

DOWRY DEATHS

The deaths of two young women - one in Madhya Pradesh and another in Uttar Pradesh - at their matrimonial homes - has shocked the nation. Both the cases fall in the ambit of Dowry deaths and domestic Violence and reflects the inherent contradictions of Indian society where on one hand a daughter (in-law) is the powerful entity of Laxmi and on the other, also the most abused one in the family. Not that it's new but one wonders why educated and empowered women have to end up on funeral pyres when their marriage doesn't work or dowry is demanded by greedy in-laws. Women in urban centers are today educated, and know their rights but still face this kind of end. The problem rises from the society that we have evolved into. With the families getting finally wealthier, the greed for turning relationships transactional has grown proportionately. Where should the change begin?

The youth can be harbinger of change in society. While the Gen G is busy with entertainment, career growth and enjoying freedoms, this generation must come forward against dowry deaths. However, it was shocking to see the muted response of this generation on social media over the two recent deaths of young women. The youth don't feel outraged and they never express shock and dismay over such tragedies. Have the youth become too engrossed in work, corporate culture and career growth to not be in touch with realities leave along changing them. The youth will have to take responsibility of their lives and not leave it to their parents to arrange their marriages in a transactional way. Another reason for weddings turning into a burden for the bride and her parents and therefore making it hard for them to end an abusive relationship is the ever growing size of the big fat Indian wedding. Gen Z is not helping curb this trend too.

World Bee Day: Saving pollinators for food Security

Satendra Singh

Every year on May 20, the world observes World Bee Day to raise awareness about the vital role played by bees and other pollinators in sustaining ecosystems, biodiversity, agriculture, and human welfare. Though tiny in size, bees are among the most important living creatures on Earth. Forests, flowering plants, fruits, vegetables, and agricultural crops all depend significantly on these silent workers for survival through the process of pollination. The growing decline in bee populations across the globe is therefore not merely an environmental concern, but a warning signal about the future of food security, ecological balance, and sustainable development. While working as a disaster management and climate resilience expert in the agriculture sectors across several countries, I witnessed firsthand how climate change, environmental degradation, and unsustainable development practices are affecting agricultural systems. Among the less discussed yet deeply alarming issues is the rapid depletion of pollinators, particularly bees.

Their disappearance threatens not only agriculture but also the resilience of ecosystems that sustain life itself. Most people associate bees mainly with honey production. However, their contribution extends far beyond honey. Bees are among nature's most efficient pollinators and are essential for the reproduction of flowering plants. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, more than three-fourths of the world's food crops depend, at least partially, on pollination, while nearly 90 percent of flowering plants rely on animal pollinators. Pollination is a natural process through which pollen grains are transferred from one flower to another, enabling fertilization and seed formation. Bees perform this process with remarkable efficiency while collecting nectar and pollen. Their activities directly support the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, oilseeds, pulses, spices, medicinal plants, and nuts.

In India, crops such as mustard, sunflower, apple, almond, cucumber, pumpkin, litchi, coffee, and cardamom benefit



enormously from bee pollination. Several forest trees and wildflowers also depend on pollinators for regeneration and survival. Scientific studies indicate that pollinators influence nearly one-third of global food production. Their contribution extends beyond agriculture to maintaining forests, grasslands, and natural ecosystems that support countless species of wildlife. Healthy ecosystems enriched by pollinators also improve climate resilience by enhancing soil fertility, supporting water cycles, and reducing vulnerability to droughts, floods, and land degradation. Bees are therefore not merely pollinators; they are silent protectors of ecological stability.

