

Medigadda Barrage: Telangana Irrigation Dept divided on way forward

Hyderabad: As the Rabi season approaches, the issue of drawing water from the Pranahita River by operationalising the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) has sparked serious debate within the Irrigation department and government circles. The pressing need is to utilize Pranahita water over the next four months to meet the irrigation requirements of the ayacut. The Irrigation department's top brass is deeply divided over the fate of the Medigadda barrage and the broader Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP). While a significant majority, barring a few exceptions, supports putting two of the three barrages back into operation, some senior officials believe that the Medigadda barrage's issues are being over-emphasized.

These officials advocate for utilizing Pranahita water by lifting it from the Medigadda pump house, thereby avoiding the need to impound water and add pressure to the barrage. They believe strongly that the structure is not fragile as it is being projected to be by the Congress government. They argue that this approach would meet irrigation needs without further compromising the barrage. Government stance and political opposition. The political leadership within the government, however, has consistently opposed reactivating any of the three barrages constructed as part of the KLIP. Their stance has remained unchanged since the day the investigation into structural issues was assigned to the National Dam Safety Authority

(NDSA). This opposition has created a serious rift within the department, with senior officials feeling sidelined in the decision-making process. The NDSA, tasked with investigating the Medigadda barrage, has faced numerous procedural delays and challenges. The preliminary investigation exercise was done under the previous BRS government. It was officially commissioned for a full-fledged investigation into the KLIP construction by the Congress government in February. The NDSA was given multiple extensions after completion of initial two month-tenure as its task was not completed due to the complexity of issues and the need for thorough technical studies. The most recent extension, announced in November, pushed the deadline for the final report to December 31. This delay has been attributed to the State government's failure to submit necessary data and reports on time, and unauthorized repairs by State authorities without NDSA approval. The geo-physical and geo-technical studies for the Annaram and Sundilla barrages remain incomplete. Despite repeated extensions, much work is still needed on the investigation, and the final report is contingent on completing these studies. As a result, the final report may not be ready by the December deadline, and the NDSA study may require yet another extension. Further delays could impact the farmers in the absence of irrigation support to the lands in the ayacut. It will be leading to mounting frustration among those who have already suffered for over a year. Excessive politicking around



the Medigadda barrage issue may exacerbate the restiveness of farmers who have been at the receiving end of these delays, some officials feel. • Fate of Medigadda barrage hangs in balance • Excessive politicking by Congress around Kaleshwaram making farmers restive • Irrigation dept divided on way forward • Issue before Govt is to go with NDSA or without it • Timeline: NDSA probe into Medigadda Barrage • October 21, 2023: Two pillars of Medigadda barrage found sagging, leading to the temporary closure of the bridge • October 23-24, 2023: Six-member NDSA team visited the site on a stock-tak-

ing mission and met with Irrigation officials • November 4, 2023: NDSA released 43-page report identifying issues in planning, design, quality control and operation & maintenance as reasons for damage • February 2024: NDSA officially commissioned by the Congress government to investigate construction of KLIP barrages • May 7, 2024: NDSA submitted its interim report recommending measures for the Medigadda barrage to State government • December 31: NDSA is scheduled to submit its final report, but is unlikely to meet deadline due to ongoing challenges and delays

Telangana's outstanding debt is Rs 3.89 lakh crore: RBI report debunks false Congress claims

Hyderabad: Telangana's outstanding liabilities as of March 2024 stood at Rs.3,89,673 crore, with guarantees for loans obtained by government organisations pegged at Rs.38,867.4 crore. In its latest report "Handbook of Statistics on Indian States", the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has debunked the Congress government's claims about Telangana's outstanding debts, lending credence to assertions by the BRS. The RBI report is in stark contrast with the Congress government's inflated figure of Rs.7 lakh crore. These outstanding loans include State Development Loans (SDLs), UDAY scheme, and National Social Security Fund (NSSF), as well as loans from NABARD, LIC and other national banks, internal debts, Central loans, and others. The outstanding debts increased from Rs.72,658 crore in 2014-15 to Rs.3.89 lakh crore in 2023-24, while guarantees shot up from Rs.18,265.2 crore to Rs.38,867.4 crore. Notably, the period 2017-18 saw a sharp increase to Rs.1,60,296 crore, reflecting significant State investments in infra-

structure and welfare schemes. Together, they account for an outstanding debt burden of Rs.4,28,540 crore. This amount includes the loans amounting to Rs.6,115 crore obtained by the Congress government after coming to power in December last year. However, the Congress government, in its white paper on State Finances in December last year, claimed Telangana's debt had ballooned to Rs.6.71 lakh crore by November 2023 and further escalated to Rs.6.8 lakh crore by March 2024. Since then, Congress leaders have been claiming that the previous BRS government left the State with a debt burden of Rs.7 lakh crore. But, the RBI's official data places the debt at a significantly lower figure, contradicting Congress's allegations that the debt had grown tenfold since the State's formation in 2014. Former Finance Minister and senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao meticulously dismantled Congress's claims earlier. He pointed out that the BRS government inherited Rs.72,658 crore in debt when Telangana was formed and had also absorbed Rs.11,609 crore of pre-formation



loans under Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs). Adjusting for these numbers, the effective debt incurred by the BRS government was Rs.4,26,499 crore over nine and a half years, rather than the Congress's claim of Rs.6,71,757 crore. Ironically, in a bid to seek restructuring of these debts from the 16th Finance Commission earlier this year,

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy unknowingly admitted to the economic progress under the K Chandrashekhkar Rao.

He informed the 16th Finance Commission that Telangana's GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) growth was at 12.9 per cent CAGR (compound annual growth rate),

Denying access to restrooms has serious health ramifications for gender non-conforming people

The Madras High Court recently sanctioned the creation of three gender-neutral toilets on campus, after advocate and transwoman R. Kanmani, wrote to the Chief Justice last November, pointing out the need to have gender-neutral toilets in addition to the existing ones on the court premises. "I have been working there since April 2023, and usually avoid using the restroom as there are no gender-neutral toilets on campus," says Kanmani, adding that it has taken a toll on her physical and mental health. "In October this year, I received a letter from the Madras HC, conveying that it had directed the construction of three such toilets on campus." This marks another milestone in the LGBTQIA+ fight for equal rights. Right to sanitation is recognised as a human right by the United Nations. However, according to a 2020 World Bank report, only 72% of people in India have access to sanitation. When it comes to gender non-conforming people, the situation is worse as they are denied admittance to gendered restrooms, and face violence while using these facilities. No hard data

