

The executive, not judiciary, must crackdown on illegal structures

THE Supreme Court has rightly pulled up civic authorities over illegal and unsafe buildings in Delhi-NCR. Slamming the attitude of local officials, a bench of Justices A Manu and Justice R Mahadevan pointed out on Thursday that "only face-saving exercises are being done" to check the menace. The apex court warned officials that it would "attach personal responsibility" on all officials who fail to act against illegal buildings and their owners despite repeated judicial directions. It ordered the personal appearance of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi commissioner and the vice-chairman of the Gurugram Metropolitan Develop-

ment Authority (GMDA) in court. These orders may drill some sense of propriety in the hearts and minds of bureaucrats. It also constituted a team comprising two senior IIT professors, two draftsmen, and MCD officials to assess unauthorised constructions in Delhi's Saket, Lajpat Nagar, and Malviya Nagar localities. The panel has also been directed to submit its report to the court. So far, so good, but there are limits that the judiciary can and should travel. The kind of localities where people live, what kind of land that should be, what rules and regulations should govern that land, and so on are matters that the executive should take a call. More importantly,

if there are any violations, the wrongdoers must be dealt with accordingly. It is not the job of the judiciary to crack down on the land sharks, and illegal colonisers, among others. Evidently, our governance system has completely broken down, at least in the matter of colonising and housing. Instead of stopping unauthorised constructions that are mushrooming by the day, local officials are sometimes found to be in glove with the violators. For instance, a newspaper report showed that around 93 per cent of establishments inspected in Gurugram's ongoing fire safety drive were found deficient in mandatory fire safety measures. While judicial intervention may yield good

dividends, it cannot offer a long-term solution to the widespread problem. The judiciary cannot substitute for the executive; courts can issue directions, fix accountability, and ensure that authorities perform their statutory duties, but they cannot and should not directly undertake urban planning, enforcement, and governance. Sustainable reform requires civic agencies, development authorities, and state governments to act with integrity, efficiency, and transparency. Building regulations must be enforced uniformly, without political interference or selective implementation. The need of the hour is a mechanism which ensures that the

officials, who deliberately ignore violations or collude with builders, are penalised, and even thrown behind bars. At the same time, approval processes should be made more transparent and technology-driven so that illegal constructions can be detected at an early stage through satellite mapping, digital records, and regular inspections. Public awareness is also important; people shouldn't knowingly purchase unauthorised buildings. Judicial monitoring may serve as a catalyst for reform, but lasting change will come only when governance institutions function honestly, efficiently, and in accordance with law, ensuring that public safety is never compromised.

India needs a political culture where facts should matter not propaganda



INDIA'S political system is both unique and complicated. Until the early 1990s, Parliament and state legislatures were known for serious debates, policy alternatives and constructive criticism. Over the years, however, political discourse has increasingly shifted from governance to controversy-driven campaigns. Instead of using issues to push for institutional reforms, political parties now use them primarily as electoral weapons.

With Assembly elections due in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in 2027, this trend has become even more evident. Rather than pursuing facts to their logical conclusion, almost every party appears focused on scoring political points. They raise an issue, embarrass the opponent and move on without ensuring lasting accountability.

The controversy surrounding Satluj, originally titled Punjab 95, has acquired political significance because Punjab goes to polls next year. The film is based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, who documented the alleged illegal cremations and extrajudicial killings during Punjab's insurgency in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The censor board did not clear the film as its producers refused to implement 127 cuts the board had suggested and instead it was screened on OTT platforms using the legal loopholes. Now on the directions of the government, it has been taken off from OTT platforms.

Enraged over this, the Shiromani Akali Dal has announced statewide screenings,

arguing that younger generations should know Punjab's history. Critics, however, contend that the film presents only one side of a deeply traumatic period. While it highlights alleged human rights violations by the police, it gives relatively little attention to the brutal violence unleashed by Khalistani militants.

Thousands of civilians, police personnel, public servants and political leaders were killed during the insurgency. Equally significant was the role of Punjab police officers such as K P S Gill, whose counter-insurgency campaign is widely credited with restoring normalcy. A historical narrative that omits either state excesses or terrorist violence cannot claim to present the complete truth.

