

Amitabh Kant : What will it take India to Grow at 10% for Three Decades?

Journey to Optimal Health: The Importance of a Good Sleep

Good bye to a Gentleman, Statesman, Patriot Dr. Manmohan Singh



CROSS SECTION CONVERSATIONS

THE BIGGER PICTURE

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**Impact of Trump Victory on
Indo-U.S. Relations**



**Conversations in and outside
Parliament**

PM MODI REACHES OUT TO THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ON CHRISTMAS



On Christmas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his warm wishes to the masses and prayed that the teachings of Jesus Christ enlighten the “path of peace and prosperity”. He also shared a short video clip, offering a glimpse of the Christmas programme that he had attended at Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) in New Delhi. This was a first-ever such visit by an Indian Prime Minister.

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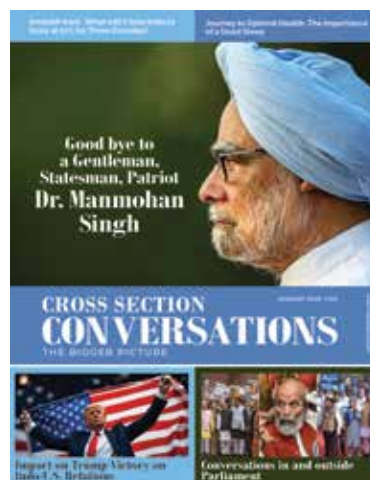
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FROM THE EDITOR

Life is seldom, if ever, seen or understood in either black or white, always in different shades of grey. And often enough, these variations in colour can also become the rainbow. So, with legacies, these are seldom in straight lines, neither crooked or bent, but would have their ups and down. The legacy of the former prime minister, Manmohan Singh, who passed on last month, is one such – brilliantly coloured with the magic of life, a human being who did what he believed was best for his country. Indeed, ‘history’ will judge him kindly, most kindly, in fact! We feature a tribute to him in the pages that follow.

The turn of every year brings with it fresh hopes, resolves and determination, to begin something new, start afresh perhaps; often with losing momentum as the days go by, at other times, with steely resolve, to strike a new beginning. As a people, as with ourselves as a nation, we need that something extra, that ‘spark’ that keeps us not just merely united but bound as with a glue, that spells India First, India Best, India Unique, and India in Harmony. 2025 is not a time for internal bickering, needless altercations, but to find consensus, the middle path, one that brings inclusion in growth, development and prosperity. This is a challenge not just for a government in power, but for all across in both public and personal life.

Viksit Bharat is not meant to be a pipedream. As the clarion call is towards India reaching her 100 years of independence, how about thinking in terms of 100s? Like a hundred new manufacturing hubs, each with a corpus of a 100 thousand crores? A hundred tourism zones competing with the world’s best destinations? A hundred world class medical cities, complete with every possible diagnostic and health care? Like a hundred world class educational centres, bringing global best practices and learning? All greenfield, each given to a distinct and separate corporate operator to build and operate. Each on its own strength, together building the *Viksit Bharat* before 2047.

With all this and more, here’s wishing our readers a happy new year.

Navin Berry
Editor



Dhankhar: Institutional challenges stem from lack of meaningful dialogue

HIGHLIGHTING THE importance of dialogue in a democracy, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday said the institutional challenges being faced today stemmed from a lack of "meaningful dialogue and authentic expression."

Addressing the 50th Foundation Day programme of the Indian Post Telecommunication Accounts and Finance Service in Delhi, he said: "Today's institutional challenges, from within and without, often stem from the erosion of meaningful dialogue and authentic expression. Both outpouring of expression and meaningful dialogue are priceless jewels of democracy." Dhankhar's remarks come when the Parliament is holding a debate on the Constitution and the Opposition moving a no-notice motion against him in Rajya Sabha.

"Democracy thrives not just on systems, but on core values... It has to be centred on the delicate balance of expression and dialogue," he said.

"... audit, self-audit is very important. The surest way to bring about degeneration of an individual or an institution, (is to) keep it or the gentleman or gentle lady from scrutiny. You are beyond scrutiny, your degeneration is assured. And therefore, self-audit, an audit beyond self, is essential," he said.

Dhankhar also said that ego serves no one and damages most of the person who possesses it. "The ego in us is irrepressible, we have to work very hard to control our ego. Ego serves no one, but damages most the person who possesses it," he said. Meanwhile, speaking at the National Energy Conservation Day function at Vigyan Bhawan later, Dhankhar spoke on the need to use innovative steps to prevent crop burning.

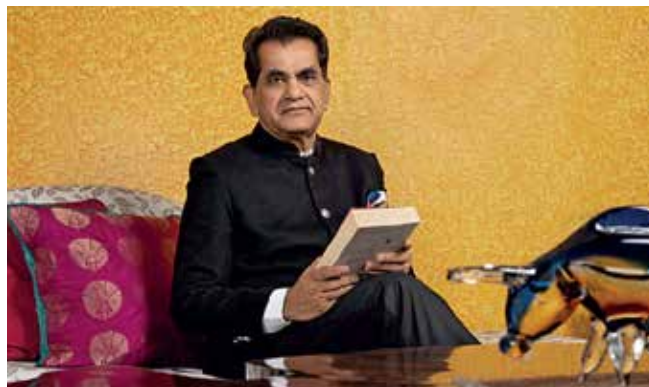
"The national capital suffers every year on account of hazardous environmental situations arising out of burning stubble. We must get into innovation mode, find a systemic solution, it should not be left to individuals. The system must come of age... our negligence is putting us in jeopardy in several ways... everyone must converge to contribute," the Vice-President added.

– The Indian Express

Civil servants, economists more Leftist than parties: Amitabh Kant

INDIAN CIVIL servants and economists are more Leftist than the political parties, India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant said.

Speaking at the release of a book *The Nehru Development Model*, written by Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, 16th Finance Commission, Kant said, "I have the greatest regard for Dr Panagariya for the simple reason that he is one economist who believes in free markets."



He's got an absolute conviction about free trade and he believes in free enterprise and there are very few economists like him in India."

"I have been a long-time believer that it will not be possible for India to grow at a high rate for a long period of time without free enterprise and many of the things that I pursued in my career were born out of many of his readings," Kant said.

He further said, "I have worked in both state and central governments and every single civil servant and economist I have come across are more Leftist than the political parties. In Kerala, I used to meet all economists coming out of the CDS [Centre for Development Studies]. They were more Leftist... The Congress was more leftist than the Leftists... It was incredible..."

"I have been a believer that if India has to grow rapidly at high rates, you need to really dismantle many of the things," he said.

Speaking about India's first PM Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy, Kant said, "I would also like to say that while Nehru's legacy is undoubtedly complex, yet his vision had laid the groundwork for many of India's achievements in education, science and technology... To my mind, these investments in human capital have yielded long-term benefits. Moreover, Nehru's commitment to secularism and pluralism has influenced India's constitutional framework and democratic discourse, but on the economic policy front, there is much to talk about, and that legacy is highly debatable."

– The Indian Express



PANTONE declares Mocha Mousse as the color for 2025

Each year, the Pantone Colour Institute reveals a shade that encapsulates the spirit of the times, and for 2025, the spotlight falls on PANTONE 17-1230 Mocha Mousse. This warm, earthy brown evokes a sense of sophistication, timeless charm, and a profound connection to nature, positioning itself as a defining colour for the year ahead.

Mocha Mousse captures the essence of a world seeking a balance between innovation and tradition. Its rich, grounding hue is reminiscent of nature's enduring beauty, echoing the colours of fertile soil, tree bark, and freshly brewed coffee. In a fast-paced, technology-driven society, Mocha Mousse offers a visual and emotional anchor, reminding us of the serenity and stability that nature provides.

The earthy tones reflect the growing global emphasis on sustainability and mindfulness, celebrating a lifestyle that values simplicity, authenticity, and a closer connection to the environment.

– *The Asian Age*

Pushpa, Too! Police case against Allu Arjun a worrying trend

For Telangana police to charge Telugu superstar Allu Arjun with culpable homicide was ridiculous. For a trial court to send him to judicial custody for 14 days was miscarriage of justice. Thankfully better sense prevailed as HC granted the actor interim bail. The



case as it stands is that a woman died and a child was critically hurt in a stampede that occurred when Allu Arjun attended the opening of his blockbuster Pushpa 2. The theatre and the actor's team say they informed police ahead of his visit. Police say they denied him permission but that he even held a 'roadshow'. The woman's spouse filed a complaint basis which police shot off the FIR. Whatever the case's merits, and however it gets decided, police neglected their obligation to manage crowds. The high-profile arrest ensured the case takes a life of its own and police can escape accountability. Film audiences in most of southern India are known to break into a frenzy at star-studded movie openings, even without the presence of their idols. Even if Allu Arjun were not present, the opening of Pushpa 2 was a hugely anticipated event and large crowds were expected at the busy Hyderabad location where Sandhya theatre is.

– *Business Standard*



BSNL set for recovery, to launch 5G by middle of 2025: Scindia

BSNL is moving towards having attainable operation. "BSNL's its path to a rejuvenation. extremely important in a country like India that we 3-4 mobile operators.

"BSNL is standing back on its own feet," he said, and added that the company has seen a 12% growth in its revenues over the past 3-4 years at Rs 21,000 crore. "The expenditure is down by 2% in the same period. BSNL has also become EBITDA positive since 2021. It had an operating profit of Rs 1,100 crore in 2021, which has now more than doubled to Rs 2,300 crore."

Scindia said that BSNL plans to install as many as 1 lakh towers-built on indigenous India stack-by May or June next year. "We have built our own 4G core through state- owned C-DOT and RAN (radio access network) through Tatas-owned Tejas. TCS is the systems integrator. So, this is a fully-integrated Bharat solution. We have rolled out close to 62,000 towers, and India is now only the fifth country in the world to have its own 4G hardware and stack."

With the completion of 1 lakh towers by middle of next year, BSNL will start switching some of them to 5G technology. "We are well on the way to do that. I

hope that BSNL will be back on its feet."

He said that telecom companies have also been asked to take steps against spam and fraud activities on their network even as the govt also stays on guard against them.

– Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia in the Times of India



Gearing for Maha Kumbh only like India can and Does!

"Thousands of people have worked day and night to make the upcoming Maha Kumbh 2025 memorable for 400 million devotees who are expected to visit here between January 13 and February 26. The team has done an incredible job," said divisional commissioner, Prayagraj, Vijay Vishwas Pant.

But there was a crucial challenge - rapid erosion had eaten away the Ganga bank and forced the river to veer away to the right, reducing the land available to Duna mela Kumbh ground. Moreover, the 3,200 hectares of river bank on which the 2019 Kumbh was held had been taken over by the Ganga over five years. It had to be reclaimed.

The authorities decided that they will not only reclaim the 3,200 hectares allocated in 2019, but also add 800 hectares more to ensure the scale of the mega religious event remains grand.

"The 4,000-hectare land will get transformed into a most frequented place in this part of the country in the next four weeks. Reclaiming such vast land for the Maha Kumbh was not an easy task," Pant said.

"Between 2019 and 2024, the Ganga shifted approximately 200 to 500 metres from its right bank, significantly reducing the land area," said Mela Adhikari (fair in-charge) Vijay Kiran Anand.

"The job to reclaim more land to accommodate the exponentially huge footfall was a difficult one. Hard work paid off. In 2019, 24 crore people visited here. This time we are expecting nothing less than 40 crores as announced by chief minister Yogi Adityanath during his visit to Maha Kumbh mela ground," said Vivek Chaturvedi, additional district magistrate, Maha Kumbh.

The 4,000-hectare land is to be divided into 25

sectors. For the smooth flow of devotees from one end to another, a total of 30 pontoon bridges are being made, eight more than in 2019. The public works department is tasked with renovating about 90 roads, out of which more than 25 have been completed. A 1,250km pipeline network with over 50,000 water connections is being laid in the mela ground area that will be lit up by 67,000 LED lights. There will be 84 stand posts (light poles) and 200 water ATMs. To maintain cleanliness in the mela area, 15,000 sanitation workers and 150 Ganga Sewa Doot will be deployed to sensitise people on how to use toilets and to educate them against open defecation, said the ADM.

"The levelling of 12km-long ghats is not an easy task. Day and night road rollers are being used to level the path over which iron plates will be placed. We are watering the area 24x7 to straighten the path for millions of people who will visit," said Anand.

Each of the 25 sectors in the Kumbh ground will have banks and ATMs in place so devotees can do financial routine transactions smoothly and securely. Besides, there will be food courts and amusement corners for kids.

The state government has focussed on health care, setting up a 100-bed central hospital, two subcentre hospitals of 20 beds each, 25 first aid posts, and 125 ambulances. The administration has also sought the cooperation from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rae Bareilly.

– Hindustan Times

Prevention Key to Survival

Doctors are urging patients to pay attention to the signs and symptoms that their bodies repeatedly give, especially when risk factors are involved, in a bid to prevent more cancer cases.

A Canadian Cancer Society study has found that for most cancers studied (breast, prostate, colon and rectal), survival was better than 90% when diagnosed at Stage 1; and survival for Stage 1 lung cancer was 62%.

With modern advancements such as artificial intelligence tools and liquid biopsies, early detection is very much possible. In January, US researchers announced that they had designed a test that analyses proteins in the blood and can pick up 18 early-stage cancers,



representing all main organs in the human body.

Their gender-specific liquid biopsy test was able to successfully detect Stage 1 cancers 93% of the time among men and 84% of the time among women. The analysis of 150 bio- markers also allowed researchers to pinpoint the origin of cancers to specific organs in more than 80% of cases.

Dr Rajesh Bendre, national technical head and chief pathologist at Apollo Diagnostics, Mumbai, says India too has diagnostic and treatment options that can improve the prognosis of the disease. "AI can help check imaging scans with utmost accuracy. Non-invasive liquid biopsies (primarily of blood) can scan for circulating tumour DNA and help find out the risk of cancer before the symptoms appear. These are vital tools for cancer detection," he says.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS

But how does one know if a particular symptom points to Stage 0 cancer? Dr Upadhyay says one should look at environmental factors and genetic predisposition first. "There are specific subgroups where someone in the family has some type of cancer, which is known to have some genetic predisposition. In such cases, if something abnormal is detected during a routine screening, we might take it out and find that it's a Stage 0 cancer. This is applicable for the screening of both cervical cancer and breast cancer. For colon cancer screening, we often perform an endoscopy or colonoscopy. If we see a polyp (abnormal tissue growth) during the procedure, we remove it. When that is tested, we often find that it's CIS," he adds.

One must also look for recurrent symptoms which may cause cancer, the doctor says. For instance, a small hard lump in the breast or nipple discharge could indicate Stage 0 breast cancer. An abnormal pap smear might mean Stage 0 cervical cancer. Very mild and vague symptoms like slight indigestion, occasional stomach discomfort or minor changes in bowel habits might be a precursor to gastrointestinal cancer. Stage 0 skin cancer can show a subtle change in skin colour or texture, like a flat, scaly, red patch, depending on the location. If these symptoms persist for longer than two weeks, then it could hint at CIS.

Dr Upadhyay says the problem is that most of these symptoms are non-specific in nature, which means they are very similar to other diseases. They may be treated by a general physician and not even land up with an oncologist. If there is a suspicious patch in the mouth, an alert dental surgeon or ENT specialist may take out the tissue and send it to the lab, where it may turn out to be CIS.

The most common type of Stage 0 breast cancer is ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) or intraductal carcinoma. A 2019-2020 American Cancer Society (ACS) study found that about 20% of all breast cancers are DCIS, which means it hasn't metastasised (spread) to other parts of the body. However, DCIS can sometimes

become an invasive cancer if left unattended. The ACS study also said that Stage 0 breast cancer has a five-year relative survival rate of 99%, which means that nearly all women with DCIS can be cured.

– *Times of India*



A Time may Come when We may have to Allow Men to have Two Wives: Nitin Gadkari

Union road transport minister has termed live-in relationships and same-sex marriage as “wrong” and said these will destroy society, while adding that there are certain societal rules which should be followed.

“Same-sex marriage would lead to the collapse of the social structure,” he said, in a recent YouTube podcast, in response to a question on the issue. Gadkari also said if this is allowed, it could potentially force future govts to consider allowing men to have two wives. He said both live-in relationships and same-sex marriage are “inappropriate”.

Recalling his visit to the British Parliament, the minister said he had asked UK PM and foreign minister about the major issues their country was facing. “They said the biggest problem in European countries is that the majority of young men and women are not interested in getting married and are opting for live-in relationships,” Gadkari said.

The minister also said there is a need to balance the sex ratio and a married couple should have children. “If it (sex ratio) reaches a point where there are 1,500 women and only 1,000 men, we may have to allow men to have two wives,” he added. Gadkari said it’s the duty of “parents to have children and raise them properly”.

The minister’s views on live-in relationship come at a time when BJP-governed Uttarakhand govt has passed a law that enforces a uniform set of rules for civil relationships, including marriage, divorce and inheritance, across all religions and makes the registration of live-in relationships mandatory.

Dismissing allegations that BJP and RSS are against Muslims, Gadkari said they don’t believe in majoritarianism or minoritarianism.

– *Times of India*

Shifting Sands

Conversations in and outside Parliament
Is the Constitution in Danger? Alliances and Goals
A New Beginning with Sri Lanka, and for South Asia
Making America Great, Again!

by NAVIN BERRY



Conversations in and outside Parliament

Did the last Parliament session witness an unwritten attempt, a successful one, to divert attention from the real issues, or shall one say, to evade the real issues of the day? Experts and insiders may have the answer to this one, not this writer, who is only reacting to the press reporting on the level of debate, the worsening dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition. It has become a veritable tu-tu mei-mei between the two, with zero coherence, meaning and outcome. This too while discussing the merits of the Indian Constitution on its 75th anniversary! The two-day debate could have been a most useful exercise in understanding the need for respecting the constitution, how the government of the day and the opposition, together, can get their act together, in ensuring that the nation upholds the best traditions enshrined by its founders.



So, the government accused the Congress, under then prime minister Indira Gandhi, of subverting the sacred constitution by declaring Emergency. It lasted only 21 months, with then ruling party unable to carry it forward. It did not degenerate into martial law, any other covert operation, but only a reversal, back to democratic rules; not to defend at all, but to say the damage was fortunately limited in time, an aberration, a limited exercise in futility, howsoever damaging. Was it an expensive exercise in futility? Is the best course now that the Congress tenders an open apology for this act, declare it would never happen again!

The Congress, however, instead of admitting the mistakes, only charged the government of trying to subvert the same constitution today, in its present course of governance. That it is pursuing this diversion through policies like uniform civil code, one nation one election, etc. The BJP considers these as essential course corrections – it was therefore all that necessary that there should have been an honest and transparent discussion on what matters most for the nation, and for every citizen to hear and learn and make his own informed opinion.

But the dialogue never went forward, one bit. Instead, it was one series of disruptions, trading charges, pressing of a no-confidence motion against the speaker in the Rajya Sabha, and so much more, all ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’.

Is the Constitution in Danger?

But the other, and graver charge, is damage to our institutions that Indira's time brought about, by openly diminishing their importance, appointing her chosen ones to head offices that were sacred to being above political appointees. But then this practice has continued, ever since, with one government after another, appointing their chosen political persona who failed to get a position in the central government, or elsewhere, as deserving of their stature and importance to the ruling dispensation of the day. Endowing them with positions like those of governors in states, elsewhere – people with relevance, knowledge, but who did not find space in central government.

The one casualty in the debate was none other than the man responsible and credited with writing of the constitution, B R Ambedkar, himself. Home Minister Amit Shah said, during the discussion, that the Congress was appropriating Ambedkar for the sake of votes.

“Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai – Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar bhagwan ka lete to saat janmon tak swarg mil jaata (It has become a fashion to chant Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Had they taken God's name so many times, they would have ensured a place in heaven for seven lives),» Shah said.

Now, was this a discourtesy to Ambedkar? How insulting was this to him? Was it heinous enough to warrant an opinion that the PM should drop Shah from the cabinet? I shall leave the answer to each of us, for our own judgement. But this did become another bone of contention, and has carried on, ever since.

Let us view another debate, not in parliament, but underlining the nature of the present-day discourse. That Kejriwal built a most expensive home for himself when we was the chief minister, that it was a modern-day plunder of government resources, unwarranted for a nation such as ours. What was the AAP's retort? That the BJP leadership travelled in Adnani's private aircraft?

Which brings us to another debate, often traded charges? When reminded of the 1984 riots and its accompanying atrocities, the Congress 'hits' back to remind the BJP of the Gujarat riots! Are we saying one is justified because of the other? Can two wrongs make a right, when pooled together? Is this the national narrative? Is it possible for the nation to accept these aberrations in time, that these must serve as reminders of what was, can be, where and how we can ensure safeguards that such incidents should not happen again in the future.

How can we live in the present, and look into the future? Young Aditya Thackeray is right when he has been repeatedly pointing out to this need of the hour; to engage in issues that are of immediate relevance today, and will

No surprise, members came to trading blows! This could never have been imagined. When dialogue is not possible, we get 'physical'! Here, again, charges were traded as to who was responsible.

ensure a more meaningful tomorrow.

Finally, no surprise, members came to trading blows! This could never have been imagined. When dialogue is not possible, we get 'physical'! Here, again, charges were traded as to who was responsible. Rahul Gandhi suggested the government release the CCTV recording of the proceedings. That might be the best, as the nation should be made to

see for themselves. So, the moot point is how we can look forward to the new year? Battle lines are drawn already, can we expect a thaw?

Alliances and Goals

Another big issue by the year-end was the future of the opposition alliance? What can become of the so-called INDI Alliance? It remains loose, and fragile! It always was. Except that it was cobbled all too hastily, without even a common minimum programme. It was better off not have been dubbed any alliance at all, but a seat-sharing arrangement, wherever it works, between whoever is ready to make one. Nothing more. That it assumed the shape of an alliance was in itself a non-starter. Therefore, no surprises, very little came of it. Over the second half of last year, it dwindled into near





Giving the alliance another dimension, a new name, new goalposts, gradual and practical, might give it realism and a brighter future.

zero, with even the ability of the Congress party to lead it being questioned. That too was a given after the self-goals of the Congress in Haryana elections, and then in Maha-

rashtra, both states where the party was seen as a winner, only to disappoint, yet again. Far from its one-time position of strength across the nation, the Congress party has virtually no visibility in many of the states, where a regional party holds sway. Like in Kashmir or in Bengal. It has however the highest common factor presence among most states. Does this give it any natural right to lead the opposition? In fact, by giving leadership to a big regional player, with proven ability to take on the ruling dispensation might create a better chance of success. Giving the alliance another dimension, a new name, new goalposts, gradual and practical, might give it realism and a brighter future.

How far can we stretch our efforts to find temples under mosques? RSS chief Bhagwat says it is enough. That as a religion, Hinduism may have achieved its high success in building the Ram temple at Ayodhya. Personally, for so many of us, we have grown up amidst a consciousness of the Ramayana and the legend of Lord Ram. That there was a Ram in Ayodhya was the core of the text books that we read. Getting a temple back could have been a homecoming of sorts. But what about Ajmer and the Dargah? We have grown up similarly knowing of the Muslim shrine, revered by all across religions, as a place of worship and seeking cure and remedies, or thanksgiving. It is the same consciousness that we have grown up with.

Is it time for status quo? That for the foreseeable future at least, let us consign such contentious issues for a stabler, more peaceful environment, ensuring that we focus on development, adequate defence for both better lives of our people, and to take on an increasingly polarised world. That unity of purpose is most important, that we need to stay united above all other costs. So, Bhagwat's call can only be welcomed and most timely.

Yet, another strong man of the government, the Uttar Pradesh CM, Yogi Adityanath is quoted to have said just the opposite. That the people and their successors, who broke down our temples in yesteryears, must pay for their acts.

How much of this is optics, how much real? One leading journalist suggested Bhagwat's call could stem from a realisation that this 'digging for temples underneath' could result in law and order problems. Meanwhile, a Hindu seers' organization has said it is not for the RSS to determine religious narratives as it is primarily a social organization. No word yet from the prime minister, himself, as this could settle some scores. Appropriately, PM Modi was among the first Indian prime ministers to attend the Catholic Bishops of India Congress around Christmas! Regardless, as we remain concerned for the plight of Hindus in other countries, we could rest-a-while, on a fair principle of reciprocity. Not giving any extras, not giving any less, treating all citizens equally, regardless of colour or creed, just as enshrined in our Constitution!

A New Beginning with Sri Lanka, and for South Asia

AKD, the new president of Sri Lanka, came to Delhi, for a second time in ten months. His earlier visit was when he was a popular leader in opposition, seen to be making big strides, largely on planks of being anti-corruption, anti-Indian. That South Block reached out to him was an act of foresight and maturity, an outreach that was reciprocated by the leader in waiting. That he chose India for his first foreign visit may or may not carry much meaning, but the wide range of agreements and statements augur well for a new, realistic and more meaningful engagement between our two countries. It could even offer a new template for India in her relations with our other immediate neighbours. That they too would pursue multi-polar relationships with the world at large, that they too would wish to pursue good relations with the global community. But within these, they will not harbour or give any kind of refuge to anti-India forces, especially those that threaten Indian defence and sovereignty. It underscores that



we enjoy and share common borders or waters, that we are the first point of help within a larger shared common heritage and people. That we, as South Asian neighbours, are more a common people than any other. That our saree or dhoti, salwar or shawl, namaste or aadab are a shared life and living.

Dissanayake has breathed a new hope for Sri Lanka, giving the country a break from past practices and politicians that wrecked the economy with corruption and pursuing vested interests. That he carries fresh hopes is best legitimised in that he got a better mandate in the North and East than any other leader in recent history, signalling that he carries the support of his minorities. Which also gives India new hope to pursue interests of the Tamil community with more of an open mind.

Dissanayake has acknowledged India's geostrategic interests in Sri Lanka and has shown an interest in working around issues rather than getting confrontational. It is often argued, that political campaign rhetoric from opposition ranks has to be seen differently from matured reasoning when in government, Dissanayake is treading the same path. This shows his deep understanding, maturity on both sides, a recognition that we really share borders and have a long future ahead, which is best served by working together as friendly neighbours. This understanding is new, mature, and far-reaching. It will call for continuous calibration, mutual respect.

How much has the Tamil issue come in the way of better relations between the two countries; in fact, could this be one of those issues where India could appear a bully to the average Sri Lankan? However honourable our concerns may be, time may have come to recalibrate our expression.

Making America Great, Again!

Get ready for surprises, galore. The less than predictable Donald is all set to Trump the world, not just America. In fact, it is just that way around. He will set forth first by trumping globally. His outreach has no end, as he reaches out to taking over Panama Canal, and to Greenland. His thirst is unquenchable. He is Mr. Disrupt, as he believes, and so do a majority of Americans, and that's why they voted for him to win with a comfortable majority, that it is time for America to reclaim its lost ground. Come 20th of this month and get ready.

As has often been pointed out, his global view seems to feature India and Indians prominently, which is a happy augury for us. Except it will involve substantial(?) give and take with the transactional president in waiting. And why not, as he is not ambiguous, demands openly and evenly fairly. Is giving concessional duty to

Get ready for surprises, galore. The less than predictable Donald is all set to Trump the world, not just America. In fact, it's just that way around. He will set forth first by trumping globally. He is Mr. Disrupt, as he believes, and so do a majority of Americans.



importing Harley Davidson such a big deal? Is the Indian bike industry not stable and mature enough to stand on its own? Is it not the likes of Royal Enfield already making a mark in global markets?

His new global order will change the way Europe sees America, as does the UK. NATO may see some disruptions, as would the United Nations and other global institutions. With a churning in place in the Middle East, we will witness another reset. Quad could witness a new direction, but

much here depends upon how the thaw in India-China axis progresses. Meanwhile, EAM Jaishankar has reached out to many of the appointments in the new dispensation, a most pro-active and meaningful outreach.

One cannot underscore the importance of the relationship that Trump and Indian PM enjoy. How can one forget the undiplomatic endorsement of Donald Trump as President in 2020 by the Indian prime minister? Fortunately, it did not dent our relations with the US, under Joe Biden, in fact, they have soared, and set to soar higher in the new dispensation. The one thing to watch out for, as the highpoints of incoming 2025 would be the first face to face meeting between the two leaders. Is it for real that a galaxy of world leaders is being invited to the president's oath taking ceremony, as briefly mentioned in some press reports. If this be true, be rest assured, PM Modi would be seated in the first row among them. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, DI Conversations, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India's first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.

