

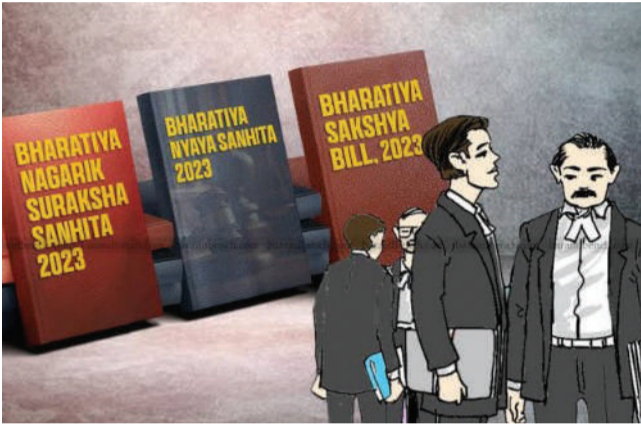
# KASHMIR OBSERVER™

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**Colonial-Era Codes Replaced**

## New Criminal Laws To Begin From July 1st



Press Trust Of India

**New Delhi:** The newly enacted laws -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Act -- to completely overhaul the criminal justice system in the country will come into effect from July 1. However, the provision related to cases of hit and run by vehicle drivers will not be implemented immediately. The three laws got the Parliament's approval on December 21 last year and President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent on December 25. According to three identical notifications issued by the Union home ministry, provisions of the new laws will come into force from July 1. The laws will replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code,

the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively. The three legislations aim at completely overhauling the criminal justice system in the country by giving definitions of various offences and their punishments. The government, however, has decided not to implement the provision related to cases of hit and run by a vehicle driver as promised to truckers who had protested against it. "In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (45 of 2023), the central government hereby appoints the 1st day of July, 2024 as the date on which the provisions of the said Sanhita, except the provision of sub-section (2) of section 106, shall come | [More on P6](#)

## Slapping Wife In Public Isn't Outraging Her Modesty: HC

KO Web Desk

**Srinagar:** The Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court recently ruled that a man slapping his wife in public does not constitute the offence of outraging the woman's modesty under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, but can attract charges under Section 323 for causing hurt. A single judge bench, comprising Justice Rajesh Oswal, passed the judgment after a man challenged the issuance of process against him for slapping his wife at a public hearing in their ongoing matrimonial dispute. The high court quashed the Section 354 charge while upholding the one under Section 323. The petitioner had filed a suit for restitution of conjugal rights against his wife, who in turn filed a suit for the

cancellation of their marriage agreement. Amid these litigations, the wife lodged a complaint leading to an investigation under Section 202 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Based on the police report, the trial court issued an order against the petitioner for alleged offences under sections 323 (causing hurt) and 354 (outraging a woman's modesty) of the IPC. The petitioner contested the trial court's decision, arguing that the allegations in the complaint did not justify the issuance of process under Section 354 of the IPC, which pertains to the offence of outraging a woman's modesty. He highlighted that the trial court did not take any witness statements from the complainant's side at the time of the complaint's presentation, contrary to what was claimed in | [More on P6](#)



## Breaking Barriers On The Road

### Kashmiri Women Claim Their Place Behind The Wheel

Shereen Naman

**Srinagar:** Amidst the cacophony of honking horns and the frenetic hustle of the main road, Tabish Khan, 22 stood poised behind the wheel. She adjusted her grip on the steering wheel, a thrill coursing through her veins, as she embarked on her first on-road practice. For Khan, enrolling in a driving school wasn't just about mastering the mechanics of a vehicle; it symbolized a profound yearning for independence. "Driving is more than just a skill; it is liberation," Khan said. She had endured the chaos and discomfort of public transportation for long, yearning for a reprieve from the confines of crowded buses. "I have to travel to university daily and driving is going to help me," she said. The sight of women confidently navigating the bustling



streets of Kashmir from behind the wheel has become increasingly commonplace. Society today is increasingly progressive and inclusive, and the establishment of driving schools for women has not only facilitated their empowerment and independence but has also challenged the prevailing gender biases. With each passing generation, more and more women are

