

TELLING NUMBERS

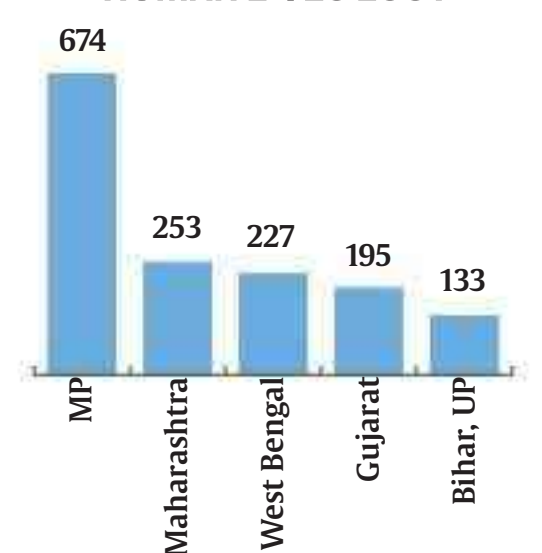
Monsoon toll: 2,400 human lives, highest in Madhya Pradesh

FLOODS DURING the southwest monsoon this year claimed 2,391 human lives in 24 states, besides leaving 15,729 cattle dead. While the southwest monsoon season typically runs between June and September, these deaths were recorded between June 1 and November 14, according to data released by the Ministry of Home Affairs during the Winter Session of Parliament. Replying to a question, the Ministry said 8,00,067 houses were damaged and 63.97 lakh hectares of cropped areas were affected due to floods, landslides, cloudbursts and other hydro-meteorological hazards. The highest number of human lives lost was 674 in Madhya Pradesh, followed by Maharashtra (253), West Bengal (227), Gujarat (195) and Bihar (133).

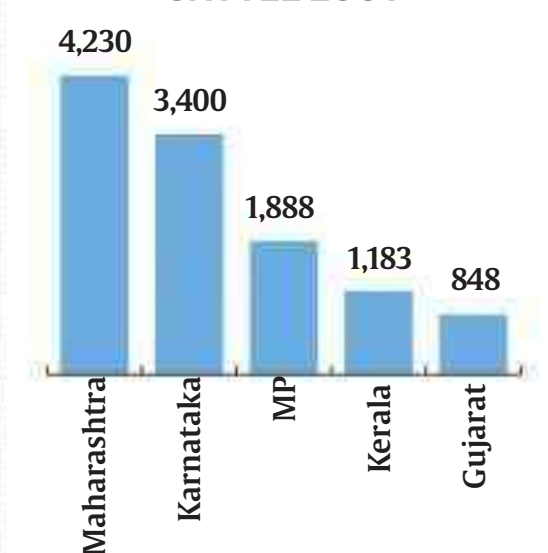
and UP (133 each). The highest number of cattle deaths was 4,230 in Maharashtra, followed by Karnataka (3,400), Madhya Pradesh (1,888), Kerala (1,183) and Gujarat (848). Assam had the highest number of houses damaged (1,31,949), followed by MP (1,18,386), Karnataka (1,15,792), Maharashtra (1,09,714) and West Bengal (83,787). The largest cropped area damaged, in lakh hectares, was in Rajasthan (27.36), followed by Karnataka (9.35), UP (8.88), Madhya Pradesh (6.04) and Maharashtra (4.17).

This year, the monsoon rainfall received in September was about 152 per cent more than normal, and over 560 extreme rainfall events were recorded, as per the Indian Meteorological Department.

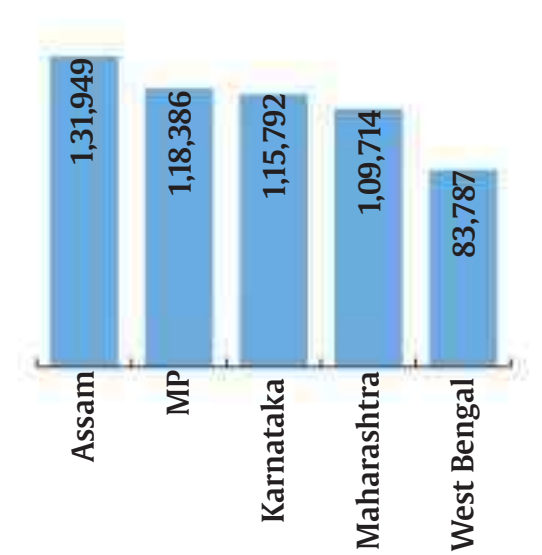
HUMAN LIVES LOST



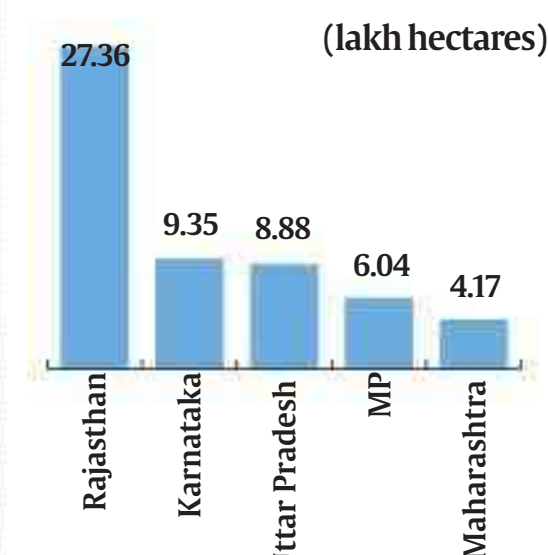
CATTLE LOST



HOUSES DAMAGED



CROPPED AREA DAMAGED



Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

THIS WORD MEANS

IDRIS ELBA

A wasp species. Why was it named after the actor?

IN THE Marvel Cinematic Universe, British actor Idris Elba stars as Heimdall. The character has an almost namesake: Heimdallr, a Norse deity believed to be the sole protector of the bridge linking the human world and the realm of the gods. Now, scientists have given the name *Idris elba* to a species of wasp that is again a protector — of crops. The wasp, recently discovered in Mexico, was found living as a parasite in the eggs of another insect, known as the bagrada bug, which is a major pest of cruciferous vegetables.

In fact, the genus *Idris* already exists, having been described in 1856. It now contains over 300 species, including the newest one discovered and given the species name *elba*. While other species of the *Idris* genus were known to only parasitise spider eggs, specimens of *Idris elba* have now been found to emerge from eggs of the bagrada bug.



