

OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

"The goal of social justice and all round development can't be achieved through ideas but actions."
Mehiel Alber

INDIA'S PLACE ON HUNGER INDEX CAUSE OF WORRY



Despite the Modi government's ongoing policy of providing free rations to marginalized sections, India's ranking in the 2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI) remains concerning. With a score of 27.3, the country finds itself in the "serious" category, alongside Pakistan and Afghanistan. This is a troubling reality for a nation that has made strides in economic growth and social welfare schemes. In 2023 too, India was in the "serious" category with a score of 28.7. The free ration policy has undoubtedly provided relief to millions, particularly during the pandemic. However, the GHI score indicates that food distribution alone cannot address the deeper issues of hunger and malnutrition. Structural problems such as unequal access to healthcare, sanitation, and education continue to exacerbate food insecurity. To tackle hunger effectively, India needs a more comprehensive approach, including improvements in agricultural productivity, nutrition education, and social welfare reforms. The high GHI score is a wake-up call, urging a shift from short-term relief to long-term solutions.

This conspiracy theory runs afoul of reality

Even if US's college students were clamouring to study history, philosophy, sociology, literature, there are so many students and so many classes, and so many teachers, that one should expect some proof of indoctrination to emerge at some point, somewhere

According to Tim Sheehy, the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate in Montana, young people have been "indoctrinated" on the issue of abortion.

"Young people, listen up, they've been indoctrinated for too long. We don't even try to talk to them anymore," Sheehy said at an event last year.

This idea, that young voters have been indoctrinated — or even brainwashed — to reject Republicans and conservative ideas has significant purchase on the political right. Last month, responding to suggestions that institutions were controlled by left-wing ideologues, Dan Crenshaw, the pugilistic Republican congressman from Texas, declared that "the left" had "turned higher education into a tool for indoctrination, rather than education" and that "the right needs to fight back" and "challenge the ideological chokehold on education" lest "woke elites" keep "pushing irrational leftist ideas."

And last year, Elon Musk told his more than 100 million followers on the social platform X that "parents don't realize the Soviet level of indoctrination that their children are receiving in elite high schools & colleges!"

It is easy to understand the real fear, among ordinary Americans, that once your children are outside the home, they will take on ideas and identities that don't fit with what you imagined for their lives. But that is not what we have here. What we have here, coming from these conservative and Republican voices, is the paranoid assertion that the nation's institutions of higher education are engaged in a long-running effort to indoctrinate students and extinguish conservatism.

The problem with this conspiracy theory, of course, is reality. To start, the vast majority of young people attending institutions of higher education in the United States are not enrolled in elite colleges and universities. They are

not even enrolled in competitive or selective institutions. Instead, most college kids attend less selective schools where the most popular degree programs are ones like business or nursing or communications — not the ever-shrinking number of humanities majors blamed for the supposed indoctrination of young people.

And even if the nation's college students were clamoring to study history, philosophy, sociology, literature and other, similar disciplines, there are so many students and so many classes — and so many teachers — that one should expect some proof of indoctrination to emerge at some point, somewhere. But even those conservative organizations devoted to tracking and monitoring college professors struggle to find evidence of anything that looks like the Soviet-style brainwashing described by Musk and other MAGA conservatives.

If, as the latest youth poll from the Harvard Institute of Politics suggests, most young people in the United States reject the Republican Party's views on abortion or climate change or health care or gun regulation, it's less because they've been indoctrinated to oppose ideological conservatism and more because, like all voters, they have come to certain conclusions about the world based on their experience of it. A young woman looking ahead to her future doesn't have to be brainwashed to decide that she wants the right to decide when and whether to have a child. A young man with memories of school shootings on the news and shooter drills at school doesn't need to be indoctrinated to decide that he wants more gun control.

If Republicans are underwater with young people, it's because Republicans are not responsive to the interests of young people. For example, polls consistently show that climate change is a top issue for young voters. But not only do Republican politicians deny the reality of man-made climate change, they actively spread lies

and conspiracy theories meant to obscure the reality that climate change is responsible for some of the heightened intensity of weather events like hurricanes Helene and Milton.

You can make this same observation with a host of different issues on which young people diverge from the Republican Party. They haven't been indoctrinated; they just have needs and desires that Republicans refuse to acknowledge or appeal to. It's the same with any group of voters. That's just the way democracy works.

But Republicans have made democracy a dirty word. And they seem to have given up on persuasion in favor of trying to win power through the brute force exploitation of the political system. Why win over voters when you can gerrymander your party into a permanent legislative majority? Why try to persuade voters to reject a referendum you disagree with when you can try, instead, to change the rules and kill the referendum before it can get on the ballot? Why aim to win a broad national majority when you can win — or try to snatch — a narrow victory in the swing states?

