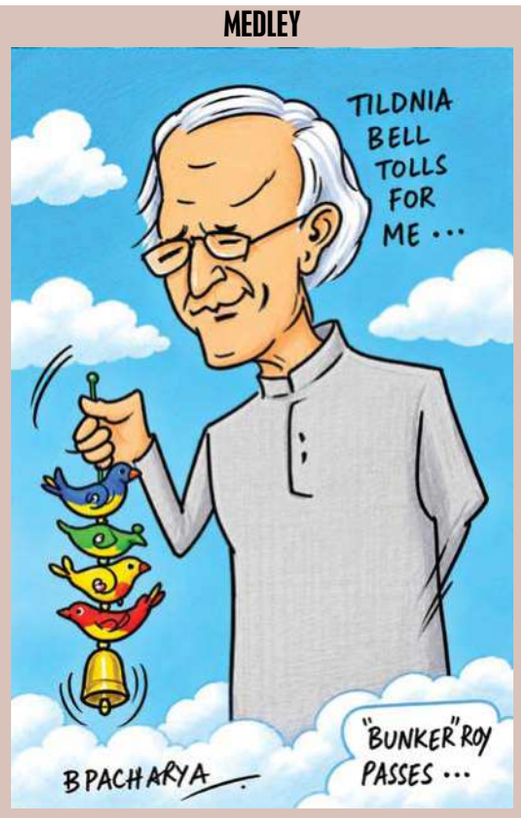
Yogi's comments on voter lists brings SIR back into spotlight

IT may not be appropriate to say that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has added his voice to that of the Opposition's against the Election Commission of India's (ECI's) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. His complaint about the alleged deletion of 1.27 crore Hindu names from the voters' list in his state is quite distinct. The Bharatiya Janata Party (NJP) prides itself on being disciplined; under the stewardship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, it was almost inconceivable till recently for an incumbent BJP Chief Minister to say anything at variance with the party's stated stand. And we have here a Chief Minister from a major state almost endorsing the allegations made by all Opposition leaders. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has sarcastically pointed out that now both are in the same boat. It is indisputable that Yogi's assertion has hugely embarrassed the saffron party. He claimed that the number of Muslim voters increased by 1.65 per cent in the state, even though the names of 1.27 crore Hindus have been excluded from the voters' list. After his complaint, the BJP has reportedly reached out to the poll panel. Countering the SP chief's taunt, Yogi said, "Ask Akhilesh Yadav to demand the rollback of SIR now. He will not do so because the number of Muslim voters has increased by 1.65 per cent in UP after SIR. And I have spoken about the situation of Hindu voters."

Whatever spin BJP leaders may try to give to Yogi's stand, they cannot dilute the import of his remarks. The important thing here is not that the ECI's SIR has been brought under a cloud of suspicion, but that it has been done by a leader who is saffron in every possible sense of the word. This pulls the rug from under the feet of the BJP high command over the issue of the ECI's credibility. This development also underlines the sour relationship between Delhi and Lucknow. It has been an open secret in the corridors of power that Yogi is not the favourite of the Modi-Shah duo; this seems to be coming to light in public view. This will have consequences not just for the Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh a few months down the line but also for the next general elections in 2029.

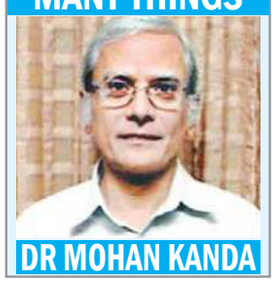
The Chief Minister's latest remarks may well be an indication that he is no longer willing to remain within the political straitjacket imposed by the party's central leadership. Whether this is a calculated attempt to assert his political autonomy or a reflection of genuine differences over the conduct of the SIR, it cannot be dismissed as an isolated episode. The BJP's central leadership faces a delicate predicament. Any attempt to rein in Yogi could deepen the perception that the party is uncomfortable with dissent within its own ranks, while allowing him a free hand could embolden other regional leaders to assert themselves. More importantly, the discord could expose fissures in the party's carefully cultivated image of organisational discipline and ideological cohesion. The party cannot allow the differences to persist. After all, a party that projects itself as a formidable electoral machine cannot afford to have its most politically consequential state become an arena for a power struggle between its central and regional leaderships.

MEDLEY



Eureka! Accidental discoveries shaping the world

TALKING OF MANY THINGS



DR MOHAN KANDA

FROM lifesaving medical breakthroughs to everyday conveniences, accidental discoveries and inventions have proved that unexpected discoveries can change the world. Stories of a failed experiment, a simple mistake, or pure curiosity remind one that innovation often comes from the most surprising places. In history, such things have generally fallen into three categories. One, to succeed in finding the objective of one's search, which is, almost always, a result of determination, patience, and systematic investigation. Another is one that was chanced upon, while looking for something else, a serendipitous discovery or invention. The third, and easily the most gratifying, is the sort of thing one had originally imagined would exist, and being able to prove that it does; what generally is called a successful 'thought experiment'.