Idris elba. Source: Pensoft Publishers

The species is described in the *Journal of Hymenoptera Research*. The research team comprised scientists from Colegio de Postgraduados (Mexico), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Florida State Collection of Arthropods.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why are birds dying at Sambhar?

Carcasses of over 18,000 migratory birds have been buried in 10 days after they were found at India's largest inland saltwater lake. What has the probe for causes found; why is changing ecology a concern?

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, NOVEMBER 20

OVER THE last 10 days, thousands of migratory birds have been found dead at Sambhar Lake, about 80 km southwest of Jaipur city. Officials have buried over 18,000 carcasses so far. While there is no clarity yet on what has caused the deaths, investigations so far suggest avian botulism, a paralytic and frequently fatal disease caused by the ingestion of toxins.

What birds have been found dead?

Sambhar Lake is India's largest inland saltwater lake at 230 sq km, spread mostly across Jaipur and Nagaur districts and also a part of Ajmer. It has a catchment area of 5,700 square km, with the water depth fluctuating between 60 cm in the dry season to about 3 metres at the end of the monsoon.

Every year, the lake attracts thousands of migratory birds. A total 83 species of water birds have been recorded at the lake, the most abundant of which are little grebe, great crested grebe, great white pelican, little cormorant, black stork, and darter, apart from various species of plovers, egrets, herons, and geese.

Birds of about 25-30 species have now been found dead, including northern shoveller, Brahminy duck, pied avocet, Kentish plover and tufted duck. The trend began on November 10 when visitors found a large number of dead birds. More and more were found over the next several days. Until Wednesday, November 20, the Rajasthan government had, using various agencies, buried 18,422 bird carcasses to prevent the spread of infection. Of these, 8,825 were disposed of in Jaipur and 9,597 in Nagaur. Officials also rescued 748 birds, of which around 400 were still alive as of Wednesday.

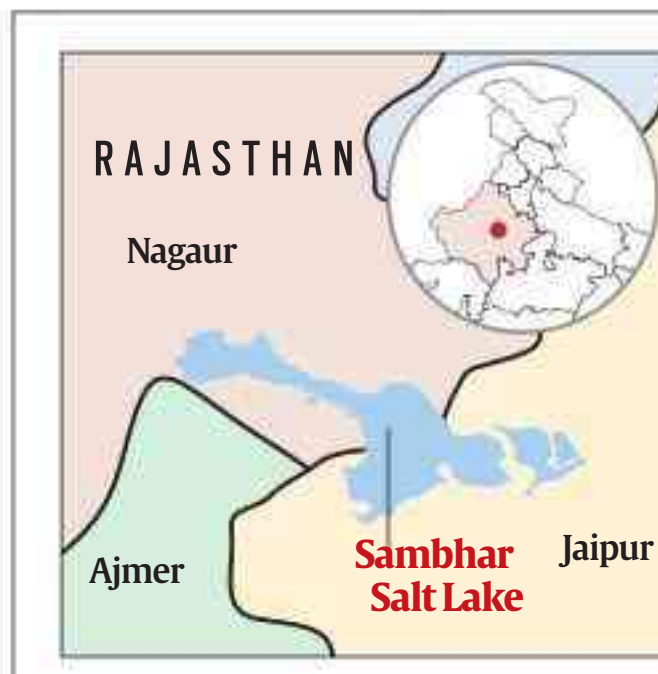
Officials said the number of dead birds being found each day is declining now. From a peak of 3,265 and 2,696 burials respectively on November 15 and 16, the count had reduced to 441 by November 20 (74 in Jaipur and 367 in Nagaur). Combing operations are, however, still on.

How much is known so far about the cause of death?

The evidence points to avian botulism, but this has not been officially confirmed. "On the basis of history, epidemiological observations, classical clinical symptoms and postmortem findings, the most probable diagnosis is avian botulism," said a report by the Apex Centre for Animal Disease Investigation, Monitoring



A worker places a dead bird into a sack at the Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan on Monday, November 11. PTI



CARCASS COUNT

DATE	BIRDS DISPOSED	JAIPUR	NAGAU
November 11	716	-	-
November 12	1,622	-	-
November 13	1,922	-	-
November 14	540	-	-
November 15	1,829	1,436	-
November 16	1,393	1,303	-
November 17	386	5,279	-
November 18	151	877	-
November 19	192	355	-
November 20	74	367	-
TOTAL	8,825	9,597	

and Surveillance at the College of Veterinary and Animal Science under the Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (RAJUVAS), Bikaner. "The clinical signs exhibited by affected birds included dullness, depression, anorexia, flaccid paralysis in legs and wings, and neck touching the ground. The birds were unable to walk, swim, or take flight. There was no rise of body temperature, no nasal discharge, no respiratory distress or any other sign."

But why is it taking so long to establish the cause of death?

The government is waiting for reports from various sources to establish the exact cause. It has so far engaged eight institutions and agencies, but has received complete reports from only two: RAJUVAS and the

National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD) in Bhopal. While RAJUVAS has suggested avian botulism, NIHSAD has ruled out bird flu.

Partial reports have been received from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and the Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board. Reports are awaited from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly; the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) in Coimbatore, the Bombay Natural History Society, and the Sambhar Salt Limited joint venture.

Is there a concern for human health?

Humans are primarily at risk from avian botulism only if they eat infected fish or birds. While NIHSAD has ruled out bird flu, this was what was feared initially. Personnel were di-

rected to adopt appropriate prophylactic measures such as use of masks and gloves and burial of carcasses in deep pits with limestone.

How common is avian botulism?

There have been several waterfowl botulism outbreaks. Between 1995 and 1997 in Alberta, 1,17,000 in Manitoba, and 1 million in Saskatchewan. In 1997, another 5,14,000 birds died due to botulism in Green Salt Lake, Utah, US. In 1952, an epizootic outbreak killed 4-5 million waterfowl across western US.

What could be other possible reasons for the bird deaths at Sambhar Lake?

