

Telangana's capital expenditure turns regressive under Congress regime

Hyderabad: Telangana's capital expenditure for 2024-25 turned regressive under the Congress government, when compared to the previous financial year during the BRS regime. The capital expenditure shows a significant surge in October helping narrow the gap with last year's spending, but overall progress continues to lag. By October 2024, the State recorded Rs 17,283.69 crore in capital expenditure, substantially lower than Rs 25,790.33 crore for the same period in 2023-24. While October alone contributed Rs 7,759.59 crore – nearly half of the year's total so far – the earlier months saw slower spending, particularly in August and September. For instance, August 2024 expenditure stood at just Rs 556.31 crore this year compared to Rs 5,069.59 crore in 2023-24. The sluggish start, with April-July 2024 spending at Rs 7,358.52 crore against Rs 13,073.95 crore in 2023, points to cautious fiscal management and potential delays in project approvals due to the elections. This early lull impacted development projects, particularly in critical sectors like irrigation, roads, and urban infrastructure. However, sharp in-

crease in October suggests a focused government push to revive momentum. The spike reflects efforts to fast-track delayed projects and maintain public confidence in infrastructure development. The officials of Finance department indicated that the capital expenditure will be increased over the next quarter, to meet the annual target of Rs 32,745.8 crore by the end of current fiscal. "The lag in capital expenditure is largely due to the Lok Sabha elections and lack of clarity over the Central funds for the current fiscal till a full-fledged union budget was presented in June this year. We are hoping to catch up with our annual target over next four months," a top official in the department said. However, they are skeptic about the State revenue as well as the market borrowings which are lagging far behind the annual target. While the revenue receipts were pegged at around Rs 1.02 lakh crore at the end of November against annual target of Rs 2.21 lakh crore, the market borrowings have already surpassed Rs 41,000 crore as on December 20 against budget estimate of Rs 49,255 crore for the current fiscal. Analysts



suggest that addressing delays in fund disbursement and prioritising high-impact sectors like transportation, irrigation, and urban development, can help bridge the gap and ensure the State's developmental trajectory

remains on track. They emphasised the need to strike a balance between fiscal discipline and development needs failing which could delay essential projects and missing opportunities for job creation and economic growth.

Telangana's paddy procurement falls short despite record harvest



Hyderabad: Despite achieving a record paddy production of over 1.5 crore metric tonnes, the paddy procurement realisation in the State has fallen short of projections. With an initial target of purchasing over 91 lakh metric tonnes, the actual procurement by the civil supplies corporation has amounted to just 46 lakh metric tonnes – only half of the anticipated target. The decisive role played by private traders, who have been reaching out to farmers with a liberal approach regarding moisture content, has impacted the civil supplies corporation's Minimum Support Price (MSP) operations. This liberal attitude

of private traders has diverted a large portion of the paddy to the neighbouring states, which otherwise would have been procured by the civil supplies corporation.

The paddy procurement process is expected to continue for another three weeks to accommodate the late arrivals in some districts. It is anticipated that an additional 8 to 10 lakh metric tonnes may be procured by the Sankranti season, including nearly 2 lakh tonnes of Grade-A paddy. The civil supplies corporation has already purchased over 18 lakh metric tonnes of Grade-A paddy. Efforts are underway to procure more paddy to meet

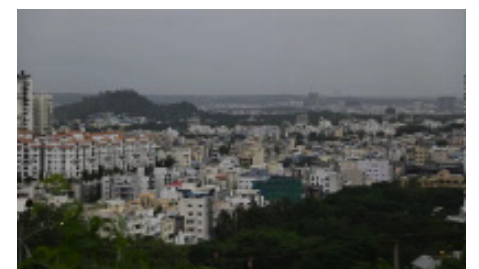
the state's fine rice requirement, which includes provisions under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and supplies to hostels and welfare institutions.

By all means the major procurement operations are nearing completion, while the civil supplies corporation has so far procured paddy worth Rs 10,675 crore during the Kharif marketing season of 2024, with Rs 9,890 crore already paid to farmers. Regarding the Rs 500 per quintal

bonus offered by the administration, Rs 530 crore has already been disbursed to the farmers however, an additional Rs 373 crore is yet to be released. Only 46 lakh metric tonnes procured against a target of 91 lakh metric tonnes. Additional 8-10 lakh metric tonnes expected by Sankranti. Rs 10,675 crore worth of paddy procured, Rs 9,890 crore paid to farmers. Rs 580 crore paid to farmers towards Rs 500 per quintal bonus, Rs 373 crore is still pending

Hyderabad may receive light showers in the middle of winter, forecasts IMD

Hyderabad: It could rain in the middle of winter! Yes, in a mid-winter surprise, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)-Hyderabad on Tuesday issued a weather bulletin forecasting isolated showers, overcast conditions and light rain or drizzle in parts of Hyderabad for the next two to three days. The chances of drizzle, sporadic showers and cloudy skies are also likely in the districts. The forecast looked at the likelihood of generally cloudy sky, mist or hazy conditions during mornings and likely light rain/drizzle. Forecasting similar conditions state-wide, the IMD said the minimum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 20 degree Celsius to 40 degree Celsius dur-



ing next 3 days. Barring Adilabad, the minimum temperatures in rest of the State will hover between 15 degree Celsius and 20 degree Celsius, a far cry from last week when the minimum temperatures.

Doctors of a lesser State: A long wait for permanent registrations in Andhra Pradesh

Becoming a doctor is a long-cherished dream. For some, like Sai Alekya, a foreign medical graduate (FMG) from Visakhapatnam, it has been a dream since she was all but four. But not all dreams come true, and some take a painfully long time to materialise. On December 9, as she waited outside the Andhra Pradesh Medical Council (APMC) office located on the premises of Dr. NTR University of Health Sciences in Vijayawada for the Registrar's response on the issuance of Permanent Registration (PR), Dr. Alekya's mind was filled with anxiety, despondency and helplessness. Dr. Alekya, along with 50 other FMGs, had gathered outside the APMC office to stage a protest highlighting their predicament and to get clarification from the APMC about their PRs. "Weeks have passed by without a proper response from the APMC on what is causing the delay in granting the PRs," she says.

