

Sri Lankan Parliament shows the way for India

As far as setting an illustrious example goes, it is a matchless move. With the salaries and perks of MPs and MLAs in India rising at regular intervals, with generous dollops of additional facilities to go along ending with a generous pension to enable them to subsist in their sunset years (base pension of Rs 31,000 per month), what has been undertaken by Sri Lanka deserves loud applause. On February 6, the Supreme Court had determined that the Parliamentary Pensions (Repeal) Bill can be passed in Parliament with a simple majority. Its main aim was to repeal the Parliamentary Pensions Law No 1 of 1977, which had established a

non-contributory lifetime pension to persons who have ceased to be members of parliament. The Sri Lankan government has gazetted the Parliamentary Pensions (Repeal) Act after it was passed by 154 votes in the 225-member House, with only two against. Ostensibly, this move is to fund other essential public services, given the not-so-secure financial status that the island-nation has been embroiled in for nearly five years now.

But beyond tokenism, this move has been highlighted as fulfilling a key campaign promise of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who assured to do away with 'unjustified' political perks. In Sri Lanka, a

member of parliament was entitled to a pension after serving a five-year term. In contrast, just look at what is happening in our nation. As an additional service pension, for every year of service beyond the mandatory five-year term, an extra ₹2,500 per month is added to the base pension, including to all former members of either House of Parliament. The salary and pension structure is subject to revision every five years based on the Cost Inflation Index. The perks for former MPs include free train travel in first-class. The recent revision was announced in March 2025, with the changes effective retroactively from April 1, 2023. According to PRS India data,

historically, the average age of the Lok Sabha has risen from 46.5 years in the First Lok Sabha to over 55 in recent sessions, indicating a long-term shift toward older representatives.

The average age of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the 18th Lok Sabha (2024) is 56 years. This reflects an aging trend in Indian politics, with 52 per cent of MPs being over 55 years, while only 11 per cent are 40 years or younger. Even if an MP ceases to be one after a single five-year term, the individual is thus part of the gray train, irrespective of age. Interestingly, with a population share of 11 per cent, senior citizens in India are among the worst

treated ones. In an impassioned speech in Parliament, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut had said that the government should kill all the senior citizens after 65 years because the government is not ready to pay attention to these nation builders and queried if it is a crime to be one. The other side of the picture is that senior citizens in politics are given all the benefits possible to MLAs, MPs or ministers and they also get pension. "Senior citizens have the right to change the government, do not ignore them. They have a lifetime experience of changing the government. Do not consider them weak," opined the mercurial MP. But will things change, is the moot question.

LETTERS

Engg education must move with the times

With reference to the article "The new blueprint for Engineering: Skills, speed and specialisation" by Prof Geeta Tripathi (THI Feb 23), I wish to emphasize the essential significance that engineering education must move with the times or risk being left behind in the fast lane of innovation. As Industry 5.0 builds upon AI, robotics, cloud computing and cyber-physical systems, the writing is on the wall: traditional degrees like engineering alone can no longer carry the whole weight of employability. Engineering education must balance theoretical depth with agility, speed and specialisation to build not just job seekers, but job creators.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Galgotias episode is an eye-opener

With reference to the editorial "Upshots of the Galgotias robodog controversy" (Feb 23), the Galgotias University episode at the recent AI summit has rightly drawn attention to deeper issues in private higher education. While the robodog claim caused immediate embarrassment, the bigger concern lies in inflated patent numbers and misleading performance claims that many institutions use for rankings and advertisements. This erodes trust among students and parents, who invest heavily expecting genuine quality. To address this realistically, the UGC and NIRF should tighten verification of patent data—perhaps by giving more weight to granted patents over filed ones—and conduct random audits of self-reported metrics. Private universities must also face stricter oversight on marketing practices. This would strengthen the overall credibility of Indian higher education.

S M Jeeva, Chennai-32

Regulators must get tough post-Galgotias

Propos "Upshots of the Galgotias Robodog Controversy". The editorial makes a fair point that the real victims here are the students, who now carry the stigma of a degree from an institution caught in a fraud. That is deeply unfair to young people who had no say in their university's conduct. NIRF and NAAC rankings are taken seriously by students and parents when choosing institutions, yet as the article notes, neither body adequately captures the gap between private and public universities on critical metrics like patent quality. Regulators must also crack down on misleading advertisements. This incident should become a turning point, not just another forgotten controversy.