Serendipitous discoveries happen when unexpected accidents or oversights are combined with a curious, prepared mind that recognizes their value. For example, the discovery of the principle of buoyancy in 287 BCE by Greek mathematician and inventor Archimedes. While wrestling with the problem of how to determine the purity of gold, Archimedes had the sudden realization that the buoyancy of an object placed in water is equal in magnitude to the weight of the water the object displaces. According to one popular version of the legend, he made his discovery at a public bathhouse, whereupon he leapt out of his bath, exclaiming in Greek "Heurēka! Heurēka!" or "I have found it!" and ran home naked through the streets. The expression 'Eureka' has since become an adjective describing moments of discovery or epiphany. Clearly, while physics is often viewed as a structured, deliberate march of logic, it is surprisingly full of serendipity.

A sensational event took place in 1492, when Italian explorer Christopher Columbus set sail westward from Spain with the explicit intent of establishing a direct spice trade route to Asia. Instead of reaching the East Indies, he accidentally made landfall in the Caribbean. This monumental navigation error opened a massive geographic reality, in the shape of the discovery of the Americas, which Europeans did not know existed, forever changing the global map.

In a somewhat similar manner, in 1895, German physicist Wilhelm Roentgen was experimenting with cathode ray tubes when he noticed a glowing fluorescent screen across the room. Even with the tube shielded by thick black paper, invisible rays passed through the room to light up the screen, revealing the bones inside his own hand. He realized that he had produced a ray of previously unknown 'invisible light', or that was being emitted from the tube, which could pass through the heavy paper covering the tube. Through



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further experiments, he also found that the new ray would pass through most substances casting shadows of solid objects on pieces of film. He named it X-ray, because in mathematics 'X' is used to indicate an unknown quantity. That discovery, as is well known, revolutionized medicine, physics, and science by making it possible to view the interiors of solid objects and living tissue for the first time, without surgery.

Another remarkable event in the history of scientific investigation took place in 1896, French physicist Henri Becquerel had stored uranium salts next to unexposed photographic plates inside a dark drawer. Even without sunlight exposure, the plates were fogged by penetrating radiation emitted directly by the uranium. Becquerel had discovered what would soon be called 'radioactivity', a term coined by the celebrated scientist couple Marie and Pierre Curie, who took up the work and found new radioactive elements. The discovery opened the way to nuclear physics, radiotherapy, carbon dating and nuclear energy, and to an understanding of the dangers of radiation.

Albert Einstein used the idea instead of physical laboratory equipment to reshape modern physics, unlocking the theories of special and general relativity. Einstein pictured a passenger on a moving train and an observer on a stationary platform watching two lightning bolts strike the front and back of the train simultaneously. Because the train moves toward one flash and away from the other, the two observers disagree on whether the strikes happened at the same time. Simultaneity, therefore, is a relative concept and time flows differently depending on one's motion.

Then there was the Scottish bacteriologist Alexander Fleming who, in 1928, had just returned from a vacation. While he was away, a stray mould spore had drifted into his laboratory, likely from a geology laboratory downstairs and landed on a petri dish planted with bacteria. The bacteria had grown normally everywhere on the plate except for a ring directly surrounding the blue-green mold. In that specific "zone of inhibition," the bacteria had been dissolved. Fleming realized that the mould was producing a powerful substance that actively killed the bacteria. He named this by product penicillin. The discovery of penicillin marked a profound turning point in history and paved the way for the development of additional antibiotics.

Swiss physicist Walter Jaeger, in the 1930s, was trying to invent a sensor that could detect poison gas. Instead, his device registered the smoke from his cigarette, a discovery that led to the invention of the modern smoke detector.

Another similar discovery was made in 1965, when radio astronomers Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were troubleshooting an antenna at Bell Labs in New Jersey. They could not get rid of a persistent, low-level background 'noise' coming apparently from everywhere in the sky, which turned out to be the leftover thermal radiation from the 'Big Bang' or the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation, a discovery dating to roughly 380,000 years after the Big Bang. The Big Bang theory is a fundamental concept in cosmology that explains the origin and evolution of the universe. It proposes that the universe began as an infinitely dense and hot point, known as a singularity, around 13.8 billion years ago, which underwent an explosive event called the Big Bang, which initiated the expansion of space, time, matter, and energy. Penzias and Wilson shared the 1978 Nobel in physics for the discovery.

