

The Hindu

Front Page

No resolution to Sri Lanka crisis (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

Political parties in Sri Lanka are scrambling to form an all-party government, a day after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe pledged to resign in the wake of historic citizens' protest.

Sri Lankans are living through a harrowing economic collapse, with accessing essentials such as fuel, food, and medicines becoming an everyday battle

In a culmination of people's agitations spanning months, massive crowds on Saturday thronged Colombo's seafront, where anti-government protests persisted for three months over the government's failure to arrest or address the long-simmering crisis.

Demonstrators stormed the Presidential palace, the Secretariat, and the official residence of the Prime Minister, and occupied the country's seats of power, in a rare display of public fury. Arsonists torched Mr. Wickremesinghe's private residence.

The escalation of citizens' anger pushed the top two leaders to agree to step down, though neither has formally handed in his resignation. Mr. Gotabaya has informed the Speaker that he will step down on July 13. Five Cabinet Ministers have announced their resignation since.

Party leaders met on Saturday in a discussion convened by the Speaker. They sought the immediate resignation of the President and the Prime Minister, agreed that Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena be made Acting President as per the Constitution, after which Parliament be convened to elect a President from among its members, to pave way for an interim, all-party government. A flurry of political meetings followed on Sunday.

With the Rajapaksas still holding a parliamentary majority, it is not a straightforward choice for the main Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People's Power), which has nearly 50 seats in the 225-member House.

Start-ups in India brace for 'long and bitter winter' (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

With funding starting to dry up due to global macro-economic factors, the startup ecosystem in India is bracing itself for a "long and bitter winter" and potential mass lay-offs in the next 12-18 months, particularly in sectors such as Ed-tech and gaming that got a significant push during the pandemic, according to experts.

In the last quarter (April-June), start-up funding fell by about 40% to about 6-7 billion, Amit Nawka, Partner, Deals & Startups Leader, PwC India, noted, adding that prior to this, start-ups were seeing investments of about USD 10-11 billion per quarter.

"When we are talking to investors globally, there is limited visibility on when things will stabilise due to factors such as overall macro economic scenario, inflationary pressures, war and fall in the stock markets.

While no one really knows, everyone is bracing themselves for a year of low funding. Given all this, start-ups are conserving cash.

As start-ups look to extend the runway with existing funds, job losses across start-ups have been making headlines. Industry estimates peg the cumulative job losses in startups at over 10,000 so far this year.

"After an extended period of sunshine, Indian startups are now waking-up to a potentially long, bitter and cold winter. A slew of factors have led us here, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, supply chain disruptions, consequent inflationary pressures, and rising cost of capital, amongst others.

As the funding squeeze set in, the layoffs were imminent," Prabhu Ram, head of Industry Intelligence Group at CyberMedia Research told *The Hindu*.

He added that over the past years, India's strong digital boom along with the relative ease of funding fuelled the rise of Indian start-ups, and with an intent to ramp-up growth through new offerings – including products and solutions, they went on a rapid expansion of their product and tech teams.

Editorial

What ails the current approach to Ayurveda (Page no. 6)

(GS Paper 2, Health)

Ayurveda, India's traditional medicine, has been in practice for close to three millennia. Even today, this ancient system serves the health-care needs of millions of Indians.

The adaptation of a traditional knowledge-system for current use comes with its challenges, which, if dealt with lackadaisically, can endanger the welfare of its users.

A few challenges that the Ayurveda establishment has for long failed to skilfully address are discussed here.

Ayurveda's ancient treatises, for obvious reasons, cannot be expected to retain relevance in their entirety. They contain useful portions alongside obsolete ones.

Therefore, a dispassionate sifting through their contents is a prerequisite for their prudent practical use. Valuable observations relating to health promotion and illness management need to be carefully sifted from outdated theories, implausible conjectures, and socio-religious superstitions.

An example would make this point clear. While documenting its observations on the benefits of physical exercise, an Ayurveda classic notes: "A sense of ease, improved fitness, easy digestion, ideal body-weight, and handsomeness of bodily features are the benefits that would accrue from regular exercise."

These observations are as valid today as they were 1,500 years ago when they were first documented. But, such continued validity cannot be claimed for the physiological and pathological conjectures the same text contains.

On urine formation, for instance, the text posits that tiny ducts from the intestines carry urine to fill the bladder. This simplistic scheme of urine formation has no role for the kidneys at all.

Needless to say, this very outdated idea can have no place in current medical education except as an anecdote from history. Placing such conjectural ideas side by side with modern physiology and implicitly equalising the truth value of both is a serious malaise that has been plaguing the current approach to Ayurveda.

Teachers of Ayurveda physiology have the unenviable job of constantly grappling with the difficulty of reconciling ancient speculations with established scientific facts.

Two main factors — one theoretical and the other epistemological — have led to this sad situation. The tridosha theory of Ayurveda is a rough-and-ready model that the ancients devised to systematise their medical experience.

