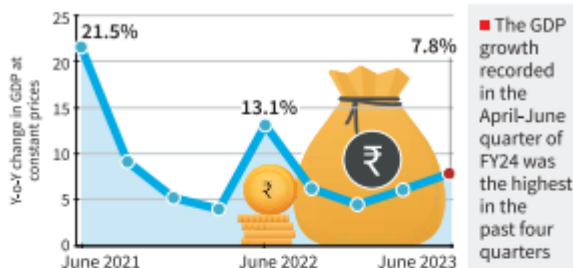


Growth accelerates

India's gross domestic product grew by 7.8% in the first quarter of FY24 compared with 13.1% growth in Q1 FY23



Economy grows 7.8%, fastest in 4 quarters

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Growth in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy sped to a four-quarter high of 7.8% in the first quarter of this financial year, but economists reckon that a weak monsoon, high inflation and global headwinds could temper the pace of growth through the rest of 2023-24.

Manufacturing GVA grew for the second quar-

ter in a row, after half a year of contraction, with the pace of growth picking up slightly to 4.7% in the first quarter (Q1) of the year, from 4.5% in the previous quarter. Agriculture, forestry and fishing GVA grew 3.5% between April and June, but it was the services sectors that saw the sharpest surge and lifted the estimates released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 14

Economy grows 7.8%, fastest in 4 quarters

Financial, real estate and professional services GVA grew 12.2% in Q1, while GVA from trade, hotels, transport, communications, and services related to broadcasting rose 9.2%. The GVA from public administration, defence, and other services, as well as the employment-intensive construction sector, rose 7.9% each.

'Below expectations'

"Although a supportive base propelled GDP growth to a four-quarter high of 7.8%, it nonetheless printed below our expectations of 8.5% as well as the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee's projection of 8%," said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar. She attributed the slower-than-expected growth mostly to the meek uptick in manufacturing and a deceleration in the construction sector.

Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran argued that this was a good growth number that keeps the economy poised to grow 6.5% this year, and downplayed interpretations of a weak manufacturing sector. "The data is not seasonally adjusted, so to say manufacturing is not doing well is not something that I would subscribe to," Mr. Nageswaran said, noting that the numbers were distorted by weaker cement production.

Crisil chief economist Dharmakirti Joshi was not as sanguine, predicting that the 7.8% growth would likely be the "peak growth performance" for this year.

Statehood for J&K may take time; polls can be held: govt.

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday conveyed to the Supreme Court its inability to commit to an exact time period within which full Statehood would be restored to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Union government, however, said Jammu and Kashmir was ready to hold elections "any time now".

Appearing before a Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the Union Territory status of J&K was only a "temporary phenomenon". "Complete Statehood may take some time as the State had faced repeated and consistent disturbances for decades together," he submitted.

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Statehood for J&K may take time, govt. tells SC

On Tuesday, Mr. Mehta sought time till August 31 to get instructions from the government about a time frame to restore Statehood to J&K.

The erstwhile State was reorganised into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh in August 2019. Ladakh would continue to be a Union Territory unlike J&K, the Centre said on August 29.

"I am unable to give an exact time period right now for the Statehood... I assure you we are progressively proceeding to make Jammu and Kashmir a complete State," Mr. Mehta submitted. The Centre was catalysing the progress to Statehood by pumping investments to the tune of ₹28,400 crore, he said.

Mr. Mehta said J&K had seen "enormous changes" post abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. Terrorism, infiltration, stone-throwing and casualties among security personnel had reduced. There were 1,767 incidents of secessionist-spurred stone-throwing in J&K in 2018, he said. "Now it is nil... In 2018, there were 52 instances of organised bandhs, now it is nil," the Solicitor-General said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the petitioners, objected to Mr. Mehta presenting figures to prove his case of "enormous change". "They had 5,000 people under house arrest and Section 144 [curfew] was ordered... Then how could there be any bandh... These figures are irrelevant to the challenge," Mr. Sibal said.