After a Division Bench of the Rajasthan High Court led by Chief Justice Indrajit Mahanty took cognisance of the deaths, the Rajasthan government listed likely reasons:

- Viral infection;
- Toxicity, as a new area has been filled up after almost 20 years, and there could be higher concentration of salts along the edges;
- Bacteriological infection; and
- Higher temperature and high water levels due to a good monsoon. This might have led to an increase in competition for resources. The weaker individuals, exhausted from the long journey, perhaps were unable to compete, and may have succumbed to stress emanating from the shortage of food, susceptibility to disease/pollutants/toxins and other habitat-related factors in the wintering grounds, the government suggested. If that is the reason, the government said it is expected that with fall of temperature and lowering of water levels, incidence of such mortality will go down.

What are the reasons that make salt concentration a concern?

In a 2016 directive, the National Green Tribunal had noted the impact of the salt industry — including "unauthorised salt pans" — on the ecosystem of Sambhar Lake and asked the state government to cancel allotment of salt pans. Over the last week, the Wildlife Institute of India, the State Pollution Control Board and Sambhar Salts Ltd have collected samples to test for water quality. Part of the lake has been leased to Sambhar Salts, a joint venture of Hindustan Salts Limited and the state government. Sambhar Salts produces 196,000 tonnes of clean salt every year, which is around 9 per cent of India's salt production.

The lake was recognised as a wetland of international importance when it was designated as a UNESCO Ramsar Site in 1990. Today, as per NGO Wetlands International, it has the worst possible Wetland Health Score at E.

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

Issues at lake: management, hydrology, salt pans



HARSH VARDHAN

Have there ever been so many bird deaths in India? What can the cause be?

No, never. The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History in Coimbatore and Wildlife Institute of India (Dehradun) will give you the causes.

How well has the government handled the situation?

The government does not have the capability to handle such a crisis; they are overwhelmed by an unexpected calamity. But whom should we blame? The Forest Department does not even have an office

there. Personnel from the Animal Husbandry Department personnel have been sent there but they don't even have access to drinking water, let alone make a cup of tea, because the water is saline.

What can the government do?

The government should pass legislation in the Assembly to create a Sambhar Lake Development and Conservation Authority. This authority should be handed A to Z responsibility of Sambhar Lake. Currently, no one is there. No official is ready to speak and every government department passes the buck to Forest or Irrigation. The Revenue Department says they had the land once; Panchayat says that they had the land but gave it to Hindustan Salts Limited, and Hindustan Salts is now not ready to talk; they are not even answering calls.

We are now telling the government that you have not done anything all these years, yet we do not wish to criticise you, but do something at least now. Set up the Sambhar Development Authority along the lines of Odisha's Chilika Development Authority for

Chilika Lake, and make the Chief Minister its Chairman. CM Ashok Gehlot should speak to Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik today and ask him to send over Ajit Patnaik, former chief of Chilika Development Authority, for help in setting up the Sambhar Lake Authority.

What are the issues at Sambhar that need to be addressed immediately?

There is no document about management of Sambhar Lake. World Wildlife Fund had created a document about 22 years ago, and it is now outdated. A fresh document should study why the water from four rivers, which flows into the lake, has decreased over the years. It should study the hydrology, sedimentation, the increase or decrease in depth of the lake, as well as birds, animals, their food sources, etc.

What are the possible reasons for deteriorating ecology at Sambhar Lake?

The absolute lack of management, the lack of bandobast. You [government] have set it loose, and handed it [partially] to Hindustan Salts Limited which did not do

anything and is itself making losses.

In 2016, National Green Tribunal had acted on a complaint that alleged the presence of illegal salt pans at Sambhar Lake. Are those still active?

Dher saarey, plenty of them. And all belong to politicians, sarpanches, MLAs, MPs, ministers. More are in Nagaur. But there is no one to share this information as there is no one who is answerable. For example, Jaipur Development Authority and Jaipur Municipal Corporation are ready to talk about Jaipur, but there is no one for Sambhar. The death of birds should make the government take concrete steps.

Harsh Vardhan, an ecologist with over four decades of work, is currently the Honorary Secretary of Tourism and Wildlife Society of India. He was previously Rajasthan Director of the World Wildlife Fund and been associated with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and International Crane Foundation. He spoke to Hamza Khan in Jaipur.

What is IPRS, the artists' body that has gone to police against Yash Raj Films?

MOHAMED THAYER
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 20

THE ECONOMIC Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai Police has registered an FIR against Yash Raj Films (YRF) Pvt Ltd, its chairman and managing director Aditya Chopra, his brother Uday Chopra, and others for alleged criminal breach of trust and failure to pay an estimated Rs 100 crore in royalty to several music composers and writers since 2012.

The FIR was registered on a complaint by the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS). This is the first criminal case initiated by the IPRS after it was re-registered as a copyright society in 2017. YRF did not respond to questions regarding the case.

What is the Indian Performing Right Society, and how does it function?

The IPRS is a representative body of artists, including music owners, composers, lyricists, and publishers of music, which collects royalties due to the artists if their work is used anywhere from a wedding to a New Year function or on radio or TV — in other words, wherever music is played. The body was set up in 1969, and re-registered as a copyright society in 2017, following which it started functioning actively.

The IPRS has its offices in Mumbai, and lyricist Javed Akhtar is its chairman.

A 2012 amendment in The Copyright Act, 1957 laid down that artists would get 50% of royalties every time their work was used, even if the copyright remained with the production house or the music brand. Which meant that every time a song was played in, say, a large party in a hotel or by a radio station, or streamed or even used as a mobile

phone ringtone, 50% of the royalty would go to the production house or music company, and the other 50% would be split between the lyricist and composer of the song.

The IPRS is responsible for collecting the 50% royalty that is due to artists involved in "literary work accompanied to music" — meaning lyricists, music composers, and publishers of music.

While even individual artists can theoretically approach the users of their work directly, it is likely to be a difficult and long drawn-out process. As members of IPRS, they have better infrastructure at their disposal to press their claim and collect the money due to them.

How does the process of licensing with the IPRS work?

The IPRS has a database of around 10 million songs, including Indian and interna-

national numbers, for which it collects royalty.

If cases of big events, the IPRS generally approaches the organisers beforehand to inform them about the licensing required to play the songs of artists who are registered with them. Most online streaming platforms are registered with IPRS, and licensed to use the artists' songs.

After being re-registered as a copyright society in 2017 under the amended Copyright Act, the IPRS sent letters to all media platforms, asking them to ensure that artists are paid 50% of the royalty as per the Act.

In 2017-18, the IPRS collected Rs 45 crore in royalty on behalf of artists, and in the following year (2018-19), it collected Rs 166 crore. Between 2012 and 2017, annual collections was usually under Rs 40 crore, an IPRS official said.

