

EDITORIAL

Consumer rights protection system crucial

With the advent of online shopping, renowned brands are readily accessible to consumers globally. However, amidst the benefits of market competition, a robust consumer rights protection system is crucial to prevent any form of exploitation. Consumer Grievance Redressal Forums play a pivotal role in addressing consumer concerns, providing a mechanism for conflict resolution and safeguarding consumer interests. The Rights of all consumers are celebrated and promoted in the country by celebrating "National Consumer Rights Day" on 24th December every year. Although the country is still striving to highlight its national consumer movement and compete with the western world, still a lot of changes have come in place after the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act. The Government of India has been promoting consumer rights through advertisements and other means. To curb misleading advertisements, the CCPA is empowered to levy penalties on manufacturers or endorsers, ranging up to Rs 10 lakhs with a maximum imprisonment of two years for a false or misleading advertisement. Subsequent offences may incur fines up to Rs 50 lakhs and imprisonment of up to five years. The CCPA can also prohibit endorsing specific products or services for up to three years for repeat offences. Over the last few years, the economy of the country has transformed by many folds which resulted into rising market competition, innovations and new ways of reach to the consumer such as e-commerce and the market is expanding every day. The old ways of shopping and the reach of services have changed completely with the arrival of the internet. This certainly created a need for the Act to be revised and amended accordingly. Considering this, the Indian Parliament amended the old Consumer Protection Act by introducing of amendment in the act on 06th August 2019. The Government of India has established District Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum in every district of India. You have a right to appeal if you are aggrieved by the order of the district Forum before the State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission. National Consumer Day 2024 highlights the importance of consumer awareness and reminds people of their rights and responsibilities in the market with the theme of "Virtual Hearings & Digital Access to Consumer Justice". National Consumer Day 2024 is an opportunity for the government, civil society organizations, and citizens to come together and focus on improving the effectiveness of consumer protection laws and addressing issues related to consumer grievances.

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Macau: The glittering gem in Xi Jinping's China

BY
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MATHEW

For the Chinese Communist Party, Macau is a beacon of controlled capitalism, showcasing the potential of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework

When Chinese President Xi Jinping landed in Macau, the world's gambling capital, the air was thick with anticipation. Macau, often dubbed the "Las Vegas of the East," is much more than a beacon of wealth and opulence. For Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it is a sparkling gem in the palm of China's vast and complex economic system—a model of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework that allows capitalist practices to thrive under the watchful eye of a socialist regime. Xi's visit underscored the stark contrasts between theory and practice in the CCP's governance and the lessons it offers not only for China's neighbours but for the world at large.

Macau's significance lies in its unique identity. A former Portuguese colony, it returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999 under the promise of autonomy. Today, its glitzy casinos, luxury hotels, and sprawling Special Economic Zone (SEZ) generate billions annually, con-

tributing substantially to China's GDP. But while the dice roll and fortunes are made on Macau's gaming tables, the CCP's control remains unyielding.

The irony is palpable. The CCP, a party built on anti-capitalist ideology, oversees the largest SEZ in the world in Shanghai, nurtures capitalism in Hong Kong, and allows gambling—once condemned as a moral vice—to flourish in Macau. This duality reflects the pragmatic philosophy first espoused by Deng Xiaoping: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice." This approach has been pivotal in transforming China into the world's second-largest economy. Yet it also lays bare the contradictions at the heart of CCP rule.

Xi Jinping's Macau visit was not merely ceremonial. It was a reaffirmation of the CCP's ability to adapt and wield capitalist tools while maintaining a tight grip on power. In Macau, Xi emphasised stability and loyalty to the central government. This aligns with his broader strategy of tightening control over regions that might veer toward autonomy or dissent, as evidenced in Hong Kong. The "One Country, Two Systems" model—once lauded as a masterstroke of governance—has increasingly become a tool for consolidating Beijing's authority. Hong Kong's story is a cautionary tale.

A vibrant hub of

multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs), it has been at the forefront of economic globalisation. However, its recent struggles with political dissent and Beijing's heavy-handed responses reveal the limits of the "Two Systems" promise. The CCP's crackdown on pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong has sent a clear message: economic freedom does not translate to political autonomy. Macau, in contrast, has largely avoided such conflicts, partly due to its economic dependence on Beijing and the absence of a robust pro-democracy movement. Yet, this does not make Macau immune to the inherent tensions of "One Country, Two Systems."

As Xi extolled Macau's success, he also warned against complacency and stressed the need for "long-term stability," a euphemism for unwavering allegiance to the CCP. For the CCP, Macau and Hong Kong are not just economic engines; they are experiments in controlled capitalism. The success of these regions bolsters the party's narrative that socialism with Chinese characteristics can coexist with, and even benefit from capitalist mechanisms.

The underlying contradictions are hard to ignore. The CCP's insistence on ideological purity clashes with its pragmatic embrace of market-driven policies. This duality is reflected in Xi's lead-



ership, which combines Maoist centralisation with Dengist pragmatism.

For Maoists, Naxalites, and urban Naxals in India, as well as other ideologies clinging to rigid dogmas, Macau stands as a testament to the power of adaptation. The CCP's ability to evolve, to reconcile its Marxist-Leninist roots with the demands of a modern, globalised economy, has been the cornerstone of China's rise. This is a far cry from the ideological purism that often paralyzes leftist movements elsewhere.