After completing medical courses equivalent to MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) from other countries, graduates who wish to work or study in India need to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE), a screening test, to be eligible for the one-year Compulsory Rotating Medical Internship (CRMI), which Indian medical graduates also undergo. After completing the CRMI, graduates, both foreign and Indian, obtain a PR from the State Medical Council. The FMGE, conducted by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences, is held twice a year, in June and December. Considered one of the toughest, the pass percentage in 2023, when 10,261 out of 61,616 graduates appeared for the exam, was 16.65%. In 2022, the passing percentage for the exam was 23.35%. In Andhra Pradesh, 73 FMGs wrote the FMGE in December 2022. They completed their internship in May 2024 and have been waiting for their PRs for six months. They all completed their medical education at universities in Russia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. However, the wait had just begun for Dr. Alekya and her batchmates, who completed their internships in November 2024 since the APMC has put a hold on issuing PRs, citing various factors.

Meanwhile, Dimple Mehta, who graduated from a university in Russia in 2022, said she was in India for nearly a year and went back to write her exams. She cleared the FMGE in January 2023. In June 2023, the Rajasthan Medical Council allotted her a one-year internship. She got her PR on July 11, 2024, and is now working as a medical officer. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have denied or withheld permanent registration for FMGs with one year of internship experience. In contrast, States like Gujarat, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Assam, Orissa, Telangana, and Karnataka, amongst others, have issued permanent registration and given post-graduation seats to students. The problem arose because of the gap in their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. All these graduates returned to India during the pandemic and continued their studies online during their courses' penultimate and final years. Some returned to their parent universities and wrote the exam offline, while others did not. NMC



notice The NMC released a public notice on June 7, 2024, stating that FMGs who attended classes online for any duration during their course completion should compulsorily undergo a two-year internship, which led to protests.

Following the outrage, the NMC withdrew the June 7 notice and issued a fresh one on June 19, stating that all students who have sufficiently compensated physical classes instead of online classes and passed an examination equivalent to MBBS should be eligible for one-year internships. Dr. Alekya (26) graduated from a Russian university in 2021, and she belongs to the batch that was affected by the pandemic. She was in her final year when the pandemic began. In 2020, after writing her fourth-year final exams, she came to India in June, as usual, for vacation. It was also the peak of the pandemic. The classes for her final year were to begin in October 2020. Her stay at home, meant for three months, was extended till February 2021 due to travel restrictions and the non-availability of flights.

However, she returned to her parent university, wrote her final exam offline, and practiced there for two more months to compensate for the lost practical sessions. After returning to India, she wrote the FMGE in June 2023 and was allotted a one-year internship, which she completed in November 2024. While the wait for PR has just been a little more than a month to date, it has been excruciating for her, burdened as her mind is full of thoughts of uncertainty. "The students who completed their internships in May 2024 have not yet received the PRs. What will I do if the process takes as long for us, too? The application for the NEET PG-2025 exam starts in April. Will I receive my PR by then?" asks Alekya, her voice cracking. Raised mostly by her mother, a nurse, Alekya always wanted to be a medical professional like her mother. Her father, who has been ill for a long time, does not go

to work. In the EAMCET in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, she secured a rank under 7,000 and 12,000, respectively, in 2015. According to news reports, 69,840 students appeared for the medical stream in A.P. in 2015. However, she could not secure a seat in the medical colleges in the two Telugu States. Nevertheless, determined to make her a doctor, Alekya's family decided that she should pursue her studies in Russia. "My parents were supportive because it was not just mine but also my family's dream to see me as a doctor," says Dr. Alekya, who flew to Russia at 17 in 2016. Like Dr. Alekya, many FMGs belonging to the two batches affected by the pandemic are worried. The protesting foreign medicos say they have given their exams offline and have compensatory certificates, yet they are being denied PR. They add that APMC Registrar I. Ramesh informed them that some have not "sufficiently compensated for their practical sessions" per the NMC guidelines. When asked about the reasons for the delay in issuance of the PRs in July 2024, the Registrar informed them that the APMC Council members had yet to be elected and nominated and that he did not have the power to make decisions in this matter. He also said the FMGs needed to undergo a two-year internship as per the NMC guidelines.

V. Aruna Vanikar, former president of the Undergraduate Medical Education Board, NMC, New Delhi, who signed the two June 7 and 19 circulars, said the decision regarding who is eligible for a PR lies with the State Medical Council (SMC). Despite the June 19 notification, if the SMC feels two years of internships are required, they can allot the same, said Ms. Aruna Vanikar, who was relieved from her duties on September 24. In Telangana, the Medical Council Vice-Chairperson, Srinivas Gundagani, told The Hindu that they followed only one rule when deciding the duration of internships. "All those who took the final year exam offline got one year, and those who did not go back got two-year

internships," he said. "But all of us were given one year, and now they are asking us to wait. Besides, we have all passed the FMGE, which is supposed to test our medical knowledge. Our batchmates in other States have also written the exam and got the PR too," points out Karthik, another FMG belonging to the batch that wrote the FMGE in December 2022, cleared it on the first attempt and completed the one-year internship in May 2024. Council formation awaited

Six months on, the State government has yet to nominate members to the Council. The 23-member Council, with 13 members elected by doctors, six nominated posts, and four ex-officio members, was dissolved when the government changed in June. Director of Medical Education D.S.V.L. Narasimham said the matter is under the government's purview. To add to the delay, the NMC, on November 19, issued an advisory to the SMCs to "invariably seek confirmation of the medical degrees from the concerned foreign medical college/university through concerned Indian Embassy/ High Commission either before granting Permanent Registration or before recommending them for registration in NMR (National Medical Registrar)". "What did they do from June to November?" asks Dr. Karthik, who returned to his parent university in Kyrgyzstan to complete the course. He has the compensatory certificate but has yet to get his PR. He says the vetting process should have been done before the allotment of internships to them when a Provisional Registration was issued. "I have made four visits to the APMC office, along with my daughter, so far. Every time we come, we hear a new reason. We do not think they have sent our degrees to the Embassy," says a distraught father from Kakinada. His daughter cleared the NEET PG but cannot attend counselling without a PR. "We are sending all the degrees and marks lists to the concerned Indian Embassies. However, Dr. Ramesh clarified that the vetting process for certificates takes time.

Maharaja Surajmal's Life Is Inspiring And Exemplary For The Younger Generations: Haryana CM

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), December 24 - Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini, has said that the government is consistently working for the welfare of the people by following the path shown by our great personalities. He emphasized that the state has taken several beneficial decisions inspired by the teachings and guidance of these personalities. The Chief Minister was addressing the gathering at a statue unveiling ceremony organized by the Bhartiya Jat Vikas Manch, along with the villagers of Phoolkan, on the occasion of Maharaja Surajmal's Balidan Diwas in village Phoolkan, district Sirsa, on Tuesday. Earlier, the Chief Minister unveiled the statue of Maharaja Surajmal installed in the village and also planted a sapling. Thereafter, he paid floral tributes to the statue of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. The Chief Minister announced to give Rs 21 lakh to the Bhartiya Jat Vikas Manch and Rs 11 lakh to the Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Shikshaarth and Charitable Trust.