The most sensational accidental discovery in the history of India is widely considered to be the Ajanta Caves. In April 1819, a British cavalry officer, John Smith, was out hunting tigers in the dense, horseshoe-shaped rocky gorges of the Waghora River near Aurangabad. Following a tiger's tracks up a steep, overgrown hillside, he cleared away thick jungle foliage and spotted the top arch of a massive, man-made cave, entering which with flaming torches, he discovered 30 rock-cut Buddhist cave temples carved directly into the basalt cliff face, the Ajanta caves.

The early 1990s saw another spectacular discovery in the shape of a drug which researchers of Pfizer were clinically testing as a potential treatment for angina or cardiovascular chest pain. While the drug failed to effectively treat angina, clinical trial participants reported a striking and consistent side effect that led to a revolution in treating erectile dysfunction. And thus, came into being the internationally popular 'wonder drug' Viagra.

Much earlier, in 1886, Dr John Pemberton, a pharmacist in Atlanta, was trying to create a remedy for headaches and exhaustion, and accidentally created a syrup, which when mixed with carbonated water, became the world-famous beverage Coca-Cola. While the formula was originally intended to be medicinal, it quickly became a popular soft drink, creating one of the most recognizable brands in the world. What had originally started off as a medicinal concoction had, in other words, finally ended up as a popular global refreshment!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Debate rages over whether India's poor have become fewer

NOMULA SRINIVAS RAO

POVERTY is not just a lack of money; it is a lack of capability to realize one's full potential as a human being -Amartya Sen

India's recent poverty numbers are striking. According to the World Bank's October 2026 Poverty and Equity Brief, the share of people living below the extreme poverty line of $3 a day (2021 purchasing power parity) fell from 27.1 per cent in 2011 to 2.6 per cent in 2023. Over the same period, the proportion below the lower-middle-income threshold of $ per cent a day declined from 57.7 per cent to 16.1 per cent, lifting an estimated 496 million people above that line. NITI Aayog's multidimensional poverty estimates show that roughly 248 million Indians exited multidimensional poverty between 2013–14 and 2022–23, with the headcount ratio dropping from 29.17 per cent to 11.28 per cent.

These figures represent one of the fastest declines recorded globally. They are not statistical inventions. They reflect real expansions in access to food, housing, sanitation, cooking fuel, electricity, schooling, and bank accounts, supported by both faster consumption growth and large-scale public transfers. As India pursues the Viksit Bharat goal, the numbers offer a legitimate basis for satisfaction. They do not, however, settle the harder question of whether the gains are self-sustaining.

Welfare as consumption, not capability

A substantial share of the measured decline stems from the monetisation of public transfers. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana supplies free food grains to approximately 79–81 crore beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act. When the value of these grains, together with other subsidies and direct benefit transfers, is added to household consumption, many families cross the monetary poverty thresholds. The World Bank itself attributes the fall to strong consumption growth, rising employment (particularly among rural women), and expanded social transfers, including food subsidies.

Households whose "non-poor" status depends heavily on continued fiscal support face an immediate reversion risk if those supports are scaled back or if fiscal space narrows. Crossing a consumption line through transfers is not the same as possessing the independent earning capacity that keeps a household above the line when transfers change. The distinction matters for policy durability.

This method is standard and transparent. It also creates a structural vulnerability. Households whose "non-poor" status depends heavily on continued fiscal support face an immediate reversion risk if those supports are scaled back or if fiscal space narrows. Crossing a consumption line through transfers is not the same as possessing the independent earning capacity that keeps a household above the line when transfers change. The distinction matters for policy durability.

Inclusion versus resilience

The same gap appears in living-standards indicators. Near-universal bank account ownership under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is counted as progress in the multidimensional index. As of mid-2026, however, roughly 59 crore Jan Dhan accounts existed; about 5.72 crore held zero balances and approximately 15.37 crore (around 26 per cent) were classified as inoperative. Many function mainly as conduits for direct benefit transfers and wages from rural employment schemes rather than as vehicles for independent savings or credit.

Access has expanded. Depth of use and household buffers have not expanded at the same pace. High out-of-pocket health expenditure—still 43.4 per cent of total health expenditure in 2022–23 according to National Health Accounts—continues to erode whatever small surpluses form. A single medical episode can push a statistically non-poor household back into distress.

Nutrition and employment quality lag behind

If extreme monetary poverty has fallen below three per cent, persistent shortfalls in nutrition and job quality require explanation. The National Family Health Survey-6 (2023–24) shows child stunting under five declining to 29.3 per cent from 35.5 per cent in NFHS-5, a genuine improvement. Child wasting, however, remains stubbornly high at around 19 per cent. Maternal anemia continues to affect most women of reproductive age. The Global Hunger Index continues to place India in the "serious" category, driven largely by these child undernutrition indicators. Free calories prevent the worst forms of starvation; they do not automatically deliver diverse micronutrient intake or address the multiple determinants of stunting and wasting.