A. Myilsami, Coimbatore-641402

Onus on NIRF and NAAC

The Galgotias robodog controversy has raised uncomfortable questions about claims made by private universities and the systems meant to verify them. When exaggerated achievements go unchecked, it is students and parents who pay the price. Regulatory bodies such as NIRF and NAAC should refine their assessment methods, giving greater weight to verified research, patents granted, faculty quality and student outcomes. Periodic third-party audits and strict penalties for misleading advertisements would help restore credibility. Universities, too, must adopt transparent disclosure practices.

M Barathi, Bengaluru-560076

Govt must ensure strict verification

This letter refers to your editorial, "Upshots of the Galgotias robodog controversy," (Feb 23). While the incident itself is embarrassing, the systemic issues it exposes regarding our higher education landscape are a matter of serious concern. The disparity in patent approval rates between premier public institutions and certain private universities suggests that quantity is being prioritised over actual innovation. To address this, the NIRF and NAAC must refine their evaluation metrics to emphasize quality and peer-reviewed impact rather than just raw numbers, while the government should implement stricter verification of technological claims made by universities in their advertisements.

K Sakunthala, Coimbatore-16

Need for a balanced reform agenda

The Galgotias robodog controversy underlines how fragile credibility can be in higher education. While the ridicule faced by students is regrettable, the larger issue is the weak performance of many private universities in research and patent approvals. This gap must be addressed through stronger oversight and transparent evaluation. Ranking bodies should move beyond cosmetic indicators and place greater weight on measurable outcomes such as patents, publications, and employability. A balanced reform agenda—combining stricter regulation with incentives for quality research—can help restore trust and ensure students are not penalised for institutional lapses.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Minister launches Amazon's 10th corporate office in state

BENGALURU: Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil on Monday inaugurated Amazon's newly constructed, fully equipped corporate main office spread across 11 lakh square feet (1.1 million sq.ft.) at Vinayaka Nagar near Yelahanka. Speaking on the occasion, he said, "This is Amazon's 10th corporate office in the State. The company, which has shared a two-decade association with Karnataka, plans to invest 35 billion dollars in India over the next four years. This investment is expected to support 15 million small businesses and generate lakhs of employment opportunities. Karnataka will receive a significant share of this investment." He pointed out that Karnataka has an annual per capita income of over ₹3.80 lakh, ranking highest in the country. The State also stands second in annual GST contributions to the national exchequer, contributing ₹1.6 lakh crore.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

Life must be protected, not 'pactually' abandoned



PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

WHETHER it is the Constitutional law or criminal law, suicide cannot be accepted under any circumstances. Life is for living. No one has the right to die, but rather a duty to live and let others live.

The recent Supreme Court's dismissal of the appeal affirms a crucial criminal law principle: surviving a suicide pact does not erase legal responsibility when one has facilitated the other's death. The judgment, delivered by a bench of Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Manmohan, not only resolves a long-pending criminal dispute but also clarifies the jurisprudential position on abetment to suicide and the criminality inherent in mutual suicide arrangements.

Right to live under Article 21 cannot be extended to include 'right to die'. This significant case presents a delicate intersection of criminal liability, medical evidence, and the State's constitutional obligation to protect life under Article 21. Life is beautiful, whether killing herself or joining a lover, may be a thrilling cinema, but not in reality. In a pact of dying together, if both die, there may be no criminal case, but all those who abetted will be a criminal offence and culpable.

A beautiful heroine, Pratyusha, ended her life following a mutual agreement (?), while the surviving lover became a criminal.

At a broader constitutional level, the decision reinforces that the State's duty is not merely to punish after death but to create legal and social conditions that discourage suicide, prevent emotional coercion, and protect the sanctity of life.

The tragedy of Pratyusha is therefore not only a criminal case but a societal warning: Love cannot justify self-destruction; despair cannot legalise death; and survival cannot absolve complicity. The law,

ultimately, speaks with a humane yet firm voice: life is inviolable, and any pact to extinguish it invites both moral sorrow and legal consequence.

Analysis of the Pratyusha case:

The recent dismissal of the appeal by the Supreme Court in the 23-year-old case concerning the tragic death of the south Indian actress raises profound questions about criminal abetment, evidentiary evaluation, suicide prevention, and the legal culpability of a surviving partner in a suicide pact.

The judgment also emphasises evidentiary discipline, rejecting sensational claims unsupported by medical proof while upholding culpability grounded in established facts.

