



## Not above the law

The verdict in the Salman Khan blackbuck case is a huge blow for conservation

The stiff sentence of five years in jail awarded to actor Salman Khan for hunting blackbuck in Rajasthan's Kankani village in 1998 should send out the message that stardom does not confer impunity. Unlike the average wildlife poaching case, where State forest departments struggle to gather credible evidence, the prosecution in the blackbuck case has been vigorously supported by the local Bishnoi community. What sets the case apart from so many other episodes of poaching and animal trapping in India's forests is its naked celebration of bloodsport. Stars like Khan, who is no stranger to controversy surrounding hunting expeditions, seem to think conservation is not serious business, and the clock can readily be turned back to an era when the wealthy and powerful organised 'shikar' parties to hunt for pleasure. That era is over. If the verdict of the Jodhpur court in the blackbuck case survives the appeals process, it would send out the powerful message that the judicial system feels no constraint in exerting the full weight of the law to protect threatened wildlife. Equally, it should bring a feeling of empowerment to forest department personnel, and help them resist the intimidation that they routinely face from influential sections in the discharge of their duties. Protecting the blackbuck case verdict – and the witnesses who made it possible – is the challenge they face today.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, the landmark law from 1972 that shields the diversity of India's endangered animals mainly in 4% of its land area designated as protected, struggles to be effective and conviction rates are low. Besides restraining 'VIP' poachers, forest guards must combat organised hunting gangs that employ traps and snares for a thriving trade in animals, body parts and trophies. Even the population of the tiger, the most protected species, faces erosion due to poaching. At least 136 tigers were killed between 2014 and 2017, according to an estimate by the Wildlife Protection Society of India that includes official data on poaching. What is more, several species protected under the Schedules of the Wildlife Act are often found in areas that lie outside sanctuaries, and are commonly hunted. Forest departments must see the need for greater vigilance in such territories, which they can exercise in partnership with local communities. The verdict in the Salman Khan case strikes a blow for these free-ranging animals, sending out the message that hunting of protected species is certain to invite severe penalties. The court makes the important observation that personalities who are capable of influencing the behaviour of others must naturally be conscious of what they do. It is to be hoped that this will convince the high and mighty that bloodsports are grotesquely incongruous in the present day when environmental concerns rule supreme and engaging in them invites deterrent action.

## Disruptive Mr. Trump

The consistent undermining of multilateralism by the U.S. must be countered

This week has seen rounds of tit-for-tat tariffs between the U.S. and China, set off by U.S. President Donald Trump levying import duties of 25% and 10% on American steel and aluminium imports, respectively, in early March. Mr. Trump, who has repeatedly used the U.S. trade deficit of over \$500 billion as a barometer for the country's lot in the international trade order, has railed against the U.S. being treated "unfairly" by its trading partners, often singling out China. While it is true that China produces approximately half the world's steel and that the European Union, India and other countries have complained about international steel markets being flooded with Chinese steel, only 3% of U.S. steel is sourced from China. Interestingly, among those exempted from the tariffs are Canada and Mexico, top sources for U.S. steel imports. Mr. Trump has linked the threat of tariffs to the North American Free Trade Agreement, a trade deal among the U.S., Canada and Mexico that Mr. Trump has pried open for renegotiation. Earlier this week China retaliated with tariffs that would impact \$3 billion worth of American goods. This was followed by the U.S. proposing tariffs on more than \$50 billion of Chinese goods, including in the aerospace, robotics and communication industries – the outcome of an investigation of several months into whether Chinese policies were placing unreasonable obligations on U.S. companies to transfer technology and hand over intellectual property while setting up shop in China. Beijing responded with a second round of proposed tariffs impacting a similar value of U.S. imports into China. Mr. Trump has now asked the U.S. Trade Representative to examine if an additional \$100 billion worth of goods can be taxed.