In April this year, IPRS distributed royalties of more than Rs 20 crore to composers,

songwriters, and publishers.

What can IPRS do if songs are used without licence?

IPRS has both civil and criminal remedies available to it under The Copyright Act. It has filed civil suits in 20-25 cases earlier, but the move against YRF was the IPRS's first criminal complaint.

According to IPRS, YRF was one of the entities it had written to after 2017, seeking royalty for artists. However, despite the amendment to The Copyright Act, YRF allegedly paid only a minuscule amount to artists. After the dispute remained unresolved despite the exchange of several letters, IPRS lodged a formal complaint with the Mumbai Police some two months ago.

Since the amount involved was high, the matter was handed over to the EOW. After inquiring into the matter for around two

months, the police registered an FIR against YRF on charges of criminal breach of trust, along with sections of The Copyright Act.

What difference has IPRS made for artists seeking copyright dues?

While IPRS has some numbers to show, not all artists are satisfied that it has delivered on its promise. Some music companies and production houses have allegedly found ways to dodge the requirement of sharing royalty with artists. On some occasions, the fees paid to artists are termed as "advance royalty", meaning the royalty has already been paid; on other occasions, the artist is allegedly offered a deal to sign a letter giving the royalty back to the music company. Some big production houses that don't get along with IPRS have started their own body to collect royalties for artists working on their projects, say these artists.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BULLY ON CAMPUS

Fee hike is a symptom, as government watches JNU administration turn on its own students

ON TUESDAY, JAWAHARLAL Nehru University's (JNU) administration moved a contempt of court petition in Delhi High Court against the institution's own students. The university authorities have drawn on a court order from August 2017, which "bans protests within 100 yards of JNU's administrative block". The petition is the latest in a series of antagonistic postures that have driven a wedge deeper between the university administration and its students, and thrown JNU into turmoil for nearly a month. The students are protesting against a hike in fees, which they claim is steep. But, by all accounts, the anger and restlessness on campus is also stoked by the administration's pattern of high-handedness. In this case, the fee hike was imposed without even a modicum of consultation with the student body. Then, to students worried about their educational prospects and careers, the JNU authorities have repeatedly given the message that their agitation will be treated as a law and order problem.

The JNU Act 1966, enshrines "social justice" as one of the university's objectives. "The University shall endeavour to promote... social justice, secularism, national integration, democratic ways of life, international understanding and scientific approach to the problems of society," it says. JNU's deprivation points system, discontinued for research scholars in 2017, enabled many students from marginalised communities and backward regions to enter the university's portals. In a country beset with myriad oppressions of caste, gender, and increasingly, religion, the university's classrooms, libraries, hostels, canteens and dhabas have been among the precious spaces where the young from disadvantaged sections can debate, discuss, disagree, and cultivate friendships with their peers from the more privileged strata of society. Around 40 per cent of students admitted to the university in 2017 had a parental income of less than Rs 12,000 per month, according to the university's annual report for 2017-2018. It's this egalitarian ideal and character of the university, the students believe, that will be imperiled by the increase in fees. As a report in this paper last week showed, those likely to be hurt by the hike include those from families with an annual income of less than Rs 50,000, students from families that have lost their sole earning member, women graduates with working class backgrounds.

Universities in democratic societies are the natural home for political discussion, provocative ideas, even dissent. But since 2016, it has seemed that the ruling dispensation has targeted the university, especially JNU, because of its reputation of being a bastion for the left-leaning. Through a variety of incursions in JNU, the BJP-led government has sent out the message that it will go after institutions it accuses of a "nationalism deficit". The JNU administration and its vice-chancellor may have fallen in unresistingly with this project but the government must know that the apparent heavy-handedness with students makes it look, not strong and decisive, but like a bully.

TAMIL TEASER

Promise of Rajinikanth-Kamal Haasan tango in electoral politics is exciting. But they might need more than star power

A TEASER FROM the two mega stars of Tamil cinema, Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, on Tuesday, of a possible political blockbuster has created a stir in the state. Though both have punctuated their statement about "joining hands" with several caveats, the idea has the potential to turn the assembly election slated for 2021 into a gripping show. A Rajini-Kamal joint entry is likely to add fizz to the campaign, which, in the absence of AIADMK supremo J Jayalalitha and DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi, is predicted to be a boring affair.

So far, the ageing superstars have had limited traction in Tamil Nadu even though they announced their entry in electoral politics some time ago. Even as Rajinikanth said he was preparing for the next assembly election and skipped the May general election, Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) contested all the Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. MNM candidates lost their deposits in all the seats and a number of its candidates finished third behind DMK and AIADMK in urban constituencies. The two actor-politicians have so far been vague about ideology, while offering issue-centric responses, and talking in general terms about the need to do good for the state. But neither of them has rejected the political paradigm and the goals the Dravidian Movement set in the 1950s and '60s, among them social justice and Tamil pride. However, there has been speculation that the BJP may align with Rajinikanth and that the latter could be projected as the face of a non-Dravidian political coalition.

While voter fatigue threatens the prospects of the AIADMK and DMK, Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan will have to offer a clear and coherent political agenda to emerge as an alternative. To begin with, the two men will have to agree on core issues — Rajinikanth welcomed the abrogation of Article 370 whereas Haasan described it as an "assault on democracy". For all their love of films, people in Tamil Nadu make a distinction between cinema and governance. Rajinikanth and Haasan would do well to realise that while their star power may pull in the crowds, they will need to spell out their political agenda to convince even their fans to vote for them. It is useful, here, to remember a certain MGR, the popular hero-turned-successful politician, who had put in many years in the DMK as a member, campaigner and fund-raiser before branching out with his own political party.

ART, ERODED

International Film Festival of India gives prominent place to mainstream films. That may not be its mandate

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM Festival of India (IFFI) self-professedly aims to "provide a common platform to project the excellence of the art of film-making". In its 50th edition, now playing in Goa, it may need to renew its commitment to its mandate. The imperatives of the mainstream market — stars, box office collections, or even being accessible to a broad audience — are not meant to animate the IFFI. But, as iconic film-maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan told this newspaper, the IFFI is increasingly distancing itself from its stated purpose.