India Loses Her Modern Day Icon: Reformer, Statesman, Humanist, Like No Other

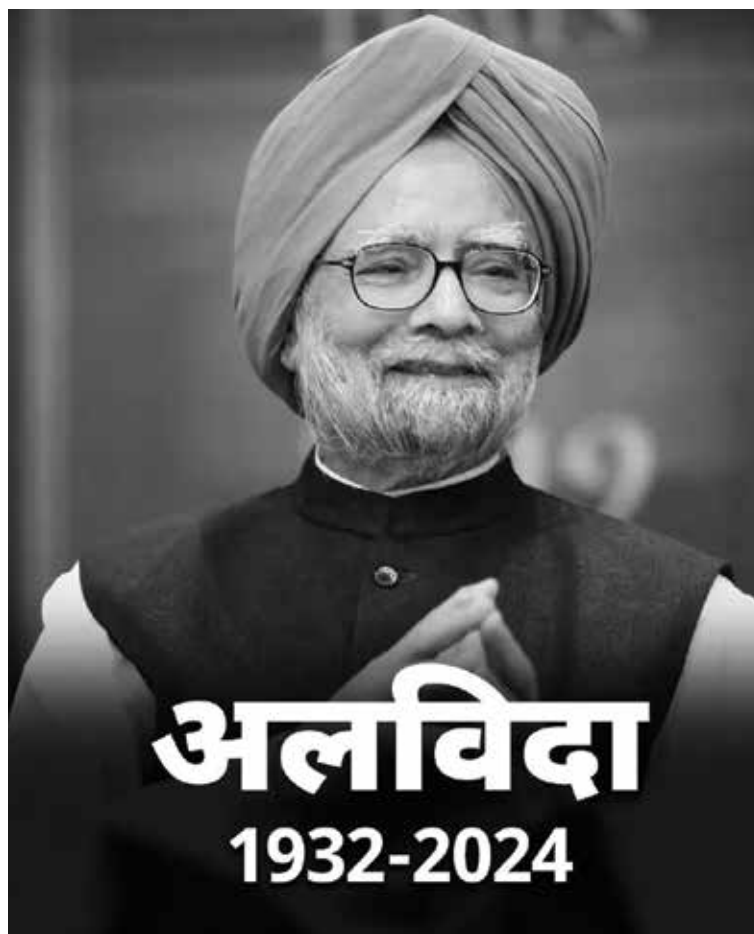
Former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, breathed his last, having lived a full life, at 92.

by NAVIN BERRY

The legend passed on at the ripe age of 92. Lived a full life, except in his later years, when old age took a toll on him; his being wheeled into Parliament House to attend the session, remains a haunting image, as a testimony to his being the quintessential democrat, a firm believer in parliamentary traditions and an unfailing spirit even when his body seemed lacking. So much has been said and is known about MMS that writing a tribute that is totally fresh and presents a new look is nearly impossible. It is best to capture the lessons that one can imbibe, recalling the many episodes in his life, the man as one came to understand him.

I had the great fortune of meeting him over an interview, in his academic days, when he was a professor in D School, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University. This was a full 50 years ago. It was for this magazine, an acknowledgement of our long innings in this task of bringing together a cross section of views and subjects critical to India matters. Even then, I recall vividly, he had landed a few hours earlier from a lecture tour, from the US, arrived direct from the airport, his small handbag tucked in a corner of the room, as he fondly recalled his impressions of his visit. My late colleague and friend, Vinod Choudary who studied economics and later taught at St Stephen's College, had fixed the appointment; we both spent a long hour with the then professor. Over the years, his manner did not change, if at all, his demeanour was the same throughout, then and when he retired from public life. Power and prominence never managed to touch him. Later, I interviewed him again, then as India's Finance Minister. He was just the same; always, timid and shy, almost self-deprecating, ready to take a bow, on the smallest courtesy extended to him.

On the subject of economics, he held his sway, in a manner that saw the opening of Indian economy, he was truly the torch bearer, for all the reforms that we have witnessed since, and pursuing even today. A mix of government capex and private enterprise, capital instinct and socialism merged to ensure that growth was inclusive and reached out to the lowest of the low. In that sense, he merged his instincts as both the academician and politician; mind you, for all his simplicity, he was never naïve, and fully understood the imperatives of



politics. But then he was firm, when we wanted to be, always had the uncanny habit of being a most patient listener, and do what he thought was best for the country.

As the prime minister for ten long years, serving a full two terms, his contributions were immense. He continued his reformer role, started earlier as finance minister. He was instrumental in ushering in the RTI Act, the RTE Act and also introduced the Aadhar card, which enabled subsequent transformations in public dealing with the government. His insistence on signing the nuclear deal brought out his steely determination, undeterred by the possibility of the government coming down.

He enshrined the values of the true Gandhian, living a simplest of lives. His trademark blue turban, almost muted expression, preferring to speak only when required, he was not prone to hearing himself out. Just



like the other prime minister, the other Gandhian, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the two have not seen their equal in simplicity in public life. Both kept their families away, not that the families aspired to any public privileges, being equally subdued, as was their upbringing. There are endless tales of how their children took bus rides to college, stood in queues for concerts and never sought any favour. His integrity remained unmatched.

Every life is accidental, in one way or the other. Even when one has survived and succeeded in his dreams. Success, expected or otherwise, is always a chance. He may not have been the prime minister by accident, but certainly by a call of divinity.

But his legacy is one that seeks emulation, much like that of Gandhi, from another perspective. In today's times, humility and empathy are crying needs and

we see more and more people in public life are unable to follow this. It is not uncommon to witness both politicians and bureaucrats walking in public fora like the world depends upon them. Exceptions, of course, stay the ground and make that vital difference.

Some gems have appeared in print from nowhere, following his demise. Like the writer from his village in Pakistan, where the late prime minister was born. He had reached out to get the same electrified, with solar lights, in the belief he would like future generations in that village to get a chance to read and write and grow up in the comfort of well-lit homes. Or, the story from the Malaysian PM, Anwar, who revealed that Manmohan Singh had offered his children scholarships while he was in jail in his country. He did not take up the offer, but nevertheless, an offer that was hard to forget. Or, the story when he ran short of cash while buying for himself a cup of tea at the Parliament House canteen, and insisted on paying himself. Such is the stuff that kept him grounded, untouched by the power and the glory of office.

Did this same legacy get scarred? For having presided over a government that relied more upon coalition dharma for survival; black marked for its scams, though some like 2G did not match up in proportions to what was earlier touted. For all the ills that one heard of, especially during the run up to the Commonwealth Games, when the nation was subjected to such public shame, as the infrastructure build-up was far from being on time, he remained insulated personally, even as the government of the day took a beating scarcely seen in our public life. It also became known as the government in paralysis, with its double engine model of power sharing.

So, while these last years remain a big cloud over him, with rampant corruption, keeping the coalition going, as it were, should he have taken the high ground and resigned? Did he, in fact, as some have suggested, that he did, indeed suggest? Was he himself conscious of the fact that he would come under a cloud, later, and thus his hope that history may judge him better and be more kind to him? Did he believe that giving up office, may lead to bigger problems for the country? Whatever be the compulsions, the last few years of the UPA 2 regime remain a stark reminder of paralysis in governance, over which the PM presided mutely.

Above all these, yes, his legacy survives as a major architect of modern India, especially at a time when India has arrived as the fifth largest in the global economy.

No surprises then, tributes have poured in for him, from across the political spectrum, singularly applauding his contribution not just to the economy, but to Indian politics and Indian ethos in public life. A life lived in dignity, never falling prey to criticism, always taking the brunt on his own shin, with his trademark smile or silence. In this hour of mourning, it appeared the nation was one, united in grief, notwithstanding a few critical comments here and there. Then, the controversy about his not being given a memorial site in time for his cremation, which are at best overlooked, for the present.

“He left a strong imprint on our economic policy over the years. As our Prime Minister, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives.”

NARENDRA MODI, *Prime Minister*

“His honesty will always be an inspiration for us and he will forever stand tall among those who truly love this country.”

RAHUL GANDHI, *Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress MP*

“He was a man of few words whose welfare schemes brought relief to millions of Indians cutting across caste, creed & religion.”

MAMATA BANERJEE, *West Bengal CM*

“He was a godly soul who embodied humility, and tolerance. As the architect of India's economic reforms, his legacy will inspire.”

SHARAD PAWAR, *NCP (SP) president*

“His calm, thoughtful leadership reflected a rare quality – a leader who spoke less but achieved more, driven by action rather than rhetoric.”

MK STALIN, *Tamil Nadu CM*

“Throughout his tenure, he had great empathy for the poor. He did not hide the fact that many millions of Indians are poor and reminded us that the government's policies must lean in favour of the poor. Examples of his empathy are MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and the restructuring of PDS (Public Distribution System) and the extension of the mid-day meal scheme.”

P. Chidambaram, *Singh's former cabinet colleague and former Union finance minister on social media website X*

“Together with P.V. Narasimha Rao, he brought about a paradigm shift from an India ridiculed for its 'Hindu rate of growth'-an India that faced a catastrophic economic crisis stemming from the twin deficits of a balance-of-payments crisis and a huge fiscal deficit-to an India that achieved about 7% steady growth and emerged as a growth driver of the global economy.”

Manoranjan Sharma, *chief economist, Infomerics Ratings, and a former chief economist with Canara Bank*



“As Prime Minister, the audaciousness with which he pursued the nuclear deal with the US stands out very sharply. This effort to improve India's dynamics with the superpower was laudable. He was building on the achievements of high GDP growth following Vajpayee's reforms as well as a nuke explosion. In fact, the nuclear deal was part of his vision to make India an attractive investment destination, no matter what was at stake for the future of the government. Regrettably, the full effects of the nuclear deal are yet to be realised due to the lack of enabling changes in laws, particularly regarding insurance, which would allow private party participation. He was the perfect example of domain expertise coupled with an understanding of the political landscape.

Dr Singh was the master of the art of the possible in the political economy of change. We will remain indebted to him for steering India on the path of growth and towards its rightful place in the committee of nations.”

N K Singh, *former Rajya Sabha member and chairperson of Finance Commission*



“At dinner with my wife and me in Kolkata's Raj Bhavan, no politics was even thought of, much less discussed. And the fare was frugal, exactly as the visiting couple wanted. When all of us had done, he rose and waited for my wife, his junior by some three decades, to pass the dining room door before exiting himself.

Civility has shrivelled, decency withered, in the departure of a great economist and a greater ethicist loaned to politics for its redemption. Dr Singh was in office, not in a war room. His table was a desk, not a battle-board. His pen wrote, not decree. The world is clever but is no fool. Though liable to err, it knows who is who and what is what. It admires the powerful for it must deal with power, but it respects the honest. Siyasat is the Hindustani for politics, sharafat for honesty. Manmohan Singh showed that sharafat could be at home in siyasat, and siyasat in sharafat.☹☹

Gopalkrishna Gandhi, a former administrator, is a student of modern Indian history.

“I was finance secretary in Delhi when I was appointed governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in September 2008. Before moving to Mumbai, I went to call on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to thank him for the confidence he reposed in me. It was a brief meeting - just about 15 minutes. We talked about the economic situation, of course-the government's fiscal challenges as well as RBI's unlikely problem of defending the rupee against appreciation. After about 10 minutes of this, I said: "Sir, you were governor of RBI yourself. Do you have any advice to give me?" Dr Singh very characteristically demurred with that faint smile of his which you saw more in his eyes than on his lips. "What advice do I give you, Subbarao? You've been in the IAS, you know the country, you know the government, and you are familiar with RBI. Do what you think is best for the economy. I am sure you will do well," he said. After a couple of minutes, I took leave of him. As I got up, he rose from his chair, came from around the table and escorted me to the exit. At the door, he put his hand on my shoulder and said: "Subbarao, you asked for my advice a moment ago. I do want to give you one piece of advice. You are moving from the IAS into RBI. That's a big change. Unlike in the IAS, in RBI, you run the risk of getting lost in numbers like inflation, interest rate, money supply and credit growth, and you will tend to forget how all this matters to people and their livelihoods. Keep your ear close to the ground.☹☹

Duvvuri Subbarao, former governor, Reserve Bank of India (2008-13), now visiting faculty at Yale

@NSITHARAMAN

Former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. He had served as the Governor of RBI and as Finance Minister of India. Presented the milestone budget of 1991 which liberalised the Indian economy. Respected by all, he was soft-spoken and gentle. Condolences to his family and friends.

@GAUTAM ADANI

Deeply saddened by the passing of Dr Manmohan Singh. History will forever honour his pivotal role in the transformative 1991 reforms that reshaped India and opened its doors to the world. A rare leader who spoke softly but achieved monumental strides through his actions, Dr Singh's life remains a masterclass in leadership, humility and service to the nation and will inspire generations to come.

@HVGOENKA

India mourns the loss of Dr Manmohan Singh, a true statesman whose quiet demeanour belied his transformative impact. An architect of economic reforms, he shaped modern India with intellect, grace, and integrity. A leader who let actions speak louder than words. #RIP 🇮🇳

“I have Tried to Give my Best to the Institution”: Shaktikanta Das



by NAVIN BERRY

In the process, since then, Das became the second-longest serving RBI Governor, and the longest serving chief post-liberalisation. After a six-year tenure, with a Masters in History, while studying at Delhi's prestigious St Stephen's College, Das was clearly the winner on most fronts.

He had earlier worked extensively in the Finance Ministry, the 15th Finance Commission, and as India's G-20 Sherpa, he was a two-time winner of the 'Central Banker of the Year' award, given by the Global Finance magazine.

Did Das toe the government's line? Did he prove to be sufficiently independent-minded? If the jury will find an answer to this one by citing absence of open conflict, between the government and the RBI, that would be most unkind to him. By temperament, Das has always been a polite, likeable, self-effacing seeker of solutions. He did just that, and while pursuing this doctrine, he worked hard on his job, gaining quick traction for his seriousness of purpose. In the end, there was this inevitable clamour for rate reductions, especially after the last GDP figures did not exactly bring joy to the treasury benches, the fault lines were passed onto the RBI's reluctance to drop rates. Providing stimulus to economic growth is one thing, largely dependent upon government policies, other as much as on global uncertainty. Keeping inflation within target, keeping a check on prices, Das kept his cool demeanour and did what best he saw for the larger good.

His innings has been overall rated as a high success. So much so, as his successor was not appointed till the very last day, murmurs had begun circulating that he may get another extension. During his tenure, the RBI

1980-batch Tamil Nadu cadre IAS officer, has a master's degree in history and is a post-graduate in public administration. This was initially held against him, as not being a student of economics. His two immediate predecessors - Urjit Patel and Raghuram Rajan - held Doctorates in Economics. Undeterred, he rode high, backed by the confidence reposed in him by the prime minister. From being the poster boy in the implementation of the de-monetisation drive, holding daily press conferences to allay fears among the public, rendering a daily advice on how best to meet the challenges of the note bandhi, Das was moved to RBI, following the sudden exit of his predecessor, Urjit Patel.

has been noted to have become stronger during his innings. His tenure witnessed some of the most unusual challenges in recent history, some of it, never seen or encompassed before. Like the covid storm, that left the global economy shattered, not just India as we seemed to have done better than most. Wars were thought of, feared, but we are still going through two wars, both of which have impacted supply chains and many an economy. These have brought about a rare unseen before uncertainty. The threat has been to both Indian and global economy, every country's financial stability has been challenged. Steering through these times, with silent dignity has been the hallmark of Das's tenure.

During the Covid lockdown, the RBI had to take stock of urgent issues like both liquidity and asset-quality constraints. He kept them under check, ensuring there would not be any cause for market disruption. The RBI chose not to finance the government through the primary market during. It was handled with immaculate ease, in a show of confidence, fully backed by none other than the prime minister himself.

Inflation has been the big concern among governments. He has stuck to his guns, keeping his targets close to the defined upper tolerance level. As Governor, he was the head of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), apart from an uncertain period or two, he largely kept his head down, managing to steer close to targets. To his credit, he did not flinch, even in the last MPC meeting, when a few voices felt there could be a course correction from the RBI. But there wasn't. Das believed and lived strongly by his conviction.

In his tenure, the net NPA ratio declined to 0.56 per cent from 4.50 per cent, banks reported a loss of 32,400 crore in FY18 whereas in FY23 the same figure stood as profits at 12.63 trillion. India's forex reserves grew from \$393.4 billion in December 28, 2018, to \$658 billion in November 2024. He has been a strong votary of Digital transactions, particularly on the UPI, which have witnessed exponential growth; UPI is currently operational in seven countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Mauritius, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore.

Most of all, Das has been credited to strengthening systems and structures within the RBI, looking at long term perspective for the institution.



His successor, Sanjay Malhotra, similarly an IAS officer moving from the Finance Ministry, as Das did, has his job cut out, as he has promised stability and continuity in his new assignment. He is the 26th Governor, educated at a premier institute like Princeton, he is known to be a consensus builder. He has equally stressed the need to remain 'alert and agile', referring to global uncertainties and the political churning, especially in the light of the incoming US president's pronouncements. A 1990 batch officer of the Rajasthan cadre, he belongs to Bikaner where he did his early schooling. We wish him all success in his new assignment.

On his exit, Das speak:

"Heartfelt thanks to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her constant support and backing. The fiscal-monetary coordination was at its best and helped us to deal with the multiple challenges during the last six years".

"In the last few years, we have traversed one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Indian economy, and perhaps, in the global economy also. It was a period of relentless turbulence and jolts".

"As a country, we can derive satisfaction that the Indian economy has not just navigated this period of trials successfully but also emerged stronger".

"Persistent high inflation reduces the purchasing power of consumers and adversely affects both consumption and investment demand. The overall implication of these factors for growth is negative. Therefore, price stability is essential for sustained growth".

"The world today is characterised by intricate complexities and profound uncertainties. As a central bank, our job is that of an anchor of stability and confidence, which would ensure that the economy achieves sustained high growth". **CS**



Don't let Old India Kill the New

Those stoking mandir-masjid/dargah disputes ignore RSS chief Bhagwat's advice — and do disservice to 'Viksit Bharat'



by SHAZIA ILMU

EVEN AS THE conflagration at Sambhal still echoes — the Supreme Court has stayed action on the survey allowed by the trial court till the high court passes appropriate orders — the decision by a local court in Ajmer to hear a petition threatens to stoke yet another religious fire. Claiming that there is a Shiva temple under the dargah of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti, the petition has sought a survey and the right to worship for Hindus at the Ajmer shrine. The petitioner, Vishnu Gupta of one Hindu Sena, with a long history of spurious complaints, has argued for the dargah to be declared the Sankat Mochan Mahadev Temple.

“ Claiming that there is a Shiva temple under the dargah of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti, the petition has sought a survey and the right to worship for Hindus at the Ajmer shrine. I wish Gupta had paid heed to the words of RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat ji, who had clearly stated that there was no need to find a “Shivling” in every mosque and start a new dispute every day.”

I wish Gupta had paid heed to the words of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat ji, who had clearly stated that there was no need to find a “Shivling” in every mosque and start a new dispute every day. In June 2022, he had said: “Now the issue of Gyanvapi mosque (in Varanasi) is going on. There is history, which we cannot change. That history is not made by us, nor by today’s Hindus or Muslims. It happened at the time when Islam came to India with invaders. During the invasion, temples were destroyed to weaken the fortitude of the people wanting freedom. There are thousands of such temples”.

For a while now, the Ajmer shrine has been a source of contention for some extremist groups. It has been subjected to ridiculous claims by some who clearly don’t understand the history and significance of Sufi thought. Ironically, the holy shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti is venerated as much by the Hindus as it is by the Muslims. More than 75 per cent of the shops and hotels in the dargah market are owned by Hindus. From Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi, all prime ministers have sent the sacred chadar on the occasion of the Urs, or death anniversary, of the revered saint, as a mark of respect.

After the disputes of Babri Masjid, Gyanvapi and Sambhal, this is the newest strain on the fabric of peaceful coexistence of the two communities. However, while other disputed sites were mosques, this one is a renowned Sufi shrine. One of the main differences between a mosque and a dargah is that a mosque is a place of worship for Muslims where the believers pros-



trate, that is, offer sajda to Allah, whereas a dargah is where shrines are built for revered Sufi saints.

This is not the first time that a Sufi shrine has been threatened. Sufi orders or silsilas are considered at odds with orthodox theology, which is the reason why they have been persecuted down the centuries. Sufism is the ascetic, mystical form of Islamic thought, the esoteric forms of which extend beyond the Shia-sunni divide, across political borders, economic classes, languages and faiths. Threatened by their widening sphere of influence, Sufis and their shrines have been attacked by all the schools of theological Islamic thought. The Wahhabi, Deobandi, Salafi and Islamic revivalists look down on the veneration of saints and Sufi practices as “shirk” or polytheistic. Right from Afghanistan and Iran to Turkey and present-day Pakistan, Sufi orders are still subjected to discrimination and violence. In India, too, the Deobandi sect has often denounced the dargah wallahs, at times even refusing them religious legitimacy. It’s easy to believe that in India the last Sufi martyr, Sarmad Kashani, was executed by the bigoted Aurangzeb.

Ajmer, which was visited by Emperor Akbar more than 17 times, was also the birthplace of his great grandson Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan’s heir apparent. However, Dara Shikoh was executed in 1659 on his brother Aurangzeb’s orders, for the coveted Mughal throne. Barely two years later, Dara Shikoh’s close confidante, Sarmad, was beheaded on the steps of Jama Masjid by Aurangzeb’s men. Sarmad, who was executed on charges of blasphemy, is still revered as a saint and his mausoleum near Jama Masjid remains an inspiring place of Sufi pilgrimage.

Though the mystically inclined Dara Shikoh’s greatest literary legacy was *Sirr-e-akbar* or the “Great secret”, which was the Persian translation of Upanishads, it was his *Majma-ul-bahrain* or the “Confluence of the Two Seas”, which is the first ever treatise on unity, one that explored the commonality between Sufism and Vedanta in an enlightened breakthrough.

Besides listening seriously to Mohan Bhagwat’s advice, the likes of Vishnu Gupta can also learn from Dara Shikoh’s insight that there is no essential difference between Islam and Hinduism. It astounded him that the scholars of each faith were so mired in the constructs of their own religions that they had not realised this

“Now the issue of Gyanvapi mosque (in Varanasi) is going on. There is history, which we cannot change. That history is not made by us, nor by today’s Hindus or Muslims. It happened at the time when Islam came to India with invaders. During the invasion, temples were destroyed to weaken the fortitude of the people wanting freedom.”

RSS chief Mohan Bhagat

one important philosophical truth — perhaps the most important of all — that, in essence, the two faiths are one and the same. It was essential, therefore, that they be apprised of this grand insight.

An India that is marching on the steady path of inclusive development can do without communal upheavals and disruptions. Religious strife is antithetical to the idea of social progress and economic growth. Crude religious animosity has to be arrested before it devours the innate spirituality of our civilisational ethos. India of yesterday must not be allowed to unsettle and derail the India of tomorrow.

After the disputes of Babri Masjid, Gyanvapi and Sambhal, Ajmer is the newest strain on the fabric of peaceful coexistence of the two communities. However, while other disputed sites were mosques, this one is a renowned Sufi shrine. One of the main differences between a mosque and a dargah is that a mosque is a place of worship for Muslims where the believers prostrate, that is, offer sajda to Allah, whereas a dargah is where shrines are built for revered Sufi saints. This is not the first time that a Sufi shrine has been threatened. Sufi orders or silsilas are considered at odds with orthodox theology, which is the reason why they have been persecuted down the centuries. **CS**

ABOUT

Shazia Ilmi is the national spokesperson for the BJP. This article was first published in The Indian Express. Printed here with permission of the author.

Ethics and Communal Harmony: Impact on Sustainable Development and Economy



by NAJEEB JUNG

Since childhood we learn of the criticality of ethics in our life. But what is ethics or an ethical life? Is it morality or a combination of morality and reasoning? There are aspects and aspects to it. The ethics that a Raja must follow—what we call Raj Dharam. Through the ages we have heard of this from Kings, and rulers. It implies ethical values to rule. Gandhi for example is a great exponent of living a life based on ethics and emerging as one of the leading philosophers of all times. His convictions came from deep readings of different religions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Another example in modern times is the Dalai Lama.

Through history we have examples of aggression by Kings that rebooted themselves for change---Ashoka after Kalinga and some failed despite efforts, like Marcus Aurelius who lived in the battlefield but would prefer a life of philosophy and poetry.

Ethics and Communal harmony or disharmony, shall we say, hugely impact us as individuals, the society and environment around us and influence the continuous process of development as indeed the economy. I suggest that an ethical community is not only desirable in its own right, what Professor Sen would call its intrinsic value, not only because it is just and fair but also because it is a necessary condition, what would be its instrumental value, for sustainable economic development, reduced poverty and enhanced prosperity.

Then there is the ethics of religious people, an example strongly set by Sufis and followers of the Bhakti movement like Baba Nanak, Bulleh Shah or Kabir. These are poets of the heart—Rumi and Bulleh Shah living several centuries apart but sharing the same mystical experiences with belief in the ethics of pure love. They question the reason for their existence—the purpose of life itself.

Rumi asks:

“what can I do my friends, if I do not know? I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Muslim nor Hindu, What can I do—not of the East, nor of the West, not of the land, nor of the sea, Not of nature’s essence, nor of circling heavens, what can I be?”

And, here is Baba Bulleh Shah:

“Bulla kii jaana main kaun?”

Not a believer in the mosque am I

Nor a disbeliever with his rites am I

I am not the pure amongst the impure,

Neither Moses nor Pharoah am I

Bulla, kii jaana main kaun?”

These people took ethics in their lives to a different level. They spoke only of love—of humankind and of God—the final mingling of man’s Atma with the ultimate Atma that created this world.

What Adi Shankaracharya says:

I am not any aspect of the mind like the intellect,

the ego or the memory, I am not the organs of hearing, tasting, smelling or seeing,

I am not the space, nor the earth, nor fire, nor air, I am the form of consciousness and bliss, am Shiva..

Nirankaar Roopam, shivoham shivoham



This is exactly akin the concept of “*wahdat al wujuud*” in Islam that we are all part of the ultimate being—the world is his creation, as are we, indeed parts of the eternal whole.

But then from the esoteric we must transcend to the real world. Away from the mystical dimensions that are within realms of possibility but never obtained through greed, avarice and rage that lead to constant conflict all around.

Of course, we believed Democracy could be a panacea---that too despite a poor start when the jurors in Greece ordered the hemlock for Socrates. And then in 1938 Thomas Mann warned an American audience that democracy must put aside the habit for taking itself for granted. What he meant was that most of times principles and ethics take a back seat when the elected ones get a sense of power or a feeling of insecurity. So much so that ethics, morals, principles can be given a go by.

And, therefore, today we see a challenge to liberal democracy—worldwide. It comes from right wing demagoguery. In 2021 the V Dem institute of Gothenburg, Sweden, produced the largest global data set on democracy, covering about 200 countries. The Institute’s findings are grim reading.

Autocracies now rule majority of people—in 87 countries. This is home to 68% of global population.

Liberal democracies diminished over the past decade from 41 to 32—a population share of just 14%.

About 1/3rd of world population—about 2.6 billion, live in nations urging “autocratisation”, just 4% live in regimes that are becoming more democratic. India with 1.4 billion---once the world’s largest democracy is now described as an electoral autocracy due to shrinking space of media, civil society, and political opposition. Attacks on freedom of expression, right to private assembly, assaults on media, academics, civil institutions are intensifying across the world. In many

ways it’s becoming increasingly clear that assassins of democracy use the same democratic institutions subtly, legally to throttle it. This is clear in Hungary, Russia, and Turkey in recent years.

Another area where ethics takes a back seat is resurgent nationalism. In the name of democracy resurgent nationalism all around the globe is one of narrow, divisive, tribalistic ethno-nationalism that rides rough shod over diversities, suspicious of dissident groups and sees minorities as potential 5thcolumnists. This crude form

of majoritarianism endangers civil rights of minorities but is attractive to populists from majority ethnic groups----catholic nationalists in Poland, Hindu nationalists in India, Islamists in Indonesia and Turkey, white evangelicals in the US and Brazil, or Zionists in Israel. And here lies serious concern as we look around the world in democratically elected governments.