There are no statistics available about the number of gender non-conforming people in India. As per the 2011 census, there are 4,87,803 transgender people in the country (who identify as other than male or female) but this doesn't include those who identify within the binary, or those staying with natal families and who may have chosen not to disclose their non-binary trans status out of fear of facing domestic violence. Many of them are forced to "hold" their stool and urine for hours on end. So, they avoid eating or drinking when they are outside, which naturally, has an impact on their health. Gendered restrooms are also often spaces where they experience violence — verbal, physical or sexual. "A lot of gender non-conforming children have faced violence while using restrooms in schools. They are asked to remove their clothes, forced to display their genitals when they go to bathrooms that correspond to their biological gender," says L. Ramakrishnan, vice president of the public health NGO, SAATHII, adding that such cases have been documented across India in educational institutions, workplaces, and public spaces. Kanmani was subject to a nightmarish experience, when, as a 23-year-old law student, she stepped into a women's restroom at the Kashmere Gate metro station in Delhi, to fix her saree. "All the women inside rushed out. I was forced to go to the men's restroom as the toilet for persons with disabilities was locked. Half the men left but the others using the urinals turned and exposed their genitals to me. I shouted, cried and tried using a stall where I could quickly drape my saree and leave, but they didn't allow me to do so," she says. This went on for half an hour, with people throwing slurs and cuss words at her. It lasted until one of the women sanitation workers managed to get the key for the washroom for persons with disability, and took her there. "She was the only one who was kind to me," says Kanmani. Fred Rogers, a man of trans experience and a trans rights activist, remembers the horrific experience he had prior to his top surgery at an airport in Goa. "As I was about to enter a women's toilet, an old man chased me with a stick, shouting that I was about to rape a woman," says Fred. "In school, I re-

frained from using gendered restrooms because I was not comfortable using the girls' restroom and the one for boys was not safe. Gender non-conforming people are abused, stripped, and even forced to do sexual acts in restrooms. People assume that we are not equal citizens, and that attitude contributes to the violence that happens in restrooms." In April 2022, he filed a petition with the Madras High Court, asking for "single occupancy, gender neutral toilets/ all gender toilets in addition to the existing gendered restrooms in educational institutions, malls, bus stations, railway stations, airports and other public places in Tamil Nadu.

Violence in schools, public spaces Even when they have parental support, gender non-conforming children face violence in schools. When Guwahati-based Indrani Chakraborty's child came out as a trans girl when she was in class 7, Indrani visited the school and changed the gender and name of her child on the school records. "But, in school, her fellow classmates and seniors dragged her to the boys' restroom, and removed her clothes to check her genitals. Her complaints were initially not taken seriously, but finally they provided her with a separate toilet," says Indrani. But, later a few students, parents and teachers ganged up against her daughter. "She was pulled up for random things and slut shamed. Finally, after class 10, we opted for open schooling under NIOS," she further adds. Kolkata-based clinical psychologist Aritra Chatterjee, a member of the community, says that even the way restrooms are designed pose a challenge to gender non-conforming people. "Even if a transman/ transmasculine person 'passes' (looks and presents like a man) and uses the men's toilet, they are unable to use the standing stalls or urinals. Most toilets have only one or two closed stalls, which they can use and a person who regularly uses only that facility becomes earmarked, and ultimately, a target of violence," she says. Health impacts

Holding your urine and stool for a long time can have a serious impact on your health. "It can lead to urinary tract infections, incontinence, renal stones and constipation-related issues like anal fissures, haemorrhoids, as well as gastric issues," says Palakkad-based transwoman Vibha Usha Radhakrishnan, a medical professional. Community members, activists and allies have been campaigning for the establishment of single-stall, gender-neutral toilets in educational institutions, workplaces, government institutions and public spaces. In Assam, Rituparna, founder-director of Akam Foundation, launched a campaign, #NoMoreHoldingMyPee, in June 2022. "A female-assigned, non-binary person, who considers me his mother, stopped going to college as he had to always wait for a friend to escort him to the toilet, he could not go otherwise. That moved me to take action," says Rituparna, who highlighted the need for gender-neutral restrooms in educational institutions across Assam during the Pride Walk in October 2023. And things are slowly changing. In 2023, the Supreme Court of India announced that nine gender-neutral bathrooms were being set up on the court premises. Institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and the Na-



tional Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR), Telangana, have introduced gender-neutral restrooms on their campuses. IIT Delhi established 14 gender-inclusive restrooms in the lecture hall complex in 2022 after members of Indradhanu, the LGBTQIA+ collective of IIT Delhi, met with the authorities. Some hotels, educational institutions and corporates have created similar facilities. But the psychological damage caused by 'holding urine' and the vio-

lence suffered has a lasting impact, says Ms. Chatterjee, who counsels members of the community.

"There is a tremendous sense of alienation and social isolation over an act so mundane as urinating. It affects the person's quality of life. There is anticipated stigma and discrimination along with trauma (if you have experienced violence), and constant fear leads to complex psychological issues that people have to battle all their lives," she says.

Scientists test grape compound's potential to prevent bowel cancer



New Delhi: UK scientists are launching a trial to explore whether an ingredient commonly found in grape juice and wine could keep bowel cancer at bay. Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is a type of cancer that starts in the large bowel, including the colon and rectum. The team will probe a chemical called resveratrol — a naturally occurring ingredient found in grapes, blueberries, raspberries, and peanuts — for potential cancer prevention.

The trial, led by researchers at the University of Leicester, UK, is also testing multiple potential prevention drugs for bowel cancer, including aspirin and metformin. While drinking red wine does not prevent cancer, and is a major risk factor, the research fo-

cussed on purified resveratrol. Karen Brown, Professor of Translational Cancer Research at the University of Leicester said that with advanced screening methods, early detection of bowel cancer has become easier. She further noted that the best way to prevent bowel cancer "is to improve our lifestyles — stopping smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, reducing alcohol consumption and having a healthy, balanced diet". However, with the new trial, funded by Cancer Research UK, the team aims to conduct a "unique experiment to see how drugs could stop bowel polyps from growing". Brown said the results can have wider "implications for how we prevent bowel cancer in people who are most likely to develop the disease as they get older."

One Nation-One Election vision is a Step Towards a Developed India by 2047: CM Haryana

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), December 13 – Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini, lauding the Union Cabinet's decision to approve the 'One Nation-One Election' vision, said this move will save both time and money, benefiting the common people significantly. It will also expedite development works, ensuring that India becomes a developed nation by 2047. The Chief Minister was interacting with the media persons after inaugurating a craft exhibition at Kisan Bhawan in Sector-35, Chandigarh.

Responding to the Punjab Chief Minister's statement on the 'One Nation-One Election' saying that it could harm regional parties, Saini said that the Punjab government has failed to meet the expectations of its people. In Delhi, leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are embroiled in corruption cases and are behind bars. They came to power promising transparent governance but failed to deliver, said the Chief Minister. Advising AAP leaders, the Chief Minister said they should focus on improving people's lives, providing clean drinking water to Delhi residents, and cleaning the Yamuna River. He asserted that people have understood their reality and are eagerly waiting for the Delhi elections, where AAP will face a big defeat.