The Indian Panorama section at the IFFI, according to Gopalakrishnan, is important because "it showcases the best of our production every year". This year, 12 of the 26 films being showcased are commercial, mainstream works. Critics, producers and even the discerning audience at a film festival expect more than merely fare that has been successful commercially. "Sadly, with our stupid effort to preen the producers of worthless films, we are providing them with equal status and esteem as the quality filmmakers," says Gopalakrishnan.

He flags an important issue. For festivals the aim is, it must be, the discovery of the new, even the discomfiting; where cinema is art, not just a business proposition. Conversation with the alternative space in Indian cinema has only enriched the mainstream. Excellence in the former is based primarily on artistic merit. By introducing films that are judged by a different yardstick, the IFFI would be placating the audience rather than challenging it. Since 2015, when the festival removed films from the FTII seemingly due to protests by students against the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as the film school's director, it has lost some of its credibility. It can ill-afford to let the temptations of commerce and glamour erode its image further.

Let them have English

In the absence of a real measure of the school's role, we pick on the medium gap, declare it the culprit



KRISHNA KUMAR

THE LANGUAGE USED by teachers to explain is known as "medium of instruction" in our system. This usage has a considerable history now. It reminds us that education was once regarded as instruction. One would like to believe that things have changed now and that education now covers a wider spectrum of efforts and effects. Had this change in the public perception of education actually occurred, no one would easily share the Andhra Pradesh government's hope that children studying in government schools will now have a bright future because they are going to switch to English medium instruction from Grade I.

Some years ago, I had an unforgettable personal encounter with the medium problem in Mumbai. Two officials of the municipality were with me on a school visit. There were seven schools in that space, each with a different medium. I spent half an hour in a Grade II classroom where the medium was Hindi. After the period, I got a brief chance to speak to the teacher who was a Marathi-speaking young woman. I asked her if there were children in her class with Hindi-Marathi parents. She said: "Quite a few." I asked her: "Do you sometimes use Marathi to explain things to these children?" Her answer stunned me. "I am not allowed to speak Marathi in my classes because this is a Hindi-medium school," she said. The last question I remember asking her was: "Who stops you from speaking your mother tongue?" Instead of answering, she looked at the officials standing beside me. It is hard to say what her gaze meant. It is unlikely that someone had actually stopped her from using Marathi in her classes. More likely, she felt constrained because she had been posted at a Hindi-medium school.

In Andhra Pradesh, the government hopes that English-medium instruction will have a transformative effect. There are plans to re-train teachers and use the new machinery of communication. The pedagogy market is full of attractive teaching devices, and language teaching forms a big segment of this market. The expectation that technology will push our moribund system into a carnival of cre-

ativity is widespread. No one is supposed to have any doubt about that. The buzz word is innovation, and digital devices are the best bet to promote it.

It is, of course, true that judicious use of technology can enhance the teacher's effort. So was it when radio sets were distributed across the system. But the hype didn't help. Now when smart boards are replacing black boards and chalk, we need to ask why teacher training remains poor and school life so regimented. Teachers have always been at the receiving end. Had they been consulted in Andhra, the switch-over to English-medium might not have happened in such a dramatic manner.

Educational reforms are not like economic reforms. The latter are publicly debated every evening. Plenty of voices keep asking for more and speedier reforms in the economy. Since the 1990s, there has been considerable consensus on what it means to reform the economy. There is no such consensus in education.

That is why the decision announced by the Andhra government will impress many as a radical reform while others will shake their heads in resignation and see it as a political gimmick. It is assumed that parents whose children study in government schools will not mind this sharp switch-over. In all probability, they will appreciate it. Like politicians, many parents have zeroed in on English-medium teaching as a solution to the problems their children suffer in government schools and after passing out.

Parental vision has not shrunk overnight. The medium gap has been growing for several decades now in every part of the nation. It is a measure of social distance, between schools ruled by bureaucratic norms and others who feel more free. The difference between the two types is not always clear. It is a common belief that private schools prepare the child for the brave new world of competition, while government schools don't worry about their children. In the absence of any real measurement of the school's role in shaping children's future, public and political imagina-

tion picks on the medium gap and declares it the culprit.

Without exception, all policy documents favour the mother tongue as the best medium of education, especially in the early grades. Those who favour English from the start point towards private schools and ask why government school children alone must carry the burden of implementing the policy. That is a valid point. Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Successive governments have failed to influence the private school world on the question of medium. Introducing English as a medium in government schools, thus, acquires a populist appeal.

To put up a stronger case for the mother tongue, we will have to go into the deeper debate — about learning itself. At the primary level, it means connecting things with words. To do that, the child's language provides a richer resource. The primary teacher who uses the child's language has a great advantage. Whether she makes the best use of this advantage is a different question.

Our teachers seldom feel free or encouraged to do their best; nor are they trained to exercise professional autonomy. Our teachers are used to being told what to do and they are mostly quite poorly trained. Many didn't want to be teachers in the first place, not at least at the primary level. If English is what the Andhra government wants teachers to use in the classroom, they will switch on to English — howsoever they can. Let the children fend for themselves. Private tutors will flourish.

What will happen to the children's mother tongue? The Andhra government has assured us that it will be taught as a compulsory subject. That is nice, but it is not the same thing. To stop the mother tongue from being used across the curriculum as a medium is like changing the architecture of the collective mind.

The writer is a former director of NCERT and author of *The Child's Language and the Teacher*

CHALLENGER FROM WITHIN

PS Krishnan was a rare bureaucrat who sought to reform government for marginalised



V VASANTHI DEVI

P S KRISHNAN, who left us on November 10, was an extraordinary combination of the bureaucrat-reformer-activist. His was a life driven by single-minded devotion to the cause of the deprived and exploited.

From his student days in his native Kerala and later, as a member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in the Andhra Pradesh cadre — and then in various positions including as secretary to the Government of India — he relentlessly worked for the empowerment of the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC).

He sought to mould governance and public administration into a proactive instrument of reaching out to the deprived communities. He fleshed out the true spirit of constitutional provisions and social legislation, and implemented them with uncompromising zeal, brushing aside severe opposition from powerful sections inside and outside government. Challenging India's inequities and inhumanities is not new. What is rare is the challenge emerging from within the system, from within the core of the "Steel Frame". And Krishnan's life and work are "the rarest of the rare" among Indian bureaucrats.

