

Circle of life

Biodiversity assessments must be factored into all economic activity:

The overwhelming message from the global assessment report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is that human beings have so rapaciously exploited nature, and that species belonging to a quarter of all studied animal and plant groups on earth are gravely threatened. If the world continues to pursue the current model of economic growth without factoring in environmental costs, one million species could go extinct, many in a matter of decades. Catastrophic erosion of ecosystems is being driven by unsustainable use of land and water, direct harvesting of species, climate change, pollution and release of alien plants and animals in new habitats. While ecosystem losses have accelerated over the past five decades universally, there is particular worry over the devastation occurring in tropical areas, which are endowed with greater biodiversity than others; only a quarter of the land worldwide now retains its ecological and evolutionary integrity, largely spared of human impact. Nature provides ecosystem services, but these are often not included in productivity estimates: they are vital for food production, for clean air and water, provision of fuel for millions, absorption of carbon in the atmosphere, and climate moderation. The result of such skewed policies, as the IPBES estimates, is that the global rate of species extinction is at least tens to hundreds of times higher today than the average rate over the past 10 million years, and it is accelerating alarmingly.

Ecological economists have for years pointed to the extreme harm that humanity as a whole is courting by modifying terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems to suit immediate needs, such as raising agricultural and food output and extracting materials that aid ever-increasing consumption. Expanding agriculture by cutting down forests has raised food volumes, and mining feeds many industries, but these have severely affected other functions such as water availability, pollination, maintenance of wild variants of domesticated plants and climate regulation. Losses from pollution are usually not factored into claims of economic progress made by countries, but as the IPBES assessment points out, marine plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980, affecting at least 267 species, including 86% of marine turtles, 44% of seabirds and 43% of marine mammals. At the same time, about 9% of 6,190 domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had gone extinct by 2016, and another 1,000 may disappear permanently. Viewed against a shrinking base of wild varieties of farmed plants and animals, all countries have cause for alarm. They are rapidly emptying their genetic resource kit. Reversing course is a dire necessity to stave off disaster. This can be done by incorporating biodiversity impacts into all economic activity, recognising that irreparably breaking the web of life will impoverish and endanger people everywhere.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Rapacious	Adjective	grasping, greedy, avaricious, covetous, acquisitive
Gravely		deeply, seriously
Threaten		Menace, Frighten, intimidate, low down
Extinct		Vanished, lost, died out, gone
Catastrophic		Disastrous, calamitous, cataclysmic
Erosion		Deterioration, abrasion, weathering
Endowed with		bestowed with, gifted with
Skewed		Unbalanced, askew, lopsided
Court	Verb	attract, curry favour with, run after, seek, wqo
Terrestrial		Earthly, worldly, mundane, earthbound
Aid	Verb	Help, assist, abet
Pollination		Fertilization

Dire

Extremely serious/urgent

Impoverish

Make (a person/area) poor.

Endless war

The U.S. must put pressure on the Taliban to heed the Afghan government's concerns:

A call by Afghanistan's Loya Jirga, a grand assembly of senior politicians and tribal and religious leaders, for a ceasefire between government troops and the Taliban underscores the mood in Kabul. Afghanistan's leaders, from its rulers to tribal chieftains, want to resolve the 17-year-long conflict. Over a four-day meeting that ended on May 2, the Jirga asked the government to set up a negotiating team with members from the assembly for talks with the insurgents. It also backed women's rights, a critical issue being debated by the political class amid the Taliban's rising clout. President Ashraf Ghani has said his government would honour the assembly's proposals, but wants the ceasefire to be mutual. The Taliban, for its part, immediately shot down the proposal, vowing to continue attacks through the Ramzan month. Without the Taliban's reciprocity, no ceasefire will hold. The group controls half of Afghanistan and has shown its capacity to strike anywhere, including in the most fortified of locations. It has also been engaged in direct talks with the U.S. for months. But the peace talks haven't prevented the Taliban from carrying out its summer offensive against the government. By rejecting the Loya Jirga proposal, the Taliban has once again made it clear that it is not ready yet to engage with the government in Kabul.

The Taliban's intransigence has darkened the prospects for peace. The talks between Taliban representatives and Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. special representative, are primarily focussed on withdrawing foreign troops from Afghanistan. The U.S. seeks, in return, an assurance that Afghanistan will not provide a safe haven to transnational terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. But for an eventual settlement of the Afghan crisis, the government and the Taliban need to talk. The war has long been in a stalemate. But the government and the Taliban see different ways out. The government is willing to engage the insurgents, a move which has now been endorsed by the Loya Jirga as well. But the Taliban, like any other successful insurgent group, wants to prolong the conflict, hoping that it can weaken the government's morale and reduce its military strength. The Taliban will change tack only if it is forced to do so militarily or through pressure. The government lacks the resources to accomplish either. It cannot defeat the Taliban militarily, as the 17 years of the war suggest. It cannot forge peace on the Taliban's terms as it would mean endangering whatever few freedoms the Afghans enjoy right now. This resource deficit can be bridged only with the help of the international community. The U.S., which is in talks with the Taliban, should not overlook the interests of Kabul. It must put pressure on the Taliban to cease hostilities and engage with Mr. Ghani's government.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Troop		Group (soldiers)
Troupe		Group (musicians and politicians)
Resolve		Settle, sort-out, solve, deal with
Insurgent		Rebellious, revolutionary, mutinous
Clout		Influence, power
Vow		Promise, pledge
Reciprocity		Mutuality
Fortify		Enkindle, energize, engender
Intransigent		Inflexible, unbending
Stalemate		Full stop, impasse
Endorse		Support, buttress, advocate
Prolong		Continue

Just recompense:
Compensation for Bilkis Bano underlines the state's obligation for horrific crimes:

