

## Hyderabad Metro reports losses in Q4FY24, cites Mahalakshmi scheme impact

Hyderabad: Hyderabad Metro Rail has reported losses in the quarter ending on March 31 (Q4) of financial year 2023-24 (FY24), attributing a major portion of the decline to the implementation of the Mahalakshmi scheme. The scheme, which offers free bus entitlement to ladies, has impacted the metro's average ridership. According to official figures released by Engineering conglomerate Larsen & Toubro (L&T), the average ridership per day increased from 4.08 lakh passengers in Q4FY23 to 4.41 lakh passengers in Q4FY24.

However, this growth was lower than the average ridership of 4.44 lakh passengers per day in Q3FY24.

P. Ramakrishnan, Head of Investor Relations at L&T Limited, stated during the Q4FY24 financial report that the slight dip in ridership compared to the previous quarter was primarily due to the Mahalakshmi scheme's impact on passenger numbers. Meanwhile, L&T's Chief Financial Officer, R Shankar Raman, expressed during a post-earning conference call that stricter mandates from IT companies for employees to return to office work could potentially boost ridership for the Hyderabad Metro Project



He mentioned that although certain IT firms have stated that employees return-

ing to the office may receive promotions and salary increases, it remains to be seen

if employees are willing to transition from the convenience of remote work.

## Student Process Steps: Navigating through the U.S. Immigration System – Part I



The next three weeks we will discuss the entire process of preparing, arriving, and thriving as an international student in the United States. This week's article focuses on preparing for your journey to study in the United States. Non-immigrant stu-

dents who come to the United States to study must follow specific rules. However, different rules apply depending on your student type and education level. Learn what student type and education level applies to you below:

### Student Type:

**F-1:** Non immigrant students enrolling in academic programs at a university, college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory or another academic institution, including an English language program. **M-1:** Non immigrant students enrolling in a technical program at vocational or other recognized non-academic institution, other than a language training program. **Education Level:**

**Kindergarten to Grade 12:** In the United States, students usually begin a formal educational program around age five or six in kindergarten. Children then complete primary and secondary school which spans from first grade through grade 12. **Postsecondary:** In the United States, students usually enrol in postsecondary schooling as adults (over the age of 18) and this category includes technical and community colleges, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. **English language training:** In the United States, non-native English-speaking students enrol in intensive training programs that have

the sole purpose of increasing fluency in the language. Students of all ages can enroll in English language training programs. As you prepare to study in the United States, keep the following steps in mind: Step 1-3: Pre-arrival

**Step 1: Choosing the Right School.** The first crucial step is to select a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school in the United States. The School Search tool (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/school-search>) provided by Study in the States helps you find eligible institutions. Whether you're pursuing an academic or technical program, ensure your chosen school is certified to enrol F-1 or M-1 students. For more information about the types of programs that are available to you, please visit EducationUSA (<https://educationusa.state.gov/>). If you are a student currently enrolled in the equivalent of a kindergarten through grade 12 program, visit the Kindergarten to Grade 12 webpage on Study in the States (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/schools/get-started/kindergarten-to-grade-12-schools>).

# In South Korea, remembering Rabindranath Tagore, for inspiring a generation of freedom fighters

Some 4,000 km from undivided Bengal, where he was born, a bust of Rabindranath Tagore stands on a busy street in Seoul's Jongno district, near Marronnier Park, silently observing scores of passersby. It was erected in 2011 in a university neighbourhood by the South Korean government to commemorate the Nobel laureate's 150th birth anniversary, in coordination with the Indian embassy. Around the world, particularly in countries where Tagore travelled—from the US to Japan—it is not uncommon to find statues and plaques commemorating one of South Asia's most prominent literary and political figures. But the memorial to Tagore in South Korea is unique. This is because although Tagore never visited the Korean Peninsula, his work left a deep impact on people in Korea during their fight for freedom from Japanese colonisation.

A copy of the edition of the Korean newspaper *Dong-A-Ilbo* published on April 2, 1929, featuring Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Lamp of the East' translated by Chu Yu-han into Korean. (Photo credit: Santosh Kumar Ranjan) A copy of the edition of the Korean newspaper *Dong-A-Ilbo* published on April 2, 1929, featuring Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Lamp of the East' translated by Chu Yu-han into Korean. While Tagore did not reach Korea's shores during his lifetime, he did travel to neighbouring China and Japan between 1916-1924. It was during this time that Tagore got an opportunity to understand the socio-politics that were unfolding. These were very different from the perceptions that he had formed while back in his homeland. "When Tagore visited Japan for the first time in 1916, he was disappointed to see that Japan was imitating the ways of the imperialist West. His indictment of Japan on the path of war cost him ovation and affection with which he was initially greeted," says Dr Pankaj Mohan, formerly Professor and Dean, the Academy of Korean Studies, South Korea. That Tagore never visited Korea was not for the paucity of invitations. Sometime during the 20th century, Korean intellectuals discovered his works in translation. "In the early 1920s, about 250 of Tagore's works were introduced. And in the history of Korean translated literature before Independence, there is no example of so many works by a foreign poet being translated," says Professor Kim Woo Joo, who previously taught Hindi literature at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul. She obtained her Ph. D from Visva Bharati University in Bolpur, West Bengal.

While Tagore knew little about the extent of Japan's brutal colonial practices and heaped praise on the Empire in what was called pan-Asian solidarity, Korean intellectuals who looked up to him as an anti-colonial figure very much knew of Tagore's opinions on Japan and tried to inform him about their lived realities. It was in Japan that Tagore first met Koreans who had been living under Japanese imperial rule. And this truly shaped his opinions on the empire's colonial policies. Japan's colonisation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910-1945 was brutal. While imperialist policies meant the imposition of several