As a young officer in Andhra Pradesh, he conducted his official camps in Scheduled Caste bastis and tribal villages, infusing self-esteem in the depressed sections, but infuriating the upper caste-classes. In addition, the imperious officialdom did not know how to deal with this young brat, who was striking at the root of its power. They viewed him as a scourge, accusing him of "strident advocacy

of inter-caste marriages, partiality to depressed classes, trusting the words of the villagers rather than village officers and acting in a manner that helped subversive elements."

Not bothering to reply to these remarks, Krishnan went on to advocate not "inter-caste" marriages, but "anti-caste" marriages. He also said that there should be a legislation prohibiting marriages in the same caste. "I expounded the concept of 'social incest', in addition to the concept of 'biological incest'."

As early as in 1957, he launched massive drives for the distribution of agricultural land and house sites to the landless and homeless in Andhra Pradesh. His pioneering work constitutes milestones in the post-independence history of Andhra Pradesh.

His vision derives, Krishnan used to say, from a unique blend of many ideologies: Of Ambedkar, Gandhi, Marx, Periyar, Vivekananda and Narayana Guru. He used to say that he entered the civil service armed with an uncompromising commitment to fight against the entrenched caste system and untouchability, and to strive for social justice.

When he rose to senior positions, as secretary to Gol, for instance, he conceived and implemented path-breaking initiatives. He was the crucial force behind constitutional and legislative enactments like the Constitution (65th) Amendment Act, 1990, vesting constitutional status in the National Commission for SCs and STs; the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989; and, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993.

Krishnan also formulated many schemes

for the betterment of the marginalised like the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes (SCP) in 1978. His tireless efforts pulled out the Mandal Commission Report from cold storage and he persuaded V P Singh to implement it. Each of these initiatives he helmed was, inevitably, challenged in the courts. With his remarkable acumen, he drafted elaborate arguments to face the judicial process, that ultimately placed them on unassailable legal foundations. Among these were the Mandal legislation and reservations in educational institutions for SCs, STs and OBCs.

On the question of who are the oppressed sections in India — is it class or caste that is the basic unit of Indian society? — Krishnan advocates a unified caste-class approach. The basic contradiction in rural India today is between the dominant landed backward castes and landless Dalits, who constitute the main labour force. However, a large section of OBCs, particularly the innumerable service and artisanal castes, too, are landless and so there is no contradiction between these castes and Dalits. The two sections of the non-dominant, landless castes coming together and transcending caste barriers, would forge the unity of the oppressed — and lead to the liberation of society. Distribution of land to all the landless is, hence, key to the much needed transformation of Indian society. Krishnan's legacy should lead us towards the annihilation of caste and a world of justice and human rights.

The writer is former vice chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tamil Nadu

NOVEMBER 21, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

SPY PROBE ON

THE GOVERNMENT HAS already commenced investigations in the case of alleged CIA connections of a cabinet colleague of Indira Gandhi during the Bangladesh war. Disclosing this in Delhi, Deputy Prime Minister Y B Chavan said that many ministries besides his own ministry of Home, would be involved in the probe. Chavan refused to say anything more on this except that an adequate probe was necessary in this case as suspicion had been raised and allegations had been made.

INDO-BANGLA FRICTION

INDIA AND BANGLADESH have agreed to

take steps to prevent recurrence of the recent incidents on the border between Tripura and Bangladesh. The two countries signed a joint statement in Dacca, agreeing to remove "all causes of irritation" that have led to several incidents on the border, including exchange of fire between the security forces near Belonia on the Tripura border.

IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

TEN MORE HOSTAGES freed from the US embassy in Teheran flew to Europe and one of them said the 49 remaining Americans were "in greater danger than we were" from their militant Islamic captors. After 16 days as hostages, the six black men and four women

were flown to Frankfurt, West Germany via Paris and driven to a US air force hospital.

CHARAN GOVT FLAWS

CONTRARY TO THE mandate, the caretaker government of Charan Singh has got away with several major policy decisions having crucial financial implications. Following the dissolution of the Lok Sabha on August 22, the President had enjoined upon the government to desist from actions "which set new policy or involve executive decisions". But the series of concessions announced recently for railwaymen, and others, do constitute major administrative decisions and involve spending of no significant order.



15 THE IDEAS PAGE



C.R. Sasikumar

Why we must listen to JNU

Students are speaking out against the eclipse of equitable access to publicly funded education, and attempts to place education in the marketplace rather than at the disposal of the social good



PARNAL CHIRMULEY

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND faculty speaking up for publicly-funded higher education have been the object of intense vilification in sections of the media and the general public countless times in the past few years. And yet, they refuse to fade away, spilling out of campuses, fighting for equitable access to publicly-funded higher education. They refuse to be shamed into submitting to education policies that exclude large sections of the population to make way for the elite few. The background to their persistence needs to be sketched out, especially because trained and paid armies of trolls continue to plague the discourse on higher education with vitriol and lies.

The attempt to construct stereotypes of students in the public sphere as lazy, good-for-nothings who want to survive on the taxpayer's money is a clever sleight of hand by the ruling party and its offspring. Students of research universities like JNU are repeatedly castigated, supposedly by a "taxpaying public" for not earning their own living and paying fees. The argument is that money spent on their education is "a waste". It helps obfuscate the true nature of education policies by this government. It seeks to draw your attention away from the fact that equitable access to inclusive higher education actually transforms lives for the better, wherein a street vendor's child, a former chowkidar, a young woman from a slum in Mumbai can each seek an education that helps them climb out of the pit of deprivation and achieve intergenerational mobility. For a ruling dispensation that stands triumphant on the shoulders of social divisions based on caste, gender, and religion, this disruption of inequality is frightening. And, this is why you are being relentlessly fed these stereotypes so that you will continue as passive participants in the drama of the oppression of the

marginalised and the underprivileged.

Here are a few facts that might help us to cut through the vitriol and ask some hard questions: According to the CAG Report of February 2019, Rs 94,036 crore of the secondary and higher education cess and Rs 7,298 crore of the research and development cess remained unutilised. Where will this money go? The fee hike in JNU (which has led to massive protests in recent weeks, bringing down upon our students the wrath of paramilitary and police), if implemented, will lead to over 40 per cent of our students being completely abandoned by the education system, and render JNU as one of the most expensive public universities in the country.