## Govt. To Provide Direct Bank Transfers For Solar Panels: PM Vows To Eliminate Electricity Bills To Zero For Consumers

Press Trust Of India

**Raipur:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday referring to the PM Surya Ghar Free Electricity scheme, which currently covers one crore households, said his government strives to cut down electricity bills of consumers to zero. The government will provide financial aid directly into bank accounts for setting up rooftop solar panels where 300 units will be made free and excess electricity produced will be bought back by the government, thereby creating additional income for citizens, he pointed out. Modi attacked the Congress saying the grand old party cannot think beyond 'parivarvaad' (nepotism), corruption and appeasement and the country's development



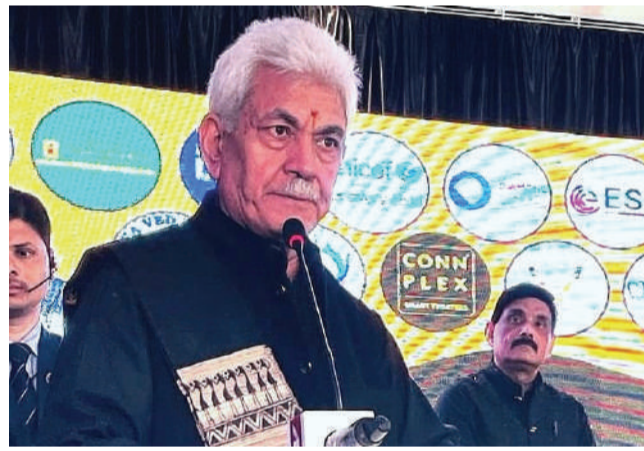
was never on its agenda. After Independence, the Congress ruled the country for a long time but its focus was only on forming the government and not building the future of the country, said Modi while virtually addressing the 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Chhattisgarh' programme. He dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation stones of 10 development projects worth over Rs 34,400 crore on the occasion and said when India becomes the world's third-largest economy in the next five years, Chhattisgarh will reach new heights of development. "those who ruled the country for a long time after Independence, their thinking was not big and they kept on taking decisions keeping in mind (their) political interests. Congress was elected to power again | [More on P6](#)

**YOU ALL ARE MODI'S FAMILY.** Your dreams are Modi's resolution. That is why today I am talking about developed India."

## Learn From J&K's Best Practices: LG To Bihar Says Peace, Stability Crucial For Economic Growth

Observer News Service

**Bihar:** Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha inaugurated the Grand Trunk Road Initiatives (GTRI) conclave at Patna on Saturday. At the inaugural ceremony, the LG called for replicating the best practices of Jammu Kashmir and other regions, through a strong network of individuals and ideas, for the overall development of Bihar. "Peace and Stability are the pre-conditions to attract investments and to build an economically empowered and inclusive society. There is also an immense potential for start-ups, technology enterprises and agro-based industries in Bihar. All the sections of the society must discharge their responsibility and work together to build a progressive state," Sinha said. In his keynote address, the LG commended the endeavour of GTRI to bring together the policymakers, entrepreneurs, innovators, influencers and thinkers to discuss and identify growth opportunities in different sectors and brainstorm over the holistic development of Bihar. He highlighted the greater efforts by states and Union Territories to develop industries and agriculture & allied sectors to address future challenges and to contribute in Viksit Bharat. In ancient times, Bihar



was considered as a seat of power, education, literature, culture and cradle of Indian Civilization. It has always been the land of spiritual unity where Buddhism and Jainism were born, the LG observed. "Today, Bihar is witnessing economic and cultural revival and it can play a big role in industrial development and bring transformation in the nation's tourism sector," he said. He said the impressive strides of Bihar's agriculture and service sector have resulted in the emergence of the state as a powerful player in the overall growth of the nation. It has an immense talent pool that will act as a main driving force in the future, he added. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, India has traveled far in the last 10 years and every region and sector have witnessed triumph, glory and laid the foundation for a promising future," the LG said. Our economy is growing at an unprecedented rate and we are confident of achieving the target of the world's 3rd largest economy by 2027. The effective on-ground implementation of people-centric policies will lead the nation in this Amrit Kaal, he further added. "Bihar's brand ambassadors, young entrepreneurs, innovators and creative networks can further push cultural awakening and create a vibrant environment for Bihar's socio-economic growth," the LG said. He also emphasized on developing a | [More on P6](#)