rules and curbs on freedoms and the human rights of Koreans, there were also other forms of violence. Approximately 1,50,000 Koreans were forced to work in factories and mines in Japan during the Second World War. Thousands of Korean girls and women were also forced into sexual slavery in military brothels. These historical occurrences have remained points of contention between Japan and South Korea since both countries formally established diplomatic relations in 1965. Dr Mohan points to the writings of Charles Freer Andrews, an English Anglican priest and social reformer who also worked for the cause of Indian independence and was a close friend of both Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore. "Charles F. Andrews, who accompanied the poet to Japan, noted: 'When (Tagore) spoke out strongly against the militant imperialism which he saw on every side in Japan and set forward in contrast his ideal picture of the true meeting of East and West, with its vista of world brotherhood, the hint went abroad that such 'pacifist' teaching was a danger in war time and that the Indian poet represented a defeated nation'," Dr Mohan says. K-pop group 'Granada', performs a fusion of Rabindra Sangeet with Korean traditional musical instruments at a commemorative event jointly held by the Embassy of India along with the Embassy of Bangladesh in honor of Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary at Nami Island, South Korea in May 2024. (Photo credit: Embassy of India, South Korea) K-pop group 'Granada', performs a fusion of Rabindra Sangeet with Korean traditional musical instruments at a commemorative event jointly held by the Embassy of India along with the Embassy of Bangladesh in honor of Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary at Nami Island, South Korea in May 2024. (Photo credit: Embassy of India, South Korea) The Song of the Defeated When the Japanese realised that Tagore was becoming more critical of Japan's imperialist policies in the Korean Peninsula, their sentiments towards the laureate began to change. Andrews states that accusations of Japanese critics that Tagore preached the sermon of peace because he was poet of the "defeated country" inspired Tagore to write the poem entitled The Song of the Defeated. This would go on to become an iconic poem associated with Tagore with immense relevance in the study of colonial Korea. "Tagore gave this poem to a Korean student in Japan named Chin Hakmun, who visited him at the Yokohama residence of Hara Tomaitaro (in July) 1916 and requested him to contribute either an essay or verse to the Korean journal 'Cheongchun' or Youth. By giving the poem to a Korean student, the poet wished to underscore the common destiny of India and Korea, and to boost the sinking morale of the Korean people, yoked to the repressive colonial rule of Japan," says Dr Mohan. One of the first invitations to Tagore to visit Korea came in 1916 through young Korean students whom he met while in Japan. Unable to travel to the peninsula, Tagore instead shared a poem with a young Korean writer. That poem came to be known as The Song of the Defeated.

"I think he recognised Korea as 'the defeated' country just like his native India.



This poem can be interpreted in multiple ways, and one of them is that it can be understood as a poem describing the longing to meet the lost homeland," explains Professor Kim. The Song of the Defeated is not a poem written separately for the Korean people under the Japanese colonial rule, but is the 85th poem included in *Fruit Gathering*, a collection published in 1916. A photo from a commemorative event jointly held by the Embassy of India along with the Embassy of Bangladesh in honor of Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary at Nami Island, South Korea in May 2024. (Photo credit: Embassy of India, South Korea) A photo from a commemorative event jointly held by the Embassy of India along with the Embassy of Bangladesh in honor of Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary at Nami Island, South Korea in May 2024.

Professor Kim says, "Poems of this collection were translated from Bengali into English by Tagore and it can be assumed that Tagore gave it to a young Korean writer because he considered it to be the most appropriate among the published translated poems, considering the situation Korea faced." While they were not specifically written for the Korean people, researchers believe that one of the reasons why some of Tagore's poems resonated with the Korean people living under Japanese colonial rule was that they exhibited his empathy towards others suffering from the violence and brutality of colonial rule. However, some historians believe that for many anti-colonial Koreans, what made Tagore stand apart from his contemporaries who were also writing about colonial oppression was that unlike them, he had openly expressed his criticism to the Japanese. "Stephen H. Hay in his book *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* tells us on the evidence of his 1955 interviews with key figures associated with Tagore during his 1916 sojourn in Japan... that several Korean students visited his residence at Yokohama and also talked to him at campuses of Japanese universities where he was invited to deliver lectures. It was indeed through these private conversations that Tagore was awakened to the harsh reality of Japanese imperialism. He was deeply aggrieved to learn about the atrocities Japan perpetrated on Korea which it had annexed six years earlier," says Dr Mohan. It was not that people in the Indian subcontinent were completely unaware of Japan's colonial brutality. Archi-

val documentation indicates that the nationalist press, run by revolutionaries and freedom fighters, had been highlighting the colonisation of Korea and the fight for freedom by the Koreans. But perhaps there was a lack of sufficient knowledge about the extent of the violence that was being perpetrated on the Koreans. It took in-person interactions with Koreans for Indian freedom fighters and revolutionaries to understand the shared grief and resistance of both peoples. A copy of the edition of the Korean newspaper *Dong-A-Ilbo* published on April 3, 1929, featuring Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Lamp of the East' in its original English version. (Photo credit: Santosh Kumar Ranjan) A copy of the edition of the Korean newspaper *Dong-A-Ilbo* published on April 3, 1929, featuring Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Lamp of the East' in its original English version. (Photo credit: Santosh Kumar Ranjan) Japan from the lens of Indian freedom fighters While it is true that during their own quest for freedom from British rule, many freedom fighters and revolutionaries looked up to Japan for inspiration, it would be doing a disservice to their contributions to believe that they were entirely uncritical of Japan's imperialist and colonial policies, scholars told *indianexpress.com*. Till the early 1900s, Indians at the forefront of the freedom struggle, like Tagore and Gandhi, harboured romantic views of Japan, but they were also astute and perceptive enough to analyse and criticise Japan's policies. It was not that Tagore believed Japan was the "leader" of Asia, a label that is sometimes inaccurately ascribed to him. "He believed that great Asian powers such as India and China were reduced to the status of colonies or semi-colonies respectively, but Japan maintained its independence. So Japan needed to 'fulfil its mission of the East' and to 'infuse the sap of full humanity into the heart of modern civilisation'," says Dr Mohan. On Tagore's last visit to Japan in 1929, another invitation to visit Korea came, this time from Seol Eui-sik, the Tokyo correspondent of *Dong-A Daily*, a Korean newspaper. Seol invited (Tagore) to visit Korea as the guest of his paper, and also requested him to write a few words to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the March First Independence Movement, arguably the most powerful symbol of Korea's will to gain independence and the greatest expression of anti-imperialist protest in the colonial history of Korea, says Dr Mohan.

# Former CBI JD Lakshminarayana Leads Quiet Revolution in Visakhapatnam Election Campaign

Jai Bharat Party Candidate Connects Directly with Voters, Offering a Refreshing Alternative to the Typical Election Frenzy

In a stark contrast to the typical election chaos and grandstanding, former CBI officer JD Lakshminarayana, the Jai Bharat Party candidate for the Visakhapatnam constituency, is conducting a remarkably different campaign. While his opponents are drawing large crowds and blaring their messages through loudspeakers, Lakshminarayana is quietly and personally engaging with each voter, one household at a time. Lakshminarayana's campaign strategy is a refreshing departure from the norm. Instead of relying on large rallies and high-profile events, he is going door-to-door, greeting voters warmly and explaining the core principles and vision of the Jai Bharat Party.

