

# The Hindu & BL Editorials

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### Start-ups on the move



India has moved from B2C start-ups to deep tech ones, with higher socio-economic spin-offs

As per a National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom) report on the country's tech start-up ecosystem, India is advancing fast towards becoming a global hub for innovation. India has added 1,600 new tech start-ups and a record 12 unicorns (market value of over \$1 billion) in 2020. Despite being a pandemic year, 2020 did better than 2019 when just seven unicorns were added. Overall, the Indian tech start-up base is witnessing steady annual growth at a scale of 8-10 per cent. But the biggest shift in the start-up space is the emergence of deep-tech ventures. Over 19 per cent of all start-ups are now leveraging deep-tech, against just 8 per cent in 2014.

There are three key reasons why India needs these deep-tech start-ups to grow, not only in numbers but also in terms of size and valuation. First, solutions based on deep tech solve real-life problems in areas like healthcare, fintech, agriculture, and water management. India also has its share of challenges when it comes to food, energy, water and national security. Second, deep-tech companies can offer alternative job opportunities to our engineers who were sought after by multinational tech companies but are now finding it difficult to move to research labs located out of the country due to tough visa norms. Finally, Indian deep-tech companies will help secure the country's data sovereignty.

The other significant data point from the Nasscom report is that 58 per cent of new unicorns in 2020 are B2B focused. This is a significant change from the initial rush of young entrepreneurs who were merely replicating successful business models from Silicon Valley, primarily aimed at retail consumers. While these businesses have made life easier, the reality is that Indian start-ups are way behind in terms of creating products. This could be a thing of the past soon with more Indian start-ups now focussing on creating solutions using deep-tech such as artificial intelligence, analytics, augmented reality/virtual reality, blockchain and internet of things, among others. The deep tech start-up pool is expanding at a five-year compounded annual growth rate of 41 per cent, faster than the overall ecosystem growth rate. What is also encouraging is that 50-55 per cent founders believe profitability should be given weightage alongside valuation. This will ensure that these entities will scale up with a sustainable business model. The Centre should smoothen the process of getting funds from the ₹10,000 crore start-up fund set up in 2016. Corporates and established entrepreneurs should step in to provide mentorship and guidance. The new generation start-ups could transform India's public services and propel it upwards in the software value chain.

## Private space: On public notices under Special Marriage Act

**Making public notices optional under Special Marriage Act is a relief for inter-faith couples**

The Allahabad High Court ruling that **people marrying under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, can choose not to publicise their union** with a notice 30 days in advance may not exactly be a judicial pushback against problematic anti-conversion

laws **enacted by several BJP-ruled States**. But it serves to get a major irritant out of the way of couples wanting to marry against the wishes of their parents or their immediate community. Many intercaste and inter-faith marriages have faced violent opposition from those acting in the name of community pride or those raising the **bogey of 'love jihad'**. Hindutva activists have been targeting Muslim men marrying Hindu women, especially if the women have converted to Islam prior to the marriage. The court said that mandatorily publishing a notice of the intended marriage and calling for objections violates the right to privacy. According to the new order, if a couple gives it in writing that they do not want the notice publicised, the Marriage Officer can solemnise the marriage. Under Section 5 of the Act, which enables inter-faith marriages, the couple has to give notice to the Marriage Officer; and under Sections 6 and 7, the officer has to publicise the notice and call for objections. But, in his order, Justice Vivek Chaudhary said the Act's interpretation has to be such that it upholds fundamental rights, not violate them. Laws should not invade liberty and privacy, he said, "including within its sphere freedom to choose for marriage without interference from state and non-state actors, of the persons concerned".

The HC ruling came on the plea of a Muslim woman who converted to Hinduism for marriage as the couple saw the notice period under the Special Marriage Act as an invasion of their privacy. Justice Chaudhary's remarks on 'state and non-state actors' will undoubtedly be read in the context of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, that particularly targets inter-faith marriages. This new law declares conversion of religion by marriage to be unlawful, mandates a 60-day notice to the District Magistrate and also requires the Magistrate to conduct a police inquiry to find out the explicit reason for the conversion. Enacted last November, there have been 54 arrests till date by the U.P. police. The HC ruling can now be cited across India to prevent public notices under the Special Marriage Act. Inter-faith couples will hope that when the Supreme Court hears pleas on the U.P. conversion law, it will be guided by progressive verdicts, such as the **2017 Aadhaar ruling**, on the **right to privacy as a basic right**, and the **2018 judgment on Hadiya**, upholding the student's right to choose a partner, a Muslim man in Kerala, as an essential freedom.

## Double ignominy: On the second impeachment of Donald Trump

**Second impeachment is an opportunity for Republicans to reassess the Trump presidency**

Outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump has entered the record books for being the **only American President to be impeached twice**. The moment of ignominy came after the House of Representatives passed a motion of impeachment against him, this time for "incitement of insurrection," following the **assault on the U.S. Capitol building** on January 6 by a violent pro-Trump mob. His **first impeachment**, in 2019,

was for “abuse of power” and “obstruction of justice” over his dealings with Ukraine and attempts by Congress to investigate the same, yet he **survived in office owing to a Senate acquittal**. On this occasion, not only did the House vote resoundingly, by a margin of 232-197, to impeach him but it passed with an unprecedented margin of bipartisan support after 10 Republicans crossed the aisle. This might signal a broader mood across Congress, particularly in the Senate, to vote differently to the outcome last time, specifically that there will be sufficient support among Republican ranks for a Senate conviction. Given the tight timeline leading up to the inauguration of Democratic President-elect Joe Biden on January 20, it might be that the Senate does not have the opportunity to conduct a full trial based on the article of impeachment sent to it by the House, before Mr. Trump demits office. Nevertheless, Senate Democrats have vowed to carry out the trial even after the fact, including not only a vote on convicting him for high crimes and misdemeanours but also potentially on barring him from running again. The question looming before Congressional Republicans is this: are they, as a group united in safeguarding mainstream conservative values, convinced that the harm that Mr. Trump has done to the presidency and the fabric of American society warrants banning him from the highest office in the land, or will there be too many holdouts within their ranks to successfully bring closure to this turbulent saga in American politics? The answer also depends on what Senate and House Republicans make of the broader “movement” that he has come to represent — a rowdy, vicious campaign built on white privilege and regularly indulging in racist attacks, yet one that has pulled in elements of economically disenfranchised middle America. Will they believe that they can cut off Mr. Trump from leading this cohort, yet appear responsive to the needs of the 74 million Americans who voted for him? Or will they fear that they have no other leaders of national standing who could bring the kind of support that he did into the Republican tent? The course of action that Senate Republicans choose now will determine which vector the country’s battered politics will travel along — one that strikes a balance between national interest and the traditional formula of economic growth with social pluralism, or one that gives ever greater voice to nativist populism and disregard for the cherished institutions of democracy.