## 'Handwara Narco-Terror Case' NIA Attaches 4 Houses, Seizes 2.27 Cr

Press Trust Of India

**Srinagar:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday attached houses of four accused in a narco-terror case in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, the agency said. The case relates to the use of the "proceeds of narcotic drugs" to fund violent terror activities by proscribed terror groups Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) operating in Jammu and Kashmir's Handwara-Kupwara region, the NIA said in a statement. In a major step towards dismantling the funding networks that are fuelling terrorism in Kashmir, the NIA attached four residential properties and seized cash in the Handwara

narco-terrorism case involving LeT and HM, it said. The properties belonging to four accused have been attached in Handwara tehsil of the north Kashmir district by the NIA, which has also seized a total of Rs 2.27 crore in cash under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the agency said. The immovable properties attached are accused Afaq Ahmad Wani's two-storey house, accused Muneer Ahmad Pandey's single-storey house, accused Saleem Andrabi's house, and accused Islam-ul-Haq's two-storey house, it said. A total of 12 accused have been arrested and 15 have been charge-sheeted so far in the case, the NIA said. The case | [More on P6](#)



## Power Shortage Spurs Curtailment Rise: KPDC

Agencies

**Srinagar:** The Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDC) has reiterated that an essential escalation in power curtailment measures is underway due to restricted power availability and related constraints. The corporation emphasized that this decision, considered crucial for upholding grid discipline and preventing the risk of major trunk line failures and extensive blackouts. Assuring the public of a relaxation in restrictions once power availability improves, KPDC has urged consumers to refrain from power theft and adopt responsible electricity usage practices. The recent surge in power demand coupled with



limitations in supply has forced utilities to implement stricter curtailment protocols. These measures entail regulated reductions in electricity supply to certain areas during peak demand hours, aimed at balancing the grid load and preventing system overloads. Officials emphasize that while the current situation

necessitates stringent curtailment measures, efforts are underway to alleviate the strain on the power infrastructure. They assure the public that restrictions will be eased gradually as power availability improves. News agency KNS reported that KPDC urged the public to cooperate by refraining from power theft and adopting responsible electricity usage practices. They underscore the importance of conserving energy and utilizing resources judiciously to alleviate pressure on the grid. The implementation of these measures underscores the collective responsibility of both authorities and citizens in ensuring the stability and reliability of the power grid. "By adhering to | [More on P6](#)

## Consumers Decry Unscheduled Power Cuts

**R**esidents of many areas in Kashmir valley on Saturday expressed resentment against the unscheduled outages in 'metered and non-metered' areas. According to agency reports consumers from different areas of Kashmir division have expressed antipathy against the claims of the Kashmir Power Development Corporation Limited (KPDC). The residents of several | [More on P6](#)

**'Every Move Judged'**  
Despite steadily reclaiming their space on the roads, women in Kashmir still | [More on P6](#)





# What's the Status of Heartfelt Conversations in Today's World?

The healing power of listening. Nurturing heart-to-heart conversations in a digital age

Dr. Rizwan Rumi

“Today, our world is noisy, with people shouting to be heard. This noise reflects our deep need to be listened to. We reward the loudest and most outrageous voices in public spaces and media. People crave attention and will do anything to get noticed. The clamor will only grow until we learn to sit down and listen. Most of us would appreciate a quieter world, and we can start by being willing to listen

In today's fast-paced world, where digital connections dominate our interactions, the essence of genuine human connection is often lost in the noise of social media updates and instant messaging. Despite our constant connectivity, many of us find ourselves suffocating under the weight of unexpressed emotions, yearning for meaningful conversations that allow us to bare our souls without fear of judgment or rejection.

In a society obsessed with projecting images of confidence and happiness, the art of heart-to-heart communication has become rare and elusive. We hide behind carefully curated social personas, afraid to reveal our vulnerabilities for fear of tarnishing our carefully constructed images. As a result, our hearts remain filled with empty defenses, longing for the release that comes with authentic connection.

This lack of genuine communication takes its toll on individuals of all ages. Children bottle up stress, while young people grapple with anxiety and depression in silence. Even within the confines of intimate relationships, many struggle to express themselves openly, fearing the consequences of revealing their true emotions.

The roots of this disconnect lie in our increasingly digital lifestyles, where instant gratification and constant stimulation have left little room for the patient art of listening. We have grown accustomed to shallow interactions and fleeting connections, trading depth for convenience in our pursuit of productivity and efficiency.