This personal approach has caught the attention of the electorate, who are surprised to see a former senior police officer engaging with them so directly.

"JD Lakshminarayana's campaign is a silent revolution," said a resident of North Visakhapatnam. "People are genuinely interested in him and are discussing how we need such a leader to represent our city and protect the future of our children." Lakshminarayana's focus on connecting with the people, rather than engaging in the typical election theatrics, has resonated with the voters. They see in him a candidate who is genuinely concerned about the well-being of the constituency and is willing to be their voice in the Assembly.

"As a senior police officer, JD Lakshminarayana has served the people with dedication and integrity," said [another local resident's name]. "Now, as a political leader, he is offering a refreshing alternative to the usual election chaos, and we believe he can be the voice of questioning and development that Visakhapatnam needs."

The unique approach of JD Lakshminarayana's campaign has sparked a wave of interest and enthusiasm among



the voters of Visakhapatnam. As the election day draws near, the people of the con-

stituency are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to make their voices heard and sup-

port a leader who they believe can truly make a difference.

## Apple says "sorry" as new iPad Pro "crush" ad draws flak

Apple's ad that was aimed at showing off its new iPad Pro - the thinnest and most powerful yet, per the company - went viral on social media, drawing flak from creatives. Following criticism from the very quarter the product was aimed at, the company said, it "was sorry", per a report by Ad Age. Apple VP for Marketing, Tor Myhren, told the outlet, "Our goal is to always celebrate the myriad of ways users express themselves and bring their ideas to life through iPad. We missed the mark with this video, and we're sorry." However, the apology was placed behind the outlet's partial paywall and was not officially published on Apple's channels at the time. During the May 7 event, Apple announced its thinnest iPad yet, which will be powered by its latest generation chip: M4. Marking the

product's launch, CEO Tim Cook shared an ad online, titled 'Crush,' showing a giant hydraulic press systematically crushing a colourful assortment of musical instruments, cameras, art supplies, nostalgic games, notebooks, and even soft toys, to leave only the new iPad Pro in their place. The slowed visuals zoomed in on shattering camera lenses, paint oozing from warped jars, the innards of a guitar exploding, a piano breaking down, books being blown to bits, and even a nervous ball-shaped emoji trying to escape the carnage but instead being flattened until its eyes popped out of its head. When the hydraulic press rises again, only the iPad Pro is revealed to be there. "Meet the new iPad Pro: the thinnest product we've ever created, the most advanced display we've ever produced."



# Punjabi poet Padma Shri Surjit Patar passes away

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), May 11: Eminent Punjabi poet and writer, Dr Surjit Patar passed away at the age of 79 on Saturday in Ludhiana. Born on January 14, 1945, Patar belonged to the village Pattar Kalan in Jalandhar district, from where he got his pen name Surjit Patar. Dr Patar served as a professor of Punjabi at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, where he embarked on his journey in Punjabi literature. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2012. But following the farm agitation in 2020, Dr. Patar announced in December his decision to return the civilian honour in solidarity with protesting farmers at Delhi borders against the now-repealed farm laws.

Expressing grief over the demise of Dr Surjit Patar, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann wrote on his X account, "Deeply saddened by the sudden loss of a proud son of Punjabi language, Surjit Patar." He said that it is an irreplaceable loss for our mother tongue Punjabi and today there is stillness in the Punjabi language community. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann often quotes his poetry during his speeches. Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said, "Saddened by the demise of renowned Punjabi poet Surjit Patar ji. He took the richness of Punjabi culture to new heights. His departure is an irreparable loss not only to his family but to the entire Punjabi world. May God grant him peace and bless the family

with the strength to bear this loss."

Punjab Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains also shared his condolences through his X account and wrote, "Passing away of Surjit Patar ji is a great loss to Punjab. So much more was to be written. I shared a very special bond with him. For me this loss is personal too." Cabinet Minister Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer also shared his heartfelt condolences and said that he was the great poet of our era, we have lost a prominent personality of Punjabi literature. He also prayed for his eternal peace and for the strength for literature and Punjabi language lovers to bear this loss. Cabinet Minister Dr. Balbir Singh said that he is greatly saddened by the news of the passing away of the great Punjabi poet Dr Surjit Patar. He said that he will live on in the hearts of Punjabis till the end of the time. Shiromani Akali Dal President and former chief minister of Punjab, Sukhbir Singh Badal commented - "Someone passed through the sticks as wind". "Due to the demise of Shri Surjit Patar, the beloved son of mother tongue Punjabi, great poet and the man of literature in this century, such a void has been created in the world of literature which will be very difficult to fill. After Shiv Batalvi, Patar Sahib was the most popular and beloved poet of Punjabis. I express my heartfelt grief and sympathy with his family and his countless well-wishers and pray to the Almighty to bless the holy soul of Patar Sahib at his



feet. May God grant their loved ones the strength to bear this trauma."

## Step inside a painting, travel in VR pods: Here's how immersive technology is changing the global art world

A dark corridor, occasionally illuminated by bright red and yellow flowers, leads one to what seems like an abyss. It lights up in seconds. There is something calming about it; you want to reach up and touch it. And with that touch comes alive another wall full of life. At teamLab's Borderless, an immersive art experience that recently opened to huge numbers in Tokyo's Azabudai Hills, a digital canvas makes up an enclosed space. It is meant to stretch the possibilities of human perception. Closer home in Hyderabad's HITEC Exhibition Centre and until March in Chennai's Express Avenue mall, almond blossoms from Van Gogh's masterpiece of the same name fell softly, albeit virtually, enveloping audiences in the warm embrace of the artist's famous blues. This is art that goes beyond the physical space of pristine white cube galleries and ebony frames. With technological aid in tow, experiential art exhibits make art accessible simply by being visually stunning.