The defining attribute of the modern Republican Party, beyond its devotion to Donald Trump, is a profound lack of confidence in its ability to compete for a majority of the country at large married with an inability to see outside its ideological cocoon. Republicans both reject the idea that voters could have a legitimate dispute with their views and do not seem to believe that the public in question has been indoctrinated or brainwashed or led astray, in one way or another, from the supposedly pure light of the Republican Party.

But the truth is so much simpler. Republicans have tied themselves to the far extremes of the conservative movement — and most voters just don't like it.

BY-JAMELLE BOUIE

Submerged nuclear submarine of China: Testimony of its another failure

The Chinese military has been undergoing significant modernisation efforts since the late 1980s, a trend that has accelerated notably since Xi Jinping assumed leadership. This transformation is evident in China's assertive behaviour in various disputed territories, such as the South China Sea and along its borders with India.

Additionally, China has established itself as a prominent supplier of arms to developing nations in the Global South, ranking among the top exporters of weapons to several countries in Africa and Asia. However, incidents involving failures of Chinese military technology have also surfaced.

Recently, a report from The Wall Street Journal revealed that a Chinese nuclear submarine sank near Wuhan. According to US officials, this incident occurred between May and June, and there are claims that Chinese authorities are attempting to suppress information regarding the event.

The Zhou-class submarine, one of China's earliest nuclear-powered vessels, featured a distinctive X-shaped stern designed to enhance its manoeuvrability. Constructed by the state-owned China State Shipbuilding Corporation, it was undergoing final equipment checks on the Yangtze River before its intended deployment.

This incident represents a significant setback for China's military modernisation ambitions and its aggressive stance towards neighbouring countries. This is not an isolated case; numerous nations have reported serious issues with Chinese weaponry after procurement.

Mediocre Chinese Weapons Worldwide China has supplied substandard military equipment to one of its closest allies, Pakistan. Currently grappling with inflation and a declining economic situation, Pakistan stands as the largest buyer of Chinese military hardware, with China accounting for 77 per cent of its arms imports.

However, several of the weapons provided by China have exhibited significant deficiencies. The Pakistani Navy acquired multi-role frigates, including the F-22P Zulfiqar class vessels: PNS Shamsheer, PNS Saif, and PNS Aslat, which were commissioned in 2009. These frigates have encountered numerous issues primarily related to their diesel engines, which suffer from high turbocharged exhaust temperatures that limit their speed capabilities.

Additionally, engines three and four have experienced various problems, including faulty cooling systems. Further complications arose with Zulfiqar's search and track radar and its single-barrel 70 mm cannon, both of which malfunctioned and restricted the ships' overall operational effectiveness. Another vessel, PNS Saif, was found to have a malfunctioning HP5 stabiliser gyro. For these frigates, China received an impressive payment of \$750 million.

Algeria, an African nation, has encountered three incidents linked to its acquisition of Chinese CH-4B drones. In 2016, a Chinese state-owned firm sold VN-4 armoured personnel carriers to Kenya, resulting in fatalities among Kenyan military personnel.

Nigeria has also raised concerns regarding problems with its F-7 fighter jets, which it purchased from China in 2009. Similarly, the West Asian country of Jordan was compelled to divest all six CH-4B drones just three years after their acquisition due to persistent technical issues. China is responsible for supplying 74 per cent of Bangladesh's military equipment, which encompasses ships, aircraft, and artillery. However, Bangladesh has faced difficulties with the KW Jets procured from China; nine of these jets were acquired in 2014, followed by an additional seven in 2020.

A serious incident occurred in July 2018 near Jassore airport involving one of the earlier K8 aircraft batches.

During the introduction of the subsequent batch in 2020, two jets encountered problems during initial firing tests with loaded ammunition. Similar complaints have been reported by other nations purchasing arms from China, including Nepal and Myanmar.

According to the SIPRI World Factbook 2022, China ranks as the fourth largest exporter of military equipment and arms globally. This notable position is not attributed to the quality of the weapons sold but rather to highly competitive pricing and a lack of stringent requirements from purchasing nations.

This approach allows authoritarian regimes to procure arms from China more readily than from democratic countries.

Conclusion China has long positioned itself as the most influential nation in Asia, second only to the United States in global competition. However, all major powers bear responsibilities towards their citizens and allies. Military equipment and associated technologies are crucial for the security of any sovereign state, yet China has repeatedly compromised this aspect by supplying substandard weapons to its partners.

BY-Lt Col JS Sodh

Is well water tested and safe for use in the USA?

About 23 million US households depend on private wells as their primary drinking water source. These homeowners are entirely responsible for ensuring that the water from their wells is safe for human consumption.

Multiple studies show that, at best, half of private well owners are testing with any frequency, and very few households test once or more yearly, as public health officials recommend. Even in Iowa, which has some of the strongest state-level policies for protecting private well users, state funds for free private water quality testing regularly go unspent. Is the water these households are drinking safe? There's not much systematic evidence, but the risks may be large.