The Haryana Chief Minister said that the Punjab government should procure its farmers' crops at MSP. If Punjab's farmers face any issues, the Punjab government must step forward and announce that they will purchase all crops at MSP, he said. CM Saini claimed that the Haryana government is procuring all crops from farmers at Minimum Support Price (MSP) and is continuously working towards empowering them. He

said that the Congress government should also decide on strengthening farmers in the state governed by them. The Chief Minister said that the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has undertaken numerous historic initiatives for the welfare of farmers over the past ten years, which has caused discomfort to other political parties. Congress and other parties in the I.N.D.I. alliance frequently question and politicize every pro-farmer decision made by the Prime Minister. Targeting Congress, the Chief Minister said that the people have now rejected Congress because its leaders lie and have used deceit to gain power in states like Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana. However, those governments have not worked in the interest of the people. This is evident from Congress's debacle in Haryana and Maharashtra.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the people of Haryana and Maharashtra have confirmed their support for BJP, ensuring that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, BJP will form the government for the fourth time in 2029. He said that the country is progressing steadily, with efforts being made for the welfare of all sections of society, including farmers, poor, youth, and women. While inaugurating a Craft Exhibition organized at Kisan Bhawan, Sector-35, Chandigarh, the Chief Minister said that handicrafts men will play an important role in Prime Minister Modi's vision of making India a developed nation by the year 2047. For this, the Central Government has launched the PM Vishwakarma Yojana, under which traditional artisans and craftsmen are being provided assistance by the government to enhance their products and services. Skill training is also being given to artisans. He said the Haryana Government is



taking forward the vision of the Prime Minister and is providing all kinds of facilities to craftsmen in the state. C M Saini said the exhibition organized by Craft Roots Sansthan has provided an excellent platform to artisans to showcase their art. The institution has imparted skill training to about 75,000 youth and women and made them skilled in various fields. He said India is a country of diversity where every province, every region and every community has its own unique art and craft tradition. Craft Roots Sansthan has made a commendable effort to bring all these traditions under one roof. He said this is not just a platform for exhibition but also a symbol of respect for those artisans and crafts-

men who dedicate their lives to their craft. He said handicrafts and handlooms have an important contribution in the development of human civilization and culture. History shows that artisans and handloom artisans have contributed a lot in developing India. Today, in the 21st century, India is again going to become a big economic power in the world and skilled hands will have a lot of contribution in achieving this. Saini said the Saras and Craft Exhibition being held from November 28, 2024 at the International Gita Mahotsav in Kurukshetra has provided a big platform to handicrafts men and handloom artisans. Handicrafts Men from India and abroad have come to this fair, which will inspire more people.

Samantha Ruth Prabhu opens up about 'shame and stigma' attached to divorce; counsellor shares ways to deal

Samantha addressed the harsh labels and unsolicited judgments she faced after her divorce. Samantha addressed the harsh labels and unsolicited judgments she faced after her divorce. (file/Instagram) Divorce is often accompanied by emotional upheaval and societal judgment, especially for women in deeply patriarchal societies. Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently opened up about her personal experience with divorce from ex-husband Naga Chaitanya, who's set to marry Sobhita Dhulipala in December, and the stigma attached to it.

In an interview with Galatta India, Samantha addressed the harsh labels and unsolicited judgments she faced after her divorce. "When a woman goes through a divorce, there's a lot of shame and stigma attached," she shared. Terms like "second-hand," "used," and "wasted life" were cruelly thrown her way, she said, reflecting the entrenched sexism in Indian society. The actress highlighted the societal tendency to view divorced women as failures, adding, "You're pushed into a corner where you are supposed to feel like you're a failure because you were once married and now you're not." Naga Chaitanya Naga Chaitanya is set

to marry Sobhita Dhulipala in December (Photo: Sobhita Dhulipala/Instagram) Her words resonate with countless women who bear the double burden of personal grief and public judgment, says Arouba Kabir, Emotional & Mental Health professional, Founder Enso wellness. She provided some tips on how to deal with the stigma and move on:

Acknowledge Your Emotions: Divorce is a significant life change. It's essential to give yourself permission to grieve, heal, and grow at your own pace. **Delete the Stigma:** Talk about the separation with friends and family members to push yourself towards the healing process. **Redefine Success:** Society may equate success with marriage and stability, but personal growth and professional achievements can be equally rewarding. **Choose Your Battles:** Resist the urge to engage with baseless criticism or gossip. Instead, focus on building a supportive inner circle of people who genuinely care about your well-being. As Samantha said, "I'm looking forward to the next stage in my life." Adopting a forward-looking perspective can help you focus on opportunities rather than setbacks. Why should you buy our Subscription? You want to be the smartest



The actress highlighted the societal tendency to view divorced women as failures, adding, "You're pushed into a corner where you are supposed to feel like you're a failure because you were once married and now you're not."

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Cambridge furthers its mission to equip learners with future skills with the launch of Integrated Learning and Assessment (ILA)

Hyderabad :To equip learners with essential future skills for a competitive global landscape, Cambridge University Press & Assessment has launched its Integrated Learning and Assessment (ILA) programme recently. This programme is designed to provide a holistic English Language learning experience for students in grades 1-8. ILA joins other Cambridge future skills initiatives like Cambridge Climate Quest and Young Pioneers, that equip learners to develop skills for a globalised world. The new ILA programme, aligned with national (NCF 2022-23) and international (CEFR) standards, provides a cohesive English language learning experience for students in grades 1-8. ILA charts a learning journey that shifts the focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning and promotes holistic language acquisition and LSRW (listening, speaking, reading writing) skills development. It integrates curriculum-aligned content with international standards to ensure thorough skill development and evaluation. India has a substantial skills gap, with the 2024 Economic Survey showing that only 51.25% of young people are employable. Within this larger skill gap, there persists the need to develop English proficiency to conquer global opportunities. India is witnessing an all-time high demand for overseas education, with a record 1.33 million Indian students pursuing higher education abroad in 2024, according to data from the Ministry of External Affairs. Proficiency in English has emerged as a critical crite-

rior for these students to secure admission to prestigious international universities and their careers. This initiative aligns with industry demands and workforce trends to navigate and excel in tomorrow's economy. Arun Rajamani, Managing Director, Cambridge University Press & Assessment, South Asia said: "The changes underway with NEP 2020 are a positive step, and the government's ongoing initiatives to impart skills are encouraging. Cambridge has always emphasised future skills, and our learner attributes are the cornerstone of our curriculum. While working with government initiatives like NSDC and TNSDC, we realised that the focus must start at the core level to effectively bridge the skills gap and enhance employability. With ILA, we are supporting the development of essential English language skills at the foundational level in schools across the country."