For seasoned art connoisseurs, this is an opportunity to see their favorite artwork from a different perspective, and sometimes even participate in it. For novices on the other hand, this makes an oth-

erwise indecipherable piece of fine art comprehensible. As for the content creator crowd (yes, they form a large per cent of the target audience), it is simply a treasure trove of visually appealing content for social media. A classic example in India is the famously reclusive Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room, which has now become a permanent exhibit at Mumbai's Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMAAC). A mirror-pannelled room houses hundreds of LED lights suspended from varying heights, lending a warped perspective of reflections including one's own. "Both internationally famous and visually captivating, an exhibit such as Infinity Mirrored Room holds instant appeal for seasoned connoisseurs of art as well the audience who may not have previously known about it. Kusama's work is the perfect example of how a piece of art, whatever the motivation or circumstances for engaging with it, can usher one into an all-new universe," says a representative of NMAAC. Kusama is considered a pioneer of immersive art, creating such fantastical worlds as early as the 1960s. The Van Gogh 360 or The Real Immersive Van Gogh

Experience — two different exhibits currently traveling the world hinged on the popular post-Impressionist's work, hope to be a seamless entryway to the artist's psyche especially for the uninitiated. Sharan John, founder at Silly Fellows, which recently brought the experience to Chennai and Hyderabad says, "Despite there being multiple narratives, the main focal point continues to be Van Gogh's evolution as an artist, his unique techniques, and the emotional depth within each piece. The exhibit also serves as an educational platform, providing insights into the artist's work, his life and the historical context of his masterpieces." In NMAAC, for Run As Slow As You Can, an absurdist exhibit imagined by Italian creative studio and image-based magazine Toiletpaper, people were hooked to the VR experience pods that ferried them on a virtual boat across different thematic sections of the exhibit. "Not to forget Oracle, an interactive application that was a part of the showcase, or the widely Instagram-ed bathtub of plastic bananas, which delighted audiences of all ages," adds the representative from NMAAC.

The endless possibilities of the digi-

tal medium is perhaps the biggest draw for creators of experiential art. "Digital technology enables complex detail and freedom for change," says Takashi Kudo of the international art collective teamLab, which navigates the confluence of art, science, technology, and the natural world. Through art, the interdisciplinary group of specialists, including artists, programmers, engineers, CG animators, mathematicians, and architects, explores the relationship between the self and the world. Today, they are one of the leading players in the immersive digital art space. The collective was born out of frustration and angst, almost as though to prove a point against the alienation faced by digital artists worldwide by the fine art crowd. "Before people started accepting digital technology, information and artistic expression had to be presented in some physical form. Creative expression has existed through static media for most of human history, often using physical objects such as canvas and paint. The advent of digital technology allows human expression to become free from these physical constraints, enabling it to exist independently and evolve freely," adds Takashi over a video call from Tokyo.

# The changing landscape of campus placements in Tamil Nadu

Last September, during the second quarter of the academic year 2023-24, college placement cells were concerned that students graduating in May 2024 would face a challenging time, as companies were cutting back on hiring. They were anticipating lower placement scenarios, as the Information Technology (IT) industry sector had been expecting a turbulent phase, and was risk averse. Some industry observers blamed the Covid-19 pandemic-induced lockdown for having robbed from students, the opportunity for hands-on experience and the developing of interpersonal skills at workplace settings. K.E. Raghunathan, national chairman, Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, observed that placements drives would have been better but for the pandemic. "The present batch of students underwent at least one year under the Covid-19 lockdown phase, where they lost practical experiences and missed out on in-person classes, affecting their interpersonal and communication skills," he said. Most students depend on campus placements, as such recruitments ensure a higher pay scale as compared to direct walk-ins and through Human Resources (HR) consultancies. Campus placements have been a disappointment however, for engineering students this year, who had centred their hopes on landing a job in an IT company. Four years ago, when these students enrolled for an engineering degree, the IT industry was hiring from campuses in bulk, but not this year. Colleges report that while compared to previous years, the number of IT campus placements have come down, companies are now focusing on specialised skill sets among students. Even in arts and science colleges, students who took up technical courses and commerce graduates followed by those from science disciplines, have had it better than engineering students, said placement officials. The downturn in the IT industry will impact students across engineering courses, experts said. Students pointed out that the IT sector not only pays well, but also gives several allowances and increments. Therefore, students who chose streams such as mechanical and civil engineering are equally concerned. A mechanical engineering student at a city college said: "IT firms hire students from across departments. So even if we don't get placed in the core sector, we had always believed we would have IT as a second option."

Director of the Centre for University Industry Collaboration, Anna University, K. Shanmugasundaram, said IT companies such as Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Wipro, who generally recruit in large numbers, had their own selection process and did not come to campuses this year. However, core companies that planned to establish plants in the State and those developing products, had come. "The companies decided to select 250 engineers from India. At Anna University we had only 60 students with the required skills and of these, 70% have been placed," he said. The downturn in the IT industry will impact students across engineering courses, ex-

perts said. The downturn in the IT industry will impact students across engineering courses, experts said | Photo Credit: File photograph. The University conducted a pooled placement programme for its 16 constituent colleges. "Smaller companies wanted a larger pool, and so, we held pooled placement drive," he said. At Anna University, of the 1,700 eligible candidates for placement 1,125 (60%) have received an offer. On average, 90% of undergraduate students in all IT and circuit branches have been placed, varsity officials said.

This year, about 95% of students in Compute Science Engineering (CSE) and IT, as well as exclusive branches such as printing, biotechnology and mining also received offers. Around 70% of students in the ceramic engineering department were hired as well, Mr. Shanmugasundaram said. The minimum annual salary offered this year was ₹7 lakh. Public sector undertakings, construction companies and banking and management firms also visited the university. Candidates who did not have knowledge of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Science (DS) and Python could not be placed, he pointed out. Around 30 companies claimed they could not find qualified candidates on campus, Mr. Shanmugasundaram said. "The students did not have the skills that these companies demanded. They wanted candidates with strong fundamental knowledge of Python and advanced knowledge in AI and DS," he said. The university relied on its alumni to offset the damage that could have occurred with low student campus placements. Alumni managed to place around 500 students. A job fair for students with arrears has been proposed to be held in mid-May, again, with alumni support. Students on their part, are not veering towards startups: the charm of such companies has faded, experts said. Students on their part, are not veering towards startups. "The charm of the money that startups used to offer has fallen in the past three years. The startups too, have not shown interest, because they are apprehensive as to whether they will receive continued financial investments," Mr. Shanmugasundaram surmised. At affiliated autonomous engineering colleges, the placement season showed similar trends. Arun Ramaswami A., Dean, (Corporate Relations and Higher Studies), Velammal Group of Colleges Chennai and Madurai, said nearly 200 companies visited the campus. "Placement crossed 94% with the average salary between ₹6 lakh and ₹10 lakh. Currently, final exams are on. After the second week in June, a few more companies will start the hiring process," he said. Service, product, core engineering, IT and IT Enabled Services (ITeS) as well as structural and construction companies visited the campus, he said. Global Capability Centres step in