Chief Minister Saini described the life of Maharaja Surajmal as both inspiring and exemplary for the younger generations. He stated that Maharaja Surajmal's name is held with immense pride and honour among the rulers who stood strong against the Mughals in North India. At the young age of 14, Maharaja Surajmal assumed control of the administration of the Bharatpur state and went on to expand it through numerous victorious battles. The Chief Minister further emphasized that Maharaja Surajmal expanded the Bharatpur state significantly through his foresight, courage, and bravery. His kingdom stretched from the Ganga in the east, to Chambal in the south, Agra in the west, and Delhi in the north. Rather than relying on warfare, Maharaja Surajmal ensured peace and security for his people through diplomacy. His strategic brilliance was evident when he turned the cannons of Abdali aimed at him through his efficient strategy.

C M Saini stated that his primary goal is to ensure the welfare and upliftment of farmers, labourers, people belonging to scheduled castes and backward classes, and the overall development of the state. He emphasized that it is the government's duty to protect the honour and self-respect of every citizen. The government has drawn inspiration from the great personality of Maharaja Surajmal ji, and in his footsteps, has implemented numerous public welfare policies. The Chief Minister highlighted that Haryana is the only state in the entire country that purchases all 24 crops of farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP), with payments for their crops being made within 72 hours. The Chief Minister stated that payments for crop purchases are directly deposited into the farmers' bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). So far, Rs 1 lakh 25 thousand crores have been credited to the accounts of 12 lakh farmers for their crop purchases. He also said that due to delayed rains during the Kharif season this year, farmers had to make additional irrigation and other arrangements for sowing their crops. Acknowledging the struggles of the farmers, the government provided Rs 825 crore at the rate of Rs 2,000 per acre. Furthermore, the government has completely abolished the Abiana that has been in place since the British era and has also waived off previous dues amounting to Rs



133 crore. Chief Minister Saini said that the state government has provided jobs to the youth of Haryana based on merit. With the formation of the government, 24,000 youth have joined government jobs, and to date, 1.71 lakh youth have been given government jobs. He further said that in the coming time, two lakh more youth will be given jobs without the need for Parchi and Kharchi (recommendation and bribes). The Chief Minister highlighted the exploitation of youth by contractors in previous governments and emphasized that his government has addressed this issue. Not only has the government established a corporation to protect youth from exploitation, but it has also ensured their future security through legislation. As a result, no one will be able to remove these youth from their positions until they reach retirement age.

The Chief Minister said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government is dedicated to empowering women. A target has been set to make 5 lakh women "Lakshpati Didi" in the state. So far, 1.5 lakh women have achieved this status. Additionally, the government has set a goal of providing free drone pilot training to 5,000 women in the first phase under the 'Drone Didi Yojana'. As part of this initiative, drones worth up to Rs 8 lakh are being provided free of cost. To date, free drones have been given to 100 women. Haryana Education Minister, Mahipal Dhanda said that Maharaja Surajmal was a great warrior whose glorious history inspires us to move forward while overcoming life's challenges. He urged that we should follow in his footsteps and resolve to pass on his legacy to future generations. The Minister emphasized that reading the history of our ancestors and great personalities fills us with pride. He also highlighted that the biography of Maharaja Surajmal provides an example of social harmony. He encouraged everyone not only to read about Maharaja Surajmal's history but also to incorporate his ideals into our behaviour and conduct. Rajya Sabha MP Subhash Barala while paying tribute to Maharaja Surajmal said that Maharaja Surajmal was a great warrior who took along all communities and not one caste. Maharaja Surajmal fought many battles against the

Mughals. Mughals trembled at his name. Maharaja Surajmal was the best among all warriors and all classes had a share in his army. Rajya Sabha MP said that his valour was such that persecution of Hindus and cow

slaughter had stopped in that period. He said that the work of Gau Sewa has been going on since the Sanatan era and Maharaja Surajmal has carried this work forward and cherished the dream of Akhand Bharat.

Gold, Silver shine bright: 2024 sees record demand and 30pc price surge



Mumbai: Gold and silver have experienced an impressive rally in 2024, gaining approximately 30 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, on the Commodity Exchange (COMEX), a report showed on Monday. While central bank policies and geopolitical risks are significant drivers of gold and silver prices, other factors also play a role in shaping the market, according to the report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd (MOFSL).

In 2024, global demand for precious metals has increased substantially. Central banks worldwide, including those in emerging markets, have been net buyers of gold for over a decade. In 2024, they collectively purchased more than 500 tonnes of gold, reflecting a strategy to diversify reserves amid economic uncertainties, said the report. "Looking ahead, the outlook for gold and silver remains positive, although some market consolidation or short-term dips may present buying opportunities. Loose mon-

etary policy environment, coupled with ongoing geopolitical risks, should continue to provide a favourable backdrop for gold and silver," said Manav Modi, analyst, Commodity Research, MOFSL. This growing interest from central banks has added upward pressure on prices, as these institutions accumulate gold as a hedge against the volatility of fiat currencies. The recent resurgence in gold ETFs, which had seen outflows in previous years, indicates renewed investor interest in gold as a safe-haven asset. "In India, domestic demand has surged, with assets under management in gold and silver ETFs surpassing Rs 30,000 crore and Rs 7,500 crore, respectively. Additionally, the reduction of import duties on gold and silver by the Indian government has spurred demand, especially during festive and wedding seasons, further driving up prices," the report mentioned. Overall imports for both gold and Silver on the domestic front has been quite sharp with this year.