The Chief Justice said the constitutional challenge to the abrogation of Article 370 would have to be answered by the Centre on constitutional grounds, and not by quoting these statistics.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mehta said the Election Commission had been doing the groundwork for elections in the erstwhile State. He said the three-tier polls in J&K would be held for the first time after 2019. These would include polls to panchayats (rural areas), municipality and to the Assembly.

The war in which Cholas ravaged a Chera town in Kanniyakumari

The war was fought between the Cholas and the Cheras at Udagai, now known as Udayagiri in Kalkulam taluk of Kanniyakumari, during the reign of Raja Raja I. The big town, surrounded by huge walls, had palatial houses. The Chola army demolished the buildings, set the town ablaze and secured Raja Raja's messenger who was locked up

B. Kolappan

Though the Tamil country ruled by Chera, Chola and Pandya kings had been a land of great literature, art, culture and temple architecture, it had also witnessed fierce battles among them. One such battle was fought between the Cholas and the Cheras at Udagai, now known as Udayagiri in Kalkulam taluk of Kanniyakumari district, during the reign of Raja Raja I, the greatest of Chola kings. In this bloodiest war, the Cholas plundered Udagai and returned to their headquarters in Thanjavur with tonnes of gold and the best elephants.

The battle between the Cholas and the Cheras began with the conquest of Kantharur Salai in the Chera Kingdom. There is an unending debate on the words about the Chola period inscription, *Kantharur Salai Kalamartharutaiya Sree Raja Raja Devan*. While it is certain that it talks about Raja Raja's victory over the Chera king, there are differences of opinion among the historians over the geographical existence of the place, and the interpretation of the words, *Salai* and *Kalam*, still continues. Some opine that Kantharur Salai existed near the Vizhinjam port in the present day Kerala and *Kalam* means sailing vessels. Tamil poet Kavimani, who was also an epigraphist, was of the opinion that *Salai* was a place where people were offered food regularly.

Evidence from epigraphy

"But the discovery of a Chola period epigraphy a few years ago near Chengam proves without doubt that *Salai* was an army training centre run by the Cheras. The training centre remained a



Rooted in history: The Udayagiri fort was built in the 18th Century by Eustachius de Lannoy, a Portuguese soldier, who later became the chieftain of the Travancore army.

challenge to the Cholas. With the battle began the end of the relationship between the Cholas and the Cheras that had been established through marriages," says K. Kalaiyovan, founder, Rajamanickanar Centre for Historical Research.

In his book, *Pazhuvur-Arasarkal, Kovilak Matturam Samuthayam* (Pazhuvur-Kings, Temples and Society), Dr. Kalaiyovan says Adityan Kothai Piratti, wife of Chola King Arinjaya, and Paranthagan Devi Ammal, wife of Sundar Chola,

were the Chera princesses.

"The relationship deteriorated fast during the reign of Raja Raja. He decided to launch a battle after one of his messengers was detained by the Chera king at Udagai. A brutal battle followed," says Dr. Kalaiyovan. He reiterates that in this case, Raja Raja was not driven by any expansionist policy, but by the desire to secure his messenger.

"Udagai is the present day Udayagiri, where stands a huge fort constructed in the 18th Century by Eustachius de Lannoy, a Portuguese soldier, who later became the chieftain of the Travancore army after his defeat in the battle of Colachel," said A.K. Perumal, author of *Then Kumariyath Kathai*. Historically, Kalkulam used to be the recruitment ground for the Chera army and subsequently for the Travancore army.

"Udagai was a big town, surrounded by huge walls with tall towers. There were palatial houses. The Chola army demolished the buildings, set the town ablaze and secured the messenger locked in prison," said historian K.K. Pillai in his book *Cholar Vanalaru* (The History of Cholas). K.K. Pillai, a student of historian K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, rejects his teacher's suggestion that Udagai was a town near Coorg. However, epigraphist Chenthee Natarajan says the town was near Kollam in Kerala.