But amidst the chaos of modern life, there remains a simple yet profound remedy: the power of listening. In a world where everyone is vying to be heard, the act of truly listening has become a rare and precious gift. It is a gift that requires no grand gestures or elaborate expressions, only a willingness to be present and attentive to the needs of others.

Imagine a world where face-to-face conversations are valued above digital distractions, where people come together to hold space for one another's joys and sorrows. In this world, conversations are not just ex-



changes of information, but opportunities for genuine connection and mutual understanding.

Such conversations come in many forms: from the simple act of listening without judgment, to the comforting embrace of a friend in times of need. They require us to set aside our devices and distractions, and to be fully present in the moment, attuned to the emotions and experiences of those around us.

In embracing the power of listening, we create space for healing and growth, allowing ourselves and others to unburden our hearts and reclaim our humanity. We discover that true strength lies not in the façade of invincibility, but in the courage to be vulnerable and authentic in our interactions with others.

In our natural state, we're meant to be together. Even though we often drift apart, we still crave connection. Everyone has a story to share, a need to connect with others. When nobody listens, we feel isolated and might even lose touch with reality. In English, the

word "health" comes from the same root as "whole." We can't be truly healthy if we're not connected to others. "Whole" also connects to "holy," showing the importance of relationships in our spiritual well-being.

Listening brings us closer, making us feel more complete, healthier, and more connected to what's sacred. When we don't listen, it leads to fragmentation and suffering.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes today's world as suffering from "radical brokenness" in relationships. There's disconnection and fear everywhere. For instance, many teenagers feel unheard and turn to their peers to feel understood.

Two wise teachers, Malidoma Some from West Africa and Parker Palmer from the United States, noted that a culture is in trouble when elders avoid engaging with the youth. We can't build a healthy culture without connection and listening. When we meet and truly listen, we mend the world and make it more whole and sacred.

Today, our world is noisy, with people shouting to be heard. This noise reflects our deep need to be listened to. We reward the loudest and most outrageous voices in public spaces and media. People crave attention and will do anything to get noticed. The clamor will only grow until we learn to sit down and listen. Most of us would appreciate a quieter world, and we can start by being willing to listen.

A teacher once shared a story of a disruptive sixteen-year-old student who shouted and threatened her. Instead of reacting with force, she sat down and listened to him. It took time for him to calm down, but eventually, he opened up about his life. Her attentive silence allowed him to see and hear himself. She didn't need to give advice or solve his problems; her listening alone made a difference.

So let us reclaim the lost art of conversation, one heartfelt exchange at a time. Let us create spaces where people feel safe to share their joys and their struggles, knowing that they will be met with compassion and understanding. Let us be the listeners that others so desperately need, offering our presence and our empathy without reservation or expectation.

In doing so, we not only heal ourselves, but we also heal the fabric of our communities, weaving bonds of trust and connection that transcend the limitations of time and space. For in the end, it is not the quantity of our connections that matters, but the depth and sincerity with which we engage with one another.

In a world that often feels chaotic and overwhelming, let us remember the simple yet transformative power of listening. Let us embrace the beauty of face-to-face conversations and heart-to-heart connections, knowing that in these moments of shared vulnerability, we find the true essence of what it means to be human.

*Views expressed in the conversation are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The author is a Columnist based in Srinagar. He X's On @roomi\_rizwan*

## Cleansing Political Funding In India

The Supreme Court's invalidation of the electoral bond scheme has sparked renewed debate on political funding, delving into transparency, accountability, and democratic principles

Sumant Batra

Last week, in a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court struck down the government's electoral bond scheme as unconstitutional, reviving the decades-old debate on political funding in the general election year. Notified in January 2018 via a money bill, the scheme allowed the purchase of bonds by natural and legal persons which could be encashed only by eligible political parties. A person could purchase limitless bonds of infinite amounts, removing the 7.5% cap on corporate donations. The details of the buyer were to be kept confidential. The bond was exempted from income tax.

Simply stated, the scheme allowed unlimited funding by corporates to political parties without disclosing the donor. Both the Reserve Bank of India and the Election Commission had expressed reservations on the various features of the scheme. Democracy watchdogs challenged the scheme in court, alleging that it violated the right to information of citizens, and was contrary to the principle of free and fair elections. An affluent person could make financial contributions to political parties with a legitimate possibility of quid pro quo arrangements, the petitions said.