Industry experts say historically, IT companies have preferred to recruit from Tamil Nadu, but recession has kept them away this year. A new entrant, Global Capability Centres, for different companies, has filled the vacuum, however. Multina-



tional firms such as CMA CGM, DHL, Maersk and Mediterranean Shipping Company, Hpag Lloyd and United Parcel Service have already established GCCs in the State. Former All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) member and former Chief Managing Director of Cognizant India, Ramkumar Ramamoorthi said newer trends were emerging now. "As business demand is through the year, off-campus hiring has taken off in a big way and is here to stay," he explained. Tepid revenue growth has resulted in large IT services companies giving campus hiring a miss or reducing intake. This has been partially offset by GCCs, however, he pointed out. Also, as GCCs are ramping up IT and BPO (business process outsourcing) operations, students from across disciplines, including liberal arts, paramedical and management studies, will be hired. At the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) for instance, over 300 GCCs visited the campus for broad-based hiring. As GCCs are ramping up IT and BPO (business process outsourcing) operations, students from across disciplines, including liberal arts, paramedical and management studies, will be hired, experts said. As GCCs are ramping up IT and BPO (business process outsourcing) operations, students from across disciplines, including liberal arts, paramedical and management studies, will be hired, experts said. As GCCs are ramping up IT and BPO (business process outsourcing) operations, students from across disciplines, including liberal arts, paramedical and management studies, will be hired, experts said | Photo Credit: File photograph. Global companies across industries such as energy, semiconductor, defence, automotive, medical devices and the pharma sector have chosen India for research and development, design, and manufacturing, Mr. Ramkumar pointed out. Students from STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) campuses across disciplines of study and those aligned to core disciplines of study that these companies specialise in have been chosen, he added. "Alumni are the biggest brand ambassadors for any educational institution, and they play a crucial role in hiring talent. Where the alumni are founders or key decision-makers in companies, the relationships run deep," Mr. Ramkumar explained.

G.K. Raajesh, placement officer of Thiagarajar College of Engineering, Madurai, said more interns were being recruited now. "The responsibility lies on the students to convert this internship oppor-

tunity into full-time employment, based on their performance during the internship," he said. The college had reached out to its alumni to visit the campus for recruitment. Over 550 students from the college had been placed this year, he said. Arts and science colleges too, placements have been challenging this year, and alumni support is being sought. Madras Christian College principal P. Wilson said 605 students had been placed as audit and tax associates, management trainees, and HR associates. Arun Mozhi G., training and placement officer of Thiagarajar College (Arts and Science) Madurai, said companies such as Accenture, TCS, HCL Technologies, Hexaware and Deloitte had visited their campus. "Two-thirds of the students in the commerce, Computer Science/IT/Computer Applications and Business Administration streams were placed," he said. Representatives of Presidency College and D.G. Vaishnav College said banking sector companies recruited in good numbers. However, both institutions claim they have fallen back on the support of their alumni. "Our alumni helped at least 100 students to get placements in reputable companies," said R. Raman, principal of Presidency College. Principal Santhosh Baboo said the alumni supported the students with internship and pre-placement drives to prepare students. Colleges say companies have made the selection rigorous by replacing conventional numerical/quantitative aptitude test with cognitive assessment tests that include abstract and critical reasoning and verbal ability. Some companies use games to assess students, Mr. Arun Mozhi said, adding: "They encourage students to not prepare specifically for their assessments so that they can evaluate the natural talent of the candidates." T.N. is still preferred destination for recruiting companies. Aditya Narayan Mishra, managing director and chief executive officer of Ciel HR Services, said: "The tech sector's downturn has led to a significant decrease in campus hiring activity. However, we are witnessing a notable trend in campus hiring across Tamil Nadu, where recruiters are prioritising specific skill sets and preferring only the 'cream of the batch'. This is yet another factor contributing to the reduction in mass hiring practices."

# A brief history of religion-based reservations in India; the question of Muslims' inclusion

In election season, India is debating fundamental constitutional questions around reservation. Can a secular country like India have religion-based reservation? Have Muslims ever been given reservation by reducing the quota for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), or Other Backward Classes (OBCs)? Does reservation for SCs that is limited to only certain religious denominations amount to reservation based on religion?

The Constitution of India moved away from equality, which refers to equal treatment for all, to equity, which ensures fairness and may require differential treatment or special measures for some groups. The Supreme Court has held that equality is a dynamic concept with many aspects and dimensions, and it cannot be "cribbed, cabined and confined" within traditional and doctrinaire limits (E P Royappa vs State Of Tamil Nadu, 1973). Formal equality is concerned with equality of treatment — treating everyone the same, regardless of outcomes — which can at times lead to serious inequalities for historically disadvantaged groups. Substantive equality, on the other hand, is concerned with equality of outcomes. Affirmative action promotes this idea of substantive equality.

The Constitution of 1949 dropped the word 'minorities' from Article 296 of the draft constitution (Article 335 of the present Constitution), but included Article 16(4) that enabled the state to make "any provision for ...reservation...in favour of any backward class of citizens which...is not adequately represented in the services under the state". The first constitutional amendment inserted Article 15(4), which empowered the state to make "any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes".