State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Telangana has convened its 43rd Quarterly Review meeting today i.e., on 23.12.2024, at Mahatma Jyothirao Phule Praja Bhavan, Hyderabad to review the performance of the Banks in Telangana State, for the quarter ended September 2024. The meeting was attended by:

1. Sri Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu garu, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister & Minister for Finance & Planning, Energy, Telangana State
2. Sri Tummala Nageswara Rao garu, Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture, Marketing, Co-operation, and Handlooms & Textiles, Telangana State
3. Sri K Ramakrishna Rao, IAS, Special Chief Secretary (Finance), Govt. of Telangana
4. Sri Dr. B Gopi, IAS, Director of Agriculture, Government of Telangana
5. Sri Kamal Prasad Patnaik, Regional Director, RBI, Hyderabad
6. Sri Uday Bhaskar, CGM, NABARD, Hyderabad
7. Sri Rajesh Kumar, CGM, SBI, Hyderabad Circle
8. Sri Prakash Chandra Baror, GM, SBI & Convenor, SLBC, Telangana

Senior Officials from the line departments of Govt of Telangana, Government of India, executives from Public Sector Banks, Private Sector Banks, RRBs, SFBs, Payments Banks, representatives of various Federations of Agriculture and MSME etc., Sri Rajesh Kumar, CGM, SBI, Hyderabad Circle presented the performance of the banks in Telangana during the quarter September 2024 as under: Total Deposits of the banks grew by **Rs. 23,312 crores** during the FY 2024-25 so far and the total deposits were at **Rs.8,03,265 crores**. Total Advances with Banks grew by **Rs. 42,800 crores** and the advances of all banks were at **Rs. 10,21,858 Crores** CD ratio continues to be above 100 percent and it is maintained at **127.21 %** as at the end of the quarter. During first 2 quarters, Banks have disbursed Short Term Production Loans amounting to **Rs.44,438 crores** achieving **81.57%** of the Kharif targets. Banks have disbursed **Rs.82,632 crores** as Investment Credit to Agri. Allied, Agri. Infra and Agri. Ancillary activities, achieving **71.40%** of the targets. Banks have disbursed Education loans amounting to **Rs.376 Crores** and Housing loans amounting to **Rs.1851 Crores** under Priority Sector during the current financial year so far. For Micro, Small & Medium enterprises (MSME) segment, Banks have disbursed **Rs.79,659 crores**, achieving **61.45%** of the targets. Under Pradhan Manthri Mudra Yojana Scheme, Banks have sanctioned **Rs.5328 crores** achieving **41.16%** of the annual targets. Banks together have disbursed an amount of **Rs. 1,66,687 crores** to various sections of borrowers under Priority Sector, recording an achievement of **63.58%** of targets. a) As per the information provided by Dept of Financial Services, there are no Unbanked Rural Centres in the State.

b) Banks in the State have **121.52 lakh** PMJDY accounts in their books and **98.76 lacs i.e., 81.27%** of the PMJDY accounts are seeded with Aadhar. RuPay cards are issued to **87.86 lacs i.e 72.30%** of the PMJDY accounts.

c) As far as the social security schemes are concerned, Banks have covered **174.71 lakh** customers under Pradhan Manthri Suraksha Bheema Yojana



(PMSBY) and **78.61 lakh** customers under Pradhan Manthri Jeevan Jyothi Beema Yojana (PMJJBY). **20.55 lakh** customers have subscribed for Atal pension Yojana scheme.

d) Under PM Svanidhi Tranche 1, Banks have sanctioned **4,25,567** applications and disbursed **loans to 4,22,603 Street Vendors**. Under Tranche 2, Banks have sanctioned **2,16,402** applications and disbursed loans to **2,10,890** Street Vendors. Under Tranche 3, Banks have sanctioned **67,081** applications and disbursed **60,486**. Under Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, banks have sanctioned **Rs.2864 crores** against a cumulative target of **Rs.3200** crores so far. Speaking on the occasion, Shri Tummala Nageswara Rao, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture emphasized the need to focus more on well exceeding the stipulated targets for FY 2024-25 under Agriculture and Allied activities. He further sought the support of Banks in focusing on development of Agricultural Economy. Further he appealed to the Banks to speed up the process of timely disbursement of credit to farming community.

Shri Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, while applauding the efforts of Banks in achieving various targets, sought the Banks to be benevolent in focusing more on extending credit to agriculture, weaker sections and SHGs. Further, he conveyed that more and more micro enterprises are to be credit linked, which will bring in significant change in scenario. From the view point of priority sector lending, he advised the Banks to have more exposure in Priority sector lending with a special focus on Agriculture, Housing and Education loans to weaker sections. He further assured the Banks of all needed support from the State Government, in partnering with social development of the State. He further appealed to all Banks for extending all needed support to another flagship scheme of State Government, "Indira Mahila Shakthi scheme", for empowerment of SHG women, by extending credit to potential income generating activities, including Solar Energy plants.

Shri K Ramakrishna Rao, IAS, Special Chief Secretary (Finance), speaking on the occasion, expressed satisfaction over the CD Ratio of more than 127% in the State.

He expressed concern over the low per capita income of farmers in the State as compared to various other states in the country and made appeal to the Banks for strategising creatively, for augmenting the income of the farmers. In this direction, he emphasised the need for Banks to focus more on financing allied activities like Oil Palm, Horticulture, Dairy etc., to supplement their income levels. Further, he stressed upon the need to create more awareness among General public, in view of the growing cyber crimes in the State.

Finally, he impressed upon the Banks to focus more on skill development to rural youth, for creating employment generation effectively. Shri Kamal Prasad Patnaik, RD, Reserve Bank of India and Shri Uday Bhaskar, CGM, NABARD, also spoke on the occasion. The meeting concluded with vote of thanks by Shri Prakash Chandra Baror, GM, SBI & Convenor, SLBC, Telangana.

(Prakash Chandra Baror)

GENERAL MANAGER & SLBC
CONVENOR STATE BANK OF INDIA.
LHO, HYDERABAD, Date: 23.12.2024

Vanguard announces new technology office in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Vanguard on Sunday announced plans to establish a new office in Hyderabad, stating that the new location would serve as an enduring site for technology development. Nitin Tandon, global chief information officer at Vanguard, said, "Vanguard is a digital-first company and technology is a critical enabler in delivering investment products and advice to more than 50 million clients."

The Hyderabad office is expected to open in late 2025 and will be led by Venkatesh Natarajan, an officer in Vanguard's Information Technology division. He currently leads technology development in the Personal Investor division and joined

Vanguard in 2019 to oversee enterprise digital marketing and analytics technologies. "Our crew members are central to Vanguard's ability to adopt new and innovative technology. I'm excited to lead an office that combines Vanguard's mission-oriented culture with India's top tier technology talent," said Venkatesh.

Founded in 1975, Vanguard is one of the world's leading investment management companies. The firm offers investments, advice and retirement services to tens of millions of individual investors around the globe — directly, through workplace plans and financial intermediaries. The company operates under a unique, investor-owned

Vanguard

structure where Vanguard fund shareholders own the funds, which in turn own Vanguard. As such, Vanguard adheres to a simple purpose: to take a stand for all investors, treat them fairly and give them the best chance for investment success.