While K.K. Pillai affirms that the Chola army was led by Raja Raja's son Rajendra, Dr. Kalaiyovan said Raja Raja was present at the battle. "There is strong literary evidence for the battle. *Moovar Ula* (a poetry collection) talks in detail about the arrest of the Chola messenger and the attack by the Chola army. *Kalingathu Parani* (a literary work) also makes a reference to Raja Raja's role in the war and how he returned

to his country with a lot of elephants from Udagai," he says. A copper plate inscription says, *Udagai Kozhuvu*, meaning the town was burnt.

Village renamed

According to K.K. Pillai, Raja Raja celebrated his birthday in a grand manner when he was camping in the Chera kingdom. "He renamed the village Muttam as Mummudi Chola Nallor. He gave grants to the temple at Thirunanthikarai for a seven-day celebration of his birthday on the day of Appasi Sathayam," he says, quoting from the inscriptions at the temple.

Subsequently, he returned to his country with tonnes of gold and a lot of elephants and cattle. Kamban Manian, one of the generals of the Chola army, brought a Shiva idol made of emerald and kept it at Thirupazhanam near Thanjavur. "But the idol is not found there now," says K.K. Pillai.

These battles had far-reaching consequences, terminating the relationship between the two countries during the reign of Rajendra Chola. "The battles eclipsed the importance of the Pazhuvettaraiyars, the rulers of Pazhuvur and advisers of the Chola Kings. The Pazhuvettaraiyars had their roots in Kerala. Raja Raja would not have liked the pre-eminent role given to them in the wake of battles with the Chera kingdom," writes Dr. Kalaiyovan.

Contrary to the presence of the Pazhuvettaraiyar brothers in Kalki's epic novel *Ponniyin Selvan*, historically there was just one Pazhuvettaraiyar whose name was Kandam Maravan. "After the eighth year of the rule of Rajendra Chola, there is no inscription to prove that the Pazhuvettaraiyars held positions in the Chola Kingdom," says Dr. Kalaiyovan.

CII aims to position Tamil Nadu as leader of socio-economic development

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is working on a comprehensive white paper which is aimed at positioning Tamil Nadu as leader in socio-economic development. It also wants to help the State achieve its target of \$1 trillion economy by 2030. To execute this plan, CII has initiated a project called 'Policy Action Dialogues'.

"This will happen in three stages. In the first stage, we will send out

questionnaires to around 400 participants from 15 different sectors. Based on the feedback, CII will then have a round table with industry experts. And in stage three, the white paper will be rolled out with suggestions and areas of growth," Shankar Vanavarayar, Chairman, CII Tamil Nadu State Council and Executive Director of AET Industries Ltd., told *The Hindu*.

The questionnaire will look at 12 parameters that are aligned with business and growth. Some of the

parameters that will be looked at is ease of doing business, construction permits and land registration, taxation and statutory compliances, access to credit, diversity and inclusion.

"The idea is to get feedback about the realities which are happening sector-wise and geographical-wise. We will also rope in other associations for this," Mr. Vanavarayar said.

He also mentioned that CII will work with Guidance (the nodal agency instrumental in bringing investments into Tamil Na-



Tourism is an important sector for Tamil Nadu, says Shankar Vanavarayar, Chairman, CII Tamil Nadu State Council. FILE PHOTO

du) on this project.

"The white paper will be submitted to the Tamil Nadu government ahead of

the Global Investors Meet (GIM)," he noted.

The sectors that CII is looking at include aeros-

According to details shared by CII, the creative and knowledge industry in T.N. is worth an estimated ₹200 billion

pace and defence, agriculture and food processing, auto and auto components and electric vehicles (EVs), chemicals, healthcare and meditech, IT/ITES and banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI), logistics, leather and footwear and textiles.

"Apart from this, we are also looking at Electronics System Design and Manufacturing, Global Capability Centres (GCC) and Research and Development (R&D). Creative and knowledge industry is another focus area," Mr. Vanavarayar said.

According to details shared by CII, the creative and knowledge industry in Tamil Nadu is worth an estimated ₹200 billion (\$2.6 billion).

Mr. Vanavarayar mentioned that CII also intends to look at the education

and tourism sector. "Tourism is an important sector and a big strength for Tamil Nadu," he said.