Of course, authoritarian leaders have an advantage over their democratic peers in situations that require quick decisions while democracy is excruciatingly slow. However, I would argue that such advantages are transient. By its very construct, a

functioning democracy is more deliberative, but electoral processes manage social conflicts better and lend stabilizing legitimacy to policy decisions that grow from conditional consent of citizens. Yes, it can often be chaotic and maddeningly slow, but the fact remains that democracies enrich individual autonomy and freedom, participation and deliberation which may be regarded as an important part of human development itself. On the other hand, abuses that are routine in authoritarian countries make the quality of development poorer.

An ethical community recognizes and respects the dignity and agency of an individual’s identity, irrespective of one’s caste, creed, religion, gender or sexual orientation. These are all its critically important intrinsic values. But I want to extend my argument further: in

Then there is the ethics of religious people, an example strongly set by Sufis and followers of the Bhakti movement like Baba Nanak, Bulleh Shah or Kabir. These are poets of the heart—Rumi and Bulleh Shah living several centuries apart but sharing the same mystical experiences with belief in the ethics of pure love.



addition to these intrinsic values, an ethical community also has an instrumental value which enables it to prosper, to more effectively fight the scourges of poverty and be a more fair, just and equitable society.

So let me now come to instances when elected democrats have behaved in a bizarre, obnoxious, illegal and unacceptable manner and all ethics and principles are given a go by. And, in the process, they harm and hurt not only the targeted victims but the society at large making it poorer, more unfair, less just, more unequal: in other words, more diminished.

The United States seems to have forgotten the brazen attack on Capitol Hill in 2021 by Trump supporters. Here is a party that supported insurrection and selling conspiracy theories that are now widely embraced.

The illegal, ruthless and unwarranted bombings of Iraq by the Bush/Blair combine in search of non-existent nuclear arms where drilling bombs were used on innocent civilians; bombs that could drill into the bowels of buildings and homes at temperatures of 3000 degrees incinerating all human life. And Gen Colin Powell at the UN when he couldn't move his lips without lying.

The use of low-grade napalm in the mountains of Tora Bora in Afghanistan in search of the allusive Mulla Omar and Bin Laden.

The unprecedented cruelty unleashed by Bibi Netanyahu on the women and children of Gaza, and now Lebanon. It's a novel horror in human history to watch a genocidal war on our mobile phones—where men, women and journalists live, tweet and put pictures, moments before dying.

India, my friends has been different. Long before we started understanding our glorious past thru William Dalrymple—many others have written of our great history. A.L. Basham wrote of the Wonder that was India, even as Romilla Thapar dug deep into understanding our richness.

Gandhi for example is a great exponent of living a life based on ethics and emerging as one of the leading philosophers of all times. His convictions came from deep readings of different religions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Another example in modern times is the Dalai Lama.

While Chanakya's Arthshastra became the bible of administrative and governance principles, we had the first Republics of the world in Magadha. Nalanda became the fulcrum of profound education making knowledge spread its wings beyond India's boundaries. The kingdoms in the South— the Chalukyas, Cholas and Rashtrakutas set new bench marks not just in fine administration but in arts, music and architecture. Similar processes unfolded across the dusty plains of North India in an epochal sweep and carried with them beliefs, traditions, rituals, cultures, mythologies, music, food, literary expressions and much else.

The mainstream, with its many tributaries and distributaries, was a celebration of diversities, a river flowing across centuries, meandering, stumbling and bursting through obstructions. India became a fabulous fabric interwoven with humanity, indeed life. And the seeds of expression scattered in the fertile polygot soil of the Indo-Gangetic plains, planted and replanted again and again, in varying soils and climes across centuries were to grow into newer and richer strains.

Later the Mughals left an indelible contribution to arts, music and architecture, with incrust-ed words in gold on the Peacock Throne in Delhi's Diwan e Khas: *"agar firdaus e bar rooh e zameen ast, hamiin ast o hamiin ast o hamiin ast"* (if there is a paradise here on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here).

Our stories for freedom from British rule are tales of folklore. If India did produce revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Batukeshwar

Dutt, Rajguru, Chandrashekhar Azad, Mangal Pande, Rani Jhansi, Ashfaqullah Khan, Ram Prasad Bismil, Begul Hazrat Mahal, Hasrat Mohani (I could go on and on); then it also had a pacifist like Gandhi or constitutionalists like Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Hundreds went to jail, gave up homes, gave up wearing western clothes to resort to simple hand-woven Khadi. India lived a revolution that was hitherto unknown to the world.

And then on November 26, 1949-75 years ago, we gifted a magnificent constitution to ourselves. Years of debates in the Constituent Assembly by patriots of the highest order, politicians, poets, teachers, men and women—some of whom had spent years in British jails gave us phenomenal Directive Principles of State Policy and guaranteed Fundamental Rights.

Despite the horrible partition, the riots, Gandhi's assassination, we rose above all that.

But as Thomas Mann had said in 1938---there are always dangers ahead. Seasoned politicians foresaw this. Writing in 1953/54 under the pseudonym of Chanakya, Nehru describes himself as a Caesar passing by, who

might turn dictator with a little twist. While Nehru did not become one, his daughter certainly turned the Constitution on its head. She refused to abdicate power after the High Court declared her election to the Lok Sabha illegal. A so-called Emergency was declared for the whole country, opposition leaders incarcerated, as most of the press crawled to her commands. Everyone crawled. Judges were made Chief Justices superseding ones that upheld the Constitution. We have lived thru those 19 months and make no mistake—very similar to Germany---many of us applauded the emergency and were in fact happy when dissident voices, particularly those of students or labour unions, were suppressed.

This is the land where Baba Bulleh Shah sang:

“Holi Khelungi, kah bismillah, naam nabi kii ratan chadhi boond padhi allah allah”.

This is our India. A bouquet of syncretic culture. Where a Muslim, Nazeer Akabarabadi sings peans in praise of Lord Krishna and Ram, where Mian Miir is called upon by Baba Nanak to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple.

Where thousands of Hindus and Muslims visit the Golden Temple, heads covered in reverence or thousands of Sikhs and Hindus pray at the dargahs of Sufi saints in hope of wishes being fulfilled.

And so we cannot have Nagas under virtual army rule, or a shattered Manipur waiting for resolution, or adivasis in Chattisgarh and the Maharashtra /Andhra border living under the fear of CRPF as foresters evict them from lands to make place for industry and are moved to destitution, or minorities living in fear of violence, lynchings or hate speeches, skilled and patriotic public sector workers demonized for inefficiency, women—urban, rural, rich and poor—crushed by patriarchy.

In the midst of all this, of course there is development. The sensex booms and the rich grow richer. But is this sustainable, if we are faced with continuing attempts to divide us? We seem to have forgotten our history when the Late Bhogilal Leherchand or Ardeshir Shroff were spokesmen for high morals and ethics in business. And when G.D. Birla or Jamnalal Bajaj walked hand in hand with Gandhi. Birla supported the independence movement even while building ethical enterprises. Bajaj integrated Gandhian principles into business and the Godrej family remained committed to environmental sustainability long before it became fashionable. How little is known that under Gandhi’s influence, Birla and Bajaj contributed funds to the Jamia Millia Islamia when this Muslim University ran out of funds in the 1920s. Jamnalal Bajaj became the treasurer for the Jamia Millia Islamia. We seem to have forgotten the achievements of the Tata group that built a vast business Empire, that symbolised in many ways the genius of India’s enterprise in an ethical way. We should bow our heads to Azim Premji who lives even now conducting his business while upkeeping the highest moral standards and is indeed a torch bearer for immense philanthropic initiatives.



We cannot reach the heights we want to or are capable of with economic inequality at such unprecedented heights as it exists. Environmental degradation threatens our existence. And dare I say corporate influence—where money buys power and influences governments—undermines the entire democratic process. It is when corporate money influences elections, when crony capitalism raises its ugly head, when environmental regulations are diluted for profit, when labour rights are compromised, when there is growing power of monopolies then there are bound to be issues that endanger the country.

The stoic philosopher Seneca said: “Life is like a play: it’s not the length, but the excellence of the acting that matters”. So, today’s business leaders must ask: What excellence are we pursuing?

Our challenges in sustainability and inequality must become opportunities for innovative solutions.

Businesses must emphasize ethical practices, develop metrics beyond profit and foster democratic corporate governance.

As the country strives to preserve its democracy and carry on the fight within Parliament and the Courts to preserve and nurture it, business leaders must step forward not just as wealth creators but as ethical stewards of our collective future.

India stands at critical crossroads. While the Constitution stands for a complete undiluted, uncompromised, secular democracy—an ethical community living in social harmony, political interests are nudging it towards a state of continuing conflict. This must be resisted. We as Indians have to rise above our communities, beyond our castes, beyond our *mohallas*, streets and families and look at a world that our forefathers dreamt about as they fought for our freedom. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Najeeb Jung is a former civil servant, former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia and the former Lt Governor of Delhi. This article is excerpted from his recent lecture at an event in Mumbai, printed with his permission.

AI Celebrates Christmas '24



AI is ruling the creative world, creating its own ups and downsides, providing imagination new leaps into figuring a new world that brings yesterday alive. This Christmas, celebrations are imagined between Rajive and Rahul Gandhi, Mrs Indira Gandhi and Queen Elizabeth II, among others. Such images bring instant smiles on viewers, opening a world never imagined before. Equally, such 'fake' memories can also destroy narratives in present times, creating doubt and fear in targeted audiences. But for the present, live through happy moments during this festive season, in the spirit of togetherness and bonding, rarely imagined. **CS**







What will it take India to Grow at 10% for Three Decades?



by AMITABH KANT

India needs robust growth to meet the aspirations of our people. Sustained growth rate of 10% can potentially see per-capita incomes increase 8x current levels, an incredible feat for a country with 1.4 billion people. We have seen the economic transformation of countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China, where they grew at rates of 10%+ for three decades. Exports and investments drove these high growth rates.

Such growth rates will require strong fiscal health, a thriving manufacturing sector, liveable cities, skilled human capital, and be driven by private investment. Investment rates will need to rise to ~ 35% of GDP. In turn, investment is financed by savings. Increasing

domestic savings will be crucial in financing these additional investments. Improving fiscal health, along with a focus on formal job creation will increase the pool of domestic savings.

Fiscal Stability

In FY24, the combined fiscal deficit (Centre + States), stood at 8.6% of gross domestic product (GDP), and the combined debt/GDP ratio stood at 81.6%. Government deficits will come down in the coming years as the economy continues to grow. Tax to GDP ratios are improving, touching ~ 18% in the past year. Capital expenditures

India needs robust growth to meet the aspirations of our people. Sustained growth rate of 10% can potentially see per-capita incomes increase 8x current levels, an incredible feat for a country with 1.4 billion people.

have also almost doubled in the past ten years, reaching 3.5% of GDP. Whilst these parameters have improved significantly since the peak impact of COVID19, further fiscal consolidation is needed. At the same time, the push towards capex must

be sustained in the coming years.

Annual net government borrowings have expanded from ~ Rs. 9 lakh crores in FY20, to about Rs. 18 lakh crores in FY24. Sustained higher borrowings by government can potentially lead to higher debt servicing costs, by raising benchmark bond yields. As these yields serve as a benchmark, this translates into a higher borrowing cost for the rest of the economy. This is essentially what is known as crowding out.

Improving government revenues will reduce the need for future borrowing. And these need not necessarily be tax revenues. Non-tax revenues can also be bolstered. Asset monetization and reducing government equity in PSUs needs to be pursued. Whilst tax to GDP ratios will improve as the economy formalises, a focus on manufacturing and exports can speed up this process

and widen the tax net. Labour intensive manufacturing can create large-scale employment opportunities, bringing more resources into the direct tax net.

Manufacturing Exports

A focus on labour intensive manufacturing and exports can also improve our current account balance. Our current account balance has almost always seen deficits, primarily owing to our merchandise trade deficit, but slightly offset by our surplus in trade of services. Whilst the production linked incentive (PLI) schemes are an interim solution, we must continue to address the cost disadvantages we face. The rules for the four Labour Codes must be notified at the earliest, harmonised across Centre and States. States must take the lead in instituting ease of doing business reforms to reduce the cost of doing business. A renewed momentum promoting EoDB at State Level is necessary. Taking cues from mobile manufacturing, we must work with lead firms in areas such as textiles and garments to boost employment and exports. The potential of food processing exports has not yet been fully realised as well.

Sustainable Urbanisation

The 12 new industrial cities announced under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) will play an important role in making our manufacturing competitive. These industrial cities will provide world class connectivity, the provision of plug and play facilities, and align urban development with community needs, creating liveable and productive cities. By building these new cities in a 'ahead of demand' manner, means that they will be able to cope with exponential growth. Dholera, for instance is designed to be twice the size of New Delhi. Furthermore, these cities will also relieve pressure existing urban centres.

Human Development

Apart from tackling infrastructure related supply-side issues, concerted action is needed in addressing the shortage in supply of skilled labour. To improve employability, both education and vocational programmes need to be industry led. The recently announced internship scheme is a progressive step. Degree apprenticeships could be another avenue to pursue. Outcome oriented funding models for skill development and vocational education can be considered. The employment linked incentive (ELI) scheme must also be implemented at the earliest. Expanding access to training in future areas of growth such as IT hardware, electronics manufacturing, digital banking and finance, for women will be crucial



If India is to grow at rate of 10%, several states will have to grow at 10%+. We will need 12 champion states which will now take. India's growth story forward. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha are populous state with rich mineral resources. These states must take the lead.

in boosting the female labour force participation rate.

Private Capex

Whilst much has been done, efforts as outlined above will spur private investment in the economy. Tapping both domestic and international demand will lead to a sustained cycle of private sector led growth in India. Our private sector must innovate, and invest in R&D. A focus on quality is crucial as well. Without a focus on quality, we will not be able to tap international markets. While an enabling environment has been created, our private sector must evolve from being domestic champions to global

ones. Similarly, we need our small and medium enterprises to mature into large industries. We need 10,000 large companies by international standards, ready to compete in global markets. Similarly, private innovation and capex will also be crucial in the energy transition. Whether it is critical raw material processing, or green hydrogen, the efforts must be private sector led.

If India is to grow at rate of 10%, several states will have to grow at 10%+. We will need 12 champion states which will now take. India's growth story forward. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha are populous state with rich mineral resources. They will have to grow at rapid rates to create jobs. These states must take the lead in implementing reforms, reducing their dependence on agriculture, undertake ease of doing business and modernise their economies. **CS**

ABOUT

Amitabh Kant is presently India's Sherpa to G20 group, during a year when India holds its presidency, and 2023 will witness over 200 meetings, in some 50 cities across the country, including the summit later in September. Kant is formerly a secretary in the Government of India, former CEO of Niti Ayog, and creator of globally acclaimed campaigns like 'Incredible India' for the Ministry of Tourism.

The Great Denial: India's Burgeoning Polulation

by AIR VICE MARSHAL RAJEEV HORA (RETD)

The French phrase '*fait accompli*' literally means "an accomplished fact", something that has already happened and cannot be changed now. That perhaps best describes the Indian attitude towards its burgeoning population. We overtook China in this respect a year back in April 2023. When the milestone figure was reached, the whole affair was underplayed except for some loose statements about a particular community being the primary culprit towards this so-called achievement.

Before we deliberate any further on the subject, reviewing a few statistics would be in order. As per the UN figures on the Worldometer website, India's population figure today stands at 145.69 crores which works out to be 17.78% of the world's population.

The corresponding population density is 488 people per sq Km. The density stats also puts us way up, with only a much smaller Bangladesh, beating us to the pole position. We are still growing at 0.89 percent which works out to be an increase of about 1.3 Crores every year. Something like adding an Australia every two years.

Notably the world's population has itself increased significantly in the last 100 years. A look at the numbers below will give us a fair idea of the rate of multiplication of the human race:

1 Billion (1804)	6 Billion (1998)
2 Billion (1930)	7 Billion (2010)
3 Billion (1960)	8 Billion (First half of 2022)
4 Billion (1974)	9 Billion (Predicted 2037)
5 Billion (1986)	10 Billion (Predicted 2060)

The key parameter that matters in demographics is the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) which is the average number of children that are born to a woman over her lifetime. No one factor can be singularly held responsible for a certain TFR. However, the most common correlations of fertility exist with levels of economic development, urbanization, gender inequality, female education & employment and access to contraceptives.

Most of these factors get clubbed together in what is called the Human Development Indices. Fertility therefore gets linked to development in a way. Karan Singh's famous one liner at the United Nation in 1974 still holds good when he said, "*Development is the best contraceptive.*" It is an established demographic paradox that more a societal group can afford more children, the lesser progeny they wish to have.

In a similar but amusing vein, another scholar



derived an inverse correlation between availability of electricity supply in the evening hours in certain states to their population growth.

In simple terms, a population that maintains a TFR of about 2.1 over an extended period is able to sustain itself provided the mortality rates are also brought down. This is because it may take numerous generations for the TFR to show its effect in terms of birth rate, due to what is termed as population lag effect. This is precisely the reason why we are continuing to increase although our TFR has already touched 1.98-2.0.

Prior to 1800, although the Total Fertility rate used to be pretty high (5-6), it used to be offset with a corresponding high mortality rate especially infant mortality. With massive improvements in medical science, life expectancy has gone up tremendously. So even with a significant drop in TFR, the population has continued to increase. So much so, that the world population has almost doubled in the last 50 years. With current trends of reducing growth rates in vogue, the peak is predicted to be around 2084-2100.

National efforts to control population by enforcement actions have generally failed all over the world. Romania and China are the prime examples. India also dabbled with the concept during the Emergency days with the infamous sterilization effort. China in fact, had to do an absolute volte-face from its one-child policy as the results proved to be counter-productive.

At this point, it would be interesting to read Mohan Bhagwat's recent statement on the issue. The RSS Chief said, "*The population policy of India, decided around 1998 or 2002, states that the population growth rate should not be below 2.1. We need more than two, that is three, that's what the population science says. This number is important because it (society) should survive.*"

"It is true that the higher the population, the greater the burden. If the population is used properly, it becomes a resource. We also have to consider how many people our country can feed and support after 50 years. Population imbalance leads to changes in geographical boundaries."

"Population control and religion-based population balance is an important subject that can no longer be ignored. So a comprehensive population policy should be brought and should be equally applicable to all. Only then rules pertaining to population control will yield results."

The welcome part is that for the first time in many decades that this issue is being acknowledged publicly. However, Mohan Bhagwat is both right and wrong as he tries to mix politics and demography with generalizations. Right in the sense that a TFR below 2.1 will indeed lead to a gradual reduction in the population. But the key question is optimum utilization of this resource especially when we are passing through the demographic dividend stage.

India occupies 2.41% of the world's land area but supports close to 18% of the world's population. So are we happy being a 145 crore nation increasing to 168 Crore by 2050 and even more? Or do we need to gradually scale down to a more manageable figure where our chances of survival are in fact better with improved standards of living and health care? A bigger cake for a smaller party!

Politically, a subtle correlation of our population growth with a certain religion/ community is constantly being done. Not entirely incorrect in relative terms but the same communities' further correlation with lack of education & development and poverty is conveniently ignored. A very understated political message of *'the fear of being outnumbered one-day'* is being passed across to continue multiplication unabated.

At the time of the partition, the total Indian population was approximately 30 crore. Today it is 145 crore and increasing. The community being referred to is today close to 20 crores. Even if the population of the community under scrutiny had Nil population at the time of partition, where has the additional 95 crores (145-30-20) come from? Something to ponder over.

The soothsayers are basking in the glory of us being the biggest consumer market in the world. However, the reality is that we are bursting at our seams with our economy, infrastructure, governance, education, health services, policing and many other associated attributes lagging far behind. It is not hurting as we are happy with just survival and shifting responsibility with warped justifications and flawed hypothesis.

The looming spectre of a huge ageing population and unimaginable quantum of their health-care needs in another four decades after the demographic dividend, does not appear to have registered. All round

depletion of natural resources, including fertility of soil, water, petroleum and minerals is a natural corollary for a not-too-distant future.

Further, no rules regarding population control as suggested by the RSS Chief are going to work in a mammoth democracy like India. So is it a fait accompli that we accept mutely? Well not exactly. The key lies in indirect influence, the primary being, 'Education, Education, Education', especially of the girl child. Only thing is that such a national program must be extremely relentless and focussed which goes beyond lip-service and affiliations.

Every educated girl will thus grow up to be aware of her physical requirements and limitations besides being financially self-reliant. Once confident on taking on this patriarchal dominated society, she will ensure that her pregnancy is a conscious choice and not

something that is thrust upon her as a gender commitment or compulsion.

Besides uninhibited contraceptive availability, the effort has to be aided by top class pre-natal and post-natal care. That would make her confident that her progeny will survive. With such a comprehensive approach, an inevitable socio-cultural impact on successive generations and so also on development is bound to happen.

It is realistic to expect that universal education for the female gender will take generations to achieve. But education need not come from higher literacy always. In today's digital age,

there is no dearth of constructive and useful information about family planning and reproduction that can be transmitted through social media and many other forms of digital transmission.

Summing up, we need to get out of the denial mindset that we do not have a demographic problem. We certainly have one but it is not a battle of the civilizations but an existential socio-economic issue. Solutions also exist but they lie in changing our political lenses and re-fixing our priorities. **CS**

We need to get out of the denial mindset that we do not have a demographic problem. We certainly have one but it is not a battle of the civilizations but an existential socio-economic issue. Solutions also exist but they lie in changing our political lenses and re-fixing our priorities.



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Air Vice Marshal Rajeev Hora is a Qualified Flying Instructor and an Experimental Test Pilot with over 3800 flying hours on multiple types of aircraft. His last appointment was as AOC HQ MAO at Mumbai. Previously

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Vision to Reality: Simplifying R&D in India



by LT. GENERAL TARUN CHAWLA (RETD)

"Innovation is the engine of growth. Research and innovation are the foundation of a knowledge-based economy. For India to emerge as a leader, it is essential to have strong R&D infrastructure and foster a culture of innovation."

- Sh. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India

Introduction

Research and Development (R&D) is the backbone of innovation, the driver of economic progress, and the key to technological dominance. For India to rise as a global powerhouse, cultivating a dynamic and forward-looking R&D ecosystem is non-negotiable. Despite a wealth of talent and growing investments, India's R&D contributions remain modest compared to advanced economies. Bridging this gap requires bold, strategic action—a synergy of transformative policy reforms, active private sector participation, and cutting-edge infrastructure development. Achieving India's ambition of becoming a \$5 trillion economy and a self-reliant nation hinges on this commitment to R&D. Currently, with R&D spending at just 0.64% of GDP—far behind global leaders like China

Self-reliance, or 'Atmanirbharta' necessitates indigenous technological capabilities. A strong R&D framework reduces dependence on foreign technologies, ensuring national security and economic stability.

and the U.S.—underinvestment threatens to stifle innovation and impede economic growth. **It's time for India to prioritize R&D as the catalyst for her global ascent.**

Self-reliance, or 'Atmanirbharta' necessitates indigenous technological capabilities. A strong R&D framework reduces dependence on foreign technologies, ensuring national security and economic stability. The private sector's role is crucial, yet its contribution

to India's Gross Expenditure on R&D is limited. Encouraging private investment through incentives and public-private partnerships can boost this several fold.

The Funding Challenge

A significant barrier to R&D in India is inadequate funding. The country's R&D expenditure has remained stagnant at around 0.65% of its GDP, far below countries like the USA, Germany, Israel and South Korea. To

facilitate R&D, a focused effort is required to include:-

- **Greater Public Investment:** The government must allocate a higher percentage of GDP to research, focusing on strategic sectors such as healthcare, energy, and defence.
- **Encourage Private Sector Participation:** Incentivizing private companies through tax benefits and grants can boost their R&D contributions. Public-Pri-

vate Partnerships should be expanded to pool resources and expertise.

- **Promote Venture Capital:** Providing venture capital support for startups and innovators will encourage risk-taking and entrepreneurial R&D efforts.

A Warm Handshake Between Academic and Research Institutions

Higher education system plays a critical role in fostering R&D. However, many of our institutions lack the resources and infrastructure required to compete globally. A targeted and concentrated approach is essential to include:

- **Building World-Class Facilities:** Establishing state-of-the-art laboratories and research centers equipped with advanced technology.
- **Interdisciplinary Research:** Encouraging collaborations across disciplines to tackle complex global challenges.
- **Focus on Quality over Quantity:** Revising curricula to emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation rather than rote learning.

Industry - Academia Bonhomie is Critical

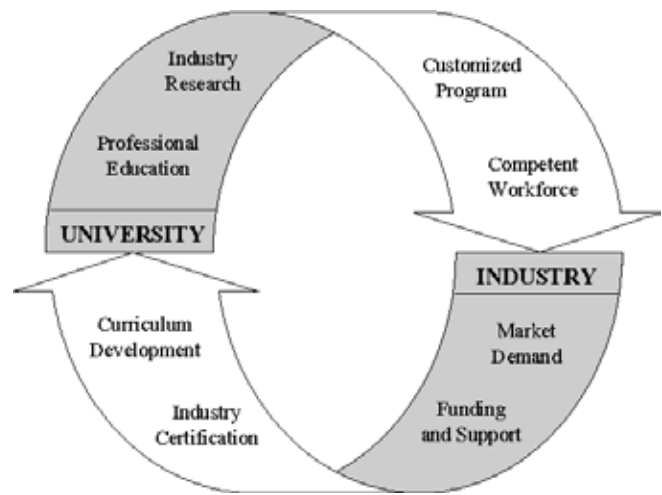
Bridging the gap between academic research and industrial application is essential to ensure innovations reach the market. Some measures include:-

- **Creating Innovation Hubs:** Establish dedicated zones where universities and industries can collaborate on projects.
- **Skill Development Programs:** Joint initiatives to upskill students and researchers, aligning academic output with industry needs.
- **Commercialization of Research:** Simplifying processes to patent and market academic research outcomes.

Regulatory Frameworks Need Simplification

Complex regulatory processes often hinder research in India. Streamlining these frameworks is crucial for a conducive R&D environment.

- **Single-Window Clearance:** Introducing a uni-



fied platform for approvals and funding processes.

- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Strengthening the IPR regime to protect innovators and attract foreign investments. Addressing gaps in existing laws for emerging technologies like AI, biotechnology, and software innovations.

- **Ethical Standards:** Ensure clear, fair guidelines for research involving sensitive areas like biotechnology and artificial intelligence.

Avoid Missing the Innovation Bus

A thriving R&D ecosystem requires a societal shift towards valuing curiosity and creativity. We need to ramp up beyond the traditional jugaad culture.

- **Early Education Initiatives:** Introduction of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) programs in schools will nurture innovation from a young age.
- **Recognize and Reward Talent:** National awards, fellowships, and grants for outstanding researchers can help motivate young minds.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Encouragement to women, minorities, and marginalized groups to participate in R&D through targeted scholarships and programs.

Leveraging Emerging Technologies

Investment in cutting-edge technologies is critical to maintaining global competitiveness.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning:** Boost AI research and its application in sectors like healthcare, agriculture, and logistics.
- **Green Technologies:** Greater focus on sustainable technologies to address environmental challenges.
- **Space and Defense R&D:** Strengthening of capabilities in strategic areas through partnerships with organizations like ISRO and DRDO.

Global Models - Need to Learn

India can draw inspiration from countries excelling in R&D. For instance:

- **South Korea:** Strong government-industry collaboration and significant R&D investments.
- **Israel:** Support for startups and innovation through government-backed incubators.



● **Germany:** Emphasis on vocational training and industrial research.

South Korean Model

South Korea is recognized as one of the world's most innovative economies, largely due to its robust ecosystem for R&D. The country's emphasis on R&D is evident in its high expenditure, strategic government policies, and industry-academia collaboration.

South Korea allocates approximately **4.5% of its GDP to R&D**, one of the highest in the world. This financial commitment enables the development of cutting-edge technologies and innovation. Government agencies like the Ministry of Science and ICT provide grants and support for basic and applied research. South Korean conglomerates, such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundai, are major contributors, accounting for a significant portion of national R&D expenditure. Government initiatives like the **"Basic Plan for Science and Technology"** outline long-term goals and allocate resources for priority sectors. Companies engaged in R&D receive tax breaks, deductions, and financial support, encouraging investment in innovation.

South Korea fosters a "Triple Helix" model, integrating the efforts of academia, industry, and government. Universities and research institutions collaborate with industries to commercialize innovations. Companies often sponsor university research programs and provide internships to students. South Korea emphasizes education and skill development to ensure a steady pipeline of researchers and innovators.

The Israeli Way

In comparison Israel, often referred to as the **"Start-up Nation,"** has emerged as a global leader in R&D, despite its small size and limited natural resources. With one of the highest R&D expenditures as a percentage of GDP (approximately 5.4%), Israel has built an innovation-driven economy. Its success is rooted in strategic policies, a robust ecosystem, and a culture of innovation.