Cremon Montessori Life School Celebrates Mithra Winter Fest 2024 with Creativity, Collaboration, and Community Spirit

Hyderabad: Cremon Montessori Life School recently celebrated the Mithra Winter Fest to mark the Winter Solstice of 2024. The event was a heartwarming display of creativity, teamwork, and the spirit of collaboration, as the school's children came together to create an unforgettable celebration. "It was a true joy to see the young, bright minds of Cremon Montessori, with skillful hands and hearts filled with love, inspire everyone around them," said Vinaya, Director of Cremon Montessori Life School. "The extraordinary care they showed for one another and their exceptional teamwork truly contributed to the success of the Winter Fest." At Cremon Montessori, we firmly believe in learning through experience, and this event was a perfect example. The children had the opportunity to run cafes, manage stalls, and engage in real-world activities that provided them with invaluable lessons. Through hands-on experiences, they developed a wide range of skills, including planning, decision-making, time management, calculation, and market analysis. This immersive approach not only helped them gain a deeper understanding of the world around them but also fostered essential life skills that will serve them in the future.

In addition to learning valuable skills, the event emphasized the importance of being part of a larger society. The children demonstrated a strong sense of community by supporting local initiatives. They encouraged participation from Venu Farms, a local farmer, and lent their support to the adolescent children's start-up Stall by Adithi. Additionally, they extended their care to street animals by collaborating with the NGO Straw, dedicated to helping animals in need. To inspire a love for reading, the Mithra Winter



Fest also featured renowned author and poet Yadaiha along with Manchi Pusthakam, a local bookstore, to promote book reading among the children and families attending the carnival. "It was truly a joy to witness the children at work, living a responsible life, enjoying their freedom, and embracing honesty

and hard work," added Vinaya. "Their joy in the process of learning and working together was evident at every turn, showcasing how engagement, responsibility, and enjoyment shape the way we learn." We extend our heartfelt thanks to our children, who are a constant source of inspiration and hope for us all. We also express our gratitude to the

parents, particularly P. Subba Reddy and P. Vedavyas Reddy, for their unwavering support of our future leaders and their commitment to making this event a success. The Mithra Winter Fest 2024 was not just a celebration of winter but a reflection of our school's values and our commitment to fostering creativity, collaboration, and community in every child.

"It Is hard to talk publicly about LGBT rights in Bhutan"

It is hard to talk about LGBT rights in Bhutan publicly, and many of us struggle to do it. In Bhutan, the safety of LGBT people has not visibly been an issue, so many people believe that community's rights are well protected. Hence, the country as a whole may not really lend a keen ear to the call for more LGBT rights. What is needed in terms of LGBT rights advancement is not well outlined. That is why it is important to speak publicly. How has the landscape of recognition for LGBT rights in Bhutan changed over the last decade? Things have changed in Bhutan in the last few years as many educated people have started learning the acronym and comprehending the identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) under the LGBT umbrella. Some people have become open minded enough to understand that it is a human rights issue to criminalise being queer. Decriminalisation is followed by a slow progress and LGBT rights is not necessarily a cause that the government or the country is keen to champion. That does not mean they are against the community or their rights. Many Bhutanese, including people in the government, have started acknowledging the community. Voices from the community are

sought in consultation for policies and inclusion.

What, according to you, have been some of the biggest achievements and milestones so far?

I would like to mention two things in particular – the amendment of Section 213 and 214 of the penal code of Bhutan, which earlier criminalized homosexuality, and the increased visibility of queer people in the media. The support that the community receives as goodwill and empathy from everyday people has massively increased over the years. We may see the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) soon to be endorsed by the parliament include the community in their inclusive action points.

Tell us about the groups and collectives at the forefront of advocacy. How have they offered support to LGBTQ community members and built relationships with allies?

Queer Voices of Bhutan and Pride Bhutan are the two main organisations in Bhutan advocating for the community. Some of ministries and civil society organization have also made LGBTQ advocacy a part of their mandate. Others such as the United Nations bodies and international NGOs are

also working to promote inclusion in the country.

A lot of Bhutanese youth go to the United States, Australia, India, Malaysia, Thailand and other countries for their college and university education. To what extent does this exposure influence their vision for LGBT rights in Bhutan?

Traveling has a big impact on people's perceptions and this is also true for many Bhutanese who cite witnessing more acceptance and visibility of queer people while they travel outside Bhutan. Some Bhutanese also claim to have seen their first person from the LGBT community outside Bhutan. However, that was the case before queer folks here started appearing in the media and living more openly. As countries like Thailand and Nepal are embracing the legalization of same sex marriages, it is interesting to see if any spillover of the policy or social change in the country will take place in Bhutan.

Do legal developments in India on issues like decriminalization of homosexuality and the demand for recognition of same-sex marriage have an impact in Bhutan?

When such historic changes hit home, we are likely to witness and take stock. This

may also increase the demand for such rights and constitutional changes in our country too. Hopefully, the spillover would be everywhere in Asia.

Based on your interactions with activists working for LGBTQ rights in other countries, what are the key similarities and differences between how queer activism takes place in Bhutan and the West?

The modern queer movement in the west took place earlier than in our part of the world. It was certainly not easy for them to raise their voice for the change we see today. This has led to a lot of positive changes and liberation for the community everywhere. Here, in Bhutan, LGBT activism has taken a more silent yet transformative approach. Raising our voice does not mean creating chaos in the form of public demonstrations and yet it was possible to bring progress in the form of decriminalization and advocating for recognition and inclusion. For instance, we do not have pride parades because the struggle for our liberation does not need to be a public demonstration and protest. Rather, it is through being part of open dialogues with policy makers and also through community engagement.

The golden seat of Karnataka's winter session



The Suvarna Soudha in Belagavi is the seat of the winter session of the Karnataka legislature. Situated on the top of a hillock in Bastawad village on the eastern side of the Bengaluru-Pune national highway, it is surrounded by a large garden under development and unending sugarcane fields, giving it an idyllic look and feel. This year's winter session concluded here on Thursday, December 19, with many heated debates and discussions. Girls dressed as Joguti for a cultural programme on Saundatti Yallamma pose in front of the Suvarna Soudha in Belagavi on Friday. It is arguably one of the most iconic buildings in northern Karnataka. Meant to be a replica of the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru, it is constructed with white marble and other stones, and extensive wood work. Though the premises is several times larger than that of the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru, the built up area is significantly smaller. Workers cleaning the helipad near the Suvarna Soudha. Some residents of the border district of Belagavi feel that the State government built it to counter the demand of a separate north Karnataka state that crops up now and then and the feeling that northern districts are neglected. The compromise was to have the winter session in Belagavi, the border region over which Maharashtra continues to make a claim. Suvarna Soudha is so named to commemorate the golden jubilee of Karnataka's formation day. Some say the idea was borrowed from Maharashtra that holds its winter session in Nagpur. The Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur is a repurposed British era building, that served as the provincial head quarters of the central provinces, built in 1912, according to some officers. There is a long standing battle over credit for building the Suvarna Soudha. Janata Dal (Secular) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy says he conceived the idea of a winter session in Belagavi and laid the foundation stone in the Vaccine Depot grounds in south Belagavi in 2007. But the venue was changed after opposition from environmentalists that the structure would damage the Vaccine Depot forest. Two years later, the then Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa performed Bhoomi Puja on the lands acquired at the intersection of Halaga-Bastawad villages. It was completed in 2012 after some cost and time overruns. The building was estimated to cost around ₹250 crore and to be completed in 18 months. But changes in design led to an increase in built-