Compensation to victims is a relatively less recognised component of criminal justice. In a system that focusses mainly on the accused, an order of compensation is a recognition of the state's obligation to victims of crime, especially horrific acts. In ordering the Gujarat government to pay ₹50 lakh to Bilkis Yakoob Rasool Bano, a gang-rape survivor of the 2002 communal pogrom in the State who has bravely fought her case, the Supreme Court has endeavoured to achieve recitative justice. Handing over the fine amounts paid by the accused as part of their sentence is one aspect of such justice; another aspect is for the court to ask the government to compensate the victim from its own coffers. A group of rioters had raped her as well as two other women, and killed seven members of her family at Randhikpur village on March 3, 2002. The court noted that she had the misfortune of witnessing her daughter being smashed against a wall, as well as the devastation suffered by her family. She was also pregnant at the time of the incident. Further, the court was told that she was leading an itinerant, hand-to-mouth existence. It is in these circumstances that the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi awarded her Rs.50 lakh, besides asking the State government to provide her with a government job and a house.

Ms. Bano's case is indeed a rare one: criminal prosecution resulted in conviction and life sentences to 11 persons. The sentences were upheld by the Bombay High Court. Further, the court found deliberate inaction on the part of some police officers and that the autopsies were perfunctory and manipulated. The Supreme Court has asked for the pension benefits of three police officers to be withdrawn. In short, this is a concrete instance of state inaction and negligence that would normally justify the payment of a hefty compensation. Not every crime would have a similar set of circumstances. While convictions are not easy to come by in cases of mob violence, victim compensation may often be the only way to ensure some justice. The Code of Criminal Procedure was amended in 2008 to insert Section 357A under which every State government has to prepare a scheme to set up a fund from which compensation can be paid to victims of crime and their dependants who have suffered loss and injury and who may require rehabilitation. The Centre has a Central Victim Compensation Fund. On Supreme Court directions, the National Legal Services Authority has prepared a compensation scheme for women victims and survivors of sexual assault and other crimes. Many States have notified schemes on these lines. While on paper there is a mechanism to assess rehabilitation needs and pay compensation, there is a need to streamline the schemes and ensure that the compensation process is not done in an ad hoc manner, but is based on sound principles.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Endeavour	Verb	try, exert, oneself, strive
Recitative	Noun	Restoration, reparation, returning
Coffers	Noun	Funds, money, finances
Itinerant	Adjective	Travelling, wandering, peripatetic, roving
Conviction		Noun Declaration of guilt, Sentence, Judgement/opinion/confidence
Deliberate		International/careful/systematic
Autopsies	Noun	Post mortem, necropsy
Perfunctory	Adjective	Quick, brief, hurried, desultory
Manipulate	Verb	Operate/massage/control/falsify.
Hefty	Adjective	Burly, heavy, violent, sturdy/large, excessive
Rehabilitation	Noun	Recondition, restoring, renovation, restoration
Streamline	Verb	Run, smoothly, be efficient, run well
Ad hoc	Adjective	temporary, casual, transient, fleeting

Parallel probes:

It is reassuring that there will be no parallel inquiries into the two sets of allegations that have rocked the Supreme Court. Justice (retired) A.K. Patnaik, who has been tasked with probing an alleged conspiracy against the Chief Justice of India, has made the right decision by choosing to wait for the end of the in-house inquiry into a former woman employee's complaint of sexual harassment by the CJI and subsequent victimisation, before starting his work. The court constituted two inquiries to deal with the situation following the complaint against the CJI. A three-judge Bench, passing orders on a matter concerning the independence of the judiciary, appointed Justice Patnaik to investigate the affidavits filed by Utsav Singh Bains, an advocate, who has alleged a larger conspiracy against the CJI involving disgruntled court employees and other 'fixers'. On the administrative side, an in-house committee headed by Justice S.A. Bobde will look into the complaint of the dismissed woman court assistant. The Bench emphasised that the probe into the alleged plot would not impinge on the harassment complaint. However, it was obvious that it would not be possible for such parallel proceedings to be independent of each other. Mr. Bains has alleged he was offered up to Rs.1.50 crore by someone to file a false complaint against the CJI. It would have been well nigh impossible to verify the claim without examining if the intermediaries had any nexus with the complainant.

Clearly, the complaint of sexual harassment should get priority. It is only if the complaint is found to be false that there will be a case to probe whether it was part of a plot to malign the CJI, or a conspiracy. It is unfortunate that the composition of the in-house committee became a controversy. There was concern that there was only one woman member, and the complainant raised the issue of the proximity of one of its members, Justice N.V. Ramana, with the CJI. He has now recused himself to make way for another woman judge. The episode has highlighted the lacuna in the in-house procedure the judges have adopted. There is no provision to deal with a situation where the CJI is the subject of a complaint. Also, the idea of the inquiry being wholly 'in-house' is in conflict with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, which envisages the presence of an external member. Despite this shortcoming, the committee should try to ensure a fair hearing for the former employee. The dignity and institutional integrity of the judiciary will be better served by probing the veracity of her charge, rather than by pursuing evidence for sweeping claims that "the rich and the powerful" are trying to run the courts.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Disgruntled	Adjective	Dissatisfied, resentful, unhappy, annoyed
Impinge on		Affect/encroach, intrude, trespass, violate
Proceedings	Noun	reports/events, activities, happenings
Well-nigh		near
Nexus		connection, (negative sense), secret agreement
Malign	Verb	impugn, criticize, reprimand, lecture
Proximity	Adjective	closeness, nearness, propinquity
Recuse		Deny, refuse, rebut
Lacuna		Scarcity, meagre, dearth/gap, hiatus
Envisage		Foresec, predict, forecast, anticipate
Probe		investigation, enquiry
Veracity		Truthfulness.