Through this in-depth analysis, CII aims to collect industry specific data and insights from stakeholders, identify potential growth areas pertaining to specific industry sectors for accelerated growth towards sustainable economy, foster collaborations and partnerships, influence policy changes and enhance competitiveness and improve the overall health of the industry.

When the British levied *Thimir Vari* on residents of a village in Coimbatore

On August 26, 1942, a group of freedom fighters from Kannampalayam set the Suler Aerodrome on fire, days after Mahatma Gandhi's 'Do or Die' call as part of his Quit India Movement. Following the incident, the British cracked down on the people of Kannampalayam and imposed the tax, which was also levied on adjacent villages

B. Meenakshi Sundaram

On August 26, 1942, a group of freedom fighters from Kannampalayam in Coimbatore set the Suler Aerodrome on fire. This was just a few days after Mahatma Gandhi's 'Do or Die' call as part of the Quit India Movement, the decisive final phase of the struggle for Independence. After the incident, the British government launched a brutal crackdown on the residents of Kannampalayam and imposed a tax called *Thimir Vari* on the entire village. With the Tamil term, *Thimir*, meaning insolence and *Vari* meaning tax, the name implies it is "a tax to be collected to deal the rude ones with an iron hand". The government served a 48-hour notice on the residents to pay the tax.

K.S. Palaniyappan, a washerman, was among the most important members of the team that set the aerodrome on fire. When freedom fighter K.V. Ramasamy, popularly called Suler Netaji, presided over a meeting to chalk out strategies to set the aerodrome ablaze, it was Palaniyappan who volunteered to make *Vendayams*.

Rings of cloth

Vendayams are rings made of pieces of cloth, soaked in kerosene, strung on a forked stick, and lit up. The forked stick, which is called *Pachangaigol* in the Kongu Tamil dialect, would be swung fast and the burning *vendayams* would fly high in the air, fall on the spots targeted, and burn them to ashes. The washerman was given this assignment as his traditional occupation was carrying flambeaus in the wedding and funeral processions. At Kannampalayam resides Saradamani, the granddaughter of Palaniyappan, with her widowed mother Angathal, the daughter of the freedom fighter. Saradamani's husband and maternal uncle Murugesan, who is also the son of Palaniyappan, died recently. She is making a living by sewing clothes at home. She says they stopped carrying on their traditional occupation of washing clothes a few decades ago.

Recalling the incident, Pulavar Ponnudi Subbayan, 87, a retired Tamil teacher and author of the book *Thiyagam Vilaintha Sempulam*



Symbol of struggle: An open stage in honour of freedom fighters. At right is K.V. Ramasamy, who held a meeting to work out strategies to set the aerodrome ablaze. SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

on Kannampalayam, says, "On an evening after the aerodrome was set ablaze, I saw some police vehicles speeding up to the village. The police thrashed whomever they caught and threw them into their trucks. The scene is indelible in my memories from the minute I came across it. I was seven or eight years old. It happened near the Kannampalayam graveyard while I was accompanying my elder sister to a nearby farmland."

Mr. Subbayan says the British government should have coined an English term for *Thimir Vari*, but no one knows it. The tax could have been collected through the *Maniyakarar* (Village Administrative Officers in the modern day).

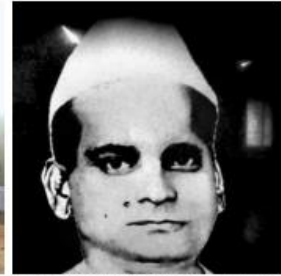
However, there is hardly anyone who knows how much the tax was. He adds that the month *Aadi* was very much favourable to the rebels as the fire they set spread fast, fanned by the speeding winds, and soon reduced the aerodrome to ashes. As many as 30 men who were accused of setting fire to the aerodrome were arrested and lodged in Alipore Prison. The jail terms for the accused differed from three years to 20 years. However, with the completion of four years in prison, all the freedom fighters were released in 1946 when the Indian National Congress formed

the Interim Government of India.