The Israeli government plays a pivotal role in nurturing R&D through funding, policy support, and infrastructure. Veterans transition into the startup

world, repurposing defense technologies for civilian breakthroughs in communication, healthcare, and agriculture. A robust startup ecosystem, supported by government-backed incubators, tax incentives, and funding, fuels this innovation. High R&D spending, along with the presence of global tech giants like Intel and Google, anchors Israel's position as a hub for advanced research. A culture of resilience, risk-taking, and strong networks among entrepreneurs and investors reinforces its status as a global innovation leader.

"A nation that does not invest in its own R&D is doomed to depend on others for its critical needs."

Indigenous innovation is not just about economic growth but also about national security and self-reliance.

Dan Shechtman, Israeli scientist and Nobel laureate in Chemistry

Conclusion

The Prime Minister in his address to the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on 15th August, 2022, had pointed out the importance of Research and Development in our country in the **Amrit Kaal** giving the clarion call of **"Jai Anusandhan"** on the occasion. The establishment of Anusandhan National Research Foundation by the Government of India was a step in this direction.

Facilitating R&D in India is not just a necessity but a pathway to achieving **self-reliance, global competitiveness, and sustainable development**. India's R&D future hinges on bold reforms: scale public funding, incentivize private innovation, and fuel startups with venture capital. Forge public-private synergies, prioritize strategic sectors, and attract global tech giants. Cultivate risk-taking, streamline regulations, and build cutting-edge infrastructure. Innovation thrives when ambition meets action — India must lead, not follow.

The vision of a self-reliant and technologically advanced nation relies on India's ability to empower its researchers and innovators. With the right policies and collective effort, India can transform into a global hub of research and innovation, driving progress and propelling the nation towards its goal of **VIKSIT BHARAT @ 2047**. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Gen Tarun Chawla, was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in Jun 1984. He has served with the United Nations Mission in Liberia and has been an instructor at the College of Defence Management

at Secunderabad. The officer has commanded an Artillery Brigade in the LC Sector in J&K, and an Artillery Division as part of Army's Western Command. He was the Director General Financial Planning, prior to assuming the role of Director General of Artillery.

Remembering the Iconic Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 100th Birth Anniversary



Here was a PM who stood out for governance, equality, development and making India tall, in the comity of nations. A believer in parliamentary democracy and upholding probity in national life. Ideals that need to be remembered, emulated and brought into prominence among all political classes and parties. It is ironic that Vajpayee's 100th anniversary falls at a time when such ideals need to be recalled most. By every government, at the centre and in the states, which have a number of regional parties in power, each doing its own bidding.

by NAVIN BERRY

One of India's most loved PMs, a statesman more than a politician, a pracharak of the RSS who was more of a maarg darshak for the nation, and truly remains ever so much, today, on his 100th birth anniversary. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a man of distinction, a poet, a dreamer and a deliverer. A rare combination of traits, who was above all, a transformer for modern India.

All these tributes came out loud and clear in his tribute to the late PM, when PM Narendra Modi penned his thoughts, widely carried in all the newspapers on Christmas Day. Coming from humble roots, Vajpayee realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance, Modi said.

"He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people."

"The NDA government under Atal ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Project which connected the length and breadth of India," he wrote.

"The Vajpayee government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration," he wrote.

His government's decision to carry out nuclear tests and its handling of the aftermath provide a wonderful example of his leadership, Modi wrote, and cited how "The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm, with the government calling for another set of tests two days later, on May 13."

If the tests of May 11, 1998, showed scientific skill, the ones on May 13 showed true leadership, he wrote.

Modi said Vajpayee understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. He presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics and became a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions.

Vajpayee was not one to cling to power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics, the prime minister said, adding that his government fell by one vote in 1999.

"When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement."

Modi noted that as external affairs minister, Vajpayee became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at the United Nations, noting that this shows how deeply rooted he was in the Indian culture. His persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression. Whenever the choice came between ideology and power, Vajpayee always chose the former, Modi wrote. **CS**

Internal Cohesion And Stability: *Essential To Achieve Viksit Bharat 2047*



To realise the dream of Viksit Bharat 2047, India must prioritize national unity through robust institutions and social harmony to ensure uninterrupted progress.

by MAJOR GENERAL SC MOHANTY, AVSM (RETD)

India has largely been able to hold its own externally in maintaining its strategic autonomy in foreign policy articulation, despite challenges. Be it the Russia – Ukraine war, the conflict in the Middle East, participation in widely disparate multilateral organisations (BRICS, SCO, QUAD, I2U2) or the COP 29 negotiations in Baku; it has been able to skilfully maintain equidistance between the West and the Non-west through pragmatic reasoning and real-politik. It has ironically catapulted itself to emerge as a potential interlocutor between belligerent opponents to promote world truce. It has undeniably emerged as the voice of the Global South with the successful conduct of G20 meet at Delhi last year buttressed by vaccine diplomacy and bailing out stressed economies. Despite the real GDP growth declining to 5.4 percent against the projected 6.8 percent, it is still regarded as the most resilient and fastest growing large economy in the forceable decade.

It has nevertheless to contend with an immediate neighbourhood ravaged by constant political, economic and security turmoil, accentuated by external agencies. As is evident, there would be contestations to repudiate India's rise through political, economic, diplomatic and informational (staged narratives) shackles. Continued rant on HR violations and democratic backsliding,

encouragement to separatist elements on foreign soil (US, UK and Canada), an insulting 105 ranking in the Global Hunger index despite providing free rations to over 80 crore population and corruption in high profile corporates are aimed to impede its growth trajectory.

Be that as it may, it is the internal societal cohesion that is likely to pose the most potent threat to its aspiration towards Viksit Bharat by 2047. While electoral politics of appeasement of a section of the electorate tend to polarise the population on the basis of caste, ethnicity and religion, there are external elements often funded by foreign governments that tend to fish in troubled waters to exacerbate internal dissent and divisiveness.

In the face of these challenges, it is imperative for the nation to project the united front on key national security and developmental goals. While there are plethora of issues affecting internal stability, this article is aimed at examining some of the contemporary challenges that can be detrimental to India's growth story.

Religious / Ethnic Polarisation

One of the biggest challenges to internal cohesion has been religious polarisation largely owing to political expediency. The joint parliamentary committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2024 has witnessed multiple acrimonious and violent exchanges in the run up to its tabling in the parliament (now postponed). The Musalman Waqf Act of 1923 and the Central Waqf Act of 1954 were legal regimes to govern waqf properties. However, the Act of 1995 is perceived as highly discriminatory lacking fairness and transparency, granting overwhelming and extra constitutional power to waqf boards even beyond the judicial jurisdictional power of civil courts. On the other end of the spectrum, is the attempt by the majority community to dismantle century old religious shrines (Sambhal quagmire) on the pretext of it being built over a Hindu temples. The Places of Worship Act 1991 is being questioned on its constitutional validity, despite the ideological Hindutva head resenting the attempt to look for a shivling under every mosque. Fringe and radical elements on both sides of the religious divide tend to conflagrate an emotive issue. The Global Risk Report ranked India the highest in terms of misinformation and disinformation. In a rapidly polarised social environment, this can be catastrophic.

Caste Census

Proponents of caste census, pertaining to enumeration

of Other Backward Classes, argue that caste is an inalienable part of Indian society determining social relationships, economic opportunities and political dynamics. Justified by the constitutional provisions of Article 14 and 21, the exercise is essential to address social inequality, political and social subjugation of the marginalised and enable equitable and inclusive distribution of resources. The antagonists view it as a reinforcement of caste system which is discriminatory, complex and cumbersome exercise with inaccurate/unreliable data. Caste enumeration could lead to deepening fault lines, socially divisive leading to violence and social and political upheavals, especially if it involves redistribution of resources (read reservations). The demand for caste census last conducted in 1931 is gaining momentum to garner support of a particular section for electoral gains. A similar demand had led to a Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) in 2011. Its data turned out to be flawed and inaccurate and thus never published. The caste census in Bihar revealed that 63 percent of its 13.7 crore population belonged to Other Backward and Extremely Backward Classes. Together with SC and ST, this would amount to a whopping 84 percent of the population (countrywide it could be as much as 69 percent). Additionally, once conducted, how the data is to be used to strategize an inclusive society especially on the issue of reservation remains an illusion.

Income Inequality

A recent study from the World Inequality Lab finds the gap between the rich and poor in India starker than was under the British rule. While the top 1% of the population possessed over 40.5% of national wealth, the bottom half of 700 million hold a mere 3%. Privatization of Indian economy coupled with globalization favoured those with higher education allowing them to compete internationally favouring wealthy and upper caste communities. The richest 10,000 Indians have an average income of Rs 48mn, more than 2000 times the average income. The number of billionaires in India has risen to 185, only behind the US(835) and China(427). Coupled with this is the regional disparity (North-South and East-West). The high income inequality significantly undermines social cohesion which manifest in social unrest and resentment amongst disadvantaged groups. The World Happiness Report puts India below war torn Mali and Liberia. Let's consider Brian Thompson's assassination as a distant warning.

Internal Instability

There has been substantial progress in combating terrorism in J&K. Insurgency in the North East has witnessed significant decline over the last few years with nearly 73 percent reduction in violent activities and 8900 cadres of militant groups shunning violence and joining the mainstream. Left Wing Extremism has

been largely contained, aimed to be eliminated by Mar 2026. However, the lingering ethnic strife in Manipur since May 2023, forcing reimposition of AFSPA in six police station areas in Nov 24, as also the recent threat to resume violent armed resistance by NSCN(IM) owing to long pending Naga Peace Accord have the potential to severely impact internal security in these border states. Statesmanship and inter-ethnic consultation/bonhomie appears to be the only way.

Summation

Internal stability and cohesion are imperative to achieve Viksit Bharat by 2047 as they form the foundational framework for sustained economic growth, social harmony and global leadership. Economic growth rests on attracting investment, efficient governance and reducing disruptions. Social harmony needs cohesion, empowering marginalised groups and countering divisive forces. A stable and cohesive India can assume global leadership and counter geopolitical challenges. Religious polarisation, caste divisiveness and societal inequality will stymie these aspirations. A unified approach must include:-

Political dispensations must rise above petty minded divisiveness to promote interfaith dialogue, respect for diverse beliefs and community engagement to protect a pluralistic and tolerant society.

Discrimination with respect to rights based on religion will perpetuate aggrievement. Consultative uniform civil code is the way forward.

Tolerance, cooperation and mutual understanding amongst religious / ethnic heads must drive dispute settlement. The demographic dividend of a young, dynamic and innovative population is to be exploited through an inclusive approach towards nation building.

While caste census may help monitor effectiveness of affirmative action and address inequality in the society, it is anathema to a casteless society.

Taxing the super-rich to reduce income inequality is easily said than done as it might lead to capital outflow in a globalised world. A granular view of inequality and curb on opuluous and ostentatious behaviour is imperative. **CS**

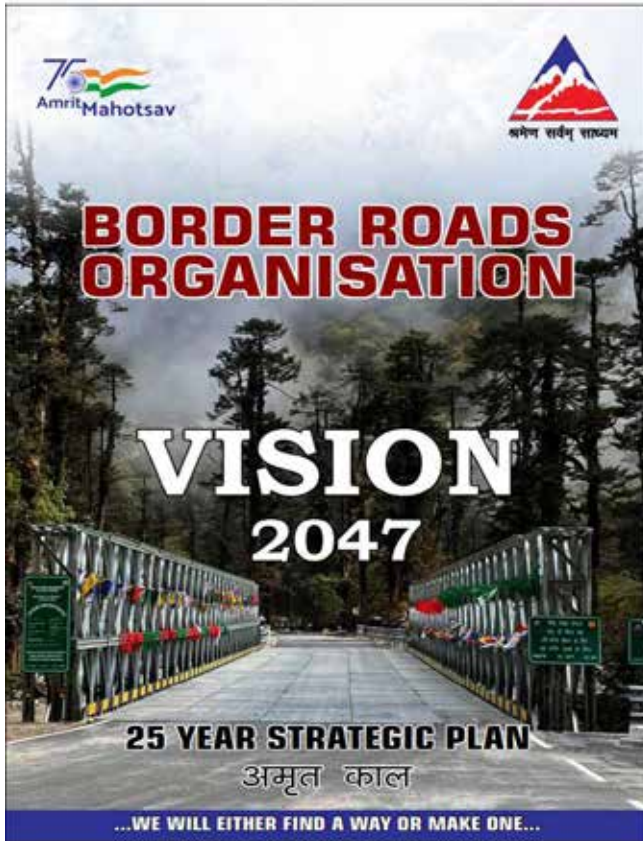


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major General SC Mohanty, AVSM (Retd), was commissioned in June 1983. The officer commanded a Mechanised Infantry Battalion, a Mechanised Brigade and an Infantry Division (RAPID Strike) in the Western Sector. As a Brigade

Major, he took active part in the Kargil Operations while located at Drass. As part of Military Operations Directorate, he headed the Information Warfare, Cyber and Electronic Warfare branches. Post retirement, he was the Security Advisor to Government of Arunachal Pradesh from July 2020 to May 2023.

From Red Tape to Red Carpet: *Bureaucratic Reforms and their Impact on BR0*



by LT GEN RAJEEV CHAUDHRY (RETD)

Modi's MGMG. The idea of "MGMG" (Minimum Government, Maximum Governance), championed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi since assuming office a decade ago, is a vision that resonates deeply with the aspirations of a modern and progressive Bharat. While this vision has indeed driven significant reforms and progress over the years, there remains a critical bottleneck: **the bureaucratic framework**. For India to achieve the status of a developed nation by end of Amrit Kaal (2047), a comprehensive overhaul of our governance model, inspired by innovative ideas such as Trump's DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) initiative, is imperative.

Bureaucratic Resistance to Change

Indian bureaucracy has long been criticized for its inefficiencies and resistance to change. While few reforms have been introduced intermittently, their impact has been limited due to following systemic issues :-

■ Unlimited Power with Zero Accountability.

The bureaucratic system in its current form wields enormous powers but remains frustratingly unaccountable, leading to widespread inefficiency. This gap between authority and responsibility is glaring in central ministries, where delays, red tape and lack of consequences for inaction have become the norm. The lack of accountability is seen in several ways :-

- Decisions are delayed indefinitely, often without justification.
- Policies and approvals are mired in unnecessary procedural red tape.
- Bureaucrats operate with impunity, as there are no mechanisms to penalize inaction or inefficiency.
- Files are often delayed unnecessarily due to lack of clarity, excessive reasoning, misinterpretation of rules and policies, or viewing policies through biased perspectives. Furthermore, the tendency to route files through multiple departments unnecessarily complicates and prolongs the process, making it both inefficient and frustrating.

■ **Resistance to Time-Bound Action.** A glaring deficiency in the current governance model is the absence of time-bound mandates. Bureaucrats and departments operate without strict deadlines, resulting in a culture of sheer complacency. This systemic inertia is detrimental to India's developmental goals.

The Compelling Bureaucratic Process Reforms

There is a compelling need for Structural/Institutional, Administrative and Procedural/Process driven reforms which should be undertaken in consonance with various studies done by numerous committees from time to time on the subject. However, biggest block to these reforms is the bureaucracy itself. Even the lateral entry of experts and officers from other departments has been effectively resisted by bureaucrats with an unfounded fear of losing control of absolute power on the intrinsic systems of governmental framework. Even if we go slow on structural/institutional reforms and focus on procedures/processes alone by integrating decentralization, technology, and accountability, we can turn the traditional governance frameworks into more transparent, efficient, and citizen-focused. Here are certain elemental process reforms which can inspire efficient governance to pave the way for India's journey to Amrit Kaal.

■ Decentralization and Technology Inte-

gration. One of the most innovative aspects of the impending bureaucratic reforms is its emphasis on decentralization. Instead of consolidating power at higher levels of government, decision-making must be distributed across various levels, enabling quicker and more localized responses. Block-chain technology plays a pivotal role in this system :-

- **Block-chain for Transparency.** It provided a secure, tamper-proof ledger for recording decisions, approvals, and transactions. This ensures that every action taken by authorities could be tracked and verified, eliminating opportunities for corruption and inefficiencies.

- Empowering regional and local administrative units with greater autonomy.

- Reducing dependency on central ministries for routine approvals.

■ **Citizen-Centric Approach.** The citizens should be placed at the heart of governance, encouraging public participation and ensuring that policies are aligned with the needs of the people:

- **Open Platforms for Feedback.** Citizens can directly interact with governance systems, providing feedback, raising concerns and monitoring progress.

- **Accountability to the Public.** By involving citizens, the model creates a direct accountability loop, where authorities are more answerable to the people.

■ **Performance-Based Governance.** We must have a performance-driven governance framework, where the efficiency and effectiveness of government officials are regularly evaluated based on measurable outcomes:

- **Data-Driven Metrics.** The performance of bureaucrats and departments needs to be tracked using clear, quantifiable metrics, such as project completion rates, adherence to timelines and quality of outcomes.

- **Incentives and Accountability.** Officials demonstrating exceptional performance to be rewarded, while those lagging behind to face accountability measures.

■ **Introducing Time-Bound Governance.** Time-bound action plans must become the cornerstone of governance. This involves:-

- Mandating **strict deadlines** for decision-making at every level of bureaucracy.

- Implementing **penalties for delays** that are not justified by exceptional circumstances.

- **Regular audits** to ensure adherence to timelines and to identify bottlenecks.

In Govt offices, most processes rely on physical



India stands at the crossroads, with the potential to emerge as a global powerhouse by 2047. However, this aspiration hinges on our ability to overcome systemic inefficiencies in governance. The Prime Minister's vision of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance provides the ideological foundation for this transformation, but it must now be translated into actionable reforms.

files and noting sheets initiation for the approval of the competent Authority, which often leads to inefficiencies. There is a common tendency to send files back and forth for unnecessary queries, many of which should be addressed by the decision-making authority. A lack of coordination among the stakeholders further exacerbates delays. **Files are routed through so many hands** that the original intent and urgency of the project are often lost, with the process taking a completely different direction.

To address this, offices should implement a **robust online tracking system to monitor the movement of files**. This system should record

how long a file remains at each level, how many times it is sent back, and the reasons for such actions. Such a mechanism would not only improve transparency but also help evaluate the efficiency of both the office and the officers handling the files, ensuring greater accountability and faster decision-making.

■ **Streamlining Processes with Technology.** Leveraging technology is essential to cut through bureaucratic inefficiencies. Digital platforms can :-



- Enable **real-time tracking** of project approvals and sanctions.
- Facilitate **inter-departmental coordination**, reducing redundancies.
- Provide a **transparent interface** for citizens and stakeholders to engage with governance processes.

Amrit Kaal Beckons

My first-hand experience as Director General Border Roads for three years dealing with strategic infrastructure development post Galwan conflict under most trying conditions of climate and terrain, and operating through tight schedules of execution of crucial projects in 11 border states and 3 Union Territories, negotiating through few central ministries, reveals a concerning pattern that the decision-making process within governing structures is not aligned with the urgency required for execution of strategic projects specifically on our Northern Borders. Delays in land acquisition processes, granting forest and wildlife clearances, environmental clearances, approval of designs, and project sanctions etc are routine. These delays push the projects back by years thus exponentially increasing project costs. This also creates a cascading effect, delaying other interlinked projects and slowing down overall progress.

BRO stands at the start line of Amrit Kaal, poised to redefine the boundaries of national security and socio-economic development. With its rich legacy spanning over six decades, BRO has evolved from humble beginnings to become a formidable force in its present incarnation, driving progress along India's border regions in unprecedented manner, where the pace of construction of strategic projects was accelerated to 2.5 times despite bureaucratic delays in sanctioning of projects and approvals of Annual Works Programs.

Minimal Immediate Reforms within MoD

■ **Financial Reforms.** There is a need for financial reforms in the BRO to ensure incremental fund flow and their efficient utilisation. This would involve greater budgetary oversight, improved financial management practices and better monitoring and evaluation of on-going projects. Also the sanctioning powers need an immediate review in step with growing economy.



■ **Modernisation of Equipment.** There is a need to revise existing archaic norms for authorisation of equipment and allotment for funds for procurement of machines to undertake ensuing works. In fact the power to decide the type of equipment and machines required to undertake the strategic works should be delegated to the DGBR to avoid delays in prevalent procurement cycle.

■ **Infusion of New Technology.** The new technology and products not only enhance the quality of projects but also reduce time of construction and long term costs. There is a need to look at this aspect with open mind in the larger national interest while creating strategic roads and other projects.

■ **Skill Development.** The BRO workforce needs to be equipped with the necessary skills to operate modern equipment effectively and adopt the latest technologies and construction methodologies to ensure effective execution of strategic works specially tunnels.

■ **BRO Act.** BRO is an integral part of Indian Armed Forces under Article 33 of the Indian Constitution and BRO is also probably the only uniformed organisation which is not governed by an exclusive Act. GREF cadre is governed by CCS (CCA) Rules, 1965; whereas Army component of the organisation is dealt by Army Act, 1950 and Army Rules, 1964. It is strongly recommended that BRO Act should be brought in for curtailing anomalies in the pay structure, to deal with disciplinary cases in just and fair manner and bring in more transparency

and accountability in functioning of BRO towards Nation building.

■ **One Border-One Agency.** There have been too many agencies constructing roads in the same space. Such arrangement creates confusion of duplication of connectivity due to lack of inter-ministerial coordination and final accountability of poor quality or speed of work as at times 3-4 agencies are allotted patches of stretch on the same road. It is recommended that there should be “One Border- One Agency” policy promulgated to have clear demarcated areas of operation. Till that happens at least we must ensure “One Axis – One Agency” principle to ensure speed and accountability. Also roads built by BRO should not be handed over to state PWDs but continued to be maintained by BRO itself.

■ **Abolition of BRDB.** BRO was formed in 1960 and placed under Border Roads Development Board (BRDB) with Prime Minister as its Chairman, for ease of funding and close monitoring. Today RRM is the Chairman of BRDB. This arrangement too has lost its relevance, as BRO has been functioning directly under Defence Secretary since Jan 2015. The last meeting held under Chairman BRDB was in 2017 and a JS level officer officiates as Secretary BRDB. It is prudent to review this dual control as it creates two power centres and defies the very logic of Prime Minister’s vision of “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance”.

■ **DGBR as HOD.** Amongst all uniformed central organisations, BRO is the only department where its Director General has been deprived of Head of Department status. He is responsible and accountable for execution of projects but most of the crucial administrative powers are held and operated by a JS level officer thereby creating undesired delays related to critical HR matters.

■ **Making up the Cadre Deficiencies.** The existing deficiency of officer (25%) and subordinate (21%) cadres of GREF should be made up on urgent basis. The BRO’s work is increasing exponentially every year due to strategic compulsions but there is negative growth in the cadre strength every successive year due to high attrition vis-à-vis induction.

■ **Approval of Study on Simplification of Processes.** There is an essential requirement for simplification of administrative and technical processes and procedures, revision of sanctioning powers and easing out of bureaucratic control on day to day functioning of BRO. A comprehensive study undertaken through KPMG on the subject has been pending approval by MoD for quite some time and should be expedited in larger national interest.

■ **BRO Videsh.** There is an urgent need to create

a foreign wing of BRO to enable it to undertake infrastructure projects in friendly foreign countries to establish sub regional connectivity to promote trade, commerce and strengthening diplomatic ties.

Daring to Dream

As we match our steps with Surging India, we look at BRO with increased expectations through a prism of operational optimization and strategic expansion, where it can play a greater role in nation building. It is imperative to recognize the organization’s true potential to transcend conventional boundaries and catalyse revolutionising reconstruct. With streamlined processes and time-bound actions, infrastructure and development projects can progress at an unprecedented pace, contributing significantly to economic growth. **It is time for BRO to march beyond borders.**

Conclusion

India stands at the crossroads, with the potential to emerge as a global powerhouse by 2047. However, this aspiration hinges on our ability to overcome systemic inefficiencies in governance. The Prime Minister’s vision of **Minimum Government, Maximum Governance** provides the ideological foundation for this transformation, but it must now be translated into actionable reforms.

Drawing inspiration from global best practices, India must embark on a path of bureaucratic reform

that **prioritizes efficiency, accountability, and citizen-centric governance.** The time is ripe for a bold, decisive shift in our governance model—one that aligns with the ambitions of a new India and sets the stage for an era of unprecedented growth and progress. Let this be the moment when we reignite our latent desire for transformation and take the bold steps necessary to turn this vision into reality. **CS**

Drawing inspiration from global best practices, India must embark on a path of bureaucratic reform that prioritizes efficiency, accountability, and citizen-centric governance. The time is ripe for a bold, decisive shift in our governance model—one that aligns with the ambitions of a new India



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Gen Rajeev Chaudhry, VSM, during his last assignment of DG Border Roads, doubled the pace of work to meet stringent targets post Galwan clash and worked to get an incremental budget allocation of 160% for GS roads

during his tenure. He infused at least 18 new technologies and procured the latest machines and equipment to enhance speed and quality of projects. He brought transparency in expenditure through increased use of GeM and ensured timely payments to the firms for which BRO was awarded Gold Certificate for two consecutive years. He also ensured desired dignity, social security, and visibility to the unsung BRO Karmyogis.

The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024: A Landmark Reform in Indian Aviation



As air traffic and infrastructural needs burgeon, this reform is both timely and transformative. The Act also sheds light on the often-overlooked contribution of military professionals to civil aviation, paving the way for a synergistic future.

by AIR MARSHAL SANJEEV KAPOOR (RETD)

The Indian Parliament, on December 5, 2024, enacted the Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024, replacing the nearly nine-decade-old Aircraft Act of 1934. This monumental legislation heralds a new era in Indian civil aviation, bringing sweeping changes to align the industry with modern global standards and domestic aspirations. By addressing technological advancements, consumer rights, and infrastructure development, the Act demonstrates India's ambition to establish itself as a global leader in aviation.

Why the Change Was Necessary

The Aircraft Act of 1934, crafted during the colonial era, catered to a nascent aviation sector with limited scope and vision. While amendments were made over the decades, the Act became increasingly inadequate in addressing the needs of a fast-evolving aviation landscape. The rise of drones, flying taxis, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and surging air traffic made a comprehensive overhaul essential.

The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 is not just a replacement—it is a recalibration of India's aviation framework to meet current and future demands. It bridges gaps in the old legislation by introducing broader definitions, innovative provisions, and enhanced regulatory mechanisms.

Key Updates and Transformative Features

■ **Broader Scope and Definitions:** The 1934 Act narrowly defined "aircraft," excluding emerging technologies like drones, flying taxis, and UAVs. The 2024 Act embraces these advancements, ensuring comprehensive regulation and fostering innovation. By doing so, it supports sectors like logistics, urban mobility, and disaster management, making India a trailblazer in the integration of cutting-edge aviation technologies.

■ **Formalisation of Regulatory Bodies:** The new legislation provides a structured framework for specialized aviation bodies. While the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) was established under the old Act, the new law formally recognizes the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Aircraft Accidents Investigation Bureau (AAIB). This ensures better coordination, safety compliance, and accident investigation protocols.

■ **Economic Regulation and Consumer Welfare:** For the first time, the Act introduces mechanisms to regulate airfares and address consumer grievances transparently. An online grievance redressal system enhances passenger rights, ensuring that consumers are at the heart of aviation policy. This shift aligns with the global trend of prioritising passenger satisfaction.

■ **Focus on Manufacturing and MRO Services:** The 1934 Act overlooked the potential of domestic manufacturing and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) services. The 2024 Act aligns with the "Make in India" initiative, encouraging domestic manufacturing and fostering self-reliance in aviation technology. It also promotes the development of robust MRO infrastructure to enhance the sector's long-term sustainability.

■ **Alignment with International Standards:** By incorporating recommendations from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Act ensures India's compliance with global aviation safety, security, and operational best practices. This alignment boosts India's credibility in the international aviation community.

■ **Air Navigation and Services:** The Act emphasises seamless regulation of air navigation services, aeronautical information, and search-and-rescue operations. By addressing these critical areas, it lays a strong foundation for future infrastructure development.

■ **Consumer-Centric Policies:** The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 stands out for its consumer-first approach. By emphasizing fare transparency and grievance redressal, it seeks to enhance the flying experience for passengers. These measures are vital as India witnesses an unprecedented rise in domestic and international travellers.