up area by around 30%. It ended up as a majestic structure on 3500 square metres of land, costing around ₹425 crore. Pune-based B.G. Shirke was the contracting agency.

Winter sessions were held for the first few years in a private college in Belagavi. Since 2012, the sessions have averaged 10 days a year. Promises by successive governments of shifting important State government offices to Belagavi have remained on paper. The session cost has been going up



every year. This year it is expected to cost around ₹20 crore. Most of the works, including the maintenance of the gardens, lighting and internet connections are outsourced for the period of the session. The other related arrangements of providing shelter to the protestors, food for the police, staff and journalists, VIP security, transport and other arrangements are taken up on an ad-hoc basis as Belagavi does not have a legislators' home or quarters. A woman worker admiring the parking place from the corridors Suvarna Vidhana Soudha where Legislative

assembly session was going on in Belagavi on July 08, 2015. The winter session has become a ready platform for protestors - not only from northern Karnataka but the whole State.

This year, for example, 75 organisations held protests. Every year during winter session, there is demand for exclusive discussions on the issues of northern Karnataka. However, it remains only partially fulfilled. Unfortunately, most such discussions end up as charter of demands for funds for irrigation projects in the region.

Why 2025 could be India's maritime moment

For long, India's security outlook had remained constrained with a dominant landlocked view. This is largely attributed to the continued threats emanating from Pakistan and China that have sought to impinge on India's territorial sovereignty. However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, New Delhi has steadily adopted a strategy to recalibrate its security thinking by prioritising its maritime periphery. Several internal and external factors have informed India's changing security outlook. First, the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, caused by the infiltration of terrorists through the Arabian Sea amply demonstrated the importance of maritime security for India's broader national security interests. The incorporation of the Indian Coast Guard service into the Indian Navy marked efforts by New Delhi to streamline its maritime security approach. Second, structural shifts following the onset of the Indo-Pacific as a singular strategic theatre posited India at the heart of the evolving strategic matrix in the region. The rising salience of the Indo-Pacific appeared to find alignment with India's capacity and intent to play an increasingly vital role in the world. In 2025, India will find itself in a unique place as it is poised to assume the chair of two important forums, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Additionally, India is also scheduled to host the Quad leaders' summit in 2025 for the first time since the leader-

level summits began in the group. In view of this, India seems perfectly placed to harness shared maritime interests and opportunities and contribute to norm-making in the maritime domain through these vital platforms. Importantly, India's role in moot-ing both IORA and IONS was critical. While IORA was initiated as an inter-governmental diplomatic forum to deliberate on common issues and challenges in the Indian Ocean security, IONS was conceived as a forum for regional navies to enhance cooperation on common issues of maritime security. The Quad, on the other hand, began with an agenda of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), but soon after broadened its agenda to incorporate issues of delivery of developmental imperatives, such as health, technological cooperation, maritime domain awareness, etc. Given that 2025 marks this pivotal moment in India's political, diplomatic, and security engagement, and the evolving complexities emerging from wide-ranging challenges at sea, New Delhi must work towards an agenda that seeks to build synergies across maritime issues in the Indian Ocean. This appears to be necessary given the manifold challenges that are increasingly emerging in the Indian Ocean. The return of piracy in the Red Sea, compounding climate crises, maritime terrorism, drug and human trafficking are some key issues which require collective thinking and action. Regionalism in the Indian Ocean has suffered

due to the vast geography of the region, differing security and strategic interests of resident countries, and lack of meaningful efforts in cooperation on issues of imminent interests and challenges. However, cooperation in the Indian Ocean remains vital for India's interests. With a growing emphasis on India's maritime geography, challenges emanating from the oceans will require increasing attention. In pursuance of its own interest of playing the role of the principal security and development partner in the Indian Ocean, working towards growing the efficiency of IORA and IONS, and leveraging the Quad appear to serve as a fitting opportunity for India to ensure synergy and alignment of these forums in directing focus towards maritime challenges and opportunities.

Both IORA and IONS made progress during India's previous tenure as chair. Notably, during India's previous tenure as chair of IORA during 2011-2013, the forum adopted key priority areas that sought to streamline the organisational focus on the group. Similarly, India was a key architect in moot-ing IONS and hosted the first symposium in 2008 and was the first chair of the forum. India's forthcoming tenure as chair of both the forums in 2025, coupled with the continued priority accorded to its maritime interests, New Delhi's role in galvanising collective regional thinking in the Indian Ocean seems complementary. Furthermore.

In Parbhani, a statue was broken, and with it, the peace

Just outside the two-platform Parbhani railway station in Maharashtra's Marathwada region flutters the Indian national flag mounted on a pole. Beyond the tea shops selling misal pav and hotels catering to travellers, in front of an Art Deco building, is a statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who headed the drafting committee of the Constitution of India. Behind the statue are more symbols of the Indian republic: a replica of the Ashoka Chakra that forms the central symbol of the national flag, and the Ashoka Pillar, the original erected in Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, where Buddha gave his first sermon. In front is the Constitution, now covered in a blue cloth, the colour of Ambedkar's Scheduled Castes Federation of India flag. From the statue, the Doctor Line market begins, extending about 3 km up to Gandhi Park. Dilip Ragade, 55, who runs a newspaper stand next to the statue, recalls a scuffle between a man and an autorickshaw driver between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. on December 10. "At first, I thought he had pulled something out of the autorickshaw and thrown it on the road. Later, I realised that it was the replica of the Constitution. The autorickshaw driver had confronted the man," he says. Soon, a crowd of about 200 people gathered and the man was thrashed, say witnesses. People ran towards the market spreading the word, and shops began to shut. The police, the District Collector, and Ambedkarite leaders showed up and took the badly injured man to hospital, says Ragade. The man was arrested and the police told people that he was mentally ill and had not done the damage on purpose. Ambedkarites, however, were not convinced. They blocked the Nandigram Express for at least 30 minutes. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Yashwant Kale says the train left Parbhani station only after the Government Railway Police dispersed the crowd. The next day, following protests by Ambedkarites, there was stone pelting and arson, followed by a crackdown by the Parbhani police. Somnath Suryavanshi, 35, who had come from Pune for his law entrance examination, was allegedly picked up from where he was staying. He died in judicial custody a few days later. Ambedkarites claim people not from their community joined the protests so the blame for the violence would fall on them. They say the "police brutality" was a reflection of how Dalits are treated in society.