The US Environmental Protection Agency still relies on a 15-year-old study showing that among 2,000 households, 1 in 5 households' well water contained at least one contaminant at levels above the thresholds that public water systems must meet. While other researchers have studied this issue, most rely on limited data or data collected over decades to draw conclusions.

I'm an economist studying energy and agriculture issues. In a recent study, I worked with colleagues at Iowa State University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Cornell University to understand drinking water-related behaviours and perceptions of households that use private wells. We focused on rural Iowa, where runoff from agricultural production regu-

larly contaminates public and private drinking water sources. We found that few households followed public health guidance on testing their well water, but a simple intervention — sending them basic information about drinking water hazards and easy-to-use testing materials — increased testing rates. The burden of dealing with contamination, however, falls largely on individual households.

Nitrate risks We focused on nitrate, one of the main well water pollutants in rural areas. Major sources include chemical fertilisers, animal waste and human sewage. Drinking water that contains nitrate can harm human health. Using contaminated water to prepare infant formula can cause "blue baby syndrome," a condition in which infants' hands and lips turn bluish because nitrate interferes with oxygen transport in the babies' blood. Severe cases can cause lethargy, seizures and even death. The EPA limits nitrate levels in public water systems to 10 milligrams per litre to prevent this effect.

Studies have also found that for people of all ages, drinking water with low nitrate concentrations over long periods of time is strongly associated with chronic health diseases, including colorectal cancer and thyroid disease, as well as neural tube defects in developing fetuses.

Nitrate pollution is pervasive across the continental US. Fortunately, it is relatively easy to determine whether

water contains unsafe nitrate concentrations. Test strips, similar to those used in swimming pools, are cheap and readily available.

The water's fine...or not Mailing lists of households with private wells are hard to come by, so for our study we digitised over 22,000 addresses using maps from 14 Iowa counties. We targeted counties where public water systems had struggled to meet EPA safety standards for nitrate in drinking water, and where private wells that had been tested over the past 20 years showed nitrate concentrations at concerning levels. We received responses from over half of the households we surveyed. Of those, just over 8,100 (37%) used private wells.

Although the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention recommends testing annually for nitrate, just 9% of these households had tested their water quality in the past year. More concerning, 40% of this group used their wells for drinking water, had not tested it in the past year, and did not filter the water or use other sources such as bottled water. They were drinking straight from the tap without knowing whether their water was safe.

Our survey also showed that, despite living in high-risk areas, 77% of households classified their well water quality as "good" or "great." This may be driven by a "not in my backyard" mentality. Households in our survey were more likely to agree with the statement that nitrate is a problem in the state of Iowa than to perceive

nitrate as a problem in their local area. Climate change is likely to worsen nitrate contamination in well water. In regions including the Great Lakes basin, increases in heavy rainfall are projected to carry rising amounts of nutrients from farmlands into waterways and groundwater.

Providing information and tools helps

To see whether education and access to testing materials could change views about well water, we sent a mailer containing a nitrate test strip, information about risks associated with nitrate in drinking water, and contact information for a free water quality testing program run by the state of Iowa to a random 50% of respondents from our first survey. We then resurveyed all households, whether or not they received the mailer.

Over 40% of households that received test strips reported that they had tested their water, compared with 24% of those that did not receive the mailer. The number of respondents who reported using Iowa's free testing program also increased, from 10% to 13%, a small but statistically meaningful impact.

Less encouragingly, households that received the mailer were no more likely to report filtering or avoiding their water than those that did not receive the mailer.

Households bear the burden Our results show that lack of information makes people less likely to test their well water for nitrate or other contaminants. At least for nitrate,

helping households overcome this barrier is cheap. We asked respondents about their willingness to pay for the program and found that the average household was willing to pay as much as US\$13 for a program that would cost the state roughly \$5 to implement.

However, we could not determine whether our outreach decreased households' exposure to contaminated drinking water. It's also not clear whether people would be as willing to test their well water in states such as Wisconsin or Oregon, where testing would cost them up to a few hundred dollars.

As of 2024, just 24 states offered well water testing kits for at least one contaminant that were free or cost \$100 or less. And while most states offer information about well water safety, some simply post a brochure online.

The upshot is that rural households are bearing the costs associated with unsafe well water, either through health care burdens or spending for treatment and testing. Policymakers have been slow to address the main source of this problem: nitrate pollution from agriculture.

In one exception, state agencies in southeastern Minnesota are providing free well water quality testing and offering a few households filtration systems in cases where their wells are laden with nitrate from local agricultural sources. However, this effort began only after environmental advocates petitioned the EPA. If state and federal agencies tracked more systematically the costs to households of dealing with contaminated water, the scale of the burden would be clearer. Government agencies could use this information in cost-benefit assessments of conservation programs.

BY-Gabriel Lade