Here, the question of where the taxpayer's money is going can be sharpened: In 2017-18, the total expenditure on JNU was Rs 556 crore, seeing over 8,000 students through one academic year, over a 1,000 research articles published in reputed journals, 1,086 special lectures being open to the public, and 4,594 MPhil and PhD dissertations being submitted. Contrast this with the Rs 1,313 crore spent on mere publicity of the central government and its schemes. The imbalance in priorities is crystal clear. In JNU, some 2,500 students with fellowships pay Rs 7,500 (Rs 22.5 crore per annum) per month as housing allowance to the university. In the last two years, MPhil/PhD (especially reserved) seats have been left vacant, despite the Delhi High Court castigating JNU for causing a national waste of resources. The struggle against seat cuts now joins the struggle against fee hike to make the same point over and over again — the decimation by the present government of the inclusive and representational higher education for all.

A deeper reflection of this imbalance is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2019, which is really what students in JNU and across campuses are fighting against. This policy is nothing more than a deliberately planned eclipse of equitable access to publicly funded education. Here is why.

The setting up of the Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA) by this government to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) requires that institutions of higher education function not on grants, but on loans that are to be recovered through fee hikes and other "internal resource generation", a pseu-

The attempt to construct stereotypes of students in the public sphere as lazy, good-for-nothings that want to survive on the taxpayer's money is a clever sleight of hand by the ruling party and its offspring. Students of research universities like JNU are repeatedly castigated, supposedly by a 'taxpaying public' for not earning their own living and paying fees. The argument is that money spent on their education is 'a waste'. It helps obfuscate the true nature of education policies by this government.

donym for placing education in the marketplace rather than at the disposal of the social good. The vision and the methods of the NEP 2019, which is built on the fundamentals of the HEFA, have nothing to do with universal humanistic values that underlie education policies in many countries where human rights, bridging social, economic, and regional chasms are the objectives of education at all levels. In fact, in many of them, university education is free, even though the average per capita income is far higher than in India. In these imaginations, the subject is defined by her rights and her needs. Moreover, the Constitution of India requires that education policy provide for equitable access to publicly funded education.

The NEP 2019, however, has little beyond the so called "Fourth Industrial Revolution" as the driving impetus, in which, the individual is seen as mere kindling in the fire of economic activity. It sees no other function to education other than producing cheap labour that toils away on the lowest rung of the labour ladder. It renders complete the shift from education as a right to education as a commodity. In the real world, in real time, this policy casts a highly porous net that will benefit but a small section of the population that can buy education from private profiteers, rendering even basic education an unaffordable luxury. Increasingly, the bottom of even the social section that believes it might be able to afford this luxury is also falling out, given the state of the economy where unemployment is the highest in 45 years. In the absence of publicly-funded education, parents and students will be driven in the direction of education loans and a lifetime of indebtedness. This puts education out of the reach of even the middle classes.

This is why students in universities like JNU are at the barricades, in a movement that is spreading like a necessary conflagration through campuses in the country, for they want to ensure their own rights and pay it forward, so that coming generations can rightfully seek solid and affordable education instead of choosing between indebtedness and illiteracy. We need to listen to them, now.

The writer is associate professor, Centre of German Studies, JNU

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Like many other countries, Pakistan too has a spotty human rights record, but when it can speak out against the human rights violations of the Kashmiris and the Rohingya, can it stay silent about the Uighurs?"

—DAWN

Ball is in the majority's court

Manufactured hate should not sway Hindu worldview post the Ayodhya verdict



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

IN AN INDIAN Express article (November 15) following the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict, Rajiv Tuli, member of the RSS's Delhi executive, asks India's Muslims to ask themselves a question: "Do we want a Bharat which represents the legacy of Babar, Ghazni and Ghori, or do we want a Bharat where the legacy of the nation is represented by Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Dara Shikoh, Kabir and APJ Abdul Kalam?"

What Tuli follows up with may be viewed by Muslims as a warning: "The call has to be taken by Muslims in Bharat and the ball is in their court now." He further adds: "Any interpretation of the Babri structure, other than... as a monument of our slavery, will clearly indicate that Hindus are being asked to live with a feeling of humiliation." Tuli hints of campaigns to come when he writes: "Hindus have asked for a peaceful return, of only three of their holy sites (Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi) that were vandalised."

Clearly, the award of 2.77 acres of contested land has not quenched the thirst for avenging history's presumed wrongs. India's Muslims are expected to do more to remove "the feeling of humiliation" that 80 per cent of Indians supposedly nurse.

Muslims must declare (even if they don't believe it) that the Babri mosque was built to proclaim Hindu slavery, and they must take steps of restitution for other ancient wrongs, starting with Mathura and Kashi — "The ball is in their court."

Actually, the ball is in the court of India's Hindus, who must ask if they will allow further infusion in their minds of manufactured hate. The immortal Tulsidas lost no sleep when the Babri mosque was built. That structure made not the slightest difference either to his Ram or to his *Ramcharitmanas*. For centuries thereafter, that structure failed to humiliate other lovers of Ram and the Ramayana.

Thus, there is no record of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who probably held more Ramayana events than anyone else in his time, saying that the Babri mosque offended him and it had to go.

K M Munshi, more responsible than anyone else for Somnath temple's renovation, was Uttar Pradesh governor for five years, staying in Lucknow — not very far from Ayodhya — from 1952 to 1957. He seems to have made no demand for Babri Masjid's removal.

Men like Malaviya and Munshi may not have liked the fact that the Babri mosque was raised on or near the site that many believed was Ram's birthplace. They may not have liked the fact that for a long time the

Mughals ruled India, or, later, that the British ruled India.

However, accepting history's facts, they did not ask for the removal of Mughal forts and mosques, or of British palaces and churches. Such buildings might recall past defeats. But they were also part of India's assets, constructed — often impressively — by human skill and toil. Hindus were glad that the structures belonged to India.

Political calculation may see value in destroying the assets, but where will you stop? Will you remove the Red Fort and the Purana Qila? The Taj? The Qutub Minar? Will you pull down Kolkata's Victoria Memorial, New Delhi's imperial structures, and Mumbai's Gateway of India?

It's time for the calm Hindu to speak up, reclaim the Hindu platform, and restore sanity to it. For centuries, the serene confidence of everyday Hindus, as also of exceptional Hindu figures, sprang not from how they were treated by others, whether non-Hindu or Hindu, but from their own peace of mind, and their own creativity.

Loyal to their inner hearts, they were comfortable also with fellow-inhabitants of India and the planet. In our world's current season, however, headlines and megaphones have been seized by merchants of anger and distortion.