On the labour side, employment expanded by roughly 134 million between 2017 and 2023—nearly twice the growth in the working-age population—with rural women accounting for a large share of the increase. Yet the World Bank notes that real earnings remained broadly unchanged and that much of the growth occurred in relatively low-productivity activities. Continued high demand for low-wage work under the rural employment guarantee (and its successor frameworks) signals that large numbers of workers still lack better alternatives in manufacturing or higher-value services. Geographic concentration persists: a contiguous belt from Uttar Pradesh to West Bengal accounts for a majority of those still below the $4.20 line.

From Transfer-Dependent Reduction to Capability

Statistical poverty reduction is a necessary and measurable achievement. It is incomplete without economic resilience. Durable exits from poverty require households to generate stable incomes that do not depend primarily on the continuation of current transfer levels.

Policy attention therefore needs to shift emphasis toward

Expanding labour-intensive manufacturing and higher-productivity services that can absorb rural labour at better wages.

Strengthening primary healthcare and nutrition interventions that reduce catastrophic out-of-pocket spending and address stunting and wasting more effectively.

Improving the quality and relevance of vocational and foundational education so that young workers can enter better jobs rather than low-productivity or public-works employment.

Data correctly records the reach of state assistance and the resulting rise in measured consumption. They do not, by themselves, establish that every household now possesses the capability to maintain an independent, stable livelihood. Until that capability is widespread, the decline in poverty remains a significant but unfinished triumph—one that still rests, for many, on the continued presence of the very supports that produced the statistical improvement.

(The writer is a former OSD to the Union Civil Aviation Minister)

LETTERS

Vested politicians will exploit Sonia's narratives

REFLECTIONS from Dr Manmohan to Pranab Mukherjee have been included in Sonia Gandhi's book 'Belonging--A journey of love '. By all accounts, it is an eye opener and should be taken in the right perspective. Her memoir narrates the truth and includes her own experiences and viewpoints. In the meanwhile, some politicians are bound to exploit her narrations to gain political mileage for themselves.

Dr Sunil Chopra, Ludhiana

Sonia and her PM aspirations

THIS refers to excerpts from Sonia Gandhi's memoir "Belonging: A Journey of Love". Sonia thought of taking Indian citizenship after the assassination of Indira Gandhi intending to enter politics. Her dislike for Hindus and Hinduism has been described by Pranab Mukherjee in his autobiography. Her justification that she was not keen on the Prime Minister's post is questionable. It is clear from A P J Abdul Kalam's account that despite Sonia demanding to become the prime minister, the request was declined on account of her being a foreign national, given that as per the Indian constitution a foreigner or her progeny is not entitled to the post.

Sakunthala KR, Hyderabad

Errors one too many

The national buzz over Sonia Gandhi's memoir has barely begun, yet critics are already pointing to errors, seemingly eager to discredit the author. The memoir reportedly mixes the dates and, while referring to the death of karsevaks in the Sabarmati Express, describes Ahmedabad as the capital of Gujarat. Such errors should surely have been caught before publication. Technology may have made publishing faster, but it cannot replace editorial judgement. When I was in the publishing industry, the editors went beyond language correction. HarperCollins and the author should have exercised greater care.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad-103

The human story behind Sonia's book

SEEING the media reviews of Sonia Gandhi's book, the common man will perceive that it is the story of a young woman from Italy who arrived in India, adapted to a new culture, learned new customs, and embraced a different way of life. However, those seeking solutions to India's current challenges, new policy ideas, or a comprehensive and impartial history of modern India may find little of that in it. Ultimately, the book is less about politics and more about the human experiences that shape a person's life.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Rs 38-crore makeover plan for Hampi's heritage monuments

HAMPI: The Centre has drawn up an ambitious Rs 38-crore plan to conserve and restore some of the most important monuments in Hampi, the historic capital of the Vijayanagara Empire and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The initiative will cover several structures dating back to the 14th to 16th centuries, including the Jain temples on Hemakuta Hill and the Saraswati temple complex at Singanayakanahalli.

The project is being taken up under the National Culture Fund of the Union Ministry of Culture, with financial support mobilised through Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's (HAL) corporate social responsibility funds and the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). Of the total allocation of Rs 38 crore, around Rs 19 crore is expected to come through MPLADS. The funding will support a comprehensive conservation programme aimed at protecting the monuments and restoring damaged structures. The Ministry will appoint a heritage conservation architect to prepare a detailed project report. The architect will assess the present condition of the monuments, identify conservation requirements and prepare technical documentation before restoration work is taken up in phases.The proposed works include comprehensive protection of the northern and southern bazaars adjoining the Virupaksha Temple. The western portion of a collapsed mandapa near the Sri Bhashyakara shrine in the Vittala Temple complex will also be reconstructed. The Jain temples on Hemakuta Hill and the Saraswati temple complex at Singanayakanahalli are among the other structures identified for renovation.

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