As expected, every political party has adopted a position shaped more by electoral calculations than historical balance.

The Akali Dal backs the film enthusiastically, seeing an opportunity to challenge the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government if it tries to stop the screening of the film. At the same time, it accuses the Centre of restricting its release. The AAP government has permitted private screenings but criticised attempts to remove the film from OTT platforms.

The Congress, uncomfortable because the events occurred largely during its tenure, has avoided endorsing statewide screenings and instead questioned the political use of the film. The BJP has opposed attempts to turn the film into an election campaign while accusing its rivals of presenting a selective interpretation of history.

Similarly, the alleged theft of donation money at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya offers another example of how India's political class has

ELECTION SEASON; OUTRAGE SEASON



As Uttar Pradesh and Punjab head towards Assembly elections, political parties are weaponising controversies instead of addressing governance. Whether it is "Chanda Chori" or the Satluj debate, accountability has become selective while controversies are amplified and pressing concerns of ordinary citizens are sidelined.

perfected the art of converting every public issue into an election narrative.

The Ram Janmabhoomi temple donation controversy, popularly dubbed "Chanda Chori", is a classic example.

The Samajwadi Party quickly transformed allegations of theft into a political attack on the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the RSS, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It succeeded because the temple administration failed the first test of crisis management—speed and transparency.

Instead of responding decisively, the VHP initially stood firmly behind Ram Janmabhoomi Trust General Secretary Champat Rai and Trustee Anil Mishra despite mounting allegations. Although reports suggested that both had offered to resign, the organisation delayed accepting their

resignations, citing procedural formalities. The explanation convinced few.

In the digital era, emergency meetings can be convened within hours, if need be, virtually. A trust administering one of the country's most important religious institutions could easily have done the same. Every day's delay strengthened the opposition's allegation that damage control had taken precedence over accountability.

The investigation raised uncomfortable questions. The delay in registering an FIR, the absence of senior trust members among the accused despite prolonged questioning and the slow pace of visible action fuelled public suspicion. The FIR was reportedly filed only after the Special Investigation Team (SIT) submitted its preliminary findings.

The SIT has since arrested eight persons, recovered cash,

jewellery, gold and a vehicle, frozen multiple bank accounts and begun investigating whether stolen money was invested in the stock market. Investigators claim that nearly 70 instances of alleged theft took place within about 40 days. They also identified major violations of standard operating procedures, including inadequate frisking and poor CCTV surveillance.

Eventually, the trust accepted the resignations of Champat Rai and Anil Mishra and appointed a professional Chief Executive Officer. The VHP acknowledged serious lapses and promised institutional reforms. Yet the most important question remains unanswered: how much money has actually disappeared? Opposition estimates range from ₹200 crore to ₹2,000 crore, prompting demands for a CBI investigation under Supreme Court supervision. Politically, the controversy has undoubtedly dented the credibility of organisations associated with the Ram Temple movement. Whether it significantly affects the BJP's electoral prospects in Uttar Pradesh remains uncertain, but the opposition has already secured a powerful campaign issue.

If opposition parties genuinely believed financial irregularities had continued for years, why did they become vocal only as elections approached? Accountability loses much of its credibility when it follows the electoral calendar rather than public interest.

The same selective outrage is likely to surface in another controversy that the BJP is expected to use as a political counterattack.

The Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation, established after the Supreme Court's 2019 Ayodhya judgment to build the new Babri Masjid along with a hospital, library and com-

munity kitchen, has collected donations for several years. Allegations regarding financial irregularities have surfaced periodically, yet no official investigation or FIR has followed. The BJP is expected to highlight these allegations to blunt the impact of "Chanda Chori". The opposition, meanwhile, is unlikely to demand a court-monitored probe for fear of alienating sections of its political support base. This is not accountability; it is competitive hypocrisy.

One side demands transparency only from institutions associated with its opponents, while the other discovers concern for financial propriety only when politically convenient. Public trust becomes the biggest casualty.