The government justified the scheme, stating it provided the shift from the cash-driven, unregulated, and unaccounted regime of political dona-

tions to a regulated, digital, and legal political donation framework. It also served a specific object of curbing black money. The right of a citizen to know how political parties are being funded must be balanced against the right of a person to maintain privacy of their political affiliations, the government pleaded. It implored that the scheme was an economic reform and urged the court to refrain from judicial review of an economic policy.

Noting that the government had itself classified the scheme as an "electoral reform", the Court held that the amendments introduced to make way for the scheme relate to the electoral process and the scheme cannot be tested on the parameters applicable to economic policy. It would thus be subject to judicial scrutiny. The Court has held that the scheme infringes upon the right to information of the voter by anonymising contributions through electoral bonds.

Recognising the nexus between the right of citizens and open governance, the judgment holds that effective participation in democratic governance is not just a means to an end but is an end in itself. The citizens have a duty to hold the government of the day accountable for their actions and inactions, and they can effectively fulfill this duty only if the government is not clothed in secrecy. The freedom of speech and expression includes the right to acquire information which would enable people to

“Noting that the government had itself classified the scheme as an “electoral reform”, the Court held that the amendments introduced to make way for the scheme relate to the electoral process and the scheme cannot be tested on the parameters applicable to economic policy

debate on social, moral, and political issues. These debates would foster the spirit of representative democracy.

Regarding black money, the judgment states that the scheme is not the only means for curbing black money in electoral finance; there are other alter-

natives which substantially do so while not impacting the right to information. Stating that at a primary level, political contributions give a "seat at the table" to the contributor, which can translate into influence over policy-making, the judgment notes there is a legitimate possibility that financial contribution by an affluent person to a political party would lead to quid pro quo arrangements in the form of introducing a policy change or license granting.

The scheme is not fool-proof and gaps enable political parties to find the particulars of the contributions made to them. Thus, de jure anonymity of the contributors does not translate to de facto anonymity. Notably, the judgment does not cite any instance of such political contributions possibly influencing a policy change or extracting a political favour in the last six years.

Having struck down the scheme, the Court directed the Election Commission to disclose the full particulars of the donor and the amount donated to the particular political party through bonds. The decision has renewed the debate on the complex and controversial subject of political funding. India is the largest democracy in the world. Finance is a necessary component of the democratic processes. The conventional system of political funding has been to rely on donations and incur expenditures in cash. The scheme was a substantial improvement from a non-transparent to a partially transparent system, albeit with

fatal legal flaws.

The decision provides a fresh opportunity to the government to go back to the drawing board and reimagine the framework on financing democracy. The judgment itself offers many cues. It neither holds that corporate donations should be prohibited nor does it suggest a cap on the quantum of donations. It has only removed the anonymity of the electoral bond scheme. The decision recognises that private funding is a fundamental right of citizens. The decision also concedes that money is a necessary component of the overall vibrancy of the political sphere. In his separate reasoning, Justice Sanjeev Khanna has suggested that the Electoral Trust Scheme introduced in 2013 best realises the objective of the government in a real and substantial manner without significantly impacting the fundamental right of the voter to know.

The new framework should aim to strengthen the cleansing of political funding in India while enabling information to citizens, and perhaps, regulation on end-use if the income of the political parties is exempted from income tax, with codes of conduct and conflicts of interest rules to foster a wider culture of integrity.

*Views expressed in the conversation are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Financial Express*

## CHASING SUCCESS?

## Cease Giving In To Failures

Shreerakash Sharma

We speak about successes and what spontaneously crops up in our mind is the milieu of great happiness and rejuvenation achieved after perseverance, hard labour, indomitable courage, persistent practice. We succeed in our efforts to achieve something which we dote on and dream about and this accomplishment brings much-expected joy and sincerely gladdens our heart. But the road-map of the stories of successes is not as simple as we perceive to be. The success passes through a labyrinth of travails and agonies. Success passes through a series of failures. More of the fiascos means more of the victories, more of the applauds. No failure means no learning, no lesson and ultimately no triumph.