Article 15 specifically prohibits the state from discriminating against citizens on grounds only of both religion and caste (along with sex, race, and place of birth). After the Supreme Court's judgment in State of Kerala vs N M Thomas (1975), reservation is considered not an exception to the equality/ non-discrimination clauses of Articles 15(1) and 16(1), but as an extension of equality. The crucial word in Articles 15 and 16 is 'only' — which implies that if a religious, racial, or caste group constitutes a "weaker section" under Article 46, or constitutes a backward class, it would be entitled to special provisions for its advancement. Some Muslim castes were given reservation not because they were Muslims, but because these castes were included within the backward class, and reservation was given without reducing the quota for SCs, STs, and OBCs by creating a sub-quota within the OBCs. The Mandal Commission, following the example set by several states, included a number of Muslim castes in the list of OBCs. The Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney (1992) laid down that any social group, whatever its mark of identity, if found to be backward under the same criteria as others, will be entitled to be treated as a backward class. Kerala: Muslim sub-quota Religion-based reservation was first introduced in 1936 in Travancore-Cochin

state. In 1952, this was replaced by communal reservation. Muslims, who constituted 22% of the population, were included within the OBCs. After the state of Kerala was formed in 1956, all Muslims were included in one of eight sub-quota categories, and a sub-quota of 10% (now 12%) was created within the OBC quota. Unlike the faulty report of the Mandal Commission which concluded, on the pattern of Hindus, that only 52% Muslims were OBCs, in Kerala and Karnataka, from the times of the Hindu maharajas, Muslims were seen as having been drawn overwhelmingly from the "untouchable" and other "low" castes, and were thus included among the backward classes.

Karnataka: JD(S) decision The Third Backward Classes Commission of Karnataka headed by Justice O Chinnappa Reddy (1990) found, like the Havanur (1975) and Venkataswami (1983) Commissions, that Muslims fulfilled the requirements for being considered among the backward classes. In 1995, the government of Chief Minister H D Deve Gowda, who is currently an ally of the BJP, implemented 4% Muslim reservation within the OBC quota. Thirty-six Muslim castes which are part of the central list of OBCs were included in the quota. Deve Gowda's JD(S) had criticised the decision of the Basavaraj Bommai government to scrap the Muslim quota before the Assembly polls of 2023. The Supreme Court subsequently stayed the Bommai government's decision. Tamil Nadu: Backward Muslims The government of M Karunanidhi passed a law in 2007 based on the recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission headed by J A Ambasankar (1985), that provided within the 30% OBC quota, a sub-category of Muslims with 3.5% reservation. This did not include upper-caste Muslims. The Act gave reservation to some Christian castes, but this provision was subsequently removed on the demand of Christians themselves. The question of giving Muslims reservation along with 112 other communities/ castes was referred to the Andhra Pradesh Backward Classes Commission in 1994. In 2004, based on a report by the Commissioner of Minority Welfare on the social, economic, and educational backwardness of Muslims, the government provided 5% reservation, treating the entire community as backward. The High Court struck down the quota on the technical ground that the mandatory consultation with the AP Commission for Backward Classes was not done. It also held that the minority welfare report was bad in law because it laid down no criteria for determining backwardness. (T Muralidhar Rao vs State of AP, 2004) However, the court held that "reservations for Muslims or sections/ groups among them, in no manner militate against secularism, which is part of the basic structure of the constitution". Relying on M R Balaji vs State of Mysore (1962), the court noted that "Muslims or for that matter Christians and Sikhs etc., are not excluded for the purpose of conferring the benefits under Articles 15(4) or 16(4)".

In M R Balaji, the Supreme Court observed: "It is not unlikely that in some States



## Can a secular country like India have religion-based reservation? Have Muslims ever been given reservation by reducing the quota for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), or Other Backward Classes (OBCs)?

some Muslims or Christians or Jains forming groups may be socially backward. That is why...though castes in relation to Hindus may be a relevant factor to consider in determining the social backwardness of groups or classes of citizens, it cannot be made the sole or the dominant test in that behalf." In Indra Sawhney (1992), the Supreme Court held that "in a particular state, Muslim community as a whole may be found socially backward. (As a matter of fact, they are so treated in...Karnataka as well as...Kerala...)"

Following the 2004 HC decision, the AP government referred the issue to the Backward Classes Commission. In 2005, based on the Commission's report, the state promulgated an ordinance declaring the entire Muslim community as backward, and providing 5% quota. But the HC struck down the ordinance in B Archana Reddy vs State of AP (2005) on the ground that the benefit could not be extended to the whole community without proper identification of social backwardness of Muslims by the Commission. The five-judge Bench of the HC reiterated that there is no prohibition on declaring Muslims as a community socially and educationally backward, provided they satisfy the test of social backwardness. Thus, the failure of the Commission to recognise the heterogeneity of Muslims became the basis for the rejection of its report, and of the ordinance based on it. The state again referred the matter to the Backward Classes Commission and, based on its report, enacted a law in 2007 giving reservation to only 14 Muslim castes such as washermen, butcher, carpenter, gardener, barber, etc. Similar occupational castes of Hindus were already in the list of backwards, and enjoying reservation. The schedule of the Act explicitly excluded 10 'higher' castes among Muslims such as Saiyed, Mushaik, Mughal, Pathan, Irani, Arab, Bhora, Khoja, Cutchi-Memon, etc. But this Act too was struck down by the HC.

The final word on its constitutionality is awaited from the Supreme Court. After the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the TRS government in Telangana passed a law in 2017 proposing 12% reservation for OBC Muslims on the basis of the reports of the G Sudhir Commission and the Backward Classes Commission.

The Sudhir Commission found that in educational attainment, work participation, and household-level possession of land, Muslims were behind SCs, STs and Hindus in general. Since the proposal would take reservation beyond the 50% mandated by the Supreme Court in its Indra Sawhney judgment (1992), it was referred to the central government for inclusion in the Ninth Schedule. But the Centre did not bring the proposal to Parliament. Sachar, Misra panels The Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee (2006) found that the Muslim community as a whole was almost as backward as SCs and STs, and more backward than non-Muslim OBCs.

The Justice Ranganath Misra Committee (2007) suggested 15% reservation for minorities, including 10% for Muslims. Based on these two reports, the UPA government in 2012 issued an executive order providing 4.5% reservation of minorities — not just Muslims — within the existing OBC quota of 27%. Since the order was issued only a few days before the Assembly elections in UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa, and Manipur, the Election Commission asked the government not to implement it. The AP High Court quashed the order, and the Supreme Court refused to stay the HC's order. Article 341 of the Constitution and the 1950 Presidential Order state that only Hindus are entitled to inclusion within SCs. However, Sikhs were included within SCs in 1956, and Buddhists in 1990. Muslims and Christians remain excluded. It could be argued that this too, is 'religion-based' reservation.