Since the proposed tariffs have not kicked off, there may be room for negotiation. The economic ties between the countries are deep; China holds some \$1.2 trillion in U.S. debt, and it is in everyone's interest to avoid escalating matters. However, the larger cause for concern here is that Mr. Trump continues to undermine the World Trade Organisation and the international world trade order, now that it has served the West well and developing countries are in a significantly stronger position than when the WTO came into existence in 1995. Mr. Trump has pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, is pushing changes to NAFTA and has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement to combat climate change. While large-scale protectionism and unilateralism may please some of Mr. Trump's constituents in the short run, undermining existing rules arbitrarily serves no nation, including the U.S., in the long run. In the current climate, it is therefore especially important for India to be a good steward for responsible globalisation.

# Cat and mouse in Uttar Pradesh

The SP's interests lie in aligning with the BSP – but their capacity to keep the alliance going will be severely tested



VIDYA SUBRAHMANIAM

As Dalits across the country took to the streets this week, protesting the Supreme Court order diluting the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, an unusual coming together happened in Uttar Pradesh. Samajwadi Party (SP) workers, with a history of violence and hostility towards Dalits and the Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), joined the protesting Dalits in large numbers. The SP has since announced grand plans to celebrate the 127th birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar.

### When it clicked

Stunning as these unity moves are, they had been preceded by another incredible event – of Ms. Mayawati offering support to the Akhilesh Yadav-led SP in the by-elections to the VIP parliamentary seats of Gorakhpur and Phulpur. The script was classic David versus Goliath. Gorakhpur was vacated by Yogi Adityanath, five-time MP from the same seat, venerated head of the powerful Gorakhnath mutt and also the incumbent Chief Minister. Phulpur had been held by Keshav Prasad Maurya before he surrendered it to take charge as the State's Deputy Chief Minister. This plus the Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide victory in the 2017 Assembly election, made the ruling party impossibly strong. Yet the SP triumphed handsomely in both seats, which allowed only one explanation: Ms. Mayawati

and Mr. Yadav had clicked as a pair and their infectious chemistry had brought together their warring vote bases.

But it wasn't clear – it still isn't clear – if the alliance will hold. During the by-election campaign, the BJP had called the SP and the BSP, *saanp* and *chuchundar* (snake and shrew) and that's indeed what they had been until they unexpectedly united for the by-elections. The last unity experiment of the two parties had been 25 years earlier – the government they formed in 1993 collapsed within two years under the weight of mutual contradictions and ambitions – and the length of time since then had only reinforced the conviction that their enmity was irrevocable. The recent rapprochement proves the truth that in politics there are no permanent friends or enemies. But will they remain friends, resisting blandishments and threats that could and will come their way? The key to this imponderable is Ms. Mayawati rather than Mr. Yadav who has shown himself to be more willing of the two. In recent interviews, he has spoken of walking the extra mile to please Ms. Mayawati knowing she will set stiff terms for the alliance, including demanding a higher share of seats.

### Tussle ahead

It is certain then that the coming months will witness a fierce tug of war between Mr. Yadav and BJP president Amit Shah. The winner will be decided by Ms. Mayawati. Though leaning towards the SP for now, she is considered entirely capable of switching sides. The uncertainty owes not only to the BSP chief's quicksilver temperament and the suspense that always accompanies her moves but also to her long-held belief that while the



BSP's catchment of Dalits votes is fully transferable, the votes of the partner are not. The most powerful actor in this triangle is Mr. Shah of course. The BJP chief's record since taking over brims with conquests accomplished via his immense persuasive powers and the humongous war chest at his command. From U.P. to the north-east, the BJP's path to success is littered with defections and alliances formed and broken.