There is no denying the fact that everyone wants to succeed in this world. In fact, there is nothing weird about this aspiration. It is natural and one of the most inherent traits of the Homo sapiens. But achieving success or getting what we want in life happens to be a tough nut to crack. It is never the matter of sheer wishes and fantasies. In fact, success in any domain of life has its own conspicuous and rigid regimen which the aspirants need to follow religiously and strictly. It is also the matter of how intensely we chase for it and how earnestly we long for it.

Success also depends upon how patiently and persistently we keep on trying to reach out to the most-cherished goal of our life. So one thing is pretty clear: success calls for hard labour, indomitable patience and undying efforts. More than anything else, the realization of one's most beautiful dreams also requires us not to give in to a series of failures which may befall us onto the path of trying for it.

But the greatest tragedy of human life is that the earnestness with which dreams are pursued in the beginning unfortunately goes on dwindling later on with the passage of time. This turns out to be what we may call the Achilles' heel of all successes and laurels in life. Have you ever se-



riously thought why the pace of making efforts to succeed goes on dissipating with each passing day? After all what ails the sustenance mechanism and paradigm of endeavours that restricts our steps from moving consistently onto the path of success? We need to make an honest soul-searching about this fatal mental block which makes us inert, inactive and consequently we fall into the permanent sloth of not making further efforts to achieve the goal of our life.

In fact, when we fail to accomplish something worthwhile for which we plan so meticulously and prepare so painstakingly, then we instantaneously get frustrated and depressed. This further results in shattering all hopes and optimism. Again, we get hamstrung by a slew of negative, pessimistic, self-doubting and demotivating thoughts. We



**WE MUST ADMIT THAT LIFE IS AN ODYSSEY OF A SERIES OF SAGAS OF UPS AND DOWNS, SUCCESSES AND FAILURES. Hoping for success without undergoing the inevitable pangs of failures is tantamount to living in a fool's paradise. Failures notwithstanding, we must never quit, we must never succumb to pessimism and self-doubt**

start underestimating ourselves. Our psycho-mental strength and physical capabilities seem to have fallen to the nadir. Our self-esteem goes on continuously plummeting down to a newer low. We start assuming ourselves to be the most undeserving person on the earth. Such self-de-

moralizing, self-doubting and self-effacing pseudo-perceptions prove to have lethal repercussions on our mental poise.

At this crossroads, we need to be more cautious and conscientious. What is to be kept in mind is the fact that failures are the inevitable part of all phenomena

which keep on occurring at regular intervals in life. No one can escape this inevitable phase of journey of what we call successes in life. Failures show us our follies, our inherent weaknesses and a lot of other obstacles which restrain us from making efforts to succeed. Thomas Alva Edison, the world known US inventor's quote "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work" reflects a very precious lesson that defeats do not mean decimation. Failures do not mean the end of the world. We fail and it helps learn a lot of vital lessons to ultimately become successful. But for this perception we need to possess a very hard bent of mind. So it is essential to keep on learning from failures and consistently strengthening and striving hard to finally succeed in life.

The famous US social rights

activist Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Rejections and failures are natural procedures to finally appear as a successful person in all walks of life. Ceasing to struggle due to disappointment brought forth from the very first failure means killing all the possibilities of successes in their embryo itself. The great Chinese philosopher Confucius had once said, "Our greatest glory is in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Failing in one's effort to succeed does only signify that the efforts were not made with flawless planning and sincere perseverance. This does not mean lack of intelligence, talent or otherwise. Failures lay out the renewed opportunities for chalking out the road maps for the more flawless and sincere efforts for final success.

Denis E. Waitley, the famous American motivational speaker, very nicely explains the importance of failures in human life when he says, "Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." We fail because we fail to learn the valuable lessons from the failure. We fail because we fail to assess our strengths and analyze our weaknesses. We fail because we so easily give in to the disappointment and depression without fighting and struggling with it.

We must admit that life is an odyssey of a series of sagas of ups and downs, successes and failures. Hoping for success without undergoing the inevitable pangs of failures is tantamount to living in a fool's paradise. Failures notwithstanding, we must never quit, we must never succumb to pessimism and self-doubt. This is what makes the time-tested secrets of success - never quit, never surrender and, at most, never stop trying to succeed despite failures and frustrations galore.

The author is Principal PM Shri School Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya

## How To Democratised Artificial Intelligence

Bertrand Badré

Charles Gorintin

The rapid advance of artificial intelligence evokes both wonder and dread. Many regard AI as an object of marvel and awe (a Stupor Mundi, to borrow a Latin phrase), while others believe it can be a benevolent savior (a Salvator Mundi). Regardless of whether AI is seen as miraculous or merely helpful, the question remains: How can we ensure that its benefits are available to everyone?