# A fantasy by those who have never lived in a village

Naturally trained to be a sniffer dog, of the kind that likes to spot codes, the semiotician in me was slightly thrilled to discover that something was happening beneath the obvious plot in *Laapataa Ladies*. Right after the two newly-wed brides are lost on the train, the mistake discovered only when a bride lifts her veil to reveal her face, and her husband, in a state of shock, says that this is not his Phool, I begin to notice the pattern. Deepak's bride's name is "Phool", flower. The bride who's mistakenly been brought to this village says that her name is "Pushpa" — that means flower as well. Her husband's name, she says, is "Pankaj", meaning lotus.

Phool, young, innocent of the ways of the world, is unable to remember the name of her husband's village. It's named after a flower, she says. Her new companions at the railway station supply her with names of flowers from time to time. "Gulab, Champa, Chameli, Matiya, Kaner, Dhatura?" asks Chhotu helpfully. No, Phool shakes her head; neither "Parijat" nor "Nalini"; not "Mogra" either. "You've turned us all into bees," Manju Mai, the woman who sells tea and bread pakoras, tells Phool playfully. We eventually discover that the name of the village is Surajmukhi. It seems appropriate, even if it comes only as an afterthought, that Deepak's village should be named sunflower — Deepak, meaning lamp, a source of light. To remain alive, Phool — flower — would need this source of light, even if it's not the sun. The bus that gets Deepak and Jaya to Surajmukhi village is called 'Pushpa Travels'; Jaya praises the lotus stem dish made by Deepak's mother. These cues and clues about plant life are smuggled into the film even though they might not be directly related to the film's "meaning" or experience. I found myself thinking frequently of a *Mahasweta Devi* story as I watched the film. It's called "Seed". Unlike *Laapataa Ladies*, which is set in the fictional state of Nirmal Pradesh — "nirmal" means pure and clean — *Mahasweta Devi's* story is set in a violent time and space, in Kuruda village, around the time of the Emergency, where landlords could kill farm workers without worrying about punishment. *Mahasweta Devi's* village is harsh and brutal, casteist and hostile. The little "politics" we are given in *Laapataa Ladies* is how names of villages change with changes in governments: Indirapur to Atalnagar to Mayaganj; how similar the village is to a woman, whose name is changed after her marriage.

It is possible that it was Jaya's passion for "organic farming" that set off the comparison with *Mahasweta Devi's* story in my mind. "Organic farming" is an imagined vocation for Jaya — it's also a feel-good phrase and upper-class aspiration for the urban audience of Kiran Rao's film, one that allows us to feel correct, equitable, and nurturing of the planet and ourselves. In *Mahasweta Devi's* story, Dulan Ganju's land, not allowed to be farmed for years because the landlord Lachman Singh has buried corpses of the men that he's killed



there, begins to show signs of fertility: The dead "Karan and Bulaki are now those putush bushes and aloe plants". Even Dulan's son Dhatua, who protests against the landlord, is buried there. After managing to kill the landlord, Dulan plants paddy on the land: "I won't let you be just aloe and putush. I'll turn you into paddy, Dhatua... When the seedlings appear... Lachman, Makhn or Ramlagan's fertiliser-fed seedlings are nothing in comparison... Tall, strong, healthy plants." It was of this manner of "organic farming" I found myself thinking of as I watched *Laapataa Ladies*,

where the only killings that are mentioned are a wife who has died by suicide and insects that are killing the crops. The flower-like sweetness of the film (Phool adds rose petals to her kalakand in a barely functional kitchen; the police inspector's name is Manohar, meaning "lovable"), with its handbook feminism that has made it endearing to all of us, is made possible not because it's a "comedy", but because it's a fantasy, an Aamir Khan Productions version of the utopian Indian village imagined by those who have never lived in a village. ("When I would see these villages from a train, I'd

wonder about what happens there," Rao said in an interview for Netflix), where patriarchy can be defeated with as much cinematic ease as winning a game of cricket helps a village get rid of land tax in Lagaan. I do not remember a single mention of any flower in *Mahasweta Devi's* story. Dulan's son will never be found — he is under the soil, his rotting flesh and bones now manure for the paddy plants. "Dhatua, I've turned you all into seed," says Dulan, the farmer-father. Organic farming indeed. Roy, a poet and writer, is associate professor of creative writing, Ashoka University. Views are personal

## The clean energy transition has become messy

I have been involved with the petroleum industry for over four decades. I do not recollect a more combustible, contrarian and confusing complex of forces bearing on it than those today. It has never been easy to call the timing and rate of change of oil prices. This is because they are influenced by the non-fundamentals of geopolitics, exchange rates, speculators and the predilections of corporate and political leaders. The direction of change has, however, been easier to foretell because it was driven by the fundamentals of demand and supply. Now, these fundamentals have also been tossed into the cauldron. As a result, policymakers in import-dependent countries like India face a challenge: How to manage and mitigate the consequential uncertainties?

A tour d'horizon of the international petroleum market is revealing. Latin America: Venezuela has the largest reserves of oil in the world. The US has reimposed sanctions on the country for breach of the government's commitment to hold "free and fair elections". It has done so with a self-interested twist. The US company, Chevron, has been allowed to continue in the joint venture with the national oil company in Venezuela, PDVSA, and to sell

crude oil to refineries in the US. The reason is, in part, to keep a lid on US petrol prices and, in part, to protect US commercial interests. President Joe Biden wants to burnish his democratic credentials and safeguard his electoral prospects.

Production of shale oil and gas is surging. The US is the largest producer of petroleum liquids in the world and the biggest exporter of LNG. It has also allocated more money than any other government (approximately \$400 billion, through the misnamed Inflation Reduction Act) to reduce carbon emissions. This presents a dilemma. At some point, the economics of fossils may have to give way to the politics of clean energy.

US: The US also continues to back the Ukrainian war effort — and for good reason. Unprovoked aggression should be resisted. It should be noted, however, that the conflict has boosted the profits of US petroleum companies. They have (predominantly) filled the vacuum created by the sanctions on exports of Russian gas and petroleum products into Europe. Here, the principles of global security clash with corporate commercial interests. Russia: Russia's petroleum industry has been degraded by sanctions, drone attacks, finan-

cial constraints and poor technology. Yet, it is generating sufficient revenue to finance its war machine. China and India have replaced Europe as their major overseas markets. Last month, these two countries absorbed 62 per cent of Russia's crude oil exports. Prima facie, this would suggest the bark of Western sanctions is stronger than its bite. And deliberately so. Were Russian oil taken off the market, the price would ratchet up sharply and hurt the electoral prospects of leaders facing elections this year. The point is, here too, there is no walking a straight line.