Mr. Yadav will do all he can to keep Ms. Mayawati by his side while Mr. Shah will want to do the opposite: wrench her away, not for an alliance with the BJP which will mean surrendering valuable seats to a volatile partner, but to keep the SP and the BSP apart. For both of them this is a fight they cannot afford to lose. For Mr. Yadav, it is a question of survival. For Mr. Shah, winning U.P., where the BJP alliance mopped up 73 of 80 seats in 2014, is intrinsic to securing a second term in office for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Yadav cannot match wits with the quick-thinking Mr. Shah. However, U.P. this time is not the U.P. of 2014 or 2017. In both elections, the Modi-led BJP was the challenger that kindled new hope among U.P.'s impoverished millions. More critically, the SP and the BSP fought separately in both elections. Had they been united in

2014, the BJP would have still been ahead but with a considerably lower share of seats. In 2017, the combined vote share of the parties exceeded the votes polled by the BJP by a few percentage points. And if the Congress were to join this alliance, the Bihar-style Mahaghatbandhan would become unbeatable, even assuming the partners don't fully transfer their votes.

### Data trail

Mr. Yadav's eagerness is backed by statistics. If the SP does not align with the BSP, it will perish. The SP's share of Lok Sabha seats and votes has plunged from 23 seats for 23.26% in 2009 to five seats for 22.35% in 2014. In the Assembly, it's seen a fall from a high of 224 of 403 seats for 29.15% in 2012, to a pitiful 47 seats for 21.82% in 2017. The SP calculates that the BSP will agree to an alliance with it because the alternative is to face political extinction. The BSP's decline since 2009 is even more dramatic than the SP's. The party that won a majority on its own in 2007, finished behind the SP and the Congress with 20 Lok Sabha seats in 2009. In 2014, it won zero Lok Sabha seats for a vote share of only 19.77%. In 2017, belying its claim of a revival, the BSP won a meagre 19 seats for a vote share of 22.23%.

An important member of the SP, Sudhir Panwar, argues that both parties are at a juncture where the status quo is no longer an option. "For Ms. Mayawati too all other options are closed. The only way forward for her is to align with the SP."

The logic is impeccable but Amit Shah is hardly likely to sit back and watch the SP and the BSP form an alliance and run away with the major share of seats. Ms. Mayawati is particularly vulnera-

ble on finances: The BSP's assets have grown manifold and she and her brother have faced several income tax raids over alleged accumulation of wealth. Sources in both parties have confirmed that at least one previous alliance attempt failed due to this pressure.

### The calculations

On the other hand, Ms. Mayawati has reached a point where she gains nothing from hedging her bets. An alliance with the BSP does not suit the BJP. So it will play deal-breaker. The SP will not oblige but the more susceptible BSP could. And yet, a surrender won't win Ms. Mayawati any seats which will effectively end her career. In recent years, the BSP chief has recklessly expelled valuable Muslim and backward caste party leaders. The SP and the BSP have also seen an erosion in their core constituencies of Yadavs and Dalits. An alliance between them will stem the desertions. Another factor in the BSP's calculation will be the perception that Dalits who were open to the BJP are now angry and alienated. The BJP's trump card could be fresh caste mobilisation via the expected sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes.

Even in that event, any SP-BSP pact will be a winner. Ms. Mayawati, though, remains an enigma. She has sworn to defeat the BJP but in Karnataka she has aligned with the Janata Dal (Secular), which indirectly helps the BJP.

Whatever happens in the end in U.P., it will be interesting to watch the upcoming cat and mouse game.

Vidya Subrahmaniam is Senior Fellow at The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. E-mail: vidya.subrahmaniam@thehinducentre.com

# Forging a culture of innovation

India's innovation policy has to shift beyond a mere focus on R&D spending to transforming the ecosystem



FEROZE VARUN GANDHI

On paper, India should be in a good position in terms of research and development (R&D) spending. Our pipeline of researchers seems undiminished; we are ranked third in the world in number of science and technology PhDs awarded and have improved our ranking in the Global Innovation Index, from 66 to 60. And yet, there is no Indian university in the top hundred (QS World University Rankings, 2018) and only 46,904 patents were filed in India in 2016 (China filed over a million patents). Somehow, we have enabled an ethos of publishing, but not "patenting, publishing and prospering".