■ **Bridging the Gap Between Military and Civil Aviation:** One of the less discussed but significant areas of reform is the integration of military expertise into civil aviation. Military professionals' pilots, technicians, and air traffic controllers possess a wealth of experience that can greatly benefit civil aviation. The Act indirectly opens avenues for leveraging this expertise, though further policy focus in this area is needed.

How Military Professionals Contribute: Transition to Civil Roles

Military personnel often transition to civil aviation roles as pilots, safety officers, and maintenance supervisors. Their training, discipline, and technical acumen make them invaluable assets to the civil aviation sector.

■ **Expertise in MRO and Design:** Military technicians bring unmatched skills in aircraft maintenance and repair, especially for high performance aircraft. This expertise is critical as India strengthens its MRO capabilities under the new Act.

■ **Training and Leadership:** Military veterans frequently serve as trainers in aviation academies, instilling a culture of safety and operational excellence.

■ **Policy and Strategic Planning:** Military professionals contribute to aviation policies and regulatory frameworks by offering strategic insights and operational experience, ensuring that regulations are both practical and effective. By acknowledging the potential of these contributions, India can strengthen the collaboration between its defence and civil aviation sectors.

■ **Supporting Innovation and Emerging Technologies:** India's aviation industry is on the cusp of a technological revolution. The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 fosters innovation by recognizing and regulating UAVs, drones, and flying taxis. These technologies have transformative potential in logistics, healthcare (e.g., medical deliveries), disaster management, and urban mobility. By integrating these advancements into the mainstream aviation ecosystem, India can redefine air transport.

■ **Building a Sustainable Infrastructure:** Infrastructure development is at the core of the new Act. It emphasizes on Enhanced air navigation systems, Meteorological support for improved flight safety, Search and rescue operations to address emergencies effectively. By focusing on these areas, the Act provides a roadmap

for sustainable growth in the aviation sector, ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with rising demand.

■ **A Visionary Step Toward Global Leadership:** The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 is not merely an update to existing legislation—it is a bold step toward positioning India as a global aviation hub. By replacing the outdated Aircraft Act of 1934, the new law addresses long standing challenges while embracing opportunities for growth and innovation.

Transformative Impact

Passenger-Centric Growth: Transparent fare regulation and consumer rights protection enhance the flying experience.

Technological Integration: Embracing drones and UAVs places India at the forefront of aviation technology.

Domestic Manufacturing: Support for the "Make in India" initiative boosts self-reliance in aviation technology.


Global Compliance: Adherence to ICAO recommendations strengthens India's international aviation standing.

A Call for Further Action

While the Act addresses a broad spectrum of challenges, the role of military professionals in civil aviation remains underutilised. A formal framework to channel their expertise into areas like MRO, training, and strategic planning could unlock immense potential. As the aviation sector evolves, continuous updates to the legislation will be essential. A dynamic, forward-looking approach will ensure that India remains a leader in innovation, safety, and passenger welfare.

Conclusion

The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 marks a new chapter in India's aviation history. By modernising an archaic legal framework, the Act propels India into a future of innovation, safety, and global leadership. As the aviation sector continues to grow, the Act's visionary provisions will play a pivotal role in transforming India into a global aviation powerhouse.

In embracing change, fostering innovation, and prioritising consumer interests, the Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024 truly soars above its predecessor, symbolising India's ascent in the skies of global aviation excellence. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Air Marshal (Dr) Sanjeev Kapoor (Retd) a pilot, with over 8000 hrs of flying. He is a flying instructor and a pioneer in aerial refuelling in IAF. He commanded the air-to-air refuelling squadron, a large operational base, Air Force Academy and National Defence Academy. He holds an Airline Pilot License and is part of various think tanks, boards and studies.

India's Nuclear Neighbourhood

New paradigms of warfighting are emerging along with possible countermeasures



by MAJ GEN JAGATBIR SINGH, VSM (RETD)

Introduction

For the first time since the end of World War II, and the Cold War getting recessed in 1991, the world is contending with three conflicts playing out simultaneously in three continents. The Russia-Ukraine War, the first war in Europe since World War II. The conflict in West Asia namely the Israel-Gaza War following the Hamas attack on 07 October 2023 which has expanded to include Lebanon and Hezbollah, Iran and its proxies. There have been attacks by Houthi's on both Israel and international shipping through the Red Sea. And now the region is witnessing the crisis in Syria which resulted in the sudden fall of the Assad rule. Following this a myriad of players supported by various external actors have emerged, with the current rule being in the hands of HTS, which owes its origin to the Al Qaeda. Further Israel is taking advantage of the flux by occupying areas in the buffer zone and capturing Mount Hermon.

This apart there are lingering tensions in the East and South China Sea, where an expansionist China under President Xi has its eyes on Taiwan, whom it wants to absorb into China.

Each of them individually has the ability to shape or reshape the world order whereas collectively they

definitely have the profound implications on the specter of unipolarity or some semblance of multipolarity which we have seen since the emergence of China.

In these unending, long, drawn-out conflicts, new paradigms of warfighting are emerging along with possible countermeasures. These may solidify into principles and define theories of warfighting in the future which will also include those to do with nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons which were used once to 'end a war' were then used throughout the cold war to 'deter a conflict' are now 'nuclear deterrence has been turned on its head' by President Putin and its threatened use is being used to provide 'the strategic space to undertake conventional operations.'

Coupled with this is the emergence of a loose alliance of nuclear and quasi-nuclear states, including China, North Korea, Pakistan and Iran, to India's North there is an emerging convergence of interests which will be India's biggest security dilemma in the coming decade and pose a challenge for Indian strategic planners to deal with.

India's Immediate Neighbours

China has unsettled land borders with both India and Bhutan. The PLA has a belligerent history, marked by aggression against India in 1962. Though there has been progress on the standoff in Ladakh since May 2020 resulting in an agreement on patrolling. But there have been unilateral Chinese attempts at salami-slicing in the Eastern sector in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Apart from its direct confrontation with India it is also dominating India's immediate neighbourhood, and as a result Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives, apart from Pakistan which is already in close concert with China, have seen an increase in Chinese presence and activities. The aggressive Chinese deployment and prolonged face-off in Ladakh further rekindled the focus on the collusive threat posed by China and Pakistan.

Pakistan today is going through one of its darkest periods, the year 2024 witnessed the highest number of terrorist attacks in the last ten years. The latest wave of militant raids in KP and Balochistan being a grim reminder of the resurgence of the menace with greater ferocity. The emerging nexus between what is being described as Talibanism and sectarianism is visible. There is growing political instability and to top it all its economic woes continue to surmount, with it now being reduced to asking for aid to clear its interest payments.

Bangladesh has seen the ouster of a democratically elected government; the fundamentalists are back in



the driver's seat and minorities are being targeted. In Myanmar a civil war has been ongoing since 2021 and rebel groups have seized control of key areas which the military are struggling to reclaim and are facing increasing setbacks. General Min Aung Hlaing's regime has lost control of an entire border: the 270km (170 miles) dividing Myanmar from Bangladesh now wholly under Arakan Army control.

India's Nuclear Neighbours

China and Pakistan are both nuclear powers and are actively seeking to expand and modernize their nuclear forces. China's nuclear journey has played a considerable role in India's own strategic outlook. While Pakistan has always been a major security concern, China's aggressiveness in Galwan has resulted in a renewed focus on India's Northern borders resulting in rebalancing and realignment of forces. To compound India's concerns, Pakistan and China have a longstanding strategic partnership. The threat is now collusive and this has created its own security challenges.

The nuclearisation of Asia has further complicated this dynamic. Today out of nine, six nuclear weapon states other than USA, France and the UK are present in Asia. When India and Pakistan became declared nuclear weapons powers in 1998, nuclear deterrence did not lower the risks of conventional war. This deterrence has been unstable, primarily due to Pakistan's continued reliance on non-conventional approaches.

India's nuclear posture of 'no-first-use' and 'massive retaliation' against a nuclear attack has not assured deterrence against Pakistan's – sub conventional war. Pakistan as per the 'Arms Control Organisation' is reported to have 170 nuclear warheads, which may be more than India's stockpile.

Further, Pakistan has threatened using tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) to prevent India from conducting limited conventional wars. It believes that



The largely unseen dynamic unfolding on to India's North needs to be more acutely observed. The China-Pakistan-Iran-North Korea friendship and subsequent nuclear spectrum is full of strategic risks and instabilities, posing a concerning threat.

its nuclear doctrine, 'Full Spectrum Deterrence,' unveiled in 2013, further reinforces its deterrence capabilities across all levels of conflict. The threat of nuclear escalation, even at a tactical level, it feels could compel India to maintain a measured response in any potential conflict, making Pakistan's TNWs a critical deterrent through credible signaling rather than actual battlefield use. But India's stance is very clear as it believes in massive retaliation to inflict unacceptable damage even if someone uses a tactical nuclear

weapon. India's 2016 surgical strikes following the Uri attack and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes challenged Pakistan's nuclear deterrence posture. While Pakistan downplayed these actions to maintain its deterrence credible, they exposed the gaps in its 'Full Spectrum Deterrence'.

In its annual "China Military Power Report," the Pentagon said the PLA had expanded its arsenal by 20 percent in the 12 months from mid-2023 and was on track to have 1,000 operational warheads by 2030. The report also states that the PLA Rocket Force, which manages most of China's nuclear arsenal, was developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles that would significantly improve its nuclear-capability.



China's regional dominance shows no signs of abating, and the global security landscape continues to change in multiple ways. India needs to safeguard itself by developing and maintaining its hard power which includes nuclear guardrails.

China aims to be a global power by 2049 and its military strength is growing accordingly both in the conventional and nuclear space. It has developed the longest-range missiles as also the Hypersonic glide vehicles. But its doctrine is of "no first use." Their white paper clearly states that China will

not use nuclear weapons first under any circumstances which leads to strategic stability as far as India is concerned. But the issue is that its ballistic missiles have a dual use capability, so if they launch a missile, it is not clear whether it is carrying a nuclear or conventional warhead.

Hence, two large countries with unresolved borders, equipped with nuclear weapons, make it imperative for both countries to seek meaningful reconciliation and this is what seems to be emerging with the recent six-point consensus for a peaceful roadmap following the talks between the NSA and the Chinese Foreign Minister on 18 December 2024.

China and Pakistan are both pursuing new bal-

listic missiles, cruise missiles, and sea-based nuclear delivery systems. North Korea continues its nuclear pursuits in violation of its earlier denuclearization pledges. Pakistan and North Korea are also pursuing the capability to deploy multiple warheads on ballistic missiles, something China already has. This would enable a rapid potential increase in deployed warheads, as well as the possibility for nuclear-armed countries to threaten the destruction of significantly more targets.

Conclusion

The largely unseen dynamic unfolding on to India's North needs to be more acutely observed. The China-Pakistan-Iran-North Korea friendship and subsequent nuclear spectrum is full of strategic risks and instabilities, posing a concerning threat.

The region therefore is one of the theatres for nuclear posturing due to the military-technological modernizations, and expansion of nuclear arsenal and can be a driver of instability bringing the region closer to a nuclear crisis.

Today long-drawn-out conflicts with indeterminate objectives are emerging as the new normal. Hence, the complex interplay of conventional and non-conventional strategies in a nuclear environment makes India's security distinct and means we cannot tiptoe around a nuclear threat or its fallout.

China's regional dominance shows no signs of abating, and the global security landscape continues to change in multiple ways. Therefore, in order to protect its vital interests against threats emanating from Pakistan and China, as well as from the alliance and architecture of the quasi-nuclear states which have the ability to transform India's security threats, India needs to safeguard itself by developing and maintaining its hard power which includes nuclear guardrails.

Having identified these challenges, we need to confront and deal with them and thereafter have the ability to surmount them. Though this challenge is not presently within our immediate consciousness but will have a germane bearing on our national security dilemmas in the years ahead. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major General Jagatbir Singh VSM, (Retd), has held various command, staff and instructional appointments and served in varied terrains in the country. He has served in a United Nations Peace Keeping Mission as a Military

Observer in Iraq and Kuwait. He has been an instructor to Indian Military Academy and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He has commanded the prestigious 1 Armoured Division. He is a prolific writer in defence & national security and is a Distinguished Fellow at USI.

A GAME OF CRICKET BRINGS POLITICS AND MPs TOGETHER



It was Rajya Sabha XI versus Lok Sabha XI, with teams consisting of MPs from across political parties; Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla inaugurated the friendly match organised in an effort to raise awareness of tuberculosis. BJP MP Anurag Thakur and former minister, was the man of the match, scoring an unbeaten 111 runs from 59 balls.



Meeting the Challenge of Ammunition Reserves

by MAJOR GENERAL VK SINGH, VSM, (RETD)

To believe that there will be no war, or war can be averted is a disastrous fallacy. In our own lifetime, how many conflicts have we witnessed and are currently witnessing? The fact is that man has always fought man. To fight better, man has been in the quest to make better weapons. From sticks and stones, to swords and spears, to chariots and elephants, to gunpowder and cannons and artillery, to matchlocks and rifles, to battleships, to tanks, to submarines, to fighter aircraft and missiles, and then to nuclear power. In today's context from perception warfare, to cyber warfare, to space warfare, to drone warfare, the quest is never ending. The only way that you can avoid war, is to prepare for it. With preparation one develops a strong deterrence. Such deterrence is by far cheaper than the cost of war. There are various methods of developing deterrence, however, the foremost and most important is hard power, that comprises of the weapon and its corresponding ammunition.

Meeting the Challenge

In order to meet the challenges posed by the environment, the Indian Defence Forces are suitably equipping themselves, upgrading and modernising existing weapon systems. The intent is to furnish the military with world-class equipment and training, a testament to the nation's unyielding spirit to overcome any challenge.

The crucial issue is to ensure that a weapon system is developed or procured as a whole. This is so because any weapon system has many components, the primary ones being the weapon itself and all types of ammunition that it can fire. Other issues include spares, maintenance, and training. In true form for any weapon system to work all these components have to be thought through and contracted as a whole.

The Myth of Short Wars

India must dispel the Myth of Short Wars. Such a narrative was possibly conceived to justify ammunition shortages. The Ukraine War has upended many of the theories of war, including one that modern wars will be short and swift.

The crucial issue is to ensure that a weapon system is developed or procured as a whole. This is so because any weapon system has many components, the primary ones being the weapon itself and all types of ammunition that it can fire.



Self-Reliance is crucial to sustaining and winning wars. India needs to wean away from import dependency. While the pursuit to infuse technology in our war fighting system indeed remains an enduring one, the conclusion that we can draw is that self-sufficiency in critical technologies and investment in R&D is an inescapable strategic imperative. The security of nations cannot be outsourced, nor can it be dependent on other nations. Inadequacies in military-industrial complexes have to be identified. War may demand, the

monthly consumption of some munitions, much more than can be produced in a year.

Types of Ammunition

There are various types of ammunition that are stocked in the Defence Forces. At the unit level these comprise of Service Ammunition and Training Ammunition. Service Ammunition includes First Line and Second Line Ammunition. First Line Ammunition can be further classified as On Weapon Scale and Unit Reserve. Second Line Ammunition is generally half of First Line Scale and is easily accessible to the unit. Service Ammunition is stored carefully to be used in case of war and comprises of the latest vintage. As this ammunition



gets older and nears the expiry of its shelf life, it is converted to Training Ammunition and is consumed during training.

At the National level, reserve ammunition is stocked in various ammunition depots, to support the Field Formations in case of war. Such ammunition is called War Wastage Reserves (WWR). WWR is calculated in two categories to cater for battle engagements, and are classified as Intense and Normal rates. It is this WWR that is most critical, as it is this ammunition that will support and tide over the Nation in case of war. Therefore, if the Nation foresees a short and swift war, say 10 days, it will cater for that much ammunition, and if it expects a long-drawn-out war, say 100 days, then it will cater for that much ammunition.

War Wastage Reserves

Ammunition, along with the weapon system required to fire it, form the most important pre-requisite for battle. Ammunition comprises of various categories and parts. For example, there is small arms ammunition, to be used in machine guns, rifles, carbines, and pistols. All different calibres. There is tank ammunition, which too has many categories, like high explosive and anti-tank etc. Likewise, there is Artillery ammunition and Missiles, to name a few. These ammunitions come as a whole or in parts, for example the cartridge case separately and the fuze separately. The point is that all kinds of ammunition have to be stocked, including all the sub-parts. At one point there was a sudden crisis and war was imminent. A fact check was carried out, only to find that there were adequate artillery cartridge cases but inadequate fuzes. The shell cannot explode without the fuze, so it was as good as not having the ammunition. In another case, ammunition was hurriedly imported from a country other than the original manufacturer. However, later it was learnt that the muzzle velocity of the imported ammunition was different from the original, while the fire control systems were manufactured to cater only for the original muzzle velocity. Resultantly, in case fired, the round would have missed the target. This necessitated modifications to the fire control systems. Therefore, to avoid hasty purchases, the WWR must cater for all types, categories, parts, sub parts etc, so that the weapon has

a corresponding ammunition, and in sufficient numbers to sustain the anticipated duration of war.

The aspect of war wastage reserves is the greatest lesson one needs to learn from the Ukraine conflict. India has been cutting down the requirement of reserves, repeatedly stating that war will last only 10 days. Accordingly, our WWR have been so catered for. This requires an urgent and immediate recalculation, not only the initial stocking but also the sustenance. Building the industrial base is a prerequisite to winning wars, and along with this comes the dependence on the private sector. The government needs to lay down consistent policies and ensure financial commitments.

Adequate Quality Control too, must be exercised. There have been cases where the ammunition failed to achieve the desired destruction or penetration levels during the trials. However, despite the shortcoming, thousands of rounds were produced, which eventually had to be segregated causing a huge loss to the exchequer. The procurement, production and quality control agencies must be held accountable for timelines and quality.

Much of the capability development should be dominated by the need for deterrence and ability to win conventional wars. In case of weapon platforms, ammunition production also needs to be factored in and ensured that all types of ammunition are available in simultaneity to operationalization of the weapon platform. We need truly Indian R&D, and production, not imported equipment stamped as Indian. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM (Retd), has commanded an Independent Recce Sqn in the desert sector, and has the distinction of being the first Armoured Corps Officer to command an Assam Rifles Battalion in Counter Insurgency

Operations in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as the first General Cadre Officer to command a Strategic Forces Brigade. He then commanded 12 Infantry Division (RAPID) in Western Sector. The General was the Major General (Operations), prior to retirement.

Maritime Domain Awareness: A 21st Century Imperative



by **COMMODORE ANIL JAI SINGH (RETD)**

The nature of the security challenges emanating in and from the maritime domain has led to the term 'Maritime Domain Awareness' or MDA, becoming a frequently used term in the maritime security lexicon of the 21st century. It gained prominence in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, which led to the realisation that the vast and largely unregulated ocean spaces surrounding the US make it equally vulnerable to an attack from the sea, and underscored the importance of gaining adequate awareness about developments in the maritime domain.

MDA has been defined by the International Maritime Organisation as the 'effective understanding of any activity associated with the maritime environment that could impact upon the security, safety, economy or environment. It is a multi-dimensional concept and relies upon multiple sources of information including space, air, surface, underwater, cyber, electronic, human, and visual amongst others. For it to be effective, its collection, fusion, analysis, display and dissemination to all stakeholders is essential.

Importance of MDA

The oceans are critical to the future sustenance and economic well-being of humankind. 70% of the earth is covered by water, 80% of the global population lives near the coast and almost 90% of global trade and energy travels over the sea. Hence, the importance of MDA

is not restricted only to maritime security in the traditional sense of the term, or the events happening in one's vicinity on the sea, but in this 'Century of the Seas', it is more about developing a better understanding of the entire maritime domain, be it marine ecology, the marine biosphere, the impact of climate change, the sustainable exploitation of the oceans, maritime transportation and connectivity, the livelihood and development of coastal communities, environmental aspects, marine hydrology or the mysteries of the deep. With the nature of the traditional, non-traditional and transnational threat at sea impacting every activity in the maritime domain, be it trade, energy, environmental or infrastructural (submarine cables and pipelines), MDA has developed a distinct maritime security connotation.

The nature of the oceans as a unifying medium providing global connectivity is increasingly being threatened with the world becoming increasingly confrontational; trouble spots are simmering across the globe, and as the two current conflicts have shown, even those that are restricted to a narrow geographic region have a maritime dimension with far reaching economic consequences.

The ocean spaces are vast and dynamic, and it is beyond the capacity of any single country to ensure effective MDA. It is therefore important for nations to combine their resources through cooperative mechanisms to enable more comprehensive and accurate MDA.

In the period between 2008 and 2013, it had taken more than 20 navies over five years to quell Somalian piracy in the Horn of Africa; young disaffected lads in small skiffs wielding Kalashnikovs were able to hold the global economy to ransom. The asymmetry could not have been more striking, and underlined the importance of effective MDA.

MDA in the Indo-Pacific

It was the scourge of piracy in the Horn of Africa that led to a major thrust on developing a coordinated response to the emerging threats at sea. A number of multinational frameworks were established in the western Indian Ocean to support the anti-piracy effort, which greatly enhanced regional MDA. Over the years, the existing infrastructure has been augmented, the improvement in technology has widened the means, and a shared recognition of the need for a collective response has enabled a far better understanding of MDA and, consequently, a more robust approach to it.

The shift in the geopolitical and geoeconomic centre

of gravity to the Indo-Pacific and the predominantly maritime orientation of this construct has also brought with it challenges to a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. This region accounts for two-thirds of the global population, generates more than 60% of the global GDP and almost 50% of global trade. Its importance to the global economy has led even traditionally Euro-centric countries and organisations, concerned about the safety of their trade and maritime interests, into promulgating their Indo-Pacific strategies.

MDA is now an integral part of the regional security discourse and even the Quad has introduced the 'Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA)', as an essential constituent in its commitment towards ensuring a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

China's rise and its maritime belligerence are a cause of concern across the region. This will soon spill over into the Indian Ocean as it will seek more space to project its maritime power and more significantly, gain access to the Atlantic Ocean. It is establishing a network of strategically located ports, bases and other infrastructure to increase its presence and to shape and influence events in the region.

The Indian MDA Effort

In India, following the audacious attack on Mumbai on 26 November 2008 the government undertook a major overhaul of the national maritime security architecture beginning with coastal security, with clearly demarcated responsibilities and an unambiguous command and control structure. In the 15 years or so since, it has made good progress but there is still room for improvement. The long awaited appointment of a National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) in 2022 is also an encouraging development.

As the leading Indian Ocean maritime power, and committed to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, India takes its responsibility of ensuring a safe and secure maritime environment very seriously. Its actions over the years has firmly established its credentials as the preferred security partner in the region and the first responder in a crisis. 90% of India's trade and 80% of its energy travels over the sea. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of over 2 million sq. kms will be the key to its future sustenance. As India grows to a five trillion economy in the next couple of years, a 10 trillion dollar economy within a decade from now and a developed economy by 2047, its trade and energy requirements will grow exponentially.

India's commitment to regional maritime security and MDA is driven by its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy of 2015, which aims to secure its strategic maritime areas of interest through inclusive, collaborative and cooperative capacity and capability enhancement, which will also be the foundation of a robust regional MDA capability.

The importance of the oceans and their vulnerability from traditional, non-traditional and transnational threats has highlighted the importance of MDA as the cornerstone of maritime security.

Undersea Domain Awareness

The oceans are less about what one sees on the surface and more about what one does not see within its depths. Hence the need for Underwater Domain Awareness or UDA. This is often overlooked in the general discourse on MDA. With humankind increasingly turning to the sea and developing various Blue Economy initiatives to exploit the oceans, there is a need to understand

what the deep has to offer. This can only be done through extensive underwater research, seabed mapping, resource extraction, and understanding the acoustic dynamics of the ocean, which are driven by environmental conditions and can vary considerably from day to day and region to region.

The ocean depths are being used for offshore exploration and drilling, deep sea fishing, offshore wind farms, marine scientific research, etc. Underwater pipelines are connecting continents and global

connectivity is possible only through undersea cables over which more than 90% of the internet travels. All of this is being weaponised to trigger major disruptions with potentially catastrophic global consequences.

From a military perspective, the efficacy of submarine deployments, the credibility of sea based strategic deterrence and the conduct of undersea warfare are all dependent on the knowledge of the underwater battlespace. Hence the frequent presence of Chinese research vessels carrying out underwater research in the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

The subject of MDA is almost as vast as the oceans themselves. The importance of the oceans and their vulnerability from traditional, non-traditional and transnational threats has highlighted the importance of MDA as the cornerstone of maritime security. For any maritime nation in a maritime world, effective MDA is a 21st century strategic imperative. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Commodore Anil Jai Singh, is a former submariner and Anti-Submarine Warfare specialist. He is also the Vice President of the Indian Maritime Foundation, an Honorary Adjunct Fellow of the National Maritime Foundation

and is on the Governing Body of the Society for Indian Ocean Studies. He has been a member of the Defence Audit Advisory Board and has co-chaired the Defence and Aerospace Committee of ASSOCHAM, a leading Indian industry association. During his three decades in the Navy, he had the distinction of commanding four submarines and a Fleet ship. He was the Deputy Assistant Chief (Maritime) in the Perspective Planning branch of the MoD's Integrated Defence Staff.

India's Defence Industrial Corridors: An Ecosystem for Defence Self Reliance



by LT GEN (DR) PJS PANNU, PVSM, AVSM, VSM,
(RETD) PHD

India, a nation with one of the largest and most diverse militaries in the world, has long faced the challenge of achieving self-reliance in defence production. Despite being one of the world's largest importers of military hardware, India has consistently worked towards reducing dependence on foreign suppliers and strengthening its indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities. Historically, India's defence manufacturing sector has been dominated by public sector undertakings (PSUs), such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL). However, in last one decade, India has

India needs to continue investing in advanced R&D, improve its supply chain infrastructure, and build a skilled workforce to meet the growing demands of the defence sector.

decided to build clusters for Defence companies to manufacture Military hardware in India called the Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs).

These would encourage private sector participation, providing opportunities for domestic players to engage in the production of defence hardware. This shift will foster greater innovation, competition, and efficiency in the sector. The introduction of DICs aligns with the government's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) and transforming India into a leading global exporter of defence equipment and technology.

As globally called, building a Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) empowers a nation the ability to defend herself without making any compromise on her national interests. The freedom from dependency on imported military hardware is a significant factor that contributes to Comprehensive National Power. MIC describes the relationship between a country's military and the Defence Industry that supplies it, seen together as a vested interest which influences public policy. A driving factor behind the relationship between the military and the defence-minded corporations is that both sides benefit—one side from obtaining weapons, and the other from being paid to supply them. As a concept, the Defence Industrial Base (DIB) is closely related to the notion of the MIC and is often discussed as a foundational element of hard power. DIB is also sometimes referred to as a defence industrial and technological base which is the network of organizations, facilities, and resources that provides a government with materials, products, and services for defence. US, China, Russia, Israel and France have very diligently build large MICs with massive R&D support both of private sector as also of the Governments. China's defence industrial base is operating on a wartime footing due to the Chinese government's centralized power and decision-making that help drive whole-of-government strategies. China's military-civil fusion (MCF) allows the state to direct university-based research to prioritized science and technology areas.

To support the growth of the Defence sector and enhance manufacturing capacity in the sector, two

Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) are being set up in India, one in Uttar Pradesh and another in Tamil Nadu. A Defence Industrial Corridor is a dedicated region or area strategically planned to promote indigenous production of defence and aerospace-related items; a pathway where domestic production of defence equipment by the public sector, private sector and Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are organised to enhance the operational capability of the defence forces. While other than the DICs, India already has four industrial Corridors : Bengaluru-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (BMIC), East Coast Economic Corridor (ECEC) with Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC), Odisha Economic Corridor (OEC) and Delhi-Nagpur Industrial Corridor (DNIC). Due to certain dual-use technology these industrial corridors are capable of extending their support to the Defence corridors in proximity.

The Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC) focuses on the northern part of the country, connecting key cities like Aligarh, Agra, Chitrakoot, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Jhansi. The state government shall Plug and Play support with a Single Window approvals and clearances to Defence and Aerospace (D&A) manufacturing units. This shall be based on simple Procedures and rationalised regulatory regime with easy reimbursement of incentives and subsidies.

Ordnance Factories, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) and BrahMos Aerospace are the major giants which have planned investments in the state to further strengthen Defence manufacturing.

The Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC), located in the southern part of the country, has a strong industrial base, particularly in the automotive, aerospace, and electronics sectors. The Tamil Nadu corridor connects cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur, and Salem and Tiruchirappalli, capitalizing on the state's existing infrastructure and manufacturing expertise. The State holds the strategic advantages with its large coastal line which has four large seaports (three government and one private) and 22 minor ports. The state has four international airports at Chennai, Coimbatore, Trichy, Madurai and two domestic airports at Tuticorin and Salem. Tamil Nadu is a power



To truly become a global defence exporter, India will need to focus on building world-class products, ensuring quality control, and meeting international standards. Further, it will be essential to create a conducive environment for foreign collaborations, joint ventures, and technology transfers to boost India's position in the global defence market.

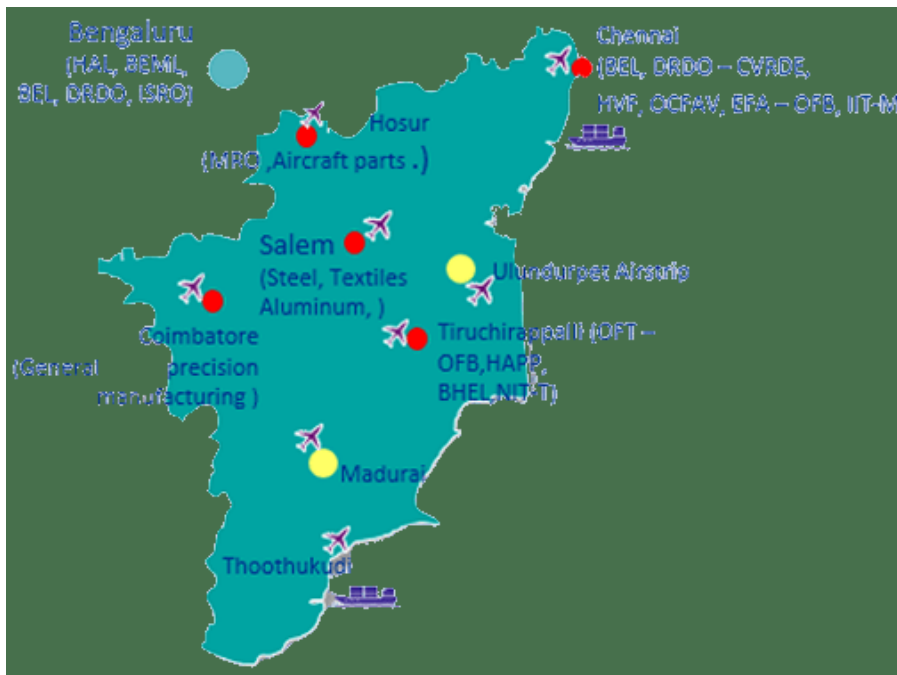
surplus state with renewable energy capacity. Other attributes such as capital city Chennai is connected to the world by three submarine cables providing a bandwidth and is also destination of choice for Korean investors; the state is the largest Recipient of Korean Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to India. The corridor promote clusters with necessary testing and certification facilities, export facilitation centres, technology transfer facilitation, etc.

Why Are Defence Industrial Corridors Important ?

The establishment of Defence Industrial Corridors is a game-changing initiative that will significantly enhance India's defence manufacturing capabilities. Some of the key benefits of these corridors are :-

■ **Boosting Indigenous Defence Production.** India has traditionally been a major importer of defence equipment, with countries like Russia, the United States, and France being its largest suppliers. The corridors provide the much-needed infrastructure to set up manufacturing plants, research and development (R&D) facilities, and testing centres for a wide range of defence products, including fighter jets, tanks, submarines, missiles, and small arms.

■ **Creating Jobs and Economic Growth.** With the establishment of DICs, a wide range of jobs will be created—from skilled labour in manufacturing plants to high-end jobs in R&D and engineering. Companies like Tata, Mahindra, L&T, and Bharat Forge have already made strides in defence manufacturing, and the corridors are expected to accelerate their growth.



■ Encouraging Private Sector Participation.

The Defence Industrial Corridors encourage private sector participation, providing opportunities for domestic players to engage in the production of defence hardware. This shift will foster greater innovation, competition, and efficiency in the sector.

■ Fostering R&D and Technological Innovation.

The corridors are designed not only for manufacturing but also for fostering cutting-edge research and development. The corridors will facilitate collaboration between defence manufacturers, academic institutions, and research organizations to create state-of-the-art technologies that can be deployed in India's military.

■ **Reducing Import Dependency and Improving National Security.** India's defence import bill is one of the highest in the world, with the country spending billions of dollars annually to procure military hardware from foreign suppliers. This reliance on external sources for critical defence needs poses a national security risk, especially during times of geopolitical tensions.

■ **Positioning India as a Defence Exporter.** According to the Ministry of Defence, India's defence exports surged from ₹2,059 crore in 2017-18 to ₹13,000 crore in 2021-22. However, India's defence exports are still far below their potential. By building high-quality, cost-effective defence products, India can capture a larger share of the global market for defence equipment, especially in countries that are seeking alternatives to traditional suppliers.

The Indian government has implemented several pro-business and pro-manufacturing policies in recent years:

■ **The Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020.** This policy framework aims to promote "Make in India" by prioritizing the procurement of indigenously developed defence systems and equipment. The

DAP 2020 emphasizes the need for joint ventures, public-private partnerships, and the participation of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in defence manufacturing.

■ **The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme.** The PLI scheme aims to incentivize domestic manufacturers by offering financial incentives based on incremental sales. This scheme has been extended to the defence sector, encouraging private companies to ramp up their production capacities and invest in innovation and technology.

■ **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Defence.** The government has gradually increased the FDI limit in the defence sector, allowing up to 74% FDI under

the automatic route and up to 100% FDI under the government route for advanced technologies. This move aims to bring in foreign expertise and capital, while also fostering collaboration with global defence companies.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Challenges remain. India needs to continue investing in advanced R&D, improve its supply chain infrastructure, and build a skilled workforce to meet the growing demands of the defence sector. Additionally, the government must ensure that the corridors are equipped with the latest technology and are supported by efficient logistics and regulatory frameworks.

To truly become a global defence exporter, India will need to focus on building world-class products, ensuring quality control, and meeting international standards. Further, it will be essential to create a conducive environment for foreign collaborations, joint ventures, and technology transfers to boost India's position in the global defence market. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Gen PJS Pannu, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was the former Deputy Chief Indian Integrated Defence Staff (Operations). He was responsible for raising the Defence Space and Cyber Agencies, as well as the Special

Forces Division. He was head of Training of the three services in 2017, where he was responsible for writing Doctrines, making Net assessments and overseeing Premier Defence Institutions. He was the Chairman of the Executive Committee of CENJOWS and USI, premier Defence Think Tanks.

More of Mani-Talk, Erudite and Frank Recall of the UPA regime

Mani Shankar Aiyar has released his second volume, "A Maverick in Politics," which as his career panned out, he indeed proved to be. His style is impeccable, smooth flow of the language, saucy, at times bitter, perhaps, but always honest, even if self-deprecating. That is typical Mani offerings, as he has lived his life, first as an IFS officer, then as PM Rajiv Gandhi's lieutenant, then as minister in the central cabinet, and finally as a member of the Rajya Sabha.

As he admits he was everything because of the Gandhi family, his loyalty to them. Or else, he would have retired from the foreign service, just like any other. For people who have watched him closely, and from a distance as well, one can wonder how on earth would he have been a successful diplomat, known for his (honest) outbursts that have often caused anguish to his political party.

On his recollection of his friend and boss, Rajiv Gandhi, he writes:

'If the world is to survive,' I concluded, 'it is necessary that the whole world imbibe the essential values of the Indian civilization', which Rajiv Gandhi had portrayed as 'the capacity to live with diversity', and more as 'the capacity to celebrate diversity'. I went on: 'If we live up to that vision of India, then it is only the body of Shri Rajiv Gandhi that would have died, the soul of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, which is the soul of India, will continue to live.'

And later, after the demise of Rajiv Gandhi, he writes:

The proceedings were to begin with tributes to the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi before adjourning to honour his memory. I sought out the Speaker, Shivraj Patil, and intimated to him my hope that I would be called to speak. Although condolence tributes are normally allotted only to party leaders, Speaker Patil made an exception in my case as he was aware of my relationship with Rajiv. Thus, I set what is perhaps a world Parliamentary record of delivering my maiden speech at my first substantive Parliament session.

Describing him as a man of exceptional courage, brave and compassionate, I went on to affirm that notwithstanding the omnipresent threat to his life, our former prime minister had 'never allowed the fear of death

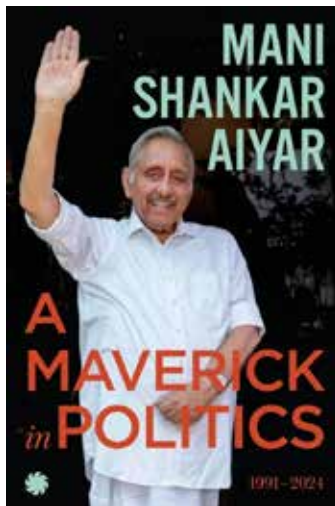
to stand in the way of taking the decision that he thought was right'. That was my summing up of the actions Rajiv Gandhi had taken to settle the issues of separatism and secession in Punjab, Assam, Mizoram and Darjeeling, apart from sending in the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) to stop Sri Lanka from tearing itself apart.

On his understanding of politics, and his advice to wannabe politicians:

I tell young people who wonder whether they should come into politics that they must first embark on a well-paid professional career to build up some personal capital, for otherwise they will have no alternative to making a commerce of politics. I also tell them that they must first understand and accept that unlike in almost all other professions and vocations, there is no set trajectory in politics that ensures you are better off tomorrow than you were yesterday. No, there is a volatility in the political curve, which you find only in speculative businesses. There is no guarantee that success will breed success or that failure will lead to more failure.

Most politicians conceal unflattering events in their memoirs. Aiyar is incapable of doing so. He draws a colourful picture of a life in politics, with vivid glimpses of politicians - and their policies - such as Jayalalithaa (whose party thugs nearly killed him), Sonia Gandhi, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Manmohan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and others.

He writes perceptively of the challenges of being a good MP and why development doesn't win a politician votes. And he tells, too, of negotiating the power struggles of the UPA era, where he was moved from the Petroleum Ministry, and turns the lens on financial improprieties and his ideological reservations as sports minister in the run-up to the 2010 Commonwealth Games. **CS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mani Shankar Aiyar is a senior politician, a former IFS officer and a seasoned author. He has served as Union Minister in the Congress regime, and been a Rajya Sabha MP.

India and Global IPR Treaties

Not just looking at the issues from first principles but also giving special attention to China's engagement with international IPR treaties because it is a good case study on how to navigate the international IPR regime and has useful lessons for India. This is a shortened version of the full document, available in full on our website www.csconversations.in



by **SANJEEV SANYAL** and **APURV KUMAR MISHRA**

Executive Summary

To become an international player in the knowledge economy, India needs to take global IPR treaties more seriously as these agreements create the framework for the country's R&D ecosystem to align with global best practices and accurately benchmark our performance with international peers. In this EAC-PM Working Paper, we explore 4 such international agreements and look at the pros and cons of each of them. These are the Strasbourg Agreement Concerning the International Patent Classification 1971, Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement on Industrial Designs 1999, Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Geographical Indications 2015 and the Design Law Treaty 2024.

In this paper, we not just looked at the issues from first principles but have also paid special attention to China's engagement with international IPR treaties because it is a good case study on how to navigate the international IPR regime and has useful lessons for India. A brief summary of our suggestions is provided below:

The Strasbourg Agreement on patents simply entails an obligation on the national patent office to label patent applications as per the international IPC system of classifying inventions. Since India follows the IPC system anyway, signing the treaty does not have any obvious downside.

The Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement on industrial designs creates a simplified and time-bound process for international registration of designs in multiple countries through a single application. India must sign the treaty with adequate safeguards to ensure it gets sufficient time to build its internal capacity to process international application.

The Design Law Treaty which was just negotiated and signed in November 2024 at Riyadh, also makes procedural improvements in filing and recording changes in design licenses.

The Lisbon System on GIs again creates a simplified and time-bound process for international registration of GIs. However, it requires greater stakeholder consultation since it will entail substantive changes in the GI Act 1999 and India must weigh the domestic sensitivities and benefits for stakeholders before signing up for the treaty.

India must shed its traditional reticence to participate in international best practices that are critical to making India the center of the global knowledge economy. For far too long, India's policies have been tuned to be defensive in benchmarking ourselves to global standards. This is ultimately counter-productive since we ultimately accept those foreign innovations anyway. We need to reimagine ourselves as the hub of innovation and switch to a system where our innovators can play on the world stage.

Introduction

To study India's engagement with international IPR treaties and their impact on our domestic innovation ecosystem, it is important to begin by first looking at our national experience with the IPR treaties we have signed so far. Historically, India has been more proactive

in signing international treaties on protecting artistic and literary works rather than scientific inventions. The two foundational international agreements on IPR that are administered by WIPO are Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works 1886 (“Berne Convention”) and the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property 1883 (“Paris Convention”).

While India has been a signatory to the Berne Convention pre-independence since 1928, we only signed the Paris Convention in 1998. China by contrast, signed the Paris Convention in 1985 and the Berne Convention only in 1992. In other words, unlike India, China has been more focussed on technology IPRS rather than artistic IPRS. India’s experience suggests that signing and ratifying international IPR agreements has led to an improvement of our domestic IPR regime. For example, India’s accession to the TRIPS regime in 1995 under the WTO framework nudged us to sign the Patent Cooperation Treaty and update the Patents Act which was TRIPS-compliant but also protected our strategic interests. The new Patents Act ensured that we become the pharmacy to the developing world and is now the gold standard for developing countries around the world.

Similarly, acceding to the Madrid System for International Registration of Trademarks in 2013 created the incentive to introduce the new Trademark Rules in 2017 which completely overhauled the trademark system in India so that the time period for registration of trademarks has come down significantly. The office is completely digital and even the hearings are online. In fact, practitioners today note that physical filing is more expensive than online filing. So far, the experience has been good while we continue to upgrade our capacities to process international applications.

In light of these experiences, India must consider engaging with other IPR treaties while keeping in mind that each of them will entail differing levels of groundwork from our IPR institutions and amendments to the existing law for India to be able to benefit from its provisions. The larger point we make in the paper is about the need for the country to change from a defensive to an offensive posture on opening our systems to international best practises, while being mindful of practical constraints in implementation.

■ Strasbourg Agreement Concerning the International Patent Classification 1971

The Strasbourg Agreement Concerning the International Patent Classification 1971 (“Strasbourg Agreement”) establishes the International Patent Classification (IPC) system that divides inventions into eight categories with approximately 80,000 classification codes. Each



group is represented by a symbol consisting of Arabic numerals and the letters of the Latin alphabet.

With an exponential growth in the number of patent applications filed and granted in India (increasingly by domestic entities), IPC classification helps benchmark standards of Indian innovation compared to other countries in a particular sector and ensure India’s contribution to global R&D is not under-represented. Indian innovators looking to license their innovations outside

India or find interested parties for tech transfer will also understand the landscape for their product by looking at the IPC classification. Our recommendation is that India should sign and ratify the Strasbourg Agreement since it anyway complies with its provisions but is unable to participate as a member to the treaty and is not able to utilize the full benefit at present.

■ Hague Agreement Concerning the International Registration of Industrial Designs

Industrial design is a specific IPR which protects the aesthetic or outward appearance of a product such as its unique shape, pattern and colour combinations. Some examples of industrial design include the unique shape of an iPhone, shape of a Coca Cola bottle and the outward appearance of a Volkswagen Beetle.

The Hague Agreement Concerning the International Registration of Industrial Designs (“Hague Agreement”) constitutes two separate treaties: The Geneva Act of 1999 and The Hague Act of 1960. The 1999 and the 1960 Acts of the Hague Agreement are autonomous and totally independent of each other. Both Acts consist of a fully fledged international treaty, so that a State may decide to become a party to only one or to both Acts. The Hague Act of 1960 has 34 contracting parties



while the Geneva Act of 1999 has 74 members 10. China did not accede to the 1960 Act but is a signatory to the 1999 Act since 2022.

The Hague Agreement creates a simplified and time-bound process for the international registration of industrial designs in multiple countries through a single application filed with WIPO. It also simplifies the management of an industrial design registration, since it is possible to record subsequent changes and to renew the international registration through a single procedural step in the International Register with the WIPO¹¹.

The Hague Agreement on Industrial Designs will bring India in alignment with international best practices followed by most mature economies and simplify the process of registering the Designs in multiple countries through a single application. This is faster, cheaper and simpler than filing applications individually in each country where you need different documents, in different languages and pay different fees to register designs. Similarly post-grant management of registered designs like maintenance and renewal fees, updates on assignees and licensees will also be streamlined with a single application.

We recommend that India sign the Hague Agreement with adequate safeguards to ensure that our systems are not overwhelmed and there is enough internal capacity to process the international applications in a timely manner. This may include carving out exceptions against single application for multiple designs and deemed registration.

■ Lisbon System for International Protection of Geographical Indications

Geographical Indication is a distinctive mark on a product which has a precise geographical origin and has qualities associated with it because of the natural and human factors uniquely available in that geographical area. Some examples of GIs are Darjeeling tea, Basmati rice and

After nearly two decades of negotiations, the member states of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) adopted the landmark Design Law Treaty (DLT). By signing the Final Act of the Riyadh Design Law Treaty, India builds on its progress and reaffirms its commitment to fostering inclusive growth and ensuring equitable access to intellectual property protection.

Champagne sparkling wine. Like the Hague Agreement, the Lisbon System comprises two treaties the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin (AOS) and their International Registration 1958 and its updated version, the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement 2015 which extended the protections to Geographical Indications (GIS). The Geneva Act has 35 contracting parties including the European Union and African Intellectual Property Organization which has 17 member countries.

Like the Hague Agreement, the Lisbon System protects AOS and GIS in foreign jurisdictions by simplifying the process of registration in multiple countries through a single application with WIPO instead of individual

application in each country with its own fees, procedures, documentation and language requirements. These procedural improvements to create centralized management of GI rights will greatly reduce the administrative burden on both the IPR authorities protecting GIS and the applicants who will be able to choose countries where they would like to protect their design after obtaining a certificate of international registration. The Lisbon System also ensures that GIs in all member countries are protected indefinitely, cannot become generic and no other competitor can use the GI name on any product in its product class¹⁴

In India, GIs are protected under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. The Lisbon Agreement on GIs will entail even bigger changes in our domestic law and procedures with fewer flexibilities than the Hague Agreement. The Lisbon Agreement demands indefinite protection for GIs with no provision for renewal. In India presently, while the protection is for an indefinite period it is subject to a 10-year renewal period. The Agreement also mandates a higher standard of protection to all goods to prevent any imitation or usurpation, currently only extended to wines and spirits under Indian law. This might create issues for our domestic industry especially in the dairy sector.

We recommend that India needs to properly weigh the sensitivities and implementation challenges with the possible benefits, if at all India plans to sign the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement 2015.

■ Design Law Treaty

The Design Law Treaty (DLT) that was negotiated in Riyadh in November 2024 and signed by India is again focussed on making procedural improvements to cut down the red tape for filing of industrial design applications in India and registering their assignment/license with the Designs Office.

The treaty seeks to make the procedures related to

filings and recording changes in design licenses simple, predictable and affordable, which will benefit both foreign and domestic innovators. Any changes required in the design license upon assignment to another entity will also be streamlined through a single application and submitting a limited number of documents as per international best practices to the IPR office. By way of illustration, if there is a change of ownership, a consolidated application with one fee and one application for multiple designs may be accepted. Furthermore, only a limited number of documents like the assignment deed may be required in case of transfer of title in a registered design.

Conclusion

This EAC-PM Working Paper looks at the pros and cons of 4 major IPR agreements administered by WIPO which relate to streamlining the procedures for filing, registering and managing IPRS in foreign jurisdictions. In summary, on recommendations on the four agreements are as follows:

S.No		Agreement Should India Sign?	Has China Signed?
1	Strasbourg Agreement on Patents	Yes	Yes
2	Hague Agreement on Industrial Designs	Yes, with safeguards	Yes
3	Geneva Act of Lisbon Agreement on GIs	No	No
4	Design Law Treaty	Yes	Yes

Of the four agreements, the Strasbourg Agreement on patents will entail no change in our domestic law while the two treaties on industrial designs (Hague Agreement and Design Law Treaty) will require amendments to the provisions of Designs Act 2000 that deal with procedural elements. The Lisbon System on GIs requires greater stakeholder consultation since it will entail substantive changes in the GI Act 1999.

Since independence, our IPR system has been defensive because we started with the assumption that Indian innovators cannot compete with international counterparts. This is no longer the case with an unprecedented rise in domestic filings of IPR and even MNCs generating IPRS in India with their global capability centers. Therefore, we need to take an offensive stance to IPR today as Indian entities are as likely to generate these IPRS with tremendous economic



potential in the global markets.

All the four agreements will require India to enact enabling provisions for international applications and check for the system-readiness for e-processing of applications, including deploying additional manpower to meet the timelines. In the short term, the major beneficiaries will be foreign applicants but given the rising number of domestic IPR filings over the last few years and India's aspiration to emerge as the manufacturing and R&D hub of the world, signing these agreements and aligning with the international best practises will send the right signals to domestic and foreign entrepreneurs about India's commitment as a protector of IPR and showcasing itself as an IPR-savvy destination.

We need to move away from the fear that these changes will only benefit foreign applicants given the rising number of domestic IPR filings over the last few years. If India wants to be a major R&D hub and a place for cutting edge manufacturing and IP generation, we need to move away from a defensive to an offensive posture. Instead of defending domestic markets, our focus must be on laying the groundwork for Indian innovators to capture global markets. **CS**

This presentation is an EAC-PM working paper co-authored by the two writers.



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Apurv Kumar Mishra is presently serving in the Government of India as a Consultant in the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. From February-June 2022, he was a Policy Leader Fellow at European University Institute in Florence, Italy. He previously worked as a senior research fellow at India Foundation, a premier think-tank in India.

Managing a Tough Neighbourhood

India tried to stabilise its volatile periphery in 2024; it should play the long and pragmatic game to create more wins in 2025



by **AJAY BISARIA**

India's neighbourhood in 2024 remained in ferment, even as the country tried to steady its bilateral relationships in South Asia. Through the year, India worked to stabilize its periphery: engaging cautiously with its traditional adversaries, China and Pakistan; making tactical adjustments with the failing states of Afghanistan and Myanmar; and extending special outreach to new regimes in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal. These smaller neighbours, often balancing between India and China, saw shifts in sentiment, including a rise in anti-India rhetoric. The regime change in Bangladesh remained the most troubling, with prospects of a resumption of democracy appearing remote. Amid these challenges, Bhutan remained India's most steadfast ally, even as it faced pressures from China.

India walked the talk on 'neighbourhood first', even as domestic discourse began to accept that neighbours too had their right to strategic autonomy and that internal dynamics driving regime changes or anti-India stances mostly lay beyond India's control. Privileging its neighbourhood has been a historical tradition for India. From Nehru's Panchsheel principles of the 1950s, advocating non-interference and peaceful coexistence with China and beyond, to the regionalism envisioned through SAARC in the 1980s, and the Gujral Doctrine of the 1990s, which championed non-reciprocity and respect for smaller neighbours, India has consistently sought to anchor its foreign policy in South Asia. The Modi government's neighbourhood first initiative since 2014 epitomized this commitment, translated into the participation of SAARC leaders, including Pakistan, for Modi's first swearing-in ceremony. This tradition continued in 2024, when the re-elected Modi government marked a decade of this policy by inviting regional leaders, though not Pakistan, to the inauguration of Modi 3.0.

The toppling of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh this August, accompanied by a surge in anti-India rhetoric, reignited debates about whether India is perceived by its neighbours as the overbearing big brother, and is consequently losing its foothold to China or hostile forces. While all neighbours do not suddenly see India as the villain, the country must now contend with three enduring realities. First, no neighbour may ever again fully align with Indian interests, requiring India to engage with neighbours as they are, rather than as it might wish them to be. Second, South Asian nations will continue to hedge between the two dominant Asian powers, so India must establish a unique relevance to each. Third, anti-India sentiments or regimes will periodically emerge, demanding strategic patience and pragmatic engagement. The central challenge for India lies in crafting both immediate and enduring benefits for ruling elites and the broader populations of these countries. Even in a landscape where neighbours play India and China against each other, or where anti-India forces occasionally gain traction, India must persist in creating meaningful wins that foster stability and goodwill across the region. For the neighbours, India must offer a simple value proposition: if they take care of India's security concerns, India would be a valuable partner for their security as well as prosperity.

Balancing Pragmatism and Partisanship

Critics argue that with a preference to engage exclusively with friendly leaders and governments, New Delhi risks undermining its broader regional interests, particularly since the benign ruling elites can be replaced rapidly by inimical ones. While such criticism has some merit, India has increasingly adopted a pragmatic approach, engaging with less amicable regimes to safeguard its strategic goals. India's historical reliance on aligned political entities stems from an impulse to find friends in a region marked by political volatility, anti-India sentiment, and now, growing Chinese influence. Recognising the limitations of this approach, India has increasingly followed a more realist policy and diversified its engagement. It now engages equally with nationalistic, anti-India, or pro-China leaders, even with coup-makers, balancing principles with pragmatism. For example, despite tensions, India did intermittently engage with Bangladesh's opposition BNP, (though these efforts yielded limited outcomes until Hasina's ouster) or with the Taliban in Afghanistan or with rebel factions within Myanmar.

Economic initiatives underpin this pragmatic turn. India's investments in regional connectivity—spanning rail, road, port, and telecommunications—have created shared economic equities. Over the past decade, India's credit lines to Bangladesh (USD 8 billion), Sri Lanka (USD 4 billion), and others have surged. Developmental aid, coupled with India's growing economic clout, has fostered optimism among neighbours. Yet, competition with China remains a persistent challenge. Domestic politics in South Asia layered with China's influence, complicates New Delhi's efforts to secure its interests. By blending pragmatic diplomacy with economic integration, India seeks to mitigate risks while maintaining influence in its strategically vital neighbourhood. But India also needs to nuance its

While all neighbours do not suddenly see India as the villain, the country must now contend with three enduring realities. First, no neighbour may ever again fully align with Indian interests. Second, South Asian nations will continue to hedge between the two dominant Asian powers. Third, anti-India sentiments or regimes will periodically emerge, demanding strategic patience and pragmatic engagement.



policy, since no one size will fit the three categories of neighbours: the adversaries, the failing states and the smaller, hedging neighbours.

Traditional Adversaries

■ **CHINA.** In 2024, India and China cautiously resumed talks to ease tensions following the military standoffs that began in 2020. High-level meetings, including a Modi-Xi interaction in Russia (October) and discussions between NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (December), marked tentative steps toward mending ties. Talks focused on maintaining peace along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and implementing earlier troop disengagement agreements. However, underlying mistrust lingers, fuelled by China's assertive military postures in Ladakh; the unresolved border disputes and the overall strategic rivalry remains a challenge. What India would hope to achieve with China in the short term are tactical adjustments and not strategic breakthroughs, given the realities of economic interdependence and trade levels of over USD 130 billion. The larger relationship would need to be situated in the context of China's challenge to the dominant global hegemon, the US. India's bilateral positioning with the traditional rival would therefore need to be bolstered by global diplomacy, as through the QUAD, which could call out China's belligerent behaviour.

■ **PAKISTAN.** While stabilising relations with China, India also reached out to its western adversary, Pakistan. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, the first such visit in nine years since Sushma Swaraj visited Islamabad for a conference on Afghanistan in 2015. This was followed by the renewal of the Kartarpur Corridor agreement, continuing visa-free access for Indian pilgrims to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib. While Pakistan continued to reel under a poly-crisis from 2021, threatening political, economic



and security meltdowns, it also was seeking some degree of stabilisation on its eastern border. India's gesture to send an influential minister, even if for a multilateral meet, was a clear signal of a willingness to stabilise relations in a backdrop of longstanding tensions. Effectively, India's message was that if Pakistan could move positively to curtail cross-border terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir, India would be willing to work towards normalising the relationship. The window for rapprochement would remain open in 2025.

