bypasses the landslide- and avalanche-prone pockets of the road, officials

said. An intelligent traffic management system will make it easier to control the flow of vehicles and will also open up the Thajiwas Glacier and Sindh River for adventure tourism, an official added.

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also welcomed the tunnel. "J&K, especially central Kashmir, looks forward to the inauguration of a vital piece of infrastructure in the coming days. This asset will be a game changer for the expansion of winter tourism

in the valley," Mr. Abdullah said in a post on X.

Strategic route

Built at a cost of ₹2,680 crore, the 6.5-km long two-lane tunnel is a key feature of the strategic access route to Ladakh. The main tunnel is 10.8 metres long, with a modified horseshoe-shaped escape tunnel of 7.5 metres, D-shaped ventilation tunnel of 8.3 metres, two major culverts of 110 metres and 270 metres, and one small culvert which is 30 metres long.

The project faced a major militant attack on October 21 last year, which left seven APCO Infratech workers, including a doctor, dead at the construction site.

The Z-Morh will lead towards the Zojila tunnel, which is being constructed nearby. The Zojila, Asia's longest tunnel will cut through the Himalayan range at Zojila Pass to reach the Kargil district in Ladakh. The 13.14-km long tunnel is coming up at a cost of ₹6,800 crore. Officials said a 7.57-metre long horseshoe-shaped single-tube, two-lane tunnel will pass under the Zojila Pass between Ganderbal in Kashmir and Drass town in Kargil.

"It will bring the travel time from three hours to 20 minutes between Ganderbal and Kargil," officials said. Ladakh is currently cut off during winter, as the Zojila Pass, the only road that connects Kashmir with Ladakh, is closed in December, with its reopening dependent on the melting of snow at mountain passes along its route. At times, the road would stay closed till April.



Sixth-generation aero-engine can be developed by tying up with foreign firm: DRDO chief

Dinakar Peri

NEW DELHI

The only way India can develop a sixth-generation aero-engine and other technologies required is by co-development with a foreign manufacturer, Samir V. Kamat, Chairman of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), said while noting that India currently invests only 5% of its defence budget for research and development, which needs to increase to 15%.

To realise that capability, he said the country will have to invest close to \$4 billion to \$5 billion, that is ₹40,000 crore to 50,000 crore.

His remarks come against the backdrop of huge delays in the development of indigenous fighter jets, while China has made rapid progress in this area.

“If we look at what we need to do in terms of technologies, the first priority



DRDO chief Samir V. Kamat with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the International Defence and Aerospace Expo last year. ANI

is aero-engines. Today, we have demonstrated a fourth-generation aero-engine for our fighter aircraft but going ahead we will need a sixth-generation aero-engine where the thrust to weight ratios exceed 10,” Mr. Kamat said, speaking at an event two days ago.

He detailed various technologies that need to be developed such as single-crystal blade powder metallurgy discs and ceramic matrix composites for static parts to begin with.

“And if we have to do this and deliver an aero-engine the only way I can see is if we do a co-development with a foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer.”

Elaborating further, he said various facilities have to be set up – testing facilities for each sub-system, a high-altitude test facility, flying test-bed, manufacturing facilities to make the disc which would need investing in a forge press which can press 50,000 tonnes, and so on.

Modi calls for documenting diaspora history

Addressing Pravasi Bharatiya Divas event in Bhubaneswar, PM lauds journey of Persons of Indian Origin and speaks about their remarkable achievements; he also highlights country's global role; he emphasises Girmityas, indentured labourers who were sent before Independence to many countries, including Fiji, Seychelles, Malaysia, Mauritius

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Lauding the journey of Persons of Indian Origin across different eras to various countries, their remarkable achievements, and contributions to the societies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for documenting the history of the Indian diaspora.

Addressing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas here, he said, "The history of the Indian diaspora across the globe, their journeys to various countries, and their remarkable stories of success form a unique part of India's heritage. There are many interesting and inspiring stories which deserve to be told, seen, and documented. They represent our shared legacies and cultural heritage."

Mr. Modi said in a world in turmoil due to wars across the globe, the future lay in Buddha, a symbol of peace, rather than in war.

Symbol of peace

"Right here in Odisha is the place named Dhauli which is a great symbol of peace. Emperor Ashoka had chosen the path of peace here while the world was expanding empires through the power of the sword. This is the strength of our heritage, with the inspiration of which India can say to the world today that the future lies in Buddha and not in war," he said.

"The pace at which 21st-century India is advancing and the scale of its development efforts are unprecedented. In just a decade, the country has lifted 25 crore people out of poverty. During the same pe-



Key event: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. ANI

riod, India has risen from being the world's 10th largest economy to the fifth largest. It won't be long before India secures its position as the third largest

economy in the world," Mr. Modi said.

Underlining the country's growing global role due to its achievements and prospects, the Prime

Minister said, "Today's India not only firmly asserts its own point but also strongly amplifies the voice of the Global South. The World patiently listens

to what India says."

The Prime Minister emphasised on the Girmityas, indentured labourers, who were sent from pre-independent India to various countries, including Fiji, Mauritius, Seychelles, Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago, British Guiana, and Suriname, to work under colonial arrangements.

"Why cannot comprehensive database of Girmityas be created? This could document the villages and States they originated from, the destinations they settled in, and the journeys that shaped their lives. It could also as to how they converted challenges into opportunities.

To bring their stories to a wider audience, films and documentaries could be produced," Prime Minister Modi said.

"There should be study

and research on Girmityas' history. Chairs can be established in universities. At regular intervals, world Girmitya conference can be organised. I will tell my team to explore possibilities on this aspect and work to take this forward," he said.

The Prime Minister mentioned about a few families which migrated from Gujarat and settled in Oman.

"Their 250 years of journey is quite inspiring. Thousands of documents related to them have been digitised and exhibited. Besides, an oral history project has been done by documenting experiences shared by senior-most members of the community. Similar efforts should be made on Indian diaspora who had gone to different countries," he said.