### Between the numbers

India's gross expenditure on R&D has increased by three times over the decade 2005-15, crossing the ₹1 lakh crore mark in 2016-17. The Centre spent 45.1% of the total amount in 2015, while private industry contributed 38.1%. In comparison to the West, the contribution of higher educational institutions in R&D spending was

lacklustre. The government's R&D spending is equivalent to an Amazon or Alphabet's R&D spend, while only 26 Indian companies figure in the list of top 2,500 companies globally by R&D spend. Our R&D activities still seem to be conducted in an ivory tower, instead of being market-focussed.

India's R&D spending, as a percentage of GDP, still lags significantly, at 0.69% in 2015 – this share has been stagnating for the last decade. Even among other BRICS countries, only South Africa lags behind India in terms of R&D expenditure. Allocation of spending is also significantly constrained. Over 90% of Indian start-ups face a risk of failure in their initial failure, partially due to a lack of access to financing. Access to such financing streams, to public and private players needs to be improved significantly, with a reduction in institutional barriers.

The translation of R&D spend into patents can be affected by institutional constraints as well. Only 28% of patents registered for applications are eventually filed. Meanwhile, patent pendency times in India are among the highest in the major economies, with a patent taking about 6-7 years between a request for examination and a final office action. In comparison, South Korea and China have pendency timings of 16 and 22 months, respectively. Meanwhile,



the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), which filed over 13,000 patents (2014-2017), shut down its commercialising arm, CSIR-Tech, due to lack of funding. India's intellectual property rights (IPR) policy is ripe for transformation – requiring an amendment encouraging start-ups to utilise filed patents on an initial no-royalty basis, with revenue sharing occurring once significant commercialisation is achieved.

Spending aside, the lack of transformative innovation across industries is something that India should be concerned about. Over 77% of Indian venture capitalists believe that India lacks unique business models or new technologies. R&D, as a professional function, fails to attract top talent – our 216 researchers per million compare with China's 1,177, Russia's 3,131 and the U.S.'s 4,232. The number of scientific publications has risen from 62,955 papers in 2009 to over 106,065 papers in 2013, with India's share of global

research publications rising from 2.2% in 2000 to 3.7% in 2013. And yet, over 35% of publications in "bogus journals" comes from India. The CSIR's patents, mentioned earlier, were mostly "bio-data patents", and are claimed to have been filed primarily to enhance a scientist's resume. The hoarding of patents has a significant cost; acquiring a higher number of patents, without due regard for quality, has become an institutional mark of success, to up our index of innovation.

### Tested by application

We need to push beyond metrics, papers and patents to focus on providing solutions to development and economic challenges. A focus on building an innovation culture is necessary, particularly giving the transformative shifts under way in sectors critical to India's economy – from electric cars in automobiles to insourcing in IT services, the economy is exposed to significant job losses and a fall in exports over the coming decade. Our innovation policy has to shift beyond a focus on increasing R&D spending to inculcating a mindset of "out-of-the-box" thinking in our universities, start-ups and corporates. India's educational policies need to be redesigned, with a focus on building cognitive abilities, beyond rote learning and focus on quantitative subjects. The Atal In-

novation Mission is an encouraging start, focussing on facilitating school-level financial grants to help nurture an initial layer of innovation. But we need to move beyond this to focus on taking advantage of the data analytics boom, improving educational qualities beyond our existing islands of excellence to the whole university system. A supporting ecosystem for this will require providing greater access to public data, through the Right to Information Act and a push to providing public data (for example, on train punctuality, water scarcity, air pollution metrics) for building innovative applications on a real-time basis.

The impact of R&D spending on shifting a nation's trajectory from a commodity-based growth to one based on capital and IP is well-noted; South Korea increased its GDP 12 times over the past 45 years, while R&D spend rose from 0.26% of GDP in 1965 to over 4.04% in 2011; private players accounted for 76.5% of total R&D spending in 2011. For a nation whose public debate is often given to recalling innovations in our historical and mythological past, the future state of India's R&D activities demands significant attention.