To answer this question, we need a nuanced understanding of AI. That means rejecting several simplistic narratives: functionalism, which says humans should adapt and augment themselves to keep up with technological progress; sensationalism, which depicts AI as an existential threat; cynicism, which seeks to exploit AI for profit; and fatalism, which implies a resigned acceptance of AI's inevitable rise.

What these scenarios overlook is that the future is still ours to shape. Adopting the verum-factum principle - knowing through making - is crucial to developing a more profound understanding of AI's capabilities and implications.

To prevent a minority from co-opting AI's transformative potential, it must be democratized. Equitable access is the key to ensuring that the benefits of technological progress are broadly shared, and that AI serves as a unifying force, rather than exacerbating the divisions within our fragile societies.

The potential benefits are enormous. In the 1990s, Joseph Stiglitz observed that "a child anywhere in the world who has access to the internet has access to more knowledge than a child in the best schools of the industrial countries did a quarter-



century ago." By democratizing access to AI, we can empower today's children to engage with humanity's brightest minds in a way that caters to their individual needs.

But achieving this depends on how we shape the narrative surrounding AI's adoption and future impact. Instead of making lofty promises like "AI will solve world hunger," we should focus on its ability to bring about incremental yet meaningful improvements in people's daily lives.

In this regard, the technology's rapidly expanding capabilities and declining costs create new opportunities for smaller-scale models and enable individual users to person-

alize AI solutions, mirroring the internet's freewheeling, creative early days. Just two years ago, for example, the leading open-source AI model was Meta's OPT-175B. Today, a leading open-source model, Mistral 7B, is 40 times smaller, at least 40 times cheaper to operate, and outperforms its predecessor. Remarkably, it was developed by a company of just 18 people.

And this is just the beginning. AI is currently experiencing its own version of Moore's law, setting the stage for rapid uptake, akin to the diffusion of telephones and televisions. This accelerated process calls for a shift in focus toward developing practical applications and miti-

gating risks, rather than fixating on reducing costs.

The rise of AI is a double-edged sword. The technology could be a powerful equalizer or a source of division, depending on how it is deployed and who controls it. Like previous technological revolutions, it promises to create new employment opportunities while simultaneously threatening to displace existing jobs. A recent report by the International Monetary Fund underscores this point, warning that AI could lead to a growing divide between tech-savvy individuals, well-positioned to reap the economic benefits of innovation, and those who risk falling behind.

But our understanding of these

technologies must reflect their complexities and the power of human ingenuity. By developing and promoting AI systems that significantly improve essential services, especially in underserved regions, we could ensure that their benefits are broadly shared. To achieve this, AI technologies must be deployed with the explicit objective of reducing existing inequalities.

At the same time, it is worth noting that AI will most likely increase the overall consumer surplus by lowering the costs associated with certain services. To ensure that these benefits reach the majority of people, a two-fold strategy is necessary: enabling individuals to harness

this value locally while redistributing the overall gains to those unable to access them.

Hence, enhancing the accessibility of AI is both feasible and critical. To leverage these technologies to tackle pressing social problems, it is crucial to identify specific areas where AI can make a substantial difference, such as health care, education, environmental sustainability, and governance. But setting the right priorities and implementing technological solutions requires a concerted effort. The concept of AI for good should be integrated into the strategies of development institutions and multilateral organisations.

But first, the global conversation about AI must shift from "wow" to "what" and "how." It is time to move away from mere fascination with the emerging technology to identifying the challenges it can address and devising strategies for its integration into the educational and social systems of developed and developing countries alike. Preparing society for an AI-augmented future requires more than just technological innovation; it calls for establishing ethical frameworks, updating policymaking, and promoting AI literacy across communities.

As we navigate the Stupor Mundi phase of AI, captivated by its seemingly magical capabilities, we must never lose sight of the fact that the impact of technology depends on how we use it. The choices we make today will determine whether AI benefits and enriches a select few or evolves into a powerful force for positive social change. To realise the promise of Salvator Mundi, we must harness these emerging technologies to forge a better, more inclusive future for all. — Project Syndicate

The article was originally published by Khaleej Times