Protests of different kinds Earlier in the day on December 10, Hindu Sakal Samaj, a right-wing outfit, had taken out a morcha (march) condemning the atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh, which has a prominent border with India. It took place a few metres from the Ambedkar statue where the statue of 17th-century Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, a symbol of Maratha pride, is located. There was not much movement in the city during the morcha, say the residents of Parbhani. Ambedkarites claim several people delivered provocative speeches. This right-wing event combined with the desecration of the Constitution's replica angered Dalits, many of whom are Ambedkar's followers. Around 8 p.m. that night, the administration organised a shanti samiti baithak (peaceful meeting). Here,

Ambedkarite leaders said they would carry out a protest at five locations in Parbhani the next day. They would also submit a letter to the Collector putting forth their demands, which included charging the man and his 'accomplices' under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and making him undergo a polygraph test to find out the 'mastermind' behind the act of vandalism. That night, the city went to sleep peacefully. The following day, Ambedkarite organisations called for a bandh. These included the Republican Sena led by a grandson of Ambedkar; the Republican Party of India (A) led by Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale; and the Buddhist Society of India, founded by Ambedkar himself, who had converted to Buddhism. Ambedkarite groups began protests across the city around 8 a.m. People gathered in groups ranging from 200 to 1,000. Seven groups peacefully submitted the charter of demands to the Collector. The police say the eighth group got disruptive, forcing its way into the Collector's office. Soon, they say, violence erupted in the market, about 600 metres from the office. There was stone pelting and arson, followed by the firing of tear gas shells, say witnesses.

A city unsettled Ambedkarites say the police reacted violently. A 32-year-old demonstrator says, "The police first stopped us from reaching out to the Collector. That is why we agitated and some of us got on top of the police van to raise slogans. Now, they are looking for me everywhere." She has been in hiding after a video featuring her protesting went viral. Infuriated, she says, "We agitated for something that has given us a dignified life." She says a few men wearing masks and holding lathis had joined the protesters. "The people of Ambedkar Basti did not have these when they left." Eight FIRs were registered, over 200 people booked, and 50 arrested, including minor girls from Dalit bastis (neighbourhoods) in Parbhani such as Gautam Nagar, Priyadarshini Nagar, Rahul Nagar, and Bhim Nagar. The police booked people on charges of rioting, assault on public servants, promoting enmity, and damaging public property. "Two police vans, two four-wheelers, 18 two-wheelers, and hundreds of shops were damaged. Nine police personnel were injured. Five women were released a day after detention," says the ASP. "So far, 27 people have been arrested," he says. On December 11, orders were issued under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, preventing the assembly of five or more people. Social activists and locals have criticised the administration for taking a whole day to do this. "The State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) unit was stationed a few kilometres from here in Hingoli, yet the police did not act," says a 49-year-old retailer in the area. The SRPF was deployed the next day after 2 p.m. Vijay Wakode, an Ambedkarite leader, who died of a heart attack while protesting against the death of Somnath, had said the protest was peaceful until 1 p.m. "Then things went haywire and we cancelled the rally scheduled to be held after the protest," he had said, adding that people not part of the Ambedkar movement



got mixed in the crowd, making Ambedkarite organisations the scapegoat "to malign us". During the Maharashtra Assembly's winter session in Nagpur, the Opposition slammed the Mahayuti government over "poor law and order" in the State. In response, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, "The government will never do anything against the Constitution and the insult of it will not be tolerated." Meanwhile, newly appointed Minister and MLA from Jintur in Parbhani Meghana Bordikar told mediapersons that "Suryawanshi's death was due to a heart attack". She also defended the police, saying, "They arrested the accused immediately." A market on edge One of the shops that was damaged belonged to Kapil Chonde, 25. As news of the violence spread, he quickly bundled up sweaters, caps, and dark glasses that lay on his makeshift platform under a tarpaulin tied between an electric pole and bamboo struts. On seeing the mob rush in his direction, he sought safety in a pucca shop, but a lot of his goods were burnt. "The crowd was massive; they could have burnt anything that came in its way. The anger was visible and the police were hiding," Chonde says, two days after the incident, distraught. He estimates his loss at ₹40,000. He has taken a loan of ₹60,000 and wonders how he will pay it back.

Several traders are grappling with the task of assessing the extent of damage. Boards were damaged, doors bashed in, pushcarts broken, and bits thrown into the gutter. The Parbhani police estimate that property worth at least ₹30 lakh was damaged. Doctor Line has shops owned by a variety of trading communities from different ethnicities and religions. However, Kashinath Shinde, 45, one of the owners, says, "Most shops are of the Maratha community. The violence was targeted at them as the perpetrator is a Maratha." The area around the Ambedkar statue has been cordoned off with barricades. Riot Control Police vans are stationed at the opposite end of the road. At least 10 police personnel are deployed every 300 metres, and police vans stationed at every kilometre, with patrolling every half an hour. The government also suspended Internet services for two days. Rumours abound in the city. One talks about the arrest of a 10-year-old girl, another the custodial death of a woman. The moment a rumour is spread, the shutters of shops go

down. This happens a couple of times. The police announce on loudspeakers that these claims are untrue. Dalits traumatised