The larger tragedy is that controversies over donations, films and historical narratives are likely to receive far greater attention during election campaigns than unemployment, education, healthcare, inflation, agriculture, investment or job creation. Electoral politics increasingly rewards emotional mobilisation rather than policy debate. India's democracy does not suffer from a shortage of controversies; it suffers from a shortage of consistency. Political parties demand transparency only from their opponents, defend institutions aligned with themselves and rediscover moral outrage whenever elections approach. Until this culture changes, controversies will continue to dominate campaigns while governance recedes into the background.

Ultimately, it is for the voter to judge governments and oppositions alike by the same standards rather than by the volume of their election-time rhetoric.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

LETTERS

Preparing careers for the AI era

THE article "Future of management careers in the era of AI" clearly brings out the objective of preparing students for lifelong learning, adaptability, resilience, and continuous learning in a rapidly changing technological environment. The experiences shared by graduates reveal that success depends not merely on academic qualifications but on the willingness to take on challenges, keep up with technological advancements, and be in pursuit of knowledge and professional excellence. The IT departments of organisations must step up by rolling out AI-driven training programmes, setting up innovation centres, carrying out ethical AI practices, and bringing in technologies that enhance productivity while protecting human dignity. IT firms should come up with flexible career pathways, back up employees through regular reskilling, mentorship, mental wellness initiatives, and transparent performance systems so that professionals can move ahead with confidence instead of fearing automation. Employees should reach out to mentors and industry experts to remain competitive in the evolving job market. Students must make the most of internships, research projects, hackathons, certifications, and networking opportunities, build up strong portfolios, and take part in collaborative learning to excel in the AI-driven IT sector. Both the government and IT firms should join hands to assure job security by expanding digital skill missions, strengthening industry-academia partnerships, providing AI transition support, and opening up new employment opportunities to bolster one's confidence levels.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Govt must support US-based desi techies

APROPOS "Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot" (THI July 10). It's no more a Sunday afternoon walk in the park for US-based desi techies, who're forced to return home due to AI-driven job layoffs, unfriendly US visa requirements, and unappetizing emoluments offered even by US-affiliated Global Capability Centers. The onus is on the Indian government to cushion the struggle of these unfortunates, who are mostly youngsters, and have been contributing to the national economy through remittances in their better days. The US-returned techies are ideally appointed without much red-tape, and the deserving offered promotions and salary hikes. Governmental support for startup firms should also ease the pain considerably for US-returned techies, who can contribute through expertise and experience.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

Make it easy for techies heading home

THIS is further to "Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot". The unpredictability of US immigration policy is the real problem here, more than any single rule change. Professionals plan years around visa timelines, mortgages and children's schooling, only to see the ground shift with a policy update. India cannot control American immigration decisions, but it can reduce the impact by making it easier for skilled professionals to reintegrate quickly, through faster credential recognition and streamlined re-entry into provident fund and tax systems. Reducing friction on return would at least soften the disruption these sudden policy shifts keep causing.

K Palaniyappan Muthukumar, Chennai-53

Displaced techies must eye emerging roles

THIS has reference to "Tight job mkt, salary cuts put US-returned desi techies in a spot". It is worth noting that this churn isn't only about visas; AI-led efficiency drives are genuinely shrinking headcount at major tech firms. Oracle, Cisco and Google's layoffs point to a structural shift, not a temporary slowdown. Indian professionals in the US and back home need to treat AI fluency as a core skill now, not an optional add-on. Companies and industry bodies should expand practical reskilling programmes so displaced techies can move into emerging roles like AI implementation and data governance, rather than competing for a shrinking pool of traditional coding jobs.

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Drug racket through post offices is worrisome

THE recent bust of an inter-state drug network operating through post offices is seriously worrisome. Criminals are misusing public services to transport illegal substances across states. Such activities endanger the youth and threaten public safety. The police deserve appreciation for uncovering the racket. Authorities should strengthen parcel screening and monitoring systems to prevent similar incidents. Public awareness and cooperation are also essential in combating drug trafficking. If drugs travel freely, the future of our youth is held hostage.