History assures us that seasons change. All Hindus who acknowledge the eternal Ram — who is also the eternal Krishna, the eternal Shiva, the eternal Allah, and the eternal God — can contribute to that change by speaking out in their circles and, where possible, on public platforms.

They can, for one thing, register their horror at the demolition of Ram to the status of a national hero. The maker of the universe, the giver of life and the master of death is greater than that.

Dear Mr Tuli, please do not bracket Lord Ram or Lord Krishna with historical figures, not even with extraordinary ones like Prince Dara, Sant Kabir and President Kalam.

You need not agree with Gandhi when he said, "The Rama whom I adore is God himself, unborn and uncreated" (*Collected Works*, 86: 427). But you cannot compel other Hindus — or Muslims or Christians — to declare that Rama was born in a particular spot in Ayodhya on a particular date.

You are entitled to your belief. Others have their liberty to disagree. That is a human right, one guaranteed — so far — by the Indian Constitution.

And, please remember, that the Supreme Court has declared unlawful both the sly insertion in 1949 of Ram idols into the Babri Masjid and the 1992 destruction of the mosque.

You have no right to ask all Hindus to defend or celebrate these two acts which will remain an embarrassment to Hinduism. Only an unqualified apology by those involved can begin to erase that embarrassment.

The writer is research professor at Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISLAND CHALLENGE

THIS LETTER REFERS TO the editorial, 'Old in the new' (IE, November 19). Sri Lanka's new president, Gotabaya Rajapakasa, has promised to strengthen ties with China. PM Narendra Modi's ambition to shape the Indo-Pacific great game will fail unless he manages to make Gotabaya play ball and keep China at bay. Over the last two years, India had tried to rebuild bridges with Sri Lanka. The various meetings between Modi and Mahinda Rajapakasa, Gotabaya's brother, mean that India will not have to start from scratch. But the Modi government will have to deliver even more on economic and security cooperation. India's main challenge is to deepen the economic interdependence with Sri Lanka and expand connectivity initiatives. India must finalise the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, which has been repeatedly delayed.

P.L. Singh, Amritsar

DON'T GIVE IN

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Scholarship has no religion' (IE, November 16). It is the beauty of Indian culture that a Muslim professor can be appointed to teach Sanskrit in BHU. The adverse reactions against the appointment must be criticised. The university authorities and the UP government should not bow to these protests.

Rishabh Singh via e-mail

CHECK THE DISTRESS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A greater ease of living' (IE, November 20). Public welfare schemes like subsidised food-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

grain, housing, toilets, electricity, and gas connections and access to various financial services have had a significant impact on the lives of the rural poor. But agrarian distress and unemployment among the educated youth has shrunk the disposable income in the hands of the rural population. The high demand for work under MGNREGA indicates the gloomy employment prospects.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

BE HONEST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Figure it out' (IE, November 20). The numbers related to the GDP and the economy are not encouraging. A series of efforts from government to boost economy is not producing results. The least the government can do is to be transparent about the economy. Scrapping the consumption survey will not fetch the desired results.

Bal Govind, Noida



J S SANDHU

A cut above

Chief of Defence Staff should play the role of the primary military adviser

CONSEQUENT TO PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's announcement from the ramparts of Red Fort, the proposed structure for the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has been deliberated upon. We should soon be seeing the first CDS take charge. The proposed charter of the CDS, his powers and status, etc, has been debated intensely. One school of thought recommends an evolutionary, incremental expansion of the role, while some feel he should be given greater operational control *ab initio*. Like many bureaucratic approval processes, turf battles often cloud judgements, the resistance to change tends to only marginally alter the existing status quo. In this case, too, Service HQs prefer to retain their powers, resources and establishments. Hence, to avoid a dilution of their spheres, they are in favour of the CDS taking charge of new organisations, domains, and also to handle the integrated structures. Existing single-service responsibilities would remain largely undisturbed.

What should be the answer to this dilemma? A logical appraisal is warranted: Retention of existing warfighting structures, while the CDS takes control of newer organi-

sations being set up for tackling future threats, has some merit. Development of future technologies and means to face emerging threats in the cyber, space, missiles domain, nurturing of AI-based platforms, usage of drones for various roles and such modern conflict realities is indeed important. These advancements are extremely costly, and the CDS can facilitate optimal, cost-effective integrated development and deployment of such structures.

Modern war and warfighting has tremendous economic costs. Defence budgets are invariably inadequate to meet the "wishlists", and intense prioritisation of capabilities is inevitable. The CDS can be the vital fulcrum to undertake such prioritisation and rationalisation, and, therefore, can play a stellar role in the perspective planning and development function. Considering the high cost of future technology, the CDS can also contribute towards optimisation of existing structures. Such review of existing establishments and manpower should also be an assigned task for him.

But should the CDS be utilised only in capability building and cost cutting, and opti-

misation measures? Future conflict situations would possibly need integrated application of fighting formations and resources, with unitary operational control of deployed elements. The CDS would be better placed for integrated employment of war fighting potential, and therefore logically needs to be part of the operational control chain.

In the debates on CDS, one often heard the designated profile as "providing single-point military advice". National security decisions are always taken after a multitude of advisory inputs from a number of agencies, duly analysing ramifications and end state probabilities. The CDS is better termed as the primary military advisor, with the service chiefs also remaining important military advisors. The CDS should not become another interposed level between the Raksha Mantri and the service chiefs, whose access to the minister should remain as prevalent.

In effect, the CDS should be in charge of newer domains and organisations, and be well poised to optimise, cut costs and prioritise different service demands. He could be an effective mentor for realising our military-

industrial power potential, and for modernisation and capability enhancement. His tri-service position makes him the most suited driver for the integrated application of warfighting resources and facilitates unitary control in integrated operations. The CDS also has a primary advisory role, and therefore should not be boxed into administrative efficiency roles, but must be in the operational control chain. In the interim, the CDS may not override the operational responsibility of the service chiefs, and in due course, his operational responsibility can expand and become more "hands-on".

Thus, it is clear that the CDS would play a far more critical role in the national security apparatus, than the three service chiefs. Our higher defence organisation would finally mature, and be more in tune with our rising power ranking. From being the "first among equals", I would like to see the CDS graduate to "first above the others".

The writer was General Officer Commanding of the Indian Army's Chinara Corps in Kashmir. Views are personal