Aligned with the National Curriculum Frameworks 2022 and 2023, NEP, as well as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), this programme charts a learning journey that integrates both national and international educational standards that ensures holistic education to thrive in a global environment. This practice-based solution is designed to empower learners to enhance their English language skills in a day-to-day context. "The Integrated Learning and Assessment Solution - Level-up Vantage, is the most innovative solution available with schools to support superior language learning with a clear fo-



The novel programme focuses on the development of English as a skill

cus on skill building. This practice-based solution shifts classroom learning from traditional tasks to skill-driven knowledge. Partner schools can now support their CBSE/ICSE Curriculum along with meeting international CEFR benchmarks for language learning. It further supports government's efforts to close the skills gap. By addressing

challenges related to balancing subject knowledge and internationally benchmarked skills, this curriculum-based approach better engages learners and aligns their interests with the development of both subject understanding and essential skills," said Arunachalam TK, Regional Director (English) – South Asia, Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

A look at the tech behind the terror, as Godzilla turns 70

When movie producer Tomoyuki Tanaka wrote his outline for Gojira and presented it to Toho Studios, executive producer Iwao Mori liked the idea but wasn't sure how feasible it would be. There were concerns over cost, so he consulted with Eiji Tsuburaya, head of special effects. Things were only ever going to go one way after that. Tsuburaya was a huge fan of the Hollywood movie King Kong (1933). Gojira was the kind of creature feature he dreamed of making. He told Mori he would ensure the special effects were convincing, and would make sure they were achieved within the assigned budget. Tsuburaya had studied King Kong extensively; he even had his own 35mm print of the film. That movie had innovated on several aspects of cinematic special effects, particularly stop-motion animation. But, King Kong had been made on the then-massive budget of over-half-a-million dollars, and all of Hollywood's resources. Gojira's budget, while high by Japanese standards — it was the third-most-expensive Japanese film of all time in 1954 — could not match up. Stop-motion would have driven costs up. So Tsuburaya went for what became known as suitmation, where a character in a monster suit moves through scaled-down models at a slower pace, while being filmed at a high frame rate. The Gojira suit was made of bamboo, chicken wire, and cotton stuffed in cloth bags. The monster's

skin was made with a mix of rubber, Vaseline, clay and gypsum. The first version of the suit was so heavy, it was unusable. A second, lighter version weighed 100 kg. The actor playing the part, Haruo Nakajima, was soaked in sweat within minutes of putting it on, and could only operate it for short periods of time. For close-ups, director Ishiro Honda used a hand puppet. Over the next decade, the use of thinner latex and rubber reduced the weight of the suits, but they were still cumbersome. A big shift would come nearly a decade later, with the use of animatronic elements in King Kong vs Godzilla (1962; also directed by Honda). This film marked the introduction of limited mechanical elements to enhance the kaiju's expressiveness. Animatronic mechanisms were used in the head to articulate movements such as the opening and closing of the jaw, and slight movements of the eyes. This allowed for more detailed expressions during close-ups, infusing drama into the monster's personality and interactions.

Animatronics developed rapidly over the next few decades, pushed forward in the US by Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. Jaws (1975; Spielberg) brought us the first fully animatronic movie monster. Star Wars (1977; Lucas) gave audiences R2-D2 and C-3PO. ET (1982; Spielberg) had its lovable alien, and things came full circle with Jurassic Park (1993), in which Spielberg chan-

nelled his love for Godzilla, and combined animatronics and CGI, to build an array of breath-taking dinosaurs. Five years later came the first Hollywood adaptation. Fresh off the blockbuster success of Independence Day (1996), director Roland Emmerich and screenplay writer Dean Devlin took Godzilla to New York City. This time, the monster was almost completely CGI, with barely a dozen practical effects involved.

In 2014, production house Legendary Pictures, known for the Dark Knight and Hangover movies, announced that they had acquired the right to make films featuring Godzilla, King Kong, Mothra, Rodan and King Ghidorah. This marked the birth of the MonsterVerse. Hollywood could now pit these titans against each other, or have them collaborate. The five films released by Legendary so far have earned over \$1.5 billion. The first of these, Godzilla (2014), cast this monster as the world's only hope, amid attacks by an army of mutant kaiju. This Godzilla incorporated elements from animals such as bears, dogs and eagles, to give it an especially expressive face. Motion-capture technology was also used, to create realistic movements in the movie's other monsters. Andy Serkis, whose motion-capture filmography is probably better-known than his onscreen appearances, consulted on the project to help make the creatures more "soulful" and "believable". The rest of

the Legendary releases — Kong: Skull Island in 2017; Godzilla: King of the Monsters in 2019; Godzilla vs Kong in 2021 and Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire in 2024 — have been high on technique too (albeit, low on plot). For a long time, the kaiju stood at 50 metres, a height that worked well for looming over the Tokyo skyline of the '50s while staying proportional to the miniatures and models used in practical effects. It took 30 years for the first growth spurt. In The Return of Godzilla (1984), the monster soared to 80 metres. He had to, if he wanted to rear over Tokyo's new cityscape. By 1991, in Godzilla vs King Ghidorah, he was standing at 100 metres. Emmerich cut him down a bit, in '98, to 70 metres, but that was more a factor of the monster's new design, which was more reptilian, with a horizontal creep. He and Devlin drew inspiration, they said, from the real-world "king of the tyrant lizards", the dinosaur Tyrannosaurus rex (which was about 6 metres tall, and most likely moved around slouched). The 2000s saw Godzilla return to heights of 50 to 60 metres. Then Legendary Pictures stepped in, and all bets were off. The 2014 Godzilla was 108 metres tall. Shin Godzilla, a Japanese production directed by Hideaki Anno and Shinji Higuchi, was envisioned as 118 metres tall. Legendary's King of the Monsters added another metre and, by 2021, Godzilla stood at 120 metres, more than double his starting size.

Cambridge furthers its mission to equip learners with future skills with the launch of Integrated Learning and Assessment (ILA)

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The new ILA programme, aligned with national (NCF 2022-23) and international (CEFR) standards, provides a cohesive English language learning experience for students in grades 1-8. ILA charts a learning journey that shifts the focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning and promotes holistic language acquisition and LSRW (listening, speaking, reading writing) skills development. It integrates curriculum-aligned content with international standards to ensure thorough skill development and evaluation. India has a substantial skills gap, with the 2024 Economic Survey showing that only 51.25% of young people are employable. Within this larger skill gap, there persists the need to develop English proficiency to conquer global opportunities. India is witnessing an all-time high demand for overseas education, with a record 1.33 million Indian students pursuing higher education abroad in 2024, according to data from the Ministry of External Affairs. Proficiency in English has emerged as a critical criterion for these students to secure admission to prestigious international universities and their careers. This initiative aligns with industry demands and workforce trends to navigate and excel in tomorrow's economy.

Arun Rajamani, Managing Director, Cambridge University Press & Assessment, South Asia said: "The changes underway with NEP 2020 are a positive step, and the government's ongoing initiatives to impart skills are encouraging. Cambridge has always emphasised future skills, and our learner attributes are the cornerstone of our curriculum. While working with government initiatives like NSDC and TNSDC, we realised that the focus must start at the core level to effectively bridge the skills gap and enhance employability. With ILA, we are supporting the development of essential English language skills at the foundational level in schools across the country."