Feroze Varun Gandhi is a Member of Parliament representing the Sultampur constituency for the BJP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Poaching case

The unending legal saga of actor Salman Khan finally appears to have reached the end ("Salman gets 5-year jail term", April 6). While the verdict has sent out the message that all are equal before the law, the delay by the judiciary in pronouncing its judgment is unacceptable. India needs an active and responsive judiciary to keep the democratic system running smoothly. Such legal delays only give rise to scepticism.

MO RUSTAM PARWEZ,  
Hyderabad

■ The mere fact that one is a celebrity or holds a position or rank does not place him or her above the law. That it has taken almost 20 years to convict Mr. Khan is cause for concern. It is unfortunate that Bollywood is attempting to drum up support for him citing potential losses.

C.K. SUBRAMANIAM,  
Navi Mumbai

■ While there is no doubt that Mr. Khan deserves to be punished, the sentence of five years along with a fine of ₹10,000 hardly serves any purpose. It would have been more appropriate had he been given a token imprisonment of a few months along with a fine of ₹1 crore or more to be used to help conserve the endangered blackbuck.

VIJAY NARAYEN,  
Chennai

■ It is a red letter day for wildlife conservationists. This is perhaps the first time that crime against wildlife in India has resulted in a definite judicial verdict. One also needs to acknowledge the courage of the Bishnoi community in this trial, which is a lesson for us.

N. VIJAI,  
Coimbatore

### Cauvery bandh

There needs to be an end to the decades-old dispute between Karnataka and

Tamil Nadu over the sharing of Cauvery waters. The problem is largely about the management of water sources in a sustainable manner. The conflict is bound to escalate if improved technologies for water conveyance, delivery and allocation are not found at the earliest. The Centre needs to suggest such solutions especially to States that share such natural resources. It is a pity that water is being thought of as only a political issue than a human right ("Opposition bandh evokes strong response across Tamil Nadu", April 6).

A.J. RANGARAJAN,  
Chennai

### Bank fraud

It is a matter of concern that fraudulent dealings in public and private banks are on the rise. Every year audit teams visit banks where each team has a focus area. How is it that none of the teams detected money leakage? Will

enabling the Reserve Bank to have more regulatory powers over public banks or empowering the Central Vigilance Commission to have oversight over private banks help prevent frauds? The perception is that the existing rules are not being applied properly at the middle level while there is a laxity at the higher levels. Otherwise, frauds of such a magnitude can never happen. What is required is exercising greater vigil over the higher levels of management and enforcing discipline at all levels ("CBI books Vadodara-based firm for cheating 11 banks", April 6).

SURYANARAYANAN S.,  
Chennai

### Minister's cure

Union Minister Smriti Irani appears to be rather inept in handling the complexities in her ministries. One cannot forget her earlier stint in the HRD Ministry, and now the Information and

Broadcasting Ministry. (Editorial page, "The 'fake news' fiasco", April 6). The generation of fake news is hardly the work of individual journalists but can be linked to user-generated content on social media platforms. Finally, the I&B Ministry should not interfere in the autonomy of Prasar Bharti. If it continues to act in a high-handed manner, it won't be long before the autonomous news corporation, known for quality-rich content, is reduced to becoming a mouthpiece of the government.

MARIA GEORGE,  
Thrissur, Kerala

### 3Rs focus

The writers (Editorial page, "Skill India" urgently needs reforms", April 6) are right in saying that the focus should be on "strengthening reading, writing and arithmetic skills". But the moot point is whether vocational institutions will have the time or the

expertise to do this. At best, they can only build on the foundation laid at the primary school level. The remedy lies in improving the primary education so that the enhancement and teaching of communication skills, logical thinking, languages and mathematics are done in a sound manner.

S. SUNDARAM,  
Padur, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu

### India at Gold Coast

The report, "Gold Coast could turn out to be India's best ever in athletics" (Sport page, April 1), appears to be spot on if our performance in the Commonwealth Games is an indication. Mirabai Chanu deserves mention for her record breaking performance and opening the gold tally. With more stars yet to open their accounts, India is sure to do well.

VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH,  
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:  
www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/