"Stalin Chinnayyan, a member of the team that set the aerodrome on fire, was arrested. Someone informed his father Pazhani Gounder that his son would be released if he was ready to pay ₹100 to the government. As suggested, Pazhani Gounder arranged the money by selling his cows. Still, the money was not enough and he had to borrow to make up the difference. At last, he did pay the money to the official concerned, but in vain," writes Mounasamy, author of the book *Suthanthira Poril Kannampalayam*.

Hard times

"Neither his son was released nor did he get back the money. Since a day's wage of labour was 8 annas (50 paise) those days, Pazhani Gounder reeled under the responsibility of repaying the loan. The hardship affected his mental and physical health, resulting in his death," records Mr. Mounasamy, a CPI leader, who is also the former panchayat president of the village. "Similarly, Kuppusamy Nadar, an innocent commoner who was on his way to work at Cambodia Mills, was thrashed black and blue by the police. As a result, he became mentally ill and died of the disease," he writes in the book.



"The *Thimir Vari* was paid, not just by the people of Kannampalayam but also by the residents of other adjacent villages such as Irugur, Pallapalayam and Athappa Goundan Pudur," adds Mr. Mounasamy. In memory of the freedom fighters stands an open stage named 'Kannampalayam Suthanthira Poraita Thiyagigal Kalyanangam' (Kannampalayam freedom fighters' auditorium). The names of the freedom fighters are inscribed on the wall. Besides, the branch office of the Communist Party of India exhibits the pictures of 19 freedom fighters. "Of the 30 freedom fighters, the photos of only 19 were available. The rest are known just by their names. But I was able to discover the photos of three more freedom fighters last year," says Mr. Mounasamy.

(The author is a freelance journalist and chronicler of the Kongu region.)

For feedback and suggestions for Tamil Nadu InFocus, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Tamil Nadu InFocus'

Assam-based oncologist Ravi Kannan wins 2023 Ramon Magsaysay award

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Surgical oncologist R. Ravi Kannan, Director of the Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (CCHRC) in Assam, is one of the Ramon Magsaysay award winners for 2023.

He is credited with revolutionising cancer treatment in Assam through people-centric and pro-poor healthcare.

Dr. Kannan hails from Chennai, where he earlier worked at the Cancer Institute, Adyar, before moving to Silchar in 2007. He became the Director of the CCHRC that year.

The citation on the website of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation says that under Dr. Kannan's leadership, the CCHRC became a full-fledged comprehensive cancer hospital and research centre. From having limited facilities, the hospital now has 28 departments covering oncology, pathology, radiology, microbiology, epidemiology, tumour registry, and



R. Ravi Kannan

palliative care.

The hospital introduced pro-poor initiatives such as free treatment, food and lodging, *ad hoc* employment for caregivers, and a home-care programme as patients could not continue their treatment due to difficulty in travelling long distances, and cost, with the underlying reason being poverty.

Hospital team members travelled long distances to train family members in pain management and palliative care, and provided free medicines.

The patient compliance rate in treatment rose from 28% to 70%.

The CCHRC now pro-

vides free or subsidised cancer care treatment to an average 5,000 new patients annually, catering to approximately 20,000 poor patients for treatments and follow-ups, the citation read.

Dr. Kannan said the award belongs to all who had joined hands to make the lives of those suffering from cancer better.

He said they were now focusing on "decentralising cancer care by setting up smaller hospitals in different parts of the State and also in Tripura so that people do not have to travel far to reach a hospital for treatment".

"We have to go near people and focus on prevention, treatment, and cancer care. We need a lot of support for infrastructure and equipment, which are one-time investments, but what we need most is human resources, which is a recurring requirement," Dr. Kannan, who is also a recipient of the Padma Shri award, said.

(With inputs from PTI)

Chennai to get integrated waste processing facility

GCC to build a waste-to-energy plant, bio-CNG plant and composting unit as part of this initiative under public-private partnership model; total estimated revenue is ₹5,705 cr. for a 20-year period

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) will construct a waste-to-energy plant, a bio-CNG plant and a composting unit as part of an integrated waste processing facility in Chennai under the public-private partnership (PPP) model.