Aligned with the National Curriculum Frameworks 2022 and 2023, NEP, as well as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), this programme charts a learning journey that integrates both national and international educational standards that ensures holistic education to thrive in a global environment. This practice-based solution is designed to empower learners to enhance their English language skills in a day-to-day context. "The Integrated Learning and Assessment Solution - Level-up Vantage, is the most innovative solution available with schools to support superior language learning with a clear focus on skill building. This practice-based solution shifts classroom learning from traditional tasks to skill-driven knowledge. Partner schools can now support their CBSE/ICSE Curriculum along with meeting international CEFR benchmarks for language learning. It



further supports government's efforts to close the skills gap. By addressing challenges related to balancing subject knowledge and internationally benchmarked skills, this curriculum-based approach better engages learners and aligns their interests with the development of both subject understanding and essential skills," said Arunachalam

TK, Regional Director (English) – South Asia, Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

Corrigendum: In our recent publication, an image related to Cambridge University was erroneously used in connection with a story unrelated to the institution. We deeply regret the oversight and extend our sincere apologies to Cambridge University and our

readers for any confusion caused. To reaffirm our commitment to accuracy, we are pleased to share a new story about Cambridge University's latest initiative: Cambridge University's latest initiative: Cambridge Furthers Its Mission to Equip Learners with Future Skills with the Launch of Integrated Learning and Assessment (ILA)— Editor, The Indian Chronicle

Lower middle class facing consumption challenge, inflation, low salaries key issue: FICCI President

India's lower-middle class section is facing a consumption challenge, with rising food inflation reducing people's discretionary spending kitty, and a slow growth of salary increases making matters worse, Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, the new president of the industry body Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) said. In an interview with Aggam Walia and Soumyarendra Barik, he also spoke about when the private sector may ramp up their capex spendings, and why the industry's research and development (R&D) budget is low, among other things. Edited excerpts:

Very clearly what we see in the consumption area, the challenge is more at the lower-middle, middle-class area because we have seen even in FMCG, rural is doing better. Premium products have been doing very well post-Covid. It is in this area of lower- and middle-income group where the real challenge is. If you see the average retail purchase, 75 per cent of it is in the food and grocery area and only 25 per cent is in discretionary. So, any impact on food inflation has a direct impact on the discretionary spend. We all know food inflation has been a bit high in the past few months and particularly in the areas of vegetable, oil, etc. But going forward, because that's a concern area for the government also and it is taking a lot

of measures, we are hopeful that maybe in the next quarter or so – we are seeing some green shoots also – the inflation rate may come down a little bit. Also, because of people's salaries, it has not been able to keep up with the pace of inflation. I think these two things may be coming back and it will have a positive impact.

The FICCI-Quest Corp report pointed out that while private sector earnings are at an all time high, wages of people have not kept pace. Why is the private sector not compensating its employees commensurately? I wouldn't say it has not kept pace, because ultimately in the free economy, obviously in such a competitive world where there's always a dearth of capable people, if a company is paying less, nobody is going to stay with the company, right? And hence, I would say it's wrong to have that view that the industry is not paying well to the people. If you see, ultimately the people can move around.

But what if everyone is paying low?

People can't talk to each other because as a competitor, I would always like to have the best people and get the people from the competing companies. It's not that the whole industry can discuss and say that we won't pay. I wouldn't say that it's the challenge from the industry perspective that the pay is low.

And again, profit has gone up, but it's cyclical so it might also go down sometimes. It will depend industry to industry and company to company. In many industries, the salary rise has been phenomenal. Despite the government's big public spending push on capex, the private sector has not started investing in a big way. Why is it not rising to the occasion?

There was an estimate by the RBI (Reserve Bank of India) that private investment this year will increase by 50 or 55 per cent in comparison to last year, and that is on the basis of approvals from banks, project reports, etc. So from that perspective, it's not that it's not increasing. Another important data point is that the capacity utilisation of the manufacturing units right now is somewhere around 74-75 per cent. That's a sweet spot according to us where a lot of private players start looking at expansion and going into the capex mode. We are very hopeful that in the times to come, we will see more participation from the private sector. The fundamental question there being why has it not happened yet? If it's the question of the last 3-4 years, because there was Covid in 2020, obviously there was a big disruption due to that. It has taken 2-3 years for the companies to normalize and for demand to normalise.

Bangladesh visit by foreign secy: How India is engaging with the new Dhaka

The visit of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to Dhaka — he met his counterpart Mohammad Jashim Uddin on Monday — reflects a willingness on the part of New Delhi to engage with the post-Hasina establishment in Bangladesh. Ties have been strained since a street uprising forced the former Prime Minister to flee to India in August, and they have deteriorated further in recent weeks over reports of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das on charges of sedition. The message from Misri's visit — the first by a senior Indian official since the fall of Hasina's government — was clear: New Delhi expects Dhaka to be responsive to its concerns, to not allow the strain in ties to impact the bilateral development partnership, and to not allow India's enemies to impinge on its security. Post-Aug 5 context: The collapse of Hasina's government on August 5 led to chaos in the country.

As students and protesters targeted the police machinery that was seen as the strong arm of the state during 16 years of Hasina's rule, personnel abandoned their posts and stations. Homes of politicians belonging to the previous regime were attacked and looted, their offices were vandalised. The ire of the mobs extended to everyone who was seen as aligned with Hasina and her Awami League — including bureaucrats, political activists, intellectuals, journalists, and civil society leaders. The student protesters who had led the agitation against Hasina did try to distance themselves from the mob — and as a semblance of order returned, people were seen returning some of the valuables and furniture that were looted from the Prime Minister's residence in the immediate aftermath of her fall. Foreign Secys meet: Delhi flags plight of minorities, Dhaka says internal issue

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with his Bangladesh counterpart Mohammad Jashim Uddin in Dhaka. (ANI) Attacks on Hindus

Immediately after Hasina's fall, as the Awami League and its supporters were targeted, religion did not matter specifically. Hindus who faced attacks did so probably because the community has been traditionally aligned with Hasina, and has received patronage and protection from her secular politics. But the ranks of the opposition to Hasina also contained large numbers of religious hardliners, including Islamist extremists, supporters of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, and the various ideological progeny of the opponents of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's secularist commitment. As the students stepped back and the police made themselves invisible, these elements took centre stage, and the looting and violence became overtly communal. Hindus attacked

A demonstrator displayed a placard during a protest against alleged violence against Hindu communities during the unrest in Bangladesh followed by the ouster of former PM Sheikh Hasina. On September 19, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the most well-organised body of the country's religious minorities, reported a total of 2,010 communal incidents between August 4 and August 20, in which nine people were killed, four women were raped, and 69 places of worship were attacked. More than 900 homes and an almost equal number of business



establishments were attacked and vandalised, and 21 properties of minorities were occupied, the report said. Prothom Alo, the country's most respected Bangla newspaper, published its own investigation by 64 correspondents in 64 districts and 69 upazilas (sub-districts) — and reported evidence of attacks on 1,068 homes and businesses, and 22 attacks on temples, churches, and Ahmadiyya prayer places during the period August 5-20. Mauhfuz Anam, editor of the Daily Star, Bangladesh's largest and most respected English daily, reported two deaths of Hindus during this period — “one was of a retired school teacher in Bagerhat, Mrinal Kanti Chatterjee, and the other was of Swapan Kumar Biswas of Paikgachha, Khulna”.