In Dalit settlements, people are gripped with fear of getting picked up by the police. Kalawanti Dabade, 50, a daily wage earner, says, "The police are searching every house and taking our children." A demonstrator from Bhim Nagar says, "We started pelting stones when the police resorted to lathi charge and opened tear gas. We missed our exams because they are looking for us and many of us are in hiding." His body is covered with black and green scars that he says are a result of the lathi charge. "The government hospital refused to take me in, saying I was a rioter." Vachala Manavte, 53, was hospitalised after she was released from jail on December 12. She works at a nearby hospital and was allegedly thrashed for recording a video of the police while they were detaining youth in Priyadarshini Nagar. "After dragging me there, they threw me in the lock-up and slapped and kicked me. They were trying to retrieve my mobile phone's password to delete the video," she says. Rutuja, 20, and Pooja, 27, along with two minor sisters, aged 14 and 12, from Bhim Nagar were taken into custody. "They treated us like animals and humiliated us for being Dalit. I could actually relate to Jai Bhim [a Tamil movie on a tribal woman fighting for justice]. They asked us to kneel and not look up," says Rutuja, adding that the police also took her hall ticket for her first-year BA exams. Pooja tells a similar story. The minor girls' mother has sent them to Nanded to avoid harassment by the police. Politicians have been visiting the area following the violence. Athawale visited the Ambedkar statue, garlanded it, met officials in-charge of the administration, and residents of Bhim Nagar. Sujat Ambedkar, the great-grandson of Ambedkar, also garlanded the statue and visited Bhim Nagar. On December 17, Prakash Ambedkar, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief and Sujat's father, posted a video on X and wrote: "A mother of a newborn was brutally assaulted by the police in her house. She had locked herself in the bathroom to save herself from the violence, but the police broke the door down and brutally beat her up." Conspiracy theories The man who desecrated the Constitution is from Mirzapur village in Parbhani district and worked at grocery shops in Parbhani.

Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures?

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024, mandates a fixed five-year term for the Lok Sabha, with State Legislature elections aligned to this cycle. If the Lok Sabha or any State Assembly is dissolved before completing its full term, mid-term elections will be held only for the remainder of the five-year term. Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures? P.D.T. Achary and M.R. Madhavan discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Aaratrika Bhaumik. Edited excerpts:

Do fixed legislative tenures promote better governance by reducing the disruptions of frequent elections?

P.D.T. Achary: It is worth questioning whether this Bill and the proposal for simultaneous polls are necessary at all. The claim that such a system will reduce electoral expenditure lacks credibility. A portion of the expenditure is allocated by the Election Commission and State governments through budgetary provisions from the Centre and the States. However, the majority of election spending is incurred by political parties. Even if some costs are saved, it is improbable that political parties would redirect these funds toward development or infrastructure projects. More importantly, frequent elections enhance political accountability, compelling representatives to regularly engage with the electorate. M.R. Madhavan: This Constitution Amendment Bill does not propose a fixed term for legislatures, as it allows for mid-term elections. It ensures accountability to the legislature, in line with the core tenet of the parliamentary system. By permitting mid-term elections, the Bill is also in conformity with the basic structure of the Constitution. The key change, however, is that in the event of a mid-term election, the term of the newly elected legislature will be shorter than five years. Whether this improves governance is uncertain. However, it does not provide the same stability as the U.S. presidential system for instance, where the incumbent President can only be removed through impeachment.

Does aligning the tenure of State Assemblies with that of the Lok Sabha compromise federalism and pose a threat to political plurality?

M.R. Madhavan: I find the Bill symmetrical since it also aligns the tenure of Parliament with that of State Assemblies. For instance, if the central government collapses after three years, fresh elections will be conducted for the Lok Sabha, and the newly elected legislative body will serve only a reduced term of two years. Therefore, I don't think State Assemblies are being aligned with Parliament. Rather, the Bill standardises the timing of all elections to a common date. I do not see any threat to federalism in this approach. The argument that simultaneous polls would drive voters to select the same party for both the Centre and the State Assembly is flawed, as it underestimates the electorate's intelligence. Historical examples, such as the 2014 elections in Delhi, demonstrate that voters can and do make distinct choices. Despite the BJP's over-



whelming victory at the Centre, voters elected the AAP in the State Assembly — despite both polls being held within six months of each other. P.D.T. Achary: For the first time, this Bill seeks to make the tenure of State Assemblies contingent upon that of Parliament. For instance, if Parliament completes its full term while a State Assembly is only in its second year, the Assembly would be prematurely dissolved, with elections held concurrently with Parliament. This approach undermines the principles of federalism. Under the existing constitutional framework, State Assemblies function as autonomous legislative bodies. This Bill seeks to alter their independent tenure, a crucial attribute of the federal structure.

cern is the dissolution of the House. If a government falls after three and a half years, mid-term elections will be necessary, taking an additional 4-6 months. This would result in a Lok Sabha with a tenure of one year or less, which I believe is undesirable. Does the Bill adequately account for political exigencies? For instance, if the ruling party splits but the breakaway faction refuses to side with the Opposition. M.R. Madhavan: I believe the Bill effectively addresses such contingencies. For instance, the 2013 Delhi and 2005 Bihar legislative assembly elections resulted in hung assemblies. The Bill resolves such deadlocks by allowing fresh elections to take place. The only difference is that the newly elected legislature will serve a reduced tenure rather than the full five years. P.D.T. Achary: The Constitution prescribes a five-year term for State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha but allows for their dissolution to address political exigencies. This flexibility reflects a pragmatic approach to governance. While fixed legislative tenures provide stability, the option to dissolve legislatures is crucial for addressing political instability. For instance, State governments have often dissolved Assemblies to seek a fresh and decisive mandate through mid-term elections—a contingency the Bill fails to adequately address. Could the German model of a constructive vote of no-confidence help resolve political stalemates? P.D.T. Achary: Such a proposal was rejected by the high-level committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind. It has also been deliberated upon previously, but I doubt its adoption is feasible in India. M.R. Madhavan: I don't think it is a viable option given our sys-

tem. In most instances, when a ruling government loses a no-confidence motion, no alternative government commands a majority in the House. This could lead to a situation where the incumbent government remains in power but lacks the majority needed to pass essential bills or the budget. The U.K.'s Fixed-term Parliaments Act of 2011, repealed in 2022, was criticised for triggering constitutional crises and policy paralysis. What lessons could this hold for India? M.R. Madhavan: The Bill is being misunderstood as proposing fixed legislative tenures when it only introduces a "maximum term".

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This is different from the system that existed in the U.K., where a newly elected legislature would complete its full five-year term, even if mid-term elections were to be held. In contrast, under the system proposed by the Bill, if the government loses the confidence of the legislative majority, mid-term elections will be called, and the newly elected legislature will then serve a truncated tenure. P.D.T. Achary: In a country like ours, political instability is a real possibility, especially at the State level. While Parliament will continue to have its five-year tenure, States may encounter situations that necessitate mid-term elections, resulting in shorter tenures for state legislatures. I firmly believe that, despite its flaws, the current system should be preserved. The proposal for simultaneous elections risks creating unnecessary turmoil, and there is no compelling reason to pursue it at this juncture. The government should instead focus on tackling more pressing challenges that affect the people.