Middle East: The region is facing a witch's brew of warfare, racism and radicalism but also houses 55 per cent of the world's petroleum reserves. It was convulsed on October 7 when Hamas attacked Israel and Israel retaliated with genocidal ferocity. The conflict entered a new phase on April 13 when Iran launched 300 plus missiles against Israel directly rather than through its proxies (Hamas, Houthis, Hezbollah). The impact was minimal. All the missiles were destroyed before they reached their intended target. That did not lower the inevitability of an Israeli response. The world was on edge. The question was how and when, not whether.

# Why spectrum allocation, tech policy must not be a matter of courts

The 3G spectrum auction of 2010, held in the wake of the 2G scandal of 2008, was a blessing at the time, for it achieved two objectives for the beleaguered process of air wave assignment to telecom operators. One, it ensured transparency in the process of allocation of scarce spectrum and two, it resulted in a revenue windfall for the government. The auction Rs 67,718.95 crore as per the government. This was a massive amount, even if significantly less than the notional — and, if I might add, illusory — Rs 1,76,000 crore that was estimated as loss to the government by the then CAG, when spectrum was given away on a “first-come-first-served basis” (FCFS). Reams have been written about this. What was a blessing then, has turned into a curse now, but it is not my intention to delve into the past. Rather, the purpose is to argue that auctions, in the current format, are inimical to the sector’s growth and downstream competitiveness and that the historical lack of institutional integrity is adding to the challenge. The year 2010 was a defining moment for Indian telecoms. Until then, spectrum was administratively assigned, and thereafter by auctions. The pre-2010 administrative assignment of spectrum suffered from a lack of transparency, favouritism and avoidable scandals. The Supreme Court thus ordered the government to auction spectrum for “all time to come”.

The phrase “all time to come” was not pronounced in a vacuum: It was in retaliation to the bitter political economy associated with administrative spectrum assignment, including the half-baked and bungled FCFS method. It was also a telling comment on the government’s incapability to assign spectrum transparently by any other method. Transparency is desirable for its own sake, and in a democracy like ours, its value multiplies manifold. Besides, if resources are to be generated in the process, these should go to government coffers, rather than unscrupulous individuals and private corporations, so that the money can be used for financing public goods.

No one could possibly quarrel with these arguments. Except that resources can be generated by means other than auctions. Think of toll roads that are coming up all over the country. Their existence has spawned businesses, generated tourism, and led to efficient transportation of goods to railways and ports. The income tax and GST revenue thus generated is also money for the government to spend on much-needed public goods. For telecoms, the backbone of Digital India, downstream competitiveness of user industries relies heavily on robust connectivity. Providing spectrum at a reasonable upfront fee to operators, thus helping firm-level efficiency and promoting competitiveness, would do what toll roads have done for the government. As the maxim goes, American roads are not good because America is rich, America is rich because American roads are good. That was the 1960s. Today’s carrier is digital infrastructure, of which spectrum is a vital input. There are many

dots (including DoT or the Department of Telecommunications) to be connected to even put this on the agenda for discussion. At the outset, the government will have to be amenable to giving up a bird in hand for many more later — just as investors do for long-term gains. Another consideration against auctions is that the revenue outcomes have been mixed. The direct and indirect opportunity costs of unsold spectrum due to high reserve prices have been steep. The auction regime worked well when demand exceeded supply, either genuinely or artificially engendered. It is quite revealing that 100 per cent of the spectrum was sold in only one of the seven auctions that have been held. That was in 2010, close on the heels of the 2G scam. Are auctions the only route to transparency?

On April 22, the DoT moved the Supreme Court to modify its 2012 order to allow administrative allocation of spectrum in select cases, where using the auction route is either not technically feasible or not desirable, such as for space and satellite applications. The recently-passed Telecom Act, 2023, specifies that only limited and narrowly-defined cases, including spectrum for BSNL, will be given on administrative basis. There are reportedly 19 such cases. It is the government’s prerogative whether it uses auctions for these or other types of assignment. It could have easily arrogated to itself the power to assign spectrum in the best interest of the country in the Telecom Act, 2023. This is a policy decision and ought not to be subject to a Supreme Court decision from over a decade ago, which directed that all spec-

trum will be assigned by auction for all time to come. Situations and market dynamics change and, hopefully, so do institutions. The DoT is giving itself the benefit of doubt that it can, under changed circumstances, assign spectrum through administrative procedures that will stand the test of transparency and legitimacy. Or it doesn’t wish to, and is taking aim from the Supreme Court’s burdened shoulders. Whatever route the assignment of spectrum takes, it is a policy decision and under normal circumstances ought to be decided by the policy maker — which is the DoT. I recall a time when the newly-established Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was engaged in telecom tariff fixing, a power that it has to this day. It was 1998 and the regulator was involved with what was known as “tariff-rebalancing”, thereby reducing the cross subsidy from long distance to monthly rentals. This was neces-

sary to attract competition and to keep the incumbent public sector undertaking, BSNL, afloat. Naturally, when competition arrives, the incumbent would lose market share and subscribers. That is inevitable. The CAG told TRAI that its actions were prejudicial to the revenue interest of the public sector and, as a consequence, overstepped into policy, beyond its audit function. This example is just for the purpose of illustrating the importance of specialists and expert bodies executing functions entrusted to them because these can have far-reaching implications. Thus, policy for the telecom sector is best left to TRAI and DoT; to auction or not to auction is a task given to them and they should be responsible for it and be made accountable. The writer is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences and professor of Economics at the Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence. Views are personal



## Now limit replies only to verified users to avoid spam: Musk

New Delhi: In yet another bid to sanitise X social media platform, Elon Musk on Sunday announced that users can now limit replies only to verified users to avoid spam and bots. The platform last month started cracking down on spam accounts which resulted in several users losing followers.

When a user posted a new X tool that “limit replies to verified users” only to prevent spam in the comment section, the tech billionaire replied: “This will improve the quality of your replies”. However, not all users appeared to follow his advice. “I can’t do that. I have too many friends I really enjoy interacting with who don’t have blue checks,” a follower commented. X saw a flood of spam and porn bots in the last few months, which triggered a mega action on such fake accounts.