Anger and retribution

The mob, which viewed India as Hasina's benefactor, ally, supporter, and enabler, turned their anger on Indian establishments. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre in Dhaka was looted, and set on fire, with neither the police nor the Bangladesh Army stepping in. Indian diplomats who lived outside the Indian High Commission compound had to shelter on the mission premises with their families before they could be evacuated in a special aircraft. Diplomats who reached out to the Bangladesh Army for help were told that the diplomatic area would be protected, but soldiers would not fire at protesters if they tried to storm the High Commission building. Many Bangladeshi politicians, activists, bureaucrats, police officials, judges, journalists, civil society leaders, and even some diplomats took refuge in Bangladesh Army cantonments across the country. At the end of August, Bangladesh Army chief Wakeruz Zaman said more than 600 people had been sheltered in cantonments. Hindus protest

Thousands of members of the country's minority Hindu community blocked the Shahbagh intersection to protest attacks on Hindu homes, temples, shops, and various parts of the country after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina had resigned and fled the country (PTI) In the days after the regime changed, political leaders and former ministers were prevented from leaving Bangladesh, and many, including officials and policemen, were arrested on charges of corruption, siphoning of funds and money

laundering. Journalists, opinion leaders, and intellectuals who criticised the Islamists were arrested — some on charges of corruption and even murder. Many others are being investigated. For the groups that faced punitive action by the Hasina regime, all this was “justice”, not vengeance.

Narratives and nuance

To be fair, Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, the transitional leader of the country who is backed by the Army, did reach out to the Hindu community, and visited Dhaka's famous Dhakeshwari Durga Temple. Leaders of Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamaat too, sought to assuage the concerns and fears of Hindus. But over the past two weeks, protests by Hindus and the arrest of the monk Das have reignited tensions in Bangladesh. This time, the Bangladeshi media has been less supportive of the minority community. Prominent journalists including Anam have criticised the alleged bias in the Indian media against Bangladesh, and ‘Rumour Scanner’, a fact-checking website, has been calling out false or manipulated images, videos and reports about the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh. Chief Adviser Yunus told Foreign Secretary Misri in Dhaka on Monday that Hasina's statements, made from India, alleging the persecution of minorities by his government, were not helping. “Our people are concerned because she is making many statements from there. It creates tensions,” Yunus said. Misri, on his part, conveyed to Jashim Uddin “India's concerns, especially those related to the safety and welfare of

minorities”, and flagged “some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties”. Jashim Uddin pushed back against the alleged “propaganda... false and misleading facts”, and asked that “other countries” should refrain from commenting on Dhaka's “internal matter” — an exchange that echoes the one that New Delhi often has with the United States on the subject of religious freedoms, during which it tells the Americans to stay away from India's internal affairs.

From Dhaka's perspective, India continues to back Hasina, while New Delhi has sought to argue that India's ties are in fact, with the “people of Bangladesh”. “We have always seen in the past, and we continue to see in the future, this relationship as a people-centric and people-oriented relationship, one that has the benefit of all the people as its central motivational force,” Misri said. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) emphasised that “people are the main stakeholders” in the relationship, and that New Delhi's development cooperation and engagements with Dhaka on connectivity, trade, power, energy, capacity-building, etc. were all aimed at benefiting the people of Bangladesh. The Foreign Secretary conveyed India's desire to work closely with the interim government, and said that a “constructive approach” would help move the relationship in a “positive, forward-looking and constructive direction”. “There is no reason why this mutually beneficial cooperation should not continue to deliver in the interests of both our peoples,” Misri said.

Hyderabad couple welcomes baby after four miscarriages: KIMS doctors achieve medical marvel

Hyderabad: A couple, who suffered four miscarriages due to a severely weak uterus that was unable to support the fetus have finally achieved the dream of becoming parents. Senior gynecologists at Krishna Institute Medical Sciences (KIMS) Hospitals performed laparoscopic sutures on the uterus during pregnancy, helping the wife carry the baby to term. “A 27-year-old woman

from Hyderabad had experienced four miscarriages previously. We suggested corrective treatment before her next pregnancy. However, she approached us when she was already nine weeks pregnant. Since medical intervention is not advisable until 12 weeks of pregnancy, we waited until then. Afterward, we performed a laparoscopic procedure to strengthen it.

IIT Madras researchers take a rare look inside the baby brain, one slice at a time

Researchers at IIT Madras have unveiled a cutting-edge tool — a detailed 3D map of five developing baby brains from the second trimester. This map, now the most detailed high-resolution 3D representation of the foetal brain, shows how it undergoes rapid growth during this critical stage and can detect possibilities of brain disorders like autism. Called DHARINI, this brain atlas is the largest of its kind and the only one that captures the developing brain at such an early stage. It uses advanced technology to map over 5,000 brain sections and more than 500 brain regions. It will be completely free for anyone to access, opening up new possibilities for understanding how our brains grow.

Why is this brain map significant?

“This is groundbreaking research for clinicians — it will help us study how the human brain develops in the womb. For instance, we’ve discovered some surprising differences in timelines; what we previously thought occurred at 14 weeks may actually happen at 17 weeks,” said Dr J Kumutha, dean and professor of Neonatology at Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, which collaborated on the project. Dr Kumutha highlighted that this data could provide crucial insights into developmental disorders like autism, which remain poorly understood and managed. “It may also help explain why some children suffer permanent damage and develop cerebral palsy after hypoxia (a lack of oxygen) while others recover without lasting effects,” she said. Additionally, the findings could shed light on changes in the adult brain linked to mental health conditions such as depression or bipolar disorder. “The output from this will keep scientists busy around the world for years to come. The developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning came from us wondering about how the brain works and trying to recreate that magic using silicon. Better understanding of human brains will create newer models, better models. And though AI is being talked about at the moment, there are improvements that need to be made. We need to understand what intelligence is from a human perspective to create a better AI tool that we can use,” said Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-Founder of Infosys. The research was conducted at the Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre. The brain atlas created by IIT Madras is not only the largest dataset in the world, it is also the only one that has been able to capture the growing brain in foetuses. The only other publicly available brain atlas such as this was released by US Allen Institute for Brain Science in 2016. It captured the brain of an adult woman in 1,356 plates.

How was the mapping done?

To capture the complex structures of the brain at a cellular level, researchers from IIT Madras used the brains of five still-borns in the second trimester — at 14, 17, 21, 22 and 24 weeks of pregnancy. The brains were frozen and thinly sliced, enabling scientists to see the structures. “The brains are very thinly sliced using complex robotic instrumentation — the slices are of just 10 to 20 micron thickness which is equivalent to 1/10th or 1/5th the thickness of human hair,” said Prof Mohanasankar Sivaprakasam,

who heads the centre that created the atlas. These thin slices, which become transparent, are then stained and microscopically imaged in extreme detail. Once digitised, these slides are put together to create a 3D map. The technology used for freezing, slicing, creating plates, digitising, and putting the map together has been indigenously developed by the IIT researchers. “We are imaging whole human brains at scale — we are processing almost one large brain a month,” said Prof Sivaprakasam. To compare, Allen Institute took around five years to map the brain. The IIT centre has collected nearly 230 brains of still-borns and neonates as of now. The institute also plans to study paediatric and older brains.