The connection between bees and biodiversity is equally significant. Biodiversity ensures ecological balance, and bees play a central role in preserving this balance by enabling the reproduction of flowering plants that sustain food chains and wildlife habitats. A healthy bee population reflects a healthy environment, while declining pollinator populations indicate environmental stress and ecological imbalance. There are more than 20,000 known species of bees worldwide, many of which have evolved alongside local ecosystems and vegetation. Yet urbanization, deforestation, industrial expansion, monoculture farming, and land degradation are rapidly destroying their natural habitats. Monoculture agriculture, in particular, has

emerged as a major challenge. Large-scale cultivation of a single crop reduces floral diversity, limiting the availability of nectar and pollen sources throughout the year. Similarly, rapid urbanization and shrinking green spaces deprive bees of nesting and feeding habitats. Such ecological stress weakens the resilience of ecosystems, making them more vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

The importance of bees becomes even greater in the context of food security. A significant proportion of global agriculture depends directly or indirectly on pollination. Pollinator-dependent crops provide essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients necessary for human health. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, nearly one-third of the food consumed by humans depends on pollinators such as bees. For developing nations like India, pollinators are especially crucial for small and marginal farmers. Effective pollination improves crop yield, enhances quality, increases farm incomes, and strengthens rural livelihoods.

Sustainable agriculture cannot succeed without the conservation of ecosystems that support pollinators. Beekeeping and apiculture also provide important livelihood opportunities for rural and tribal communities. Climate change remains one of the most dangerous and complex. One of the most alarming impacts is the mismatch between flowering seasons and pol-

linator activity. Due to rising temperatures, many plants are blooming earlier than usual, while bees may not adapt quickly enough to these shifts in seasonal cycles. As a result, pollination becomes less effective. Extreme weather events further damage pollinator habitats and reduce nectar availability. Agrochemicals affect bees' nervous systems, immunity, navigation abilities, and reproductive health. Often, bees exposed to pesticides fail to return to their colonies. The decline of bees should therefore be viewed as a warning from nature.

A world with declining pollinator populations will face reduced agricultural productivity, food shortages, nutritional insecurity, biodiversity loss, and increasing ecological instability. Economically, reduced pollination directly impacts farmers' incomes, especially in countries heavily dependent on climate-sensitive agriculture. Ecologically, the disappearance of pollinators weakens soil conservation, carbon absorption, and water regulation systems, making communities more vulnerable to environmental disasters. Protecting bees requires urgent collective action at international, national, and local levels. Agriculture must become more pollinator-friendly by reducing pesticide use and promoting sustainable alternatives such as organic farming and integrated pest management. Conservation of forests, wetlands, and grasslands must become a priority, alongside the plantation of native flowering species that support pollinators. Ultimately, although bees are small creatures, their contribution to sustaining life on Earth is immeasurable. Their declining populations reflect disruption of nature's balance.

World Bee Day should therefore not merely be a symbolic celebration, but a global call for sustainable action. Protecting bees means protecting biodiversity, agriculture, climate resilience, food security, and ultimately the future of humanity itself.

The writer is former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, Government of India; Views presented are personal.