Failing States

■ **MYANMAR.** Three years after a military coup toppled an elected and partially democratic government, Myanmar has spiralled downwards into becoming a failed state, with civil war fragmenting the country. Only 14% of its territory and 33% of its population remain under stable control of the military junta. Escalating violence, including scorched-earth tactics by the junta, has displaced millions, creating a dire humanitarian crisis, with an estimated 18.6 million people requiring assistance in 2024, a sharp increase from previous years. For India, Myanmar's instability poses security risks, including of cross-border insurgencies, terrorism, and drug trafficking, particularly along the porous northeastern border. The junta's challenge from ethnic insurgent groups has seen internal battles, particularly the Arakan Army's control over significant chunks of territory- the Rakhine and Chin States. These threaten India's strategic interests, including the crucial US\$484 million Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP). This project, vital for directly linking India's eastern coastline with its Northeastern states through Myanmar, was designed to alleviate logistical challenges and enhance regional integration. But the Arakan Army's hold on vital areas along the Kaladan project route requires India to balance engagement with the ruling junta with an outreach to armed ethnic factions to safeguard its strategic interests. India will need to be less shy of engagement with all actors who matter.

■ **AFGHANISTAN.** Afghanistan remains a failing state under Taliban rule since US troop withdrawal in August 2021. The country faces economic collapse, food insecurity, and rising extremist threats, including from the ISIS-K, apart from the wrath of the Pakistan army for sheltering the deadly TTP. For India, Afghanistan's instability risks fostering anti-India militant activity, jeopardizes development projects, and raises concerns about potential refugee inflows. India's pragmatic approach to Afghanistan is guided by its historical goodwill and friendship with its people while being in



lockstep with the global community and UN resolutions. Even as India closed its embassy in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover of 2021, it positioned an Indian 'technical team' in the embassy in 2022: for monitoring projects, continuing humanitarian assistance and having an ear to the ground. While India is in no rush to recognise the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' its civilizational ties with Afghanistan are updated with a development partnership that has more than five hundred projects spread across each of the 34 provinces of the country in critical areas of power, water supply, road connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture and capacity building. India needs to build on the goodwill by giving visas more generously to Afghans, particularly students, and to pragmatically engage the Taliban to ensure it does not allow any anti-India violence from Afghan soil,

while at the same time pressing it to adopt more inclusive policies for women and girls education.

Encouraging Quad partners like the U.S., Japan, and Australia to join South Asia's economic initiatives will enhance regional stability, despite occasional differences. Reviving SAARC will offer a more manageable mechanism for dialogue, complementing sub-regional platforms like BIMSTEC and BBIN, while reducing reliance on the China-led SCO.

Hedging Neighbours

■ **BANGLADESH:** Since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, Bangladesh has begun to distance itself from India, marking a significant shift in its foreign policy. Hasina's administration had fostered strong ties with India, prioritizing security cooperation and economic collaboration. Under her leadership, Bangladesh effectively managed

Islamist forces and maintained a pro-India stance, which included welcoming Indian investment and addressing mutual concerns regarding terrorism.

However, following Hasina's removal amid widespread protests and the establishment of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, relations have soured. The new administration has openly signalled a desire to recalibrate its approach to foreign policy, indicating a potential pivot towards Pakistan and other regional actors in an open challenge to India's influence. The resurgence of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which has historically been

more sceptical of India, raises further concerns for New Delhi. The BNP in partnership with Islamist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, could increase hostility both to the Bangladeshi minority of 13 million and to India, thus threatening Indian security interests. The visit of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri in December was aimed at sensitising Bangladesh to Indian concerns and assuring strong economic cooperation.

The extradition request for Hasina from Yunus's interim government is an internal political signal as much as one to India. For India, the request has both political and legal consequences. India, under no political circumstances, would agree to extradite Hasina to



Bangladesh and could cite several legal reasons for this action. In the medium term, India would need to engage with a less friendly regime, pointing to the benefits for the people of Bangladesh of security and economic cooperation with India.

■ **NEPAL.** Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's December 2024 visit to China underscored Nepal's deepening ties with Beijing, marked by agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Oli's policies, including reducing reliance on India for trade and prohibiting anti-China activities in Nepal, highlight a pro-China stance that won't go away but may be balanced by better ties with India. On its part, India would need to recognise this reality of Nepal hedging between India and China and provide some unique benefits to its contiguous Himalayan neighbour.

■ **SRI LANKA.** Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's December 2024 visit to India reflects efforts to rebuild ties as much as rebuild the country following Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis. While discussions focused on trade, investment, and security, most significant was Dissanayake reaffirming commitments to regional stability and ensuring Sri Lankan territory is not used against India's interests. Clearly, as Sri Lanka navigates its recovery while balancing Indian and Chinese influence, it will have incentives to check China's growing influence, especially through projects like the Hambantota Port. By balancing relations with India, the leftist Dissanayake signalled a desire to engage both Asian powers while safeguarding

national sovereignty. For India, Sri Lanka represents a successful example of proactive and pragmatic engagement across regimes and despite domestic turmoil.

■ **MALDIVES:** President Mohamed Muizzu's first bilateral visit to India in October marked a shift from his earlier anti-India rhetoric. Clearly reversed was the earlier 'India Out' campaign rhetoric that sought to diminish Indian influence in the Maldives. Muizzu had earlier advocated for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel and leaned towards strengthening ties with China and Turkey, in a diplomatic snub to India. Economic challenges have driven a recalibration of policy, and Muizzu's pragmatic approach denotes a correction in policy which could lead to normalization of relations.

Strategic Patience with Short-term Wins

All this shows that India's regional strategy is a delicate balancing act of navigating adversarial relations, managing spillovers from failing states, and maintaining influence over neighbours hedging between global powers. Combining diplomatic pragmatism with robust economic initiatives will be key to safeguarding its interests in this complex and dynamic environment.

India's neighbourhood policy demands strategic patience, embracing occasional anti-India regimes, navigating Chinese competition, and rejecting zero-sum approaches. A durable framework for regional security and prosperity should prioritize grants over loans, emphasizing economic and security cooperation, connectivity, and humanitarian assistance. Engagement spans energy collaboration, development aid, defence partnerships, disaster relief, cultural exchanges, and infrastructure projects. Encouraging Quad partners like the U.S., Japan, and Australia to join South Asia's economic initiatives will enhance regional stability, despite occasional differences. Reviving SAARC will offer a more manageable mechanism for dialogue, complementing sub-regional platforms like BIMSTEC and BBIN, while reducing reliance on the China-led SCO.

India has lately pursued active regional diplomacy, blending gentle persuasion with respect for its neighbours' internal dynamics. Recognizing external counterbalances, especially China's unprecedented regional investments, India must strategically intensify its efforts to counter these challenges. By stabilizing its periphery and aligning regional policies with its broader goals, India can secure its neighbourhood and focus on its larger global interests, that would include pursuing its aspiration to become a developed major power by 2047. **CS**



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India-Bangladesh Relations — What Next?

Need to Tread with Care for both Countries!



by ASHOK SAJJANHAR

More than four months have elapsed since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee Dhaka for India on 5th August, 2024. She had to take this precipitous step in the face of rising student protests which had become increasingly violent over the previous month. Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus was installed as the Chief Adviser in the capacity of the head of the caretaker government on 8th August, 2024. There is no provision for a caretaker government in the Bangladesh Constitution. Two main objectives of the interim administration were to establish peace and ensure security in the country, and hold early elections. Neither of these objectives



has been achieved so far. There is no indication as to when the elections might be held. Yunus appears to have made statements suggesting that his interim government could continue for up to four years.

In addition to the continuing and worsening internal strife, relations with India have witnessed a new low, particularly on account of the brutality and assaults against the minority Hindu, Christian and Buddhist communities. Yunus and his administration refuse to acknowledge the reality of this barbarity and violence, notwithstanding the large number of videos and documentary evidence available to this effect. This policy of denial has led to further emboldening of the perpetrators and more atrocities against the minorities.

Islamists and jihadists appear to be having a field day and with the feeble and ineffective leadership of Yunus and his Advisers, the once promising land of Bangladesh appears rudderless. It is clear that Yunus and most of his Advisers have had no previous administrative or governance experience. Most of them have cut their teeth working in the NGO sector or agitation politics. They are finding themselves out of their depth in dealing with the serious political, security, economic and social challenges confronting the country.

During his one-day visit to Bangladesh for Foreign Office Consultations on 9th December, 2024, Indian Foreign Secretary (FS) Vikram Misri held "frank, candid, and constructive exchange of views with all" his interlocutors including Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad

Yunus, Foreign Affairs Adviser and Foreign Secretary. This diplomatic language indicates that Misri did not hold back his punches in outlining India's concerns about the violence against minorities in Bangladesh and the anti-Indian frenzy leading to the "regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious, and diplomatic properties."

Did the United States Engineer the August Coup?

While it might be difficult to marshal conclusive evidence to irrefutably prove the involvement of the US in the August developments, it is clear that the US government was unhappy with the Sheikh Hasina government and desperately wanted to see her back. It is also well known that the US deep state is no stranger to scheming and spawning colour revolutions and regime changes in different parts of the world. It can be safely assumed that the US had a significant motive and role to play in the violent change of government in early August, 2024.

Sheikh Hasina, after her removal in August, 2024, apparently alleged that the United States master-minded her ouster from power and the country after she refused to cede sovereignty of St. Martin Island, which would have given Washington control over the Bay of Bengal. The charge of US involvement is further substantiated by the comments of Muhammad Yunus in his meeting with President Joe Biden during his visit to the US in September, 2024 for the UN General Assembly Session. He paraded two "student leaders" at the meeting with Biden and claimed that the change in August, 2024 was meticulously crafted and planned over a long period of time. It laid to rest the argument that the movement to dislodge Hasina was purely homegrown, spontaneous and organic and an offshoot of the anti-quota stir over the few months preceding August, 2024.

It however needs to be recognized that Hasina's fifteen year-long rule had made her lose contact with the common people and the grass roots. She had become increasingly autocratic and dictatorial. Freedom of press, speech and media, and personal liberties were curtailed. This resulted in considerable disaffection amongst the people which led to the growing street protests, principally by students on the quota issue which came to occupy center-stage. The quota issue erupted not on account of any decision by the government but by a High Court ruling on 5th June 2024. However, Hasina's timely actions did seek to quell and contain the discontent and alienation amongst the common people on this issue. The student protest movement however was soon taken over by the jihadist elements of Chhatra Shibir, the Student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) party, the extremist Islamist force

in the country, leading to relentless and persistent violence. It would appear that if foreign funding and support had not poured into the protest movement, the outreach moves by Hasina would have been successful in containing the unhappiness and angst of the people.

In addition, the US has refused to make any critical comments against the Yunus dispensation for the violence and vandalism against the minority communities in Bangladesh. This was in spite of the fact that this matter was discussed during Biden's call to PM Modi on 26th August. The matter found a prominent mention in the readout of the discussions issued by India but failed to find a reference in the press release on the conversation by the White House. Moreover, in response to a question on 12th August on the atrocities being committed against the Hindus in Bangladesh, the White House refused to issue either a strong condemnation or a promise to act.

It is obvious that while there is a significant convergence of interests between India and the US, there is not absolute congruence in the policies of the two countries. In the case of Bangladesh, it would appear that core interests of India and the US don't align. Being next door, Bangladesh is very important for India strategically and for security reasons. Any disturbance or instability there is bound to impact India, whereas the US, located 13,000 km away, is immune to any crisis in Dhaka. Things could change radically with the takeover of President Donald Trump on 20th January, 2025, as he

had, during his Presidential campaign, stridently castigated the Bangladesh establishment for its persecution of the Hindus and minorities.

While the constitutional validity of the formation and continuation of the caretaker government continues to be under a serious question mark, the regime change seems to have brought the US, China and Pakistan on the same page with common interests which are inimical to the stability and security of India.

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The Churn in Bangladesh

The Yunus government has not been able to effectively tackle the major problems confronting the country. Thus far, Yunus and his team have not demonstrated the requisite leadership or statesmanship.

The way the situation is evolving, it appears possible that many members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamaat would probably get elected as and when the elections are held. There are strong pressures on Dr. Yunus from many sides, particularly the BNP to hold early elections. Yunus has however appointed several reform Commissions covering areas like the constitution, the electoral system, the judiciary, the police, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and public administration etc. to establish a fair election system and good governance. These Commissions are expected to submit their initial reports next month.

If the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) are elected in large numbers and come to power, it would spell serious trouble for the country. In particular, the Jamaat-e-Islami has an unsavoury past. It opposed the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and was involved in war crimes during the Liberation War. Despite this, it sneaked its way back into politics because of political expediency, particularly on part of the BNP.

A large number of imprisoned Islamists were set free recently under an amnesty. Among them was an ISIS and Al-Qaida sympathizer, Jasimuddin Rahmani, head of the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) who was convicted on serious murder charges. Upon his release, he lost no time to threaten India with dire consequences. He exhorted all Muslims to fight for the independence of Kashmir and vigorously urged West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to secede from India. Today, the Jamaat and its off shoots are being courted by China and Pakistan. All this is bound to have medium to long term disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.

In the midst of this upheaval, it needs to be remembered that the majority of Bangladesh population stands

for good relations with India. They support a secular administration focused on peace, stability and economic development. Some elements of the interim government and groups like the JeI, Hefazat-E-Islam Bangladesh, Ansarul Bangladesh, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and some more of the same ilk who harbor anti-Indian sentiments, constitute the fringe and radical elements of the population. Several of them who were earlier behind bars were released after the eviction of Sheikh Hasina and are leaving no stone unturned to incite anti-Indian and pro-Pakistan passions. The caretaker government and these groups

are conflating anti-Hasina feelings with anti-Indianism and anti-Hinduism resulting in the spate of violent attacks on Hindus and their places of work and worship. These groups are seeking to change the secular, syncretic character of Bangladesh and destroy the spirit of the 1971 liberation movement to take the country towards an Islamic state ruled by Sharia law. It is important for the people of Bangladesh to ensure that in the existing chaos and lawlessness, no permanent damage is inflicted on the democratic, pluralistic and tolerant social fabric of the nation.

As the economy of the country flounders and deteriorates, Yunus will find that the initial generous support extended to him and his Advisers by the people is fast dissipating. His honeymoon with the public will not last more than a few more months, at the most.

A clear and direct message was conveyed by FS Misri to his Bangladesh interlocutors about India's redlines regarding the safety and security of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh as well as the imperative of not sheltering insurgencies or militant elements targeting India.

India-Bangladesh Relations

India and Bangladesh share deep-rooted bonds of history, language, culture, and multitude of other commonalities. This has however not stopped the bilateral ties from experiencing several tumultuous ups and downs since Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971 in which India played a significant role. Bilateral ties blossomed rapidly over the last 15 years since Sheikh Hasina assumed power in 2009. The relations were reflected in an all-encompassing partnership based on sovereignty, equality, trust, and understanding. It

evolved as a model for bilateral relations for the entire region and beyond.

There was extensive interaction and exchange between the two countries at the highest political level. The period witnessed intense trade, commercial and economic cooperation promoting two-way connectivity – rail, roads, inland waterways, ports and energy; defence cooperation; tourism; education; health; people-to- people contacts etc.

In the preceding 15 years, the two countries helped beat back militant groups, resolved a thorny boundary and maritime issue and signed a number of infrastructure and power deals. All these advances promoted mutual benefit of the two countries and brought them closer than they had been for decades.

Everything however changed in early August 2024 when Sheikh Hasina's government collapsed. Today the India-Bangladesh relationship is in serious trouble.

Following Hasina's departure, a series of communal attacks were reported, particularly targeting Hindus in Bangladesh. These incidents included attacks on temples, houses, and shops belonging to minority communities, as well as looting and murder across several districts in the country. PM Modi strongly raised the issue of protection and security of all Hindus and minorities in Bangladesh with the Chief Advisor when the latter called him on 16th August, 2024. Dr Yunus assured protection, safety and security of Hindus and all minorities in Bangladesh. So far these have proved to be mere words. Yunus and his officials have stated that the media reports of persecution of minorities are highly exaggerated. This has further encouraged the perpetrators to continue their violent actions with impunity. According to Investigations conducted by some Bangladesh agencies, more than 2,000 attacks including personal assaults, killings, abductions, rapes and destruction of properties have taken place on the minority community since Sheikh Hasina fled the country. Serious concerns about the increasing spate of attacks against the minorities, particularly the Hindus have been expressed by law-makers and civil society leaders from the US, UK, Australia, Canada and European nations. The interim government can no longer take refuge behind its rationalization that the accounts are "highly exaggerated" or that they are an internal matter of Bangladesh.

The recent arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition charges has added fuel to the already simmering fire. Chinmoy Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilit Sanatan Jagran Jote, remains in custody despite calls from India for his release. The level of intolerance and anti-India sentiment among the common people is evident from the fact that



no lawyer was allowed to take up Chinmoy Das's case in court for fear of reprisals due to threats issued by the Lawyers' body. In response to India's expression of strong concern and calls for legal action against the perpetrators, Yunus repeatedly asserted that the attacks are not "communal" but are politically motivated because the Hindus are largely considered AL supporters. This can hardly be a solace or justification for those who are being attacked or whose homes and places of worship and work are being vandalized or torched.

To make matters worse, Pakistan has started making an ingress into Bangladesh. The first cargo ship to travel directly from Pakistan to Bangladesh in 53 years docked at Chittagong port on November 11, 2024. In October, the caretaker Bangladesh government scrapped the mandatory physical inspection of imports from Pakistan. These developments need to be seen in the context of the arms haul confiscated in 2004 in Chittagong. The cargo consisted of around 1,500 boxes of Chinese ammunitions, worth an estimated \$4.5-7 million, allegedly meant for the banned militant outfit ULFA (United Liberation Front of

It is clear that Yunus and most of his Advisers have had no previous administrative or governance experience. They are finding themselves out of their depth in dealing with the serious political, security, economic and social challenges confronting the country.

Asom) and thought to be masterminded by Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). In yet another move, the Yunus dispensation removed the requirement for Pakistani citizens to obtain security clearance before applying for a visa. In his meeting with Pakistan prime minister Shehbaz Sharif at the UN General Assembly in New York in September, Yunus had stressed on the need to revitalize bilateral cooperation. All these developments further enhance the challenges for India emanating out of Bangladesh.

Some analysts in Bangladesh and India allege that India committed a mistake by putting all its eggs in the Hasina basket. This is a faulty reading of the ground situation. India was required to engage with the government in power in the country. Sheikh Hasina was a democratically elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh. India will continue to deal with whichever government



is in power in the country. All decisions taken by the two governments in fields of security, connectivity, trade, education, health, culture etc. were for the mutual benefit of the people of the two countries and not to promote the individual interests of any country or leader. All connectivity and infrastructure projects commissioned by India continue to function for the welfare of the people of Bangladesh. Moreover, India had reached out to all interlocutors in Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and most other political dispensations across the board.

Under India's "Neighbourhood First Policy", India has pursued a non-reciprocal and generous policy with its neighbours. Bangladesh has been by far the largest beneficiary of this approach with more than US\$8 billion in grants and assistance. Bangladesh sits at the intersection of most of India's key foreign policy visions – the "Act East Policy", the doctrine of SAGAR, as well as its Indo-Pacific Vision.

During his visit to Bangladesh on 9th December, FS Vikram Misri informed all his interlocutors "that India desires a positive, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh. We have always seen in the past and we continue to see in the future this relationship as a people-centric and people-oriented relationship."

He referred to the "mutually beneficial engagement we have on a whole set of issues ranging from trade, commerce, connectivity, power, water and energy, development cooperation, consular cooperation, and cultural cooperation" and expressed the confidence that this will continue. He emphasized that "India desires a positive, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh."

A clear and direct message was conveyed by FS Misri to his Bangladesh interlocutors about India's redlines regarding the safety and security of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh as well as the imperative of not sheltering insurgencies or militant elements targeting India. It is necessary for the Bangladesh interim government to realize that positive relations with India are hugely beneficial for it and its people in promoting peace, security, economic development and growth. Yunus in his meeting with Misri said that Sheikh Hasina's statements from Delhi against the interim

government raise tension in the society.

Bangladesh FS raised a number of issues with FS Misri including alleged killings of people on the border by Indian security forces, trade barriers, renewal of the Ganga Waters Treaty, sharing waters of Teesta River, ensuring uninterrupted supply of essential commodities, facilitating visas for Bangladeshi citizens, transmission of hydropower from Nepal and Bhutan to Bangladesh, etc. All these requests and more clearly demonstrate the acute dependence of Bangladesh on India.

Conclusion

The change of government in Bangladesh and developments over the last more than four months pose a serious challenge for India. India is already confronting two hostile powers to its West and the North. Bangladesh could emerge as an adversary to the East. If this happens, it will stretch India's defences to the limit. So far the Bangladesh border is protected by the BSF. In the coming months, India will have to consider whether it needs to depute its army too on certain sections of the six states that adjoin the 4,000 km plus long border with Bangladesh.

Yunus and his group of Advisers appear to be totally inadequate in dealing with the evolving situation. Either they are incapable, or worse still, complicit in what is happening. They need to realize the imperatives of interdependence. Much of Bangladesh's exports of readymade garments depend for their intermediates and inputs on imports from India. Much of their exports also go to global markets from Indian ports. Most of Bangladesh's requirements of essential commodities are met by imports from India. It is in the mutual interest of both the countries to have good relations with each other. Bangladesh needs to ensure that it does not become a hub of radicalism, Islamism and jihadism. It should not follow the Pakistani example of becoming an epicentre of terrorism. Security, stability and economic progress are the need of the hour for Bangladesh and its people. India is the best partner for it in realizing these aspirations.

India has followed a calibrated approach of sending out a clear message to Bangladesh to be mindful of India's security interests and protect the lives and welfare of its Hindu and other minorities. India will need to keep a close watch on developments in the country in the coming weeks and months and take necessary measures as required. **CS**



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Hospitality Drives Indian Tourism

As 2025 dawns upon us, for those in India's tourism industry, it is becoming apparent that hospitality business is the key driver for our tourism.

by NAVIN BERRY

First, that domestic segment has boomed like never before, with Indians willing and keen to travel, spend, never blink at prices that they may have balked at in earlier days. That hotel spends, offerings, promotions have visualised traditional and modern concepts – from weddings and events to staycations, meaning taking a vacation in your own city of residence, to packages that take care of food and beverages, outdoor catering, health foods, and so much more. Inbound tourism has picked up, yet to reach the 2019 levels, but nevertheless will remain inadequate to feed the existing rooms supply.

Destination promotions are increasingly being generated by hotels, with the industry being the new driver of demand. It is not early days, but an opportune time, for state governments to dovetail infrastructure that ensures last mile connectivity and visitor conveniences. Also, state tourism organizations will do well to do joint marketing, or specific marketing in areas that need support.

New investments, ploughing back of profits: With the increased revenues coming in, hotels are essentially ploughing back into their business. This is resulting in new infrastructure across the country, both in old and newer markets becoming tourist destinations. Such confidence among investors has never been witnessed before; hospitality meanwhile, has become more driven by corporate responsibility, signalling a big change from days when promoters siphoned off earnings towards other businesses. Modern promoters are vying to be noticed for ethical growth, vying for leadership among brands, bringing in expertise and professionalism matching global standards.

Technology is a big help in this direction. Online is the big disruptor, now being seen as the big enabler. It has brought greater transparency for the customers always seeking the best deal. Equally, within every organization, technology enables solutions to inventory, pricing, budgeting have changed the structure – dealings are on record, as are earnings. Government regulations over time, like limiting cash transactions to two lakhs only, have helped. Increased spending on credit



Rambagh Palace, Jaipur

Small are becoming big, big are becoming bigger. IHCL (Taj Group) is envisaging a 700-hotel portfolio in the next few years, companies like Lemon Tree are signing a new hotel almost every other week. Hilton Hotels signed one single deal for 150 properties with Olive by Embassy under the Spark brand.

cards is another. While money is king, it is not cash.

Healthy supply line: Most hotel companies are talking of robust growth projection, in number of projects in progress, both in number of properties and rooms, across brands, across price points, though the mid-market, traditionally unknown in India, is blossoming. Small are becoming big, big are becoming bigger. IHCL (Taj Group) is envisaging a 700-hotel portfolio in the next few years, companies like Lemon Tree are signing a new hotel almost every other week. Hilton Hotels signed one single deal for 150 properties with Olive by Embassy under the Spark brand. Marriott Hotels have 150 operational hotels with 83 in the pipeline. Home grown Royal Orchid Hotels passed the magical 100 properties mark. Minor Hotels, with brands like Anantara, plan over 50 hotels in the next decade.

In Keeping with infrastructure growth: Such a robust pipeline augurs well to match accommodation growth to keep pace with growth in airport, airline and highways sectors. As we open more airports, add airline capacity, add highway infrastructure, we need more quality accommodation. Growth in business in hospitality, this new confidence and capacity building, therefore, could not have come at a better time in the growth of both the economy in general and for tourism specifically.

Hospitality as Lobbyist for Tourism: In the absence of a well defined 'tourism' lobby in the country, hotels and hospitality have emerged as the key promoters. **CS**

Impact of Trump Victory on Indo-U.S. Relations



The recent elections in the U.S. have had a dramatic impact on the internal alignments within U.S. domestic politics as well on the US stance in geopolitics. This article attempts to explore the implications for India, both with the lens of the impact of figures of Indian origin at both federal and state levels, as well as the implications of the Trump administration's likely geopolitical policies on India.

by KANWARJIT SINGH in US

Representation in US Legislative and executive Branches

With every U.S. election there is growing political engagement of the Indian-American community. Even though the overall numbers of elective repre-

sentatives are not as significant as in other countries, such as Canada or the UK, the impact is greater than the raw numbers indicate. Below is an overview of the emerging leaders in both major parties, and prospects for the collective "Samosa Caucus":

Democratic Party

Indian-American Democrats continue to dominate the Republicans in terms of legislative representation and influence. Its high-profile members include:

- **Ro Khanna (CA):** Known for his progressive stance on economic justice, tech policy, and U.S.-India relations. His voice is amplified as the representative of the Silicon Valley in Congress and he is seen as a balanced and authoritative voice on the controversies that arise in that crucial sector. He has a political pedigree that has its roots in Indian politics - his grandfather, Amarnath Vidyalankar, was a freedom fighter and Lok Sabha member from Chandigarh.

- **Pramila Jayapal (WA):** A leading voice in the



India USA turn-around in Last Decade

■ Bilateral trade has surged from \$20 billion in 2000 to \$195 billion in 2023 while defence trade has jumped from zero to \$24 billion during the same period. Two-way trade is expected to cross the \$200 billion mark in 2024.

■ The number of Indian students in the US has increased from just 54,664 in 2000 to over 330,000 in 2023, while the population of the Indian diaspora is now over five million from 1.9 million in 2000.

■ The Biden-Harris administration appointed a record number of 130 Indian Americans to senior positions.

■ India today is the top military exercise partner of the US.

■ The US is the biggest source of remittances to India.

■ A fifth of unicorns in the US have Indian migrants as founders or co-founders.

progressive wing, chairing the Congressional Progressive Caucus. With the Democrats in a minority, the Progressive Caucus is likely to be in the cross hairs of the new administration while also representing the most ideologically divergent opposition to the MAGA positions of the incoming administration.

• **Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL):** Focused on bipartisan issues such as education and anti-corruption and also becoming a strong interlocutor on both domestic and global issues from the ever-narrowing middle ground in American politics.

Their collective inputs will be especially significant in debates within the Democratic Party, especially on immigration reform, healthcare, and technology regulation, and will emerge as the talking points for the Democratic opposition.

Also, in the mix at the state level are the following:

• **Shri Thanedar (MI):** Recently elected as the first Indian-American congressman from Michigan, Thanedar has a strong story of immigrant success and appeals to working-class voters.



• **Aruna Miller (MD):** Maryland's Lieutenant Governor is the first Indian-American woman elected to a statewide executive role, representing a milestone for Indian-American women in politics.

• **Neil Makhija:** A lawyer and advocate, Makhija leads organizations that mobilize South Asian voters and could emerge as a future political candidate.

Republican Party

Indian-Americans in the Republican Party remain fewer in terms of numbers in the legislative branch but are gaining in prominence in all echelons of Republican politics as the diaspora diversifies in its political affiliations. Ad this trend could be amplified based on the policies and pronouncements of the incoming administration and of Donald Trump himself, including the personal equation he projects with Narendra Modi.

Several figures in the Republican Party have also been given prominent executive roles in the incoming administration:

Vivek Ramaswamy: (entrepreneur and 2024 Republican primary candidate) while not currently in any elective position, has a national following and is bringing Indian-American perspectives to the GOP while advocating for aligning with the MAGA nationalism and tough social "anti-woke" policies. His policy ideas focus on economic deregulation, and U.S. self-reliance in critical industries. And given his co-responsibilities, with Elon Musk, in the emergent Department of Government Efficiency, he has the potential to have high visibility and impact. But equally a failure in the role could scuttle his carefully crafted political identity. His nationalist stance and opposition to China could align with India's strategic goals, particularly in countering Beijing. However, his domestic focus might limit direct contributions to Indo-U.S. bilateral ties. Given his relative youth, he could well emerge as a powerful power broker in the party as well as a future member of the Senate from Ohio.