If Trump-led US breaks the Russia-China alliance, who will fall first?

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the formation of the so-called “alliance without limits” between Moscow and Beijing. Announced by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in February 2022, just before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, this alliance emphasises their commitment to strategic cooperation across security, economic, and political domains, without restrictions on their collaboration.

While strategic ties between Moscow and Beijing have strengthened since the early 2000s, the February 2022 declaration marked an unprecedented level of anti-American solidarity. A year later, Xi remarked on the historic changes he was setting in motion with Putin: “Right now there are changes — the likes of which we haven’t seen for 100 years — and we are the ones driving these changes together.” The conviction that the US-dominated world order is crumbling has been a long-held belief for both leaders, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis, fuelled by a surge of “declinist” literature in America and apparent political dysfunction during the Obama and Trump administrations. The growing global interest in BRICS and the perceived rise of the Global South seemed to confirm the decline of the US-led international system. However, these assessments of American decline appear a lot less convincing today. The US economy has shown remarkable resilience, outpacing both the European Union and China in growth and technological innovation. The US continues to attract significant investment, maintaining a dynamic business environment, while Europe faces structural challenges such as declining population, high unemployment, and slower economic growth. China’s economy, though still growing, is decelerating due to demographic shifts, rising debt, and trade tensions.

The prospect of China overtaking the US in GDP terms now seems unlikely in the near term. Projections for 2024 estimate the US GDP at \$29 trillion, compared to China’s \$19 trillion and the Eurozone’s \$16 trillion, with Russia lagging at around \$2.5 trillion. With America rebounding as an eco-

nomically powerful, the return of Trump will impart vigorous new political will to Washington in challenging Sino-Russian ambitions for a post-Western order. Although the Sino-Russian alliance appears positioned to challenge the US across Europe, the Middle East and Asia, their coordinated efforts have not yielded the expected results. Instead, they have prompted a reassessment of US priorities in these regions.

What began as Russia’s brief “special military operation” in Ukraine is approaching its third year. Despite some recent territorial gains in eastern Ukraine, Russia has suffered significant losses in personnel and resources; its political and economic position in Europe has taken a big dent. It seems increasingly unrealistic to believe Russia will emerge stronger from this conflict. As a hard-boiled realist, President Putin may have less inhibitions than his supporters in recognising the necessity of a reasonable settlement with the West. In the Middle East, Iran, a key partner in the Sino-Russian alliance, is now on the defensive. Iranian proxies in Gaza and Lebanon have suffered setbacks, and Bashar al-Assad has fled to Moscow for refuge. Israel has battered Iran’s much-feared “axis of resistance”. The narrative has shifted from Iran’s ambition to overthrow US dominance to concerns about the survival of the Islamic Republic amid significant adversity. In Asia, Beijing’s efforts to displace the US and assert dominance have suffered setbacks. The US has revitalised its alliances, formed new partnerships, and established institutions like the Quad and AUKUS. Trump is poised to intensify economic pressures on China, which, coupled with its slowing economy, will force Beijing to reconsider its strategies towards its neighbours and Washington. Engaging the US in bilateral negotiations has always been part of China’s strategy and may now acquire a new urgency.

Within the Republican foreign policy establishment, there are strong sentiments advocating an emphasis on countering China in Asia rather than expending valuable military resources in Ukraine. Some suggest a deal with Putin on Ukraine. During his presidential campaign, Trump frequently spoke

of “un-iting” Russia and China and referred to the natural contradictions between these neighbouring powers. His nominee for national security adviser, Mike Waltz, has proposed strategies to achieve this goal in an article published last month in *The Economist*. A stronger America, led by Trump, wants to tempt both Russia and China into seeking separate agreements with Washington. This dynamic might allow Trump to exploit divisions between Moscow and Beijing. However, sceptics question the feasibility of this approach, pointing to the deepening economic ties and shared interests of Moscow and Beijing in countering the West. To be sure, there is continuing anti-American bravado in both Moscow and Beijing. Nonetheless, it is realistic to assume both Putin and Xi will prioritise their bilateral interests with the US over the building of a unified front against Washington. It will be intriguing to see which of the two leaders — Putin or Xi — will be the first to betray the “alliance without limits.” Betrayal is inherent in statecraft, where self-interest often supersedes alliance commitments. The ancient text “Mitrabhedam” from the Panchatantra explores the complexities of friendship, trust and betrayal in the relations between sovereigns. Regardless of the outcome, Trump will undoubtedly attempt to fracture the Russia-China alliance. Historically, Russia and China have oscillated between alignment and betrayal over the past eight decades. In the 1950s, they were ideological allies against American imperialism, but by the 1970s, both sought separate deals with the US, accusing each other of betrayal. By the late 1990s, they had rekindled their partnership to counter Washington. The question remains: Does Trump possess the diplomatic acumen to divide the alliance between Russia and China? Delhi is not in a position to influence the outcome of the new efforts by Trump to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. Any deal that the US might want to make with Russia or China will involve the resolution of many complex issues. But does Delhi have a preference? Yes, of course! India would be pleased to see a reconciliation between Moscow and Washington on European security issues.

How maritime Islam connects the Indian Ocean: From East Africa to India and Malaysia

Since his days as a Masters student of History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Professor Mahmood Kooria developed an interest in the medieval Indian Ocean world. Although his specialisation was in ancient Indian history, being from Kerala he found himself more drawn towards subjects like trade in the Indian Ocean and the cultural exchanges that followed. Since the early 2010s, Kooria has emerged as a pioneer in the scholarship of Islam in the Indian Ocean. His studies have revealed the role that Islamic law played in transforming the economy, politics and culture in this region with a special focus on Kerala. He is also the first historian to have described in detail the impact that maritime Islam has had, not just on traders and sailors, but also on poets, thinkers and writers of north Malabar in the 17th and 18th centuries. As his work suggests, Islamic law has bound cultures as far apart as East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Malaysia, and Indonesia for centuries – a shared history that is almost forgotten. Recognising the remarkable scholarly contributions made by Kooria, he was awarded the prestigious Infosys prize for Humanities and Social Sciences this year. In an interview with Indianexpress.com, Kooria discussed his work on the Shafi'i school of law that is predominantly followed in the Indian Ocean world, how the Islamic legal framework has contributed to maritime trade, cultural ethos as well as matriliney in this region, as well as the surprising commonalities between modern nation-states that are far apart geographically but are unified only by an ocean. He also explains what the study of maritime Islam tells us about the shared heritage that connects India to the world. Excerpts: The Infosys Prize recognised, among other things, your innovative study on the history of Islam in the Indian Ocean world. Can you explain how the Islamic world in the Indian Ocean region is different from anywhere else in the sub-continent?