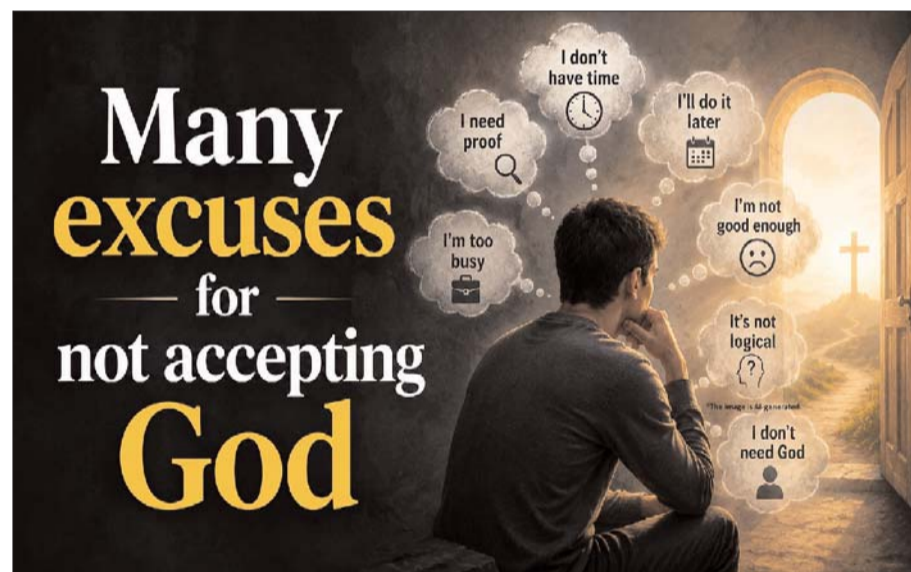
MANY EXCUSES FOR NOT ACCEPTING GOD

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

My aged mother, living in one of the six states that went to the Assembly polls, was unsure whether she would cast her ballot this time because of poor health. Yet members of a certain party arranged her commute to the polling booth, where she was told she could not vote because she had misplaced her Aadhaar card. Strangely, she was not disappointed. In her words, "It doesn't matter who comes to power. They are all the same." Still, she and my late father had always shown allegiance to the Congress party and voted for the "hand", regardless of the candidate. Their loyalty was less about ideology and more about history and habit.

For many people like me, national politics is not central to everyday life. It appears in fragments - television debates, newspaper headlines or snippets overheard in conversation. To those deeply invested in politics, this may seem like indifference towards democracy or a lack of strong views about governance. But that is not entirely true.

Many who consider themselves apolitical stay away from mainstream political discourse because of the confusion, disillusionment and fatigue it creates. It often brings to mind George Orwell's Animal Farm, where ideals of equality and justice slowly



collapse into hypocrisy and moral decay. Time and again, political systems appear trapped in this cycle. Even newer political entrants that promised reform and clean governance eventually seem vulnerable to the same compromises they once criticised. This raises an uncomfortable question: is genuine political change sustainable in a world quietly driven by self-interest behind public-good rhetoric? The repeated cycle of hope and disappointment reinforces the popular belief that "all are the same", push-

ing many people away from the theatre of politics. Adding to this spectacle is the growing trend of celebrity politics, where film stars can become political heavyweights overnight, often because of public adoration rather than political credentials. Vijay continues Tamil Nadu's long tradition of blending cinema with politics, turning elections into dramatic public events. Whether his entry will truly reshape the State's political landscape remains uncertain.

For most ordinary citizens, however, pol-

itics is ultimately judged by stability and governance. People care less about who rules and more about whether governments improve daily life. Employment, safety, healthcare, education and economic relief matter more than ideological slogans. Political parties may champion grand principles, but unless citizens feel protected and supported, party names and leaders gradually lose significance.

Being ideologically neutral does not mean being ignorant or opinionless. For many, it is simply a refusal to be boxed into rigid political identities. Political parties demand loyalty and fixed alignment, while individuals often hold complex and even contradictory beliefs. A person can value secularism and equality simultaneously without subscribing entirely to one political camp. Yet modern political discourse increasingly pushes people to choose sides and follow strict ideological lines.

As a result, many prefer distance - not from public issues themselves, but from the insistence that they must think in only one prescribed direction. They are anti-political; they are merely quieter participants in democracy. Their silence should not be mistaken for apathy. Often, it reflects a belief that thoughtful engagement does not always need to be loud, partisan or confrontational.

Italy and India: A strategic partnership for the Indo-Mediterranean

Narendra Modi | Giorgia Meloni

The relationship between India and Italy has now reached a decisive stage. In recent years, our ties have expanded with unprecedented momentum, evolving from a cordial friendship into a special strategic partnership grounded in the values of freedom and democracy, and a common vision for the future.

At a time when the international system is undergoing a profound change, the partnership between Italy and India is guided by regular exchanges at higher political and institutional levels, and is gaining a new and higher dimension that combines our economic dynamism, societal creativity, and millennia-old civilisational wisdom. Our cooperation mirrors our shared awareness that prosperity and security in the 21st century will be shaped by the ability of nations to innovate, manage energy transitions, and strengthen strategic sovereignty. To this end, we have committed to deepen and diversify our bilateral relationship with a view to pursuing new objectives and pooling our complementary strengths. We aim to forge a powerful synergy between Italian design, manufacturing

excellence, and world-class supercomputers - reflecting Italy's position as an industrial powerhouse - and India's rapid economic growth, engineering talent, scale, and innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem with over 100 unicorns and 200,000 startups. This is not a simple integration, but a co-creation of value where our respective industrial strengths amplify one another.

The Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India paves the way for increased trade and investment in both directions. We want to reach and exceed the Euro 20 billion target for trade between Italy and India by 2029, with a focus on defence & aerospace, clean technologies, machinery, automotive components, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, agri-food, tourism and more.