The GCC Council on Thursday passed a resolution to approve establishment of the integrated waste processing facility to process wet waste and the refuse-derived fuel, which will be generated from a material recovery facility to be set up at Kodungaiyur and Perungudi.

Following an announcement by Minister for Municipal Administration and Water Supply K.N. Nehru to implement projects for



According to estimates, the waste generation in Chennai is estimated to be 11,793 tonnes by 2040. M. KARUNAKARAN

generating electricity from waste, the civic body has proposed to construct the facilities.

The private entities will get a revenue of ₹2,484

crore from the sale of electricity for 20 years. The revenue from the sale of recyclables for the period is estimated to be ₹1,886 crore; from CNG sale, ₹764

crore; and from compost, ₹529 crore.

The total revenue is estimated to be ₹5,705 crore and the expenditure ₹5,045 crore for the 20-year-period.

Other revenue sources

There are other sources of revenue such as extended producer responsibility charges, carbon emission credit and other services to automobile industries that can be earned by the concessionaire.

The land area to be used for the waste-to-energy plant and material recovery facility will be 50 acres. The compost unit will be constructed on 15 acres and the bio-CNG plant on 9.74 acres.

According to estimates, the waste generation in Chennai is estimated to be 11,793 tonnes by 2040.

Are natural disasters man-made?

PARLEY

Torrential rains in several parts of north India, particularly Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, damaged highways and buildings, and took hundreds of lives. While a warming Arctic is said to be a cause for the unusually heavy rains, years of haphazard planning and construction have multiplied the tragedy. Are natural disasters man-made? Vimal Mishra and Lubaina Rangwalia discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Jacob Koshy. Edited excerpts:

Every year, particularly in the monsoon, we witness extreme natural calamities. However, this is also the result of poor planning. To what extent are natural disasters man-made?

Lubaina Rangwalia: The scale of natural disasters that we now see across the world are definitely man-made. Some sections of the population are more vulnerable to them and more at risk than others. We need to figure out systems and solutions that can be channelised specifically towards this large pool of people. We need to build stronger systems from the bottom up and learn to do it collectively.

Vimal Mishra: Humans have played an important role in enhancing the risk from climate hazards. The frequency and intensity of hazards have increased, and anthropogenic climate change has played a major role in that. We have built on floodplains, encroached water bodies, and planned our cities without thinking about sustainability. So, humans are responsible. Not fully, but we have played a considerable part in increasing the problem. But we should find solutions and learn from our failures.

While natural variability and anthropogenic causes have a role to play, India was affected by natural disasters even before the framing of climate change as a catalyst. Whether excessive flooding in Mumbai or landslides in the hills, do you see disaster-preparedness having evolved over the years?

LR: There are a few different ways in which the landscape of disasters in India has changed. We are constantly talking about the importance of urban planning and how the movement of people to urban centres has affected natural landscapes. Some [landscapes] have changed drastically and exceeded their carrying capacity and this has exacerbated the extent of loss and damage in these areas. I don't think that



The damaged Kiratpur Manali road following heavy rainfall, near Pandoh in Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh. *VM*

agencies regulating the manner in which cities, villages and towns have urbanised have kept up. It is heart-wrenching to see a beautiful ecosystem crumble; it is a failure of planning in understanding how to ensure that certain critical ecosystems are kept alive and natural systems are kept at the core of the way we live.

In Mumbai, we have seen floods viscerally and the city has continued to grow. Mumbai has its own Disaster Management Agency. It has been engaging with the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, which develops models to predict floods better. Also, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's storm-water drainage department has, in the last decade, built larger water-holding tanks. Mumbai has been able to perform much better in this regard than, say, Delhi, which is seeing recurrent floods. With the kind of sea-level rise expected and the coastal inundation projected in the coming decades, I am not confident that some of the planning decisions that we have made are very wise.