India, too, can draw inspiration from Macau. As the world's largest democracy grapples with its development challenges, it must consider the role of SEZs, MNC headquarters, and even industries like gambling in driving economic growth.

While gambling remains taboo in much of India, the success of Macau shows how regulated gaming can become a major revenue source.

Similarly, expanding SEZs and creating hubs for MNCs can transform India into a global economic powerhouse. At the heart of this debate is the question of whether ideology should dictate policy. The CCP's approach—that opinion is not an iron rod—offers a compelling case for pragmatism. Yet, the party's intolerance for dissent, as seen in its suppression of Mao's "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign, highlights the dangers of unchecked authority. The CCP's success in economic management is undeniable, but its human rights record and stifling of democratic aspirations serve as stark reminders of the

cost of its iron-fisted rule. As Xi Jinping departed Macau, the world was left pondering the paradoxes of modern China. Under his leadership, the CCP has doubled down on centralisation, curbing dissent while championing economic liberalisation. Macau's glittering casinos and towering skyscrapers are symbols of this duality, where capitalism thrives under the shadow of socialism. For Xi, Macau is more than a gem in China's palm; it is a symbol of the CCP's ability to adapt and endure. Whether in the neon-lit streets of Macau or the corridors of power in Beijing, the CCP's experiment in controlled capitalism continues to shape the future of China—and the world.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

New PhD eligibility rule faces challenges

BY
MANASA

The success of UGC's new PhD eligibility rule will depend on addressing systemic issues

In a landmark decision by the University Grants Commission (UGC), students who have completed four-year undergraduate programmes (FYUP) with 75% or above marks can directly apply for PhD programmes. This move, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, aims to focus more on academic pathways, promote early research exposure among students and raise the standards of higher education. As the policy intends to fast-track the promotion of students into research areas, it has raised concerns over academic rigour, equity and their preparedness for doctoral studies.

Traditionally, post-graduate qualifications such as a Master's degree or

MPhil used to be a mandatory prerequisite for PhD programmes. The new rule represents a significant departure from the earlier norms as students, after completing FYUP with research components, can now bypass the Master's degree phase and enrol for a PhD directly.

This, however, does not apply to students from a three-year undergraduate programme. As this policy opens doors for students to pursue interdisciplinary studies and research-oriented education, it also demands the institution adopt and be equipped with a high-quality undergraduate curriculum that meets these rigorous standards.

Critical Concerns Knowledge gap is one of the most critical concerns surrounding this rule. It's usually seen that individuals with better access to resources and quality education tend to yield better results in their academics. In contrast, students from humble backgrounds and with limited educational resources face disparities in academic percentages. The quality of

undergraduate education is highly variable in India, as premier institutions offer state-of-the-art facilities and research opportunities with better resources and infrastructure. On the other hand, rural and semi-urban areas that lack infrastructure, funding and faculty pose a hindrance to students in meeting the required percentage. The rule allows students of a four-year graduate programme with 75% marks to directly apply for a PhD course. There's also the risk of dilution of the quality of doctoral research due to this rule. A PhD programme requires advanced theoretical and methodological training typically gained during a Master's programme. Skipping the post-graduation step may put students at a disadvantage.

Opportunities, Challenges The UGC's new eligibility rule presents a mix of opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, it allows high-performing students to embark on research careers much earlier than in previous times. This significantly cuts down the time and financial investment required for advanced education. One major concern is a lack of clarity and research interest in students from undergraduate programmes. Such students may not have fully explored academic potential and thus could end up making a wrong choice while selecting a course. Even supervisors might face pressure as admitting students with less experience into doctoral programmes would need additional guidance and mentorship on their part. Furthermore, it would be a strenuous thing for many universities with limited resources, compromising the quality of doctoral education. While the policy aligns with NEP's vision of fostering a research-oriented academic ecosystem, its success, however, depends on addressing systemic disparities and ensuring equitable access to high-quality research opportunities across various educational institutions.

Global Perspective From the global perspective, the new rule aligns with the international norm where undergraduate

research is often considered enough for direct entry into PhD programmes. This move would bring India closer to countries like the US and the UK, where research-intensive undergraduate degrees are offered and valued.

To ensure a successful implementation of the new UGC PhD eligibility rules and address contemporary issues, there is a need to address the various challenges facing the student community and initiate reforms. The first thing is to ensure that the UGC establishes clear and uniform guidelines in maintaining consistency and quality in education, ensuring that all FYUP students receive adequate research exposure and academic rigour, regardless of the institutions they attend.

Equitable resource allocation is another important measure to prevent the widespread disparities in the quality of education. The government, on an urgent basis, must prioritise investments in under-resourced universities to provide them with equal access to high-quality research infrastruc-

ture and faculty memberships. This needs frequent monitoring. The move could also lead to a significant knowledge gap within the academic landscape. The UGC should reconsider the percentage bar. Reducing it on the lines of UPSC, with 'just qualified' as the basic eligible criterion, could pave the way for students from various socio-economic backgrounds to make their imprint in research programmes. This is a bold step towards modernising India's higher education system. While the policy aligns with global trends with promising opportunities, it will be successful only if the systemic challenges are addressed. By ensuring that students from all communities get equal access to resources backed by a robust support system, we can unlock the transformative potential of this new move.

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