"Made in Italy" has always been synonymous with excellence worldwide, and today it finds a natural synergy with the high-quality goals of the "Make in India" initiative. In this context, the growing interest of Italian businesses in the production for India and the increasing presence of Indian industries in Italy, numbering over 1000 from both sides now, is a positive sign that will strengthen the integration of our supply chains.

Technological innovation lies at the

very heart of our partnership. The coming decades will be shaped by a technological revolution of unmeasurable scope, marked by advances in sectors such as Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals, and digital infrastructure. India's dynamic innovation ecosystem, coupled with highly skilled professional talent pool, and Italy's advanced industrial capabilities make our cooperation in the above sectors both natural and strategic. The growing partnership between our Universities and Research Centres will support this. India's Digital Public Infrastructure is already finding resonance with a large number of countries particularly in the Global South. Artificial Intelligence, in particular, is already impacting our societies and the global economy. Italy and India have long been collaborating to ensure that AI development is responsible and human-centred. From this perspective, India and Italy also see AI as a powerful instrument for inclusive development, especially for the Global South, where digital public infrastructure and accessible, multilingual technologies can bridge divides rather than deepen them. Building on India's vision of MANAV - putting human at the centre of technology - and Italy's leadership in promoting a hu-

man-centric 'algor-ethics' rooted in its humanist tradition, our partnership seeks to ensure that AI acts as a catalyst for social empowerment. Our approach combines India's digital scale with Italy's ethical and industrial expertise, ensuring technology serves human dignity. By sharing best practices in secure digital cooperation, capacity-building and resilient cyber infrastructure, we aim to create an open, trustworthy and equitable digital space in which every nation can shape and benefit from AI.

This perspective forms the core of Italy's G7 Presidency and outcomes of the AI Impact Summit 2026, held in New Delhi. Conceiving AI as a tool created by humans for humans means firmly asserting that technology cannot replace individuals or undermine their fundamental rights, nor be used to manipulate public debate or alter democratic processes. Our approach to defending freedom and human dignity in an increasingly interconnected world hinges on this very challenge.

Security and stability remain essential to ensuring nations' prosperity. Italy and India intend to further strengthen their cooperation in sectors such as defence, security and strategic technologies. Our collaboration will help ensure the security of critical maritime routes, strengthen

resilience in the face of threats, such as terrorism, international criminal networks, drug trafficking, cybercrimes and human trafficking.

Energy is another key pillar of our partnership. The global transition towards diversified energy sources requires innovation, investment, and cooperation. India and Italy are collaborating from renewable energy to hydrogen technologies, and from smart grids to resilient infrastructure. While India's push for becoming a hub for Green Hydrogen exports offers immense potential, it perfectly complements Italy's advanced technology in renewable infrastructure and its strategic role as an energy gateway for Europe. Our collaboration along with other countries in key India-led initiatives - International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) - is also important in this context.

Physical, digital and human connectivity is the thread that weaves us together. Both India and Italy are located at the very heart of two crucial hubs of the global economy, the Indo-Pacific and the Mediterranean - regions that cannot be viewed as separate spheres, but instead as increasingly interconnected spaces. As a matter of fact, we are witnessing

the emergence of what might be termed the Indo-Mediterranean, an important corridor for trade, technology, energy, data and ideas tying the Indian Ocean to Europe. It is precisely within this interconnected space that our bond naturally evolves into a special strategic partnership - one that bridges two continents and shapes new global dynamics.

We can address our shared challenges by drawing upon the profound partnership and the enduring cultural ties between our nations. Within Indian culture, the concept of "Dharma" evokes the sense of responsibility that must guide our actions, whilst the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" - the world is one family - resonates powerfully in this interconnected digital age. Such values find a natural echo in Italy's humanist tradition, rooted in the Renaissance, which highlights the dignity of each individual and the power of culture to unite peoples and societies. Our shared vision, therefore, aims to lay the foundation for a strong and forward-looking India-Italy Partnership with our people at the centre.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India and Giorgia Meloni, President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic; Views presented are personal.