If you consider the historical development of cities everywhere, it is the story of urbanisation. Increased population density means greater dependence on fossil fuel and greater climate-disruptive anthropogenic forces. So, in one sense, aren't we caught between the devil and the deep sea?

VM: Development translates to infrastructure growth. However, we don't pay enough attention to whether our development pathways are sustainable. Sustainability means emphasising not only economics, but also society and environment. Any sustainable development will consider the environmental implications. So far, we have just run behind the economics, you know, the land holdings, finding cheaper land, filling the water bodies, removing



The frequency and intensity of hazards have increased, and anthropogenic climate change has played a major role in that.

VIMAL MISHRA

palaeochannels (deep underground stores of groundwater) and destroying natural drainage systems. So, yes, we are caught in the trap and we are facing a lot of challenges because of that. The only solution is adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, implementing careful urban planning, and creating roads and streets keeping these in mind.

LR: I don't think we are at a dead end. We are developing and growing, and people will need houses, jobs and services. But as Dr. Mishra said, we have allowed certain business-as-usual practices to persist in city planning. We did a workshop with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's storm-water drainage department about a year ago. Stakeholders from planning, design, landscape firms, private developers, community-based organisations, and citizens who have been impacted by landslides, disasters and routine flooding were present. At the end of it, the workshop led to the realisation that cities had to start thinking of long-term solutions. It comes down to understanding that there are no quick-fix solutions to what we are going through; we will have to think about long-term risk assessments, vulnerability assessments, and understand how socioeconomic drivers are worsening the problem in certain communities compared to others in the city.

We have building codes to determine how and where structures and roads ought to be constructed. Municipal authorities are trained and clearly know what to do. So, is it the case that knowledge already exists but our experts are unable to implement them for various reasons, or is there genuinely a lack of knowledge among city planners in terms of accounting for climate hazards and natural disasters?

VM: Knowledge is never complete. We learn new things every day and have some knowledge from past events, but the challenge is most often from a lack of awareness, or from ignoring a risk. And the risk is not clearly estimated or defined when we implement a new infrastructure project. Let's say we are going to build a new highway in a mountainous region and we have to calculate the risk from an

extreme weather event. We will have some idea of it based on past events; it is not that nobody knows what to do. The problem is, most of the time this risk is underestimated. Why? Because often, we don't have a complete record that informs planners about current and upcoming disasters. Data sets are often pretty old and do not directly provide sufficient information about the future. If you talk about the Himalayan territory, for instance, we have a very limited understanding because of an inadequate observational network. So, if you go and survey how many rainfall recording stations we have, what is the density of rainfall, I would say they are fewer than that we have in other parts of the country where it is easier to manage, install, monitor, and take care of such infrastructure.

LR: There are excellent institutions even within the government that are constantly monitoring and understanding the scale of the climate crisis in terms of rainfall patterns, trends, and the ways in which risk is becoming more pronounced in certain regions versus others. I think the disconnect is in the ways in which decisions continue to be taken. And while we understand that there are certain regions that are increasingly becoming more flood-prone, what we really have to do is think transformatively. We have to analyse the implications of imposing a strict carrying capacity in certain regions and not allowing for more urbanisation to happen in certain areas or restricting certain ways in which infrastructure is built. This need to constantly shorten travel time and to make it easier to connect tourist destinations, for example, has run counter to the ways in which we in the environment space have been talking about preserving, conserving, and building stronger relationships with ecosystems. These two desires are also part of the schizophrenic nature in which government agencies function. These desires are constantly at conflict. And so, it's not so much the knowledge. If you really want to make the right decisions, you will bring in experts from both private and public agencies and you will have very good solutions on the table, current and modern ways of understanding the scale of a disaster, where the risk is, and what kinds of solutions should be modelled around it. Whether there is political will to take action in that manner is the question.



To listen to the full interview
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www.thehindu.com

India sees the lowest August rainfall in a century: IMD

Met department indicated in July that the August rainfall would be 'below normal'; the rainfall in September is likely to be within a 10% window of the 16.7 cm that is normal for the month

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Rainfall in August has been the lowest in over a century, with India getting 36% less rainfall than it usually does in the month. Of the four monsoon months, August usually sees the most amount of rainfall (25.4 cm) after July with 28 cm.