Love, opposition and a fatal pact:

It is again a story of love, opposition, and a fatal pact. The prosecution's case, accepted by the courts, was that the actress and Gudipalli Siddhartha Reddy were in a relationship despite opposition by his parents. In this emotionally charged setting, both allegedly consumed poison together. While she succumbed, he survived. He was thereafter convicted for: 1. Abetment to suicide; 2. Attempt to commit suicide.

The trial court imposed five years' imprisonment, later reduced to two years by the Andhra Pradesh High Court in 2004. The surviving accused challenged the conviction, while the victim's mother alleged rape, murder by strangulation, and inadequate sentencing.

The Supreme Court, after examining ocular and medical evidence, rejected allegations of rape and strangulation, holding that death was due to poisoning and that purchase of poison (neurotone) constituted abetment.

Survival as a liability!

The crucial legal principle reaffirmed by the Court is that a surviving partner in a mutual suicide pact can be legally culpable for abetment to suicide. This doctrine flows from Sections 107 and 306 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalise instigation, conspiracy, or intentional aid to commit suicide. The law does not treat suicide pacts as romantic acts of shared despair but as legally culpable agreements that normalise self-destruction. Thus, survival does not imply innocence. It may instead



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A judicial reasoning:

The oral pronouncement of the bench outlines a layered evidentiary assessment:

- Murder by strangulation ruled out
- Overwhelming ocular and medical evidence proved poisoning
- Rape allegations not established
- Related claims of rape and strangulation rejected
- Accidental consumption defence disbelieved
- Purchase of poison established abetment
- Unprofessional post-mortem report criticised
- Premature publication of medical findings condemned

These findings reflect the Court's reliance on forensic consistency, contemporaneous evidence, and legal causation, rather than speculative allegations emerging decades later.

Distinction between attempted suicide and abetment:

Attempts to commit suicide historically attracted punishment under Section 309 IPC, though contemporary mental health jurisprudence treats survivors with compassion. However, when a survivor is shown to have actively enabled the other's death, the law shifts focus

from mental vulnerability to criminal complicity.

Thus:

Mere survival may invite therapeutic response, while survival with facilitation invites penal consequences

Romantic myth vs criminal reality:

Popular culture often portrays suicide pacts as tragic expressions of love. Criminal law rejects this romanticism for three reasons:

- Suicide is not a private contract:** A pact to die together cannot be legally validated because life is constitutionally protected, the State has an interest in preserving life, and consent cannot legalise self-destruction.
- Power imbalance and emotional coercion:** One partner may be more vulnerable. Emotional dependence can turn a "mutual pact" into subtle coercion.
- Survival distorts the pact:** If one dies and the other survives, the survivor's role must be scrutinised: Was it equal participation, passive presence, or active facilitation? The law, therefore, pre-emptively that survival coupled with preparatory acts (like procuring poison) may constitute abetment.

State's duty to prevent suicide:

The constitutional guarantee of life under Article 21 imposes a positive obligation on the State:

- To protect individuals from self-harm;
- To regulate circumstances enabling suicide;
- To penalise those who facilitate self-destruction

Suicide is not merely a private tragedy; it is a constitutional concern involving dignity, mental health, and social responsibility. Criminalising abetment ensures that despair is not converted into a shared criminal enterprise.

A doctrinal clarification:

This case reiterates a settled but often misunderstood principle—a suicide pact is not a shield against criminal liability. Participation in planning, procuring means, or encouraging the act can constitute abetment if one partner dies. Thus, the law treats suicide pacts not as mutual consent but as shared participation in a legally prohibited act, where survival triggers accountability.

While the decision affirms criminal liability for abetment, it also indirectly underscores the importance of suicide prevention. Punishment alone cannot address the root causes of emotional distress, familial opposition, and social pressures. Preventive measures must include:

- Mental health counselling for vulnerable individuals
- Social awareness about emotional coercion
- Early intervention in toxic or high-pressure relationships
- Responsible media reporting in celebrity tragedies
- Law punishes facilitation, but society must prevent desperation.

Media and medical evidence:

An important aspect of the case is the Court's criticism of an "unprofessional" post-mortem report and premature publication of medical findings. This highlights two systemic concerns: Forensic evidence must be scientifically consistent and professionally verified; Media leaks of medical opinions can prejudice trials and distort public perception. By rejecting unsupported strangulation claims and relying on consistent ocular and medical evidence, the court reaffirmed the primacy of credible forensic science over sensational allegations.