What is interesting is that the Indian Ocean by itself is a unifying factor across vast regions. From East Africa to Southeast Asia, including different parts of India, there exists a shared history. We see that from the ninth century onwards, Islam begins to become popular across these areas and there are a lot of interesting commonalities between people in, let's say, Tanzania with people in the Philippines. One of these similarities is the Shafi'i school of law that I study. In the rest of the Indian subcontinent, the majority of Muslims follow the Hanafi school of law. But in the South Indian coastal area, you see the Shafi'i school of law being followed historically. And this is the same in Indonesia, Malaysia, as well as in East Africa. This is one of the features in which the Indian Ocean Islam has a unique character, separating it from the rest of the country.

Can you give me a historical overview of the origin of the Shafi'i school of law?

After Prophet Mohammad's death, Islamic teachings were codified into the Quran and the Hadith. But then scholars came to the realisation that there were many issues which were neither addressed by the Quran nor the Hadith, especially as the community was expanding. So, a lot of scholars tried to infer new solutions out of the scriptures.

Hence, among Sunni Muslims, four major schools were established by four different jurists, although they were not the only ones. The Hanafi school, for instance, is named after Abu Hanifa who interpreted the Quran and Hadith by laying more emphasis on rationality. Malik Ibn Anas, who founded the Maliki school of law, suggested that one must give more importance to the examples set by the Prophet. These are two early divisions. Then came the Shafi'i school of thought based on the teachings of Idris al-Shafi'i who said that the ideal legal structure would be a combination of Hanafi and Maliki. Then came the Hanbali school of law by Ahmad ibn Hanbal. All these four scholars emerged between the eighth and ninth centuries. And the four schools of thought expanded beyond the Middle Eastern regions to places like Central Asia and India within a couple of centuries. Interestingly, the Hanafi school of law became popular across the Silk Road, while the Shafi'i school became popular across the Indian Ocean.

So, how does the Shafi'i school of law shape society in these places?

There are two ways, one is internally and the other externally. To start with the external reason first, people traveling across the Indian Ocean were following different schools of Islamic law. But from the 16th century onwards, we see that the Shafi'i school of law is being predominant. This is mainly because many people who followed this school began to travel widely and, several jurists among them began writing new texts in Islamic law, addressed specific concerns of the community that were not addressed in other schools of law. This was a network of scholars that contributed to the change in society and led to people following the Shafi'i school of law. Internally, I believe that the Shafi'i school of law addressed more oceanic components. For example carrying out maritime trade or eating certain seafood. The Shafi'i school of law is way more lenient about these aspects than the Hanafi school. There is an interesting incident that happened in Cape Town, South Africa in the 19th century. The Ottoman Empire which was following the Hanafi school of law, sent a Hanafi Qazi to Cape Town to lead the Muslim community there. The Muslims in Cape Town were Shafi'is on account of being part of the Indian Ocean region. The Qazi was horrified to see the people consuming crabs, which he believed was haraam or prohibited and asked the community to quit eating it immediately. The community was very offended by this and argued that they had been consuming crabs for generations. Eventually they wrote to the Ottoman Sultan, asking him to call back the Qazi, lest they do some harm to him.

Among Shafi'i Muslims, what were some of the socio-cultural similarities between people in, say, an African country and South or Southeast Asian country in this region?

While there are many similarities, I study mainly the circulation of texts and ideas, particularly legal texts. So one interesting figure I studied is a 16th-century Malabari scholar: Zainuddin al-Malibari. From his name itself we can identify that he is from the Malabar coast in Kerala. Some-time back I was in this remote region up in



It was Prof Mahmood Kooria's keen interest in the medieval Indian Ocean world that led to studies which shed light on the role played by Islamic law in transforming the economy, politics and culture across the region.

the highlands of Comoros, an island country in East Africa with less than 1 million population. The people there were surprised to see an Indian and when I told them I was from Kerala they could not recognise. But when I said I am from Malabar, they immediately said, 'Oh you are from the land of Zainuddin al-Malibari'. An old man among them hugged me saying that his book is very important to them. Everyone in that island has to study that text in order to be trained in Islam or Islamic law. The country is predominantly Muslim and they follow the Shafi'i school. So in order to study their law they need to study an Indian scholar's work.

I have come across similar examples all the way up to Indonesia and Malaysia. People immediately identified this text. So much of the Indian Ocean region, from Asia to Africa, is unified by a single text. And there are several other similar texts in the region. This text itself attracted about 35 commentaries and translations. In Indonesia alone, it has been translated by at least three different people. Then there are mystical texts written by Indian scholars that continue to be studied and taught across this vast oceanic region. Even though these scholars are not well known in the Indian subcontinent, they are popular in the Indian Ocean. Mentioning their names is almost like a passport, people immediately recognise you. In Indonesia for example, I remember people expressing their lifelong desire to visit the grave of Zainuddin al-Malibari at least once before they die. These texts may not be well known in the Indian subcontinent mainly because they were not written in Urdu or Persian, but rather in Arabic. This is yet again a common feature of the Indian Ocean world. In the rest of the Indian subcontinent, Persian stood as the lingua franca. Whereas in places like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, coastal Karnataka, it was mainly Arabic. Not just the language but also the script that was employed to write Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, etc. Similarly, Indonesians or Swahili people would use the Arabic script to write their language.

You have also done a lot of work on the matrilineal societies of this region. How does your study of the law tie up with matriliney?

Both Islamic law and the Indian Ocean region would appear to be a very masculine space. Very rarely is the contribution of women in Islamic law and the Indian Ocean taken into account. So I wanted to look at the role of women within both these spaces. And what I understood immediately was that a lot of literature posed a contradiction between Islamic law and customary law. Matrilineal communities have a different way of dividing inheritance. It appears to go through feminine line, in contradiction to patrilineal Islamic law. But the community members do not see this as a contradiction. In the existing literature, the perspective of the community is not taken into account, especially that of the women members. So I wanted to explore how women engage with Islamic law as well as the Indian Ocean region. What I found was how important the Indian Ocean is to the survival of the matrilineal system. Since the men could come and go as traders and sailors, women stayed looked after the property and home. That meant that men had no control over the property which would pass on from woman to woman. Whether men came back to their family or not, did not have any implication.

How is your study of Islamic law relevant in the current socio-political situation?

It is a difficult question because much of historical inquiry emerges out of sheer scholarly interest. That is the case with most Humanities research, I believe. We can suggest one or two reasons, but ultimately it is our academic interests that drive us. Even so, I can say that it helps understand the diversity of communities and the cosmopolitan heritage that all nation-states had, which are now sidelined. Our own heritage is celebrated far away in a place like Comoros or Indonesia, while our long connections and interactions with these places are forgotten. Similarly, works and scholars born and produced in India in the medieval and early modern centuries are not taken into account while one writes histories of laws or religions, or global history. I want to foreground works produced in India, as well as in Asia and Africa, as part of global connections before the European epistemes dominated.