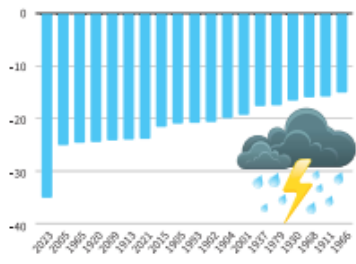
With the strengthening of the El Nino and unfavourable conditions in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, August rainfall has been markedly deficient in most of India, except in northeastern India, the Himalayan States, and parts of Tamil Nadu, show data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

El Nino refers to a warming of the central Pacific that usually translates to deficient monsoon rainfall over India.

The last time India recorded such severe deficits

Rainfall deficiency

The chart shows some years of the lowest rainfall recorded in August since 1901. Last month's deficit of 36% is an all-time low, dipping below the 2005 mark of 24%.



in August was in 2005, when the shortfall was about 25% of the normal, and in 2009, when India saw its biggest drought in half a century and August rainfall was 24% less than normal.

Rainfall in August has

brought the overall national deficit to 10%, with the regional deficits being 17% in east and northeast India, 10% in central India, and 17% in southern India.

"There is an increasing trend in the break days," M. Mohapatra, Director-

General, IMD, said. "Break days refer to rainless stretches during the monsoon months of June-September."

'Below normal'

The IMD on July 31 indicated that August rainfall would be "below normal", but its weather models did not indicate that the shortfall would be as sharp as has been experienced.

Monsoon rainfall in September, the last of the four monsoon months, is likely to be within a 10% window of the 16.7 cm that is usual for the month, the agency's forecast noted.

"While there is a reasonable chance of normal rainfall, thanks to favourable conditions in the Indian Ocean and two rain-bearing low-pressure areas in the Bay of Bengal, getting extra rain is quite difficult," an IMD meteorologist, who declined to be identified, said.

Jaya Verma becomes the first woman to head Railway Board

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Jaya Verma Sinha

The Union government on Thursday appointed Jaya Verma Sinha Chairperson of the Railway Board, the top decision-making body of the Railway Ministry. She will assume office on or after Friday. She replaces Anil Kumar Lahoti.

Ms. Sinha becomes the first woman to head the Board in its 118-year history.

Prior to the new appointment, Ms. Sinha was Member (Operations and Business Development) of the Board. She was at the forefront in handling the aftermath of the Balasore train accident which killed 291 people.

"The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Jaya Verma Sinha, Indian Railway Management Services, Member (Operations & Business Development), Railway Board, to the post of Chairman & Chief Executive Of-

ficer (CEO), Railway Board," the order said. Her tenure will be till August 31, 2024.

Ms. Sinha was slated to retire on October 1, but she will be re-employed the same day till her tenure gets over.

Ms. Sinha joined the Indian Railway Traffic Service in 1988 and worked in Northern Railway, South Eastern Railway and Eastern Railway. She also worked as Railway Adviser in the High Commission of India, Dhaka, Bangladesh for four years. The Maitree Express from Kolkata to Dhaka was inaugurated during her Bangladesh stint.

(With agency inputs)

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Chandrayaan probe finds sparse plasma on moon

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A payload on board Chandrayaan-3's lander, Vikram, has completed the first in-situ measurements of the surface-bound lunar plasma environment over the south polar region. The Radio Anatomy of Moon Bound Hypersensitive Ionosphere and Atmosphere-Langmuir Probe (RAMBHA-LP), named after American chemist Irving Langmuir, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, is a device used for characterising plasma.

"The initial assessment indicates that the plasma encompassing the lunar surface is relatively sparse, characterised by a number density ranging from approximately 5 to 30 million electrons per cubic metre. This evaluation specifically pertains to the early stages of the lunar daytime. The probe operates without interruption, aiming to explore the changes occurring in the near-surface plasma environment throughout the lunar day," the ISRO said on Thursday.

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