Balancing compassion and accountability:

Modern jurisprudence recognises that suicide survivors may themselves be victims of mental distress. However, when evidence shows (a) Purchase of lethal substance, (b) Active facilitation, and (c) Knowledge of consequences, the law must respond not merely with sympathy but with accountability. The Supreme Court's approach reflects a calibrated balance: Reject exaggerated allegations (rape, strangulation); Affirm proven criminal facilitation (purchase of poison); recognise the survivor's culpability within evidentiary limits.

Evidentiary integrity:

The Supreme Court's refusal to accept rape allegations demonstrates a commitment to evidentiary rigour. Criminal law cannot sustain convictions on delayed or unsupported claims. While sensitivity to victims is essential, judicial fairness requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The judgment thus balances compassion with legal certainty.

(The writer is Advisor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad)

Inclusive governance gets an urban mandate in Telangana

AMARAVAJI NAGARAJU

THE outcome of the recent municipal elections in Telangana has done more than merely redrawing the political map of urban local bodies. It has reopened a substantive debate on representation, caste arithmetic and the evolving grammar of social justice in a rapidly urbanising State.

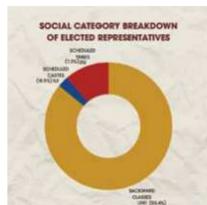
While local elections are often treated as peripheral contests, the scale and pattern of results across the State's 113 municipalities and corporations suggest a deeper political recalibration.

The Congress, which returned to power in the State promising "praja palana" (people-centric governance), has secured control in 90 municipalities. What distinguishes this verdict, however, is not merely the number of urban bodies won, but the social composition of those who now head them.

Approximately, 66 of the 113 municipal chairpersons are from Backward Class (BC) communities, which roughly translates to 61 per cent of the

total. In municipalities secured by the Congress, 51 chairperson posts have gone to BC leaders. Representation extends beyond titular leadership: BCs account for more than 60 per cent of key positions including chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, mayors and deputy mayors. At the ward level too, more than 55 per cent of elected councillors are from BC communities.

At the corporation level, the numbers are equally striking. Four of the seven mayoral positions are now held by BC representatives, marking a notable shift in the social profile of urban power centres. In a State where BC communities constitute a significant share of the population, and are deeply embedded in urban informal economies from small traders and artisans to service providers and lower-middle-class employees, this redistribution of political authority carries symbolic as well as practical weight. The Congress leadership has projected this outcome as validation of its commitment to institutionalising social justice. In the run-up to the Assembly



elections, the party had promised caste enumeration and 42 per cent reservations for BCs in local bodies. While legal and procedural complexities surround the full operationalization of such quotas, the party appears to have moved proactively in ticket distribution. Reports indicate that over 53 per cent of party nominations in municipal elections were given to BC candidates exceeding the stated reservation benchmark.

Critics may argue that candidate selection is ultimately a political calculation rather than a moral gesture. Yet electoral endorsement by voters suggests that the strategy has resonated. Urban constituencies, often perceived as less driven by caste considerations than rural ones, have demonstrated that social

Urban local bodies are not ornamental institutions. They oversee critical functions: water supply, waste management, road infrastructure, public health, urban planning and local taxation. The composition of leadership in these bodies shapes budget priorities and administrative focus. Enhanced BC representation may therefore influence policy choices, particularly in areas like slum upgrading, small enterprise facilitation, market infrastructure and welfare delivery for lower-income households.

identity and representational claims remain potent in towns and cities as well.

Broader implications merit closer scrutiny:

Urban local bodies are not ornamental institutions. They oversee critical functions: water supply, waste management, road infrastructure, public health, urban planning and local taxation. The composition of leadership in these bodies shapes budget priorities and administrative focus. Enhanced BC representation may therefore influence policy choices, particularly in areas like slum upgrading, small enterprise facilitation; market infrastructure and welfare delivery for lower-income households. At the same time, social justice in governance cannot be reduced to numerical dominance.

Telangana's municipal structure also accommodates representation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities and other communities under constitutional mandates. The current distribution appears to reflect a layered inclusion rather than a zero-sum redistribution. Whether this balance endures will depend on the government's administrative prudence.

Politically, the municipal verdict strengthens the Congress's urban foothold at a time when local elections are increasingly interpreted as mid-term referendums. Consolidation among BC voters, a decisive social bloc in Telangana, could influence future Assembly and Parliamentary contests. Yet, as history repeatedly demonstrates, social coalitions are sustained less by symbolism and more by performance.