OPED

The road to productivity (Page no. 7)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

It has taken a pandemic to know how important cities are. One reason why our progress towards a \$5 trillion economy could be stifled is the pandemic-induced lockdowns in cities which play an important role in realising national and macroeconomic growth targets.

Even as early in the pandemic as April 2020, a Barclays report found that "the absolute economic loss was likely the largest from the shutdown of Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Delhi and Mumbai, ranging from \$1 billion-\$1.7 billion per week."

One aspect of cities that we know very little about, which contributes to their economic productivity, is that they are labour markets where the labour force exchanges their labour and creates knowledge spillovers.

As the famous French planner Alain Bertaud points out, a lot of economic and productive activity takes place in cities and its jobs.

There is no doubt that the commute time for the labour force to the workplace plays a very important role in determining their productivity in cities.

The travel time to work was one of the slowest in our cities in 2016: Bengaluru being the slowest at 22 km per hour, Delhi at 25 km per hour, and Chennai the highest at 33 km per hour.

Travel time continues to be long in our post-pandemic cities which are fiscally stressed and battling the problem of potholes following heavy rains.

The longer the commute time in a city, the smaller is its effective labour market and vice-versa. While the nominal labour market of the city refers to all jobs created in the metropolitan area, the effective labour market refers to the jobs accessible within a certain commute.

From the viewpoint of enlarging a city's effective labour market and economic output, it is therefore very important to keep the commute time short and commuting cost cheap within a city as it keeps growing in population.

It should be clear that a short commute is desirable not only from the micro perspective of the commuter who otherwise wastes time, health and productivity with the delays in traffic, but also from a macro, city-level perspective, to enable a large effective labour market. In this context, it is instructive to note that in the pre-pandemic period, firms in Bengaluru threatened to leave the city and relocate if the traffic problems were not fixed, as it was affecting the productivity of their employees.

Explainer

Twitter's petition on Section 69A of the IT Act (Page no. 8) (GS Paper 2, Governance)

On July 5, microblogging platform Twitter moved the Karnataka High Court seeking to set aside multiple blocking orders of the Central government as well as to alter their directions to identify specific violative content than imposing a blanket ban on individual accounts.

According to Twitter, the blocking orders were "procedurally and substantially" non-compliant with Section 69A of the Information Technology Act (IT Act).

The U.S.-headquartered tech company had been speaking to the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology since May about a reconsideration of some of the blocking orders.

However, in June the Ministry gave it a last opportunity to comply with the orders, setting out serious consequence for non-compliance. *The Hindu* learnt from a source privy to the development that it was owing to the seriousness of these warnings that Twitter filed the current writ petition challenging several of the blocking orders.

Responding to the development, Minister of State for Information and Technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar stated that while all foreign intermediaries have the right to judicial review, they also have the unambiguous obligation to comply with Indian laws.

Section 69A of the IT Act empowers the government to restrict access to any content in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of the country, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or for public order.

All directions to restrict information or content in circulation must be recorded in writing. Social media intermediaries failing to comply with the regulations are liable to be monetarily penalised along with an imprisonment term which may extend up to seven years.

The procedures for executing the provisions of the act are enlisted in the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009.

The ongoing dialogue between Pakistan and the TTP (Page no. 8) (GS Paper 2, International Relations)

On June 29, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, chief of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) during an interview on YouTube said that the group would not back down from its primary demand for reversal of the merger of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province in 2018.

This statement comes amid ongoing negotiations between the government of Pakistan and the TTP in Kabul with the Afghan Taliban's interim government facilitating the negotiations.

On June 2, the TTP announced an "indefinite ceasefire" given the "substantial progress" made in talks with the government during a round of meetings. This announcement came a day after a 50-member jirga (tribal council) comprising elders of major tribes and clans from KP visited Kabul and held talks with the TTP leaders.

Negotiations between the TTP and the Pakistan government have been held since 2007. However, the talks have failed to bring stability and peace.

The first round of negotiations with the TTP took place in May 2007 when a nine-point peace deal was reached wherein the TTP agreed to stop attacks on security forces and government installations.

They stated that they would not disturb peace in the region. Similar talks took place in 2008, 2011, 2013, and 2014 during which the TTP agreed to denounce militancy and condemned the elements involved in attacks on state institutions, police and other law-enforcement agencies.

The latest round of talks began in 2021 after Pakistan President Dr. Arif Alvi suggested that the government could consider giving amnesty to those members of the TTP who have not remained involved in "criminal activities" and who lay down their weapons and agree to adhere to the Constitution.

Following this, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government under Imran Khan announced that they were holding talks with the TTP so that its members may surrender and reconcile in order "to be able to live like ordinary citizens."

During the talks, aside from the TTP's primary demand for reversal of the merger, it is also insisting on the withdrawal of security forces from the tribal districts, amnesty for its fighters and the enforcement of Sharia in the Malakand Division. Conversely, the government has maintained that all negotiations would take place within the framework of the Constitution.