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Preserving TG's tribal glory, the Adya Kala way

DR MUCHUKOTA SURESH BABU

TELANGANA is home to a rich and diverse tribal heritage that has been preserved for centuries through music, dance, storytelling, handicrafts, and oral traditions. Communities such as Gonds, Koyas, Chenchus, Lambadas, and Thotis have nurtured unique cultural practices that reflect their close relationship with nature and their collective wisdom. However, rapid urbanisation, changing lifestyles, and the influence of modern entertainment have placed many of these traditions at extinction risk.

To preserve this invaluable heritage, eminent folklorist and cultural researcher Prof Jayadhir Thirumala Rao established Adya Kala, a unique museum and cultural initiative dedicated to documenting and showcasing Telangana's tribal and folk traditions. Built on more than four decades of field research, Adya Kala serves as a living archive of indigenous culture and a reminder of the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity.

The museum houses a remarkable collection of tribal and folk artifacts, including rare musical instruments, leather puppets, ancient manuscripts, handicrafts, ritual objects, agricultural tools, and household items. These exhibits offer insights into the everyday lives,

beliefs, and artistic expressions of tribal communities across Telangana. More importantly, they preserve traditions that are gradually fading from public memory.

One of the most significant components of Adya Kala is Adi Dhvani, a special exhibition dedicated to tribal and folk musical instruments. Combining live performances with rare instrument displays, the exhibition celebrates the musical heritage of indigenous communities and highlights the craftsmanship involved in creating these instruments.

Among the rare instruments showcased is the Kinnera, a multi-stringed folk veena traditionally made from bamboo and dried gourds. For generations, it was used by wandering bards to narrate community histories and folklore. The exhibition also features Thudum, a percussion instrument central to the musical traditions of the Gond and Koya tribes, and the Runja, an indigenous instrument associated with storytelling performances. Another important exhibit is the Kikri, a violin-like string instrument played by the Thoti community during rituals and devotional events.

These instruments are more than musical tools; they represent centuries of indigenous knowledge, artistic skill, and cultural identity. Crafted from



The significance of Adya Kala has been recognized nationally. Artifacts from its collection have been displayed at prestigious venues, including the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad and Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. "Janjatiya Darpan", a gallery developed by IGNCA, celebrates the shared cultural traditions of India's tribal communities. The inclusion of artifacts from Adya Kala highlights the national importance of Telangana's indigenous heritage. Adya Kala is not merely a museum; it is a cultural movement dedicated to preserving the voices, memories, and artistic traditions of tribal communities.

natural materials such as bamboo, gourds, wood, and animal hide, they reflect the deep ecological understanding of tribal artisans.

Telangana's tribal heritage extends beyond music. Traditional performances such as the Gussadi dance of the Raj Gonds, the Jamba Puranam accompanied by Kinnera, and Dakkali Kathas preserve history, mythology, and social

memory through oral storytelling. These art forms have long served as vehicles for transmitting knowledge and strengthening community bonds.

Despite their cultural significance, many of these traditions are in decline. Younger generations often seek alternative livelihoods because traditional arts no longer provide sustainable income. The availability of natural materials required for

instrument-making has also diminished due to environmental changes and urban expansion. In addition, television, cinema, and digital media have gradually replaced many traditional forms of entertainment, reducing opportunities for folk artists and storytellers.

Against this backdrop, Prof Thirumala Rao's work assumes immense significance. Over the past 45 years, he has travelled extensively through remote villages and tribal settlements, documenting oral traditions, collecting rare artifacts, and preserving endangered musical instruments. His efforts have ensured that invaluable aspects of Telangana's cultural heritage are not lost forever.

The significance of Adya Kala has been recognized nationally. Artifacts from its collection have been displayed at prestigious venues, including the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad and Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. A notable moment came when President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the "Janjatiya Darpan" Gallery at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Developed by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the gallery celebrates the shared cultural traditions of India's tribal communities. The inclusion of artifacts from Adya Kala in this prestigious space highlights the national importance of Telangana's indigenous heritage.