Kash Patel: his rise to be the nominee to head the FBI has been truly meteoric and he is possibly the candidate most vulnerable to challenge in the senatorial vetting process. Patel has been a key Trump ally and former Pentagon official, who played a significant role in defence and intelligence policy during Trump's first



term and belongs in the inner circle. If confirmed, he would potentially advocate for deepening U.S.-India defence cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism and Indo-Pacific strategies.

Tulsi Gabbard: Although not Indian-American, Gabbard's Hindu faith and strong ties to the Indian-American community make her a cultural and diplomatic link. Her basic non-interventionist foreign policy views align with Trump's scepticism of endless wars. Some of her prior initiatives especially with the Bashar regime in Syria were controversial; but if confirmed, she could be his personal eyes and ears in the various branches of the US intelligence community often seen as suspect in the eyes of those who target the "deep state". Gabbard has consistently supported stronger U.S.-India ties, advocating for India's role in counterterrorism and as a democratic counterweight to China. Her presence could foster greater cultural and strategic alignment between the two nations.

The growing significance of the Indian voice in US politics can be gauged by the growing prominence of the informal "Samosa Caucus," comprising of members of Congress with an Indian connection. Members of the caucus have already shaped debates on immigration reform, U.S.-India relations, healthcare, and tech innovation. As the numbers increase, their ability to push for bipartisan policies may strengthen. By bridging progressive and moderate platforms, the caucus could play a strong role in bringing bipartisan support to policies impacting India.

Members of the Samosa caucus have already shaped debates on immigration reform, U.S.-India relations, healthcare, and tech innovation. As the numbers increase, their ability to push for bipartisan policies may strengthen.

Geopolitical Alignment and impact on India

We turn next to the larger impact of a Trump administration on the geopolitical environment and its implications for India. Donald Trump has demonstrated in his pre-inauguration moves a willingness to take on almost any aspect of the established order - as his comments on the status of Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal revealed. His basic America First stance has major ramifications for the multilateral political and economic institutions including global institutions like the UN, WHO, World Bank, NATO, and the U.S. dollar's role as the global reserve currency. Here's an analysis of likely trends:

Fragmentation of Multilateralism:

Trump's "America First" ideology emphasizes bilateralism over multilateralism, potentially weakening the global multilateral system that emerged out of the Second World War and was amended and reinforced by the competition of the Cold War. With the ending of the Cold War, the logic of multilateralism has been eroding and Trump's ascent could mark a further critical stage

in the evolution. Trump's scepticism of global institutions could further undermine multilateral governance. His policies might encourage a universal transactional, zero-sum approach to diplomacy.

- **Reduced U.S. Funding** could be the most direct way to impact the multilateral bodies. During his previous term, Trump cut contributions to global bodies (e.g., WHO) and questioned the value of funding institutions perceived as inefficient or biased. Another vehicle could be through using its economic clout to tamper with the

recruitment practices of the agencies precipitating a legitimacy and effectiveness crisis.

- **World Bank/IMF:** Trump's administration was critical of lending practices, particularly those benefiting China. U.S. influence in these institutions may decrease if his policies become more isolationist.

Rethinking NATO and Security Alliances

- **Burden-Sharing:** Trump has consistently demanded NATO members increase their defence spending. A second term could see heightened tensions with European allies. Though unlikely, the possibility of the U.S. scaling back or even withdrawing from NATO could resurface, just the threat of which could upend world strategic status quo. Also, by extension of the same logic, he is unlikely to have enthusiasm for putting resources to reinforce the Quad alliance.

- **Global Security Impact:** Reduced U.S. commitment to NATO and other alliances could embolden adversaries like Russia and China, destabilizing the global security architecture.

U.S. Dollar and Macroeconomic Policy

Currency supremacy represents an area where Trump's views have been consistently hawkish. He has specifically avowed his desire to reinforce the US Dollar's status as the exclusive global reserve currency; most recently threatening crippling tariffs if the BRICS countries contemplated de-dollarizing or launching their own reserve currency

- The threat of tariffs and trade wars has been a recurrent theme in his economic policy pronouncements. Professional opinion among economists is divided on the scope of the tariffs or their impact on broad macro-economic variables or even if they are compatible with the goals of quelling inflation or spurring investment: But he seems as determined to exercise economic power as he seems reluctant to exercise military power. And the maintenance of the dollar as a safe-haven asset seems to be an overriding priority.

- Trump's unilateralism could accelerate moves by China, Russia, and others to de-dollarize trade and financial systems, as seen in efforts like the BRICS currency initiative referred to above. But these initiatives would be difficult to accomplish in the face of stringent opposition from the US

Specific impact on bilateral U.S.-India Relations

Trade & Defence: Under Trump's previous administration, there was an emphasis on strengthening U.S.-India ties, especially in defence and economic cooperation. Indians might expect continuity in areas like defence partnerships and the Indo-Pacific strategy with the caveats about the willingness to participate in multilateral partnerships like the Quad noted above.

Tariffs and Trade Policies: Trump's protectionist trade stance analysed above could impact India in complex and difficult to predict ways. There could be a return to negotiations over tariffs, which might affect



Indian exports like pharmaceuticals, textiles, and IT services. But a recalibrate its stance on trade policy with China, could potentially benefit India strategically by opening new trade and investment opportunities. But it is too early to say. U.S. investments into India's technology and manufacturing sectors could either grow or face barriers depending on trade negotiations and bilateral relations.

Legal Immigration Policies H-1B Visas: Indians in the U.S. or planning to migrate for work might be concerned about stricter visa policies, as Trump's administration previously tightened H-1B regulations and has been parsimonious in supporting legal immigration together with a vigorous opposition to illegal immigration, a corner of his campaign.

Diaspora Concerns and Community Safety: Indian Americans will remain vigilant about potential up-ticks in xenophobic rhetoric or actions, as such issues have been a concern in previous years and Trump's campaign rhetoric could foment animus and hostility against all visible immigrant groups. This could have broad ramifications including the willingness of students and tech professionals to move to the US, which have been a cornerstone of the enlarging partnership between the two countries. **CS**

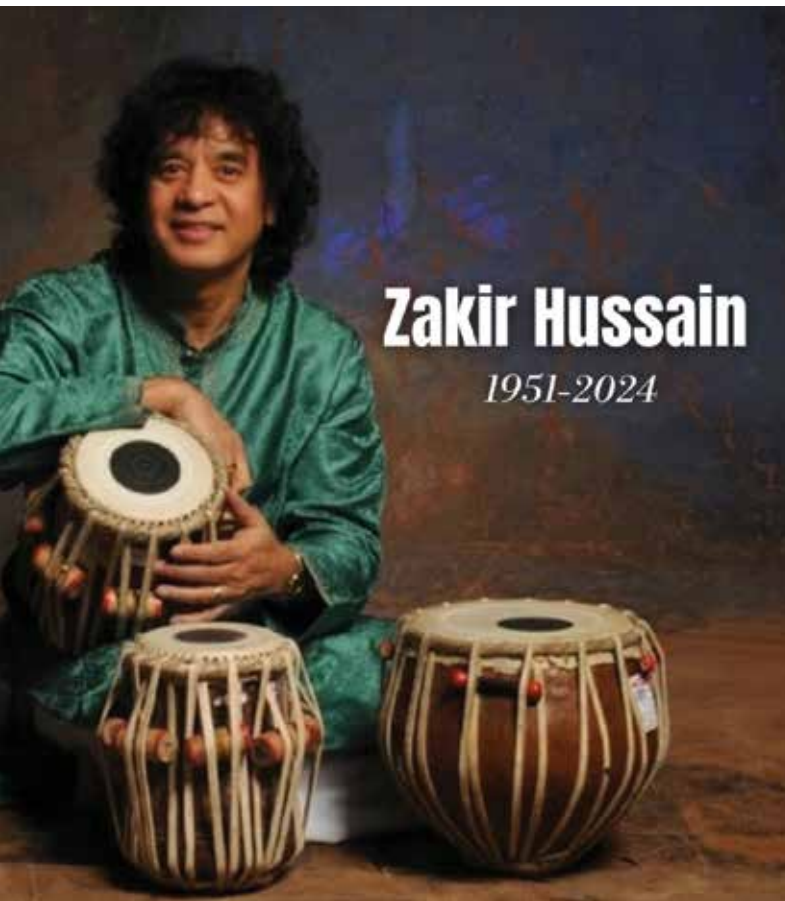


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kanwarjit Singh is a physician working in the biotech sector in Southern California. Prior to that he worked at McKinsey and the Gates Foundation and has degrees in Physics from St Stephen's College, Delhi, Economics from Oxford, Business from MIT and Medicine from Columbia.

Wah Ustad! The Taj of Tabla

With his technical mastery, creative genius, and complete understanding of the tabla, he carved out a distinctive niche for himself in the esoteric world of Indian classical music so much so that he became synonymous with the tabla.



by **DR. MANORANJAN SHARMA** and
ARCHANA CHOUDHARY

Ustad Zakir Hussain, who was born on March 9, 1951, in Mumbai, was a child prodigy. As the worthy son of the legendary Ustad Allah Rakha, a renowned tabla player, he shot to fame at the tender age of 12, when he accompanied India's most prominent classical musicians, including Sitar maestro Ravi Shankar and Sarod legend Ali Akbar Khan.

How do we describe someone as talented and versatile as Ustad Zakir Hussain? For, he spanned the complete spectrum of music as a tabla player, as composer, percussionist, music producer, and film actor. Ustad

Zakir Hussain exemplified the Matthew Arnoldian sense of "man and the milieu".

William Wordsworth called poetry "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science" and Matthew Arnold stressed, "We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto". These

attributes of poetry isolated and identified by Wordsworth and Arnold apply equally to music in all its forms and manifestations.

The Tabla Maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain was completely familiar with the long and distinguished tradition of Classical Indian music, a tradition which continues to hold its own despite all-pervading Western influences in most aspects of life, activity, and culture. With his incredible skill, versatility, and passion for the ancient instrument, this musical genius was symptomatic of the times he lived in- a powerful example of what T.S. Eliot called it "tradition and individual talent". In the sense of Eliot's "following tradition", he had a "historical sense" which enabled him to draw on the past and the present to craft something new and innovative-what is now fashionable to call an "out of box" work. No wonder, then, the honorific "Ustad" was always prefixed to his name.

In his outstanding career, Zakir Hussain experimented and collaborated with a diverse range of musicians, from Indian classical legends, such as, Ustad Rashid Khan, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia to Western jazz and rock icons to create an enchanting music.

How do we describe someone as talented and versatile as Ustad Zakir Hussain? For, he spanned the complete spectrum of music as a tabla player, as composer, percussionist, music producer, and film actor. Ustad Zakir Hussain exemplified the Matthew Arnoldian sense of "man and the milieu".



His trailblazing work with Western musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma, Charles Lloyd, Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, Mickey Hart and George Harrison and the fusion band Shakti, which he co-founded with English guitarist John McLaughlin, L. Shankar, and T.H. Vinayakram, broke fresh ground, expanded the horizons of Indian music and enthralled audiences worldwide John McLaughlin who performed with Hussain in the band Shakti - described him as “the King, in whose hands, rhythm became magic”

Accordingly, Zakir Hussain’s indelible impact on the music world transcended his extraordinary technical prowess. He was instrumental in popularizing Indian classical music globally, introducing it to new audiences, and inspiring a new generation of musicians. His dedication to preserving and promoting India’s rich cultural heritage is reflected in awards, including the Padma Shri in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 2002, and Padma Vibhushan in 2023. He also won four Grammy Awards.

His concerts in India and overseas always reflected his “breath and finer spirit of knowledge”, his unfathomable energy, creativity, and passion for music. In the words of Zakir Hussain himself, “Music is the universal language, and the tabla is my voice.” This power of music seamlessly swept across borders, cultures, and generations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “a true genius who revolutionised the world of Indian classical music”.

Incidentally, the word “Ustad” is originally an Arabic word and is used to denote a person, who has scaled the top of his profession with utmost aplomb and acclaim. The exalted position of Professor in the Arab world’s higher education system is called “Ustad.”

My father, who was Professor & Head of the Department of English & Modern European Languages

at the University of Lucknow for twenty years moved to the Middle East on his superannuation and was Professor & Chairman there for about twelve years. At the domestic airports there, most passengers were required to undergo a stringent security check. But my father had to identify himself as “Ustad”, i.e., the Arabic word for Professor and he was always given the red-carpet treatment. This is the universal significance of the title “Ustad”, something which doesn’t come easily but is entirely appropriate in the case of Ustad Zakir Hussain, who lifted the art of the Tabla to a new and higher level. This was a tall order because as the Maestro himself wrote in his Foreword to Sadanand Naimpalli’s Theory And Practice Of Tabla, 2005 “[the] tabla is one of the youngest instruments in the field of North Indian Classical music”. Nayan Ghosh, who plays the sitar and table, justifiably maintained “He was a path-breaker, a game-changer, an icon who put tabla and Indian music on the world map” Shankar Mahadevan’s words “I’ve never seen a rhythm artist with so much musicality and there will never be one more like this. Either there will be knowledge or expertise... It is impossible for an artist to be born of this calibre or to have knowledge, expertise, and stage presence. Tabla is never going to sound like this ever again” resonate and reverberate globally. Zakir Hussain’s legacy as a tabla virtuoso, a pioneer of Indian classical music and an extraordinary human being will be enduring and long-lasting. May his soul rest in peace! **CS**

Note: This article was first published in Financial Express on December 18, 2024.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Manoranjan Sharma, Chief Economist, Infomercials Ratings is globally recognized as an expert in the Indian economy, banking, MSMEs, rural credit, financial inclusion, etc. He has over 300 publications, including in The Business Review (Cambridge), Journal of Economy and Business (Bulgaria), Occasional Papers (RBI), The Indian Banker (IBA), Bank Quest (IIBF), CAB Calling (RBI), The Economic Times, Financial Express, Times of India, Hindu Business Line.



Mrs. Archana Choudhary, IRS, is former Principal Director General of Income Tax (Pr. DGIT) with 36 years of service. In her distinguished career, she worked across geographies and areas, viz., assessment, appeal, investigation, administration, judicial processes, and training. A recipient of the gold medal for academic excellence at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National

Academy of Administration (1987), she did her Mid-Career Training at the Maxwell School, Syracuse University, USA and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIM-B).

The Remaking of the Notre Dame Cathedral: A Lesson In Restoration, Passion And Detailing



It's a late awakening for us in India but one that is gaining gradual momentum. Preserving our heritage has firm roots in many developed countries, it's not just about government priority but more an intrinsic part of the average consciousness. France has impeccable credentials and is also signed as strategic partner in our redevelopment of North and South blocks on Raisina Hill. We capture in these pages the restoration of the fire-destroyed Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, re-opened only last month.

With inputs from NOTRE DAME FOUNDATION

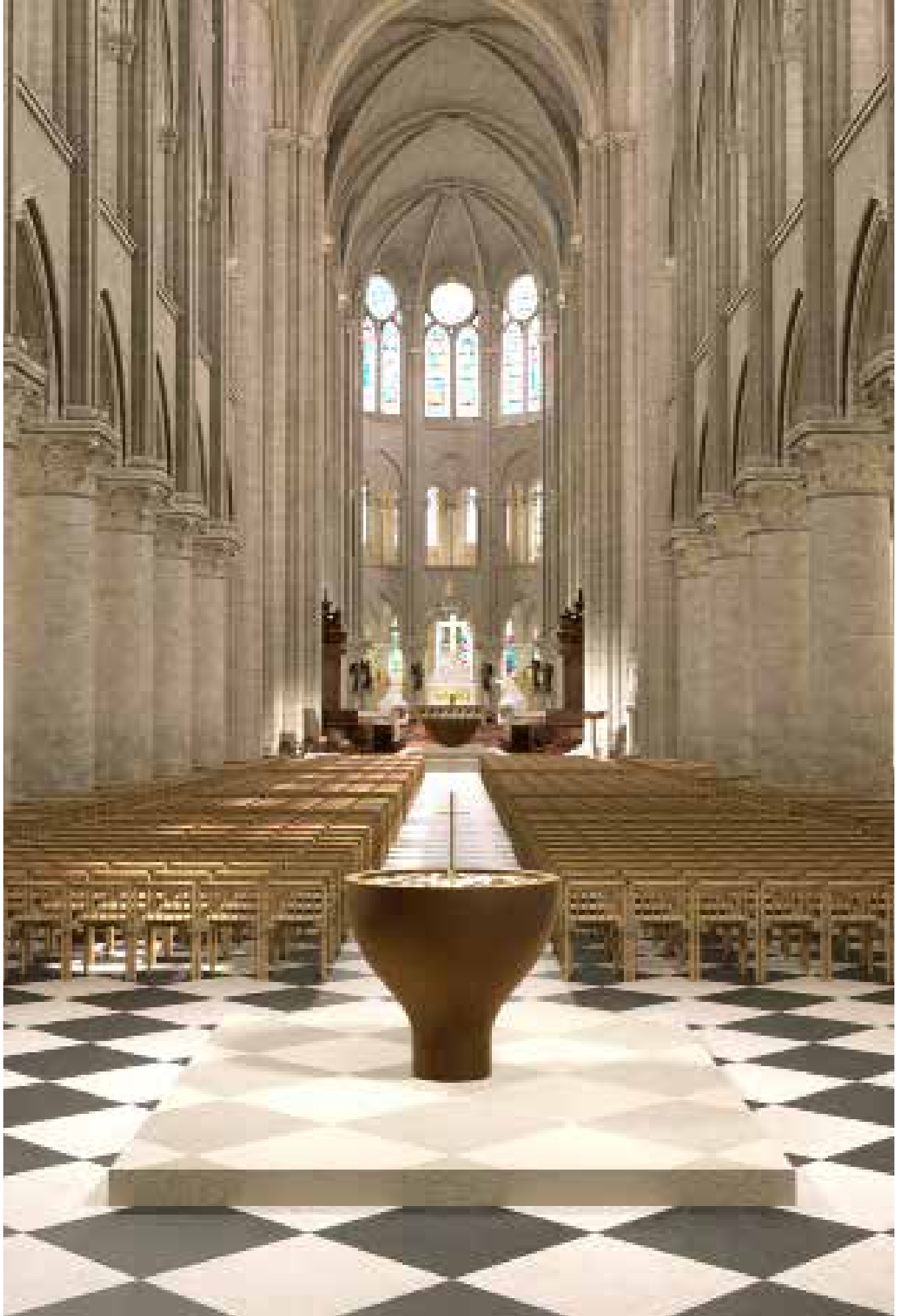
The teams, the people, the man hours went into this elaborate exercise

The work of designer and sculptor Guillaume Bardet, the liturgical furnishings consist of five key elements: the altar, cathedra and associated seats, ambo, tabernacle and baptistery. Each piece has been designed in sculpted bronze for its powerful, timeless and luminous aesthetic. The furnishings are being produced at the Barthélémy Art foundry in Crest (Drôme).

The Diocese of Paris commissioned Guillaume Bardet to design liturgical objects, namely the sacred vessels. The collection of sacred vessels includes the chalice and paten, a monstrance, one large ciborium and several small ciboria, a censer and shuttle, cruets, a ewer and a basin. In accordance with liturgical requirements, the sacred vessels are made of precious metals, in this case, silver and gold.

A collection of almost 30 pieces (including the censer, cruets, ewer, basin, etc.) was produced by the Atelier d'Orfèvrerie Marischael, goldsmiths from father to son for 4 generations.

The designer, Vincent Dupont-Rougier, was commissioned to create the additional furnishings, including stanchion posts, votive candle burners and votive stands. "I wanted to create furniture that would be in dialogue with Notre-Dame's thousand-year-old

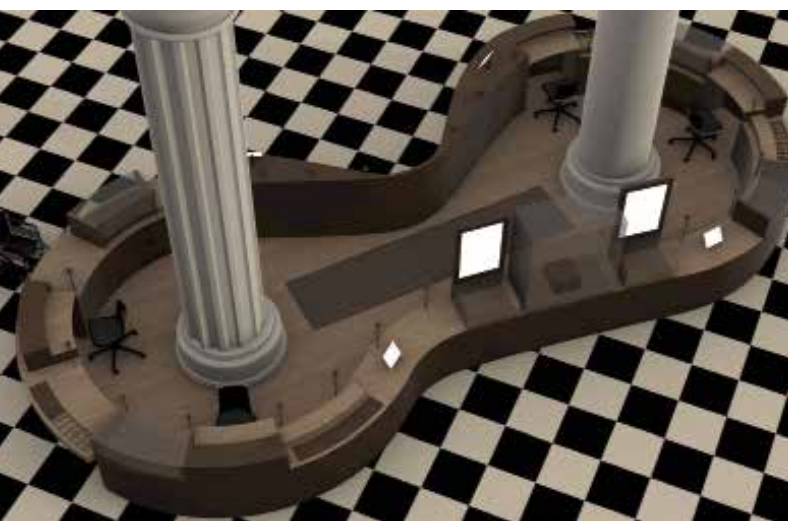




Mgr Laurent Ulrich
Archbishop of Paris



Mgr Olivier Ribadeau
Dumas, Rector-Archpriest
and Assignee of the Notre-
Dame de Paris Cathedral



Gothic-inspired architecture, its arches, columns and stained-glass windows; but I also wanted to echo the softness and transparency that move both the worshippers and visitors that come from all over the world", explains designer Ionna Vautrin.

Ionna Vautrin is also responsible for designing other new cathedral furniture such as kneelers, individual prie-dieu, benches and long prie-dieu, while maintaining the overall aesthetic harmony. These other items of furniture were also produced by Bosc.

Numbers of items: 1,500 chairs • 170 kneelers • 40 pews • 60 individual prie-dieu • 20 long prie-dieu

The manufacture of the reliquary was entrusted to Ateliers Saint-Jacques & Fonderie de Coubertin for the woodwork, casting, stonework and metalwork, and to master glassmaker Olivier Juteau for the glass cabochons.

To mark the celebrations for the reopening of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris in December 2024, a series of vestments and liturgical ornaments were created in collaboration with Jean-Charles de Castelbajac.

Designed by the Patrick Rimoux Agency, the cathedral's lighting scheme offers a range of lighting scenarios, including 10 architectural scenarios, 30 liturgical scenarios and 10 concert scenarios, using 2,175 lights and 1,550 spotlights.

For the first time in the cathedral, all the spotlights are individually controlled from a central lighting board. This means that the intensity of each spotlight can be independently increased or decreased by varying the wattage. The white light can also be nuanced in terms of colour, from 2200K for a warm candle glow to 5000K for a bright white light.

How much is original. Have designs been upped any bit so to say, or only stay original?

■ A new route through the cathedral

The new route takes visitors from north to south, in line with the cathedral's core, unchanging features, in particular the choir enclosure which features sculptures of scenes from the life of Christ in the north, and scenes from Christ's resurrection in the south. The app and guides will help visitors understand the meaning of this route, which is shown on the map on the right.

■ New furnishings

The cathedral's vast volume is the first thing that visitors experience. Once past the baptistery, visitors are directed to the north aisle. There they come immediately to the reception desk designed by Agence NC Nathalie Crinière, which wraps around the first column.

It consists of a low metal counter embellished with wood that will adjust its color according to the ambiance of the cathedral. Its slightly spiral shape is designed to accommodate requests along its entire circumference while leaving maximum space for visitor movement. From here, visitors can pick up a brochure or audio guide or receive personalized advice from the welcoming staff. This space meets all the requirements

for public-access buildings and does not block any of the cathedral's architectural features. Symmetrically, on the south side, the gift shop is fully open under the arches of the aisle. Low and made of metal, it twines around the last two columns with the slight twist of a Möbius strip. The only high element, a glass display window in the narrowed area between the columns, is designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. It is illuminated by a set of small lights along the counter. The welcoming staff's stations are spread all around it between the displays of available items.

■ **Visitor Access to the Cathedral**


In order to make visiting to Notre-Dame easier and more secure, a digital time slot reservation system has been introduced for access to the cathedral. Access to the cathedral will be restricted to individual visitors and worshippers for the first 6 months, until Pentecost 2025. Groups will only be able to enter after the first 6-month period.

A "visitor guide" application (developed by Maze-dia) is available on the cathedral website and on Android and Apple stores. The app will help all visitors rediscover the building, with particular attention to accessibility. A range of publications, guides and catalogues are also available.

Finally, there is a reception team to welcome visitors and worshippers to the cathedral. It is embodied by the smiles of the cathedral staff and 500 volunteers who will all work to ensure access, comfort, contemplation, meditation and prayer within this magnificent site.

Cost of this refurbished version, source of funds

The public entity Rebuilding Notre-Dame de Paris is responsible for the restoration of the cathedral, whereas Diocese of Paris is responsible for the interior furnishings. The "Notre-Dame Atelier" brings together all the craftspeople and experts that have worked on the various restoration projects. It is this team that has brought this project to a comprehensive and coherent fruition.

More than 340,000 donors have contributed to the restoration of Notre-Dame through three foundations: the Notre-Dame Foundation, the Fondation du Patrimoine and the Fondation de France. 

Source: Press Kit – Atelier Notre-Dame – Jun25

ABOUT THE NOTRE-DAME FOUNDATION

The Notre-Dame Foundation is the benchmark foundation for Christian philanthropy, working to alleviate poverty and vulnerability, and spreading the faith. It is particularly committed to preserving our cultural and historical heritage, ensuring it lives on today and will be passed on to the generations of the future. The Diocese of Paris is entirely responsible for the extensive programme of interior renovations, which is not covered by national funding. Funding for these interior renovations (liturgical furnishings, seating, sound/light, reliquary, visitor route) is shared between the Fondation Notre Dame and the Diocese of Paris. As a recognized charity, the Fondation Notre Dame only funds non-cultural or heritage projects that are essential to the reopening of Notre-Dame.

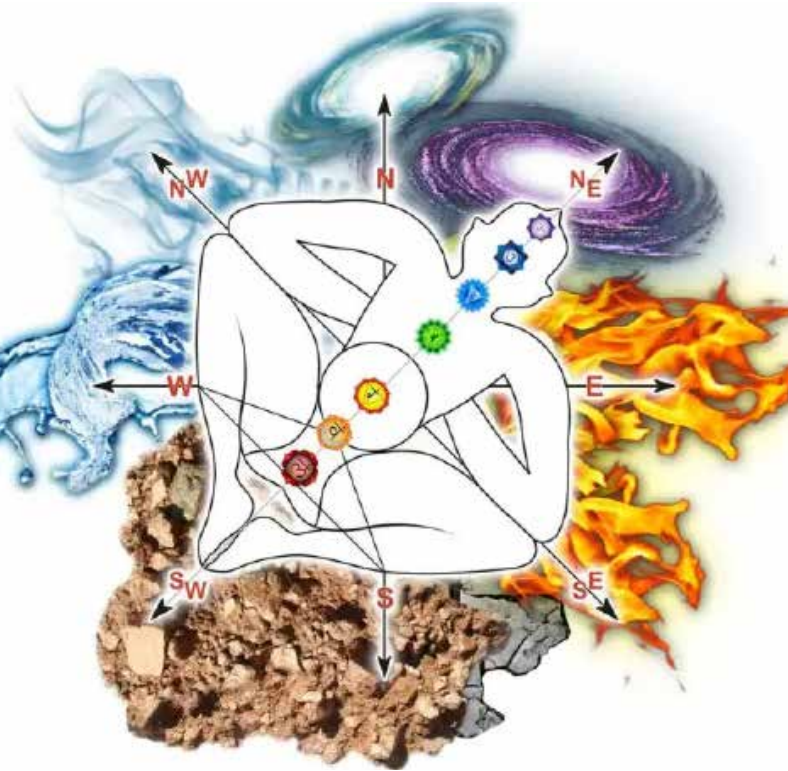


Altar production phases at the Barthélémy Art Foundry (Drôme)



Understanding and Decoding the Fear Around Vastu

Astrology and Vastu share a Common Factor



In a world of increasing social media 'experts' or influencers, the subject of Vastu and Astrology is much discussed and spoken about. We sit down with **Ridhi Bahl and try to decipher how best to approach this subject to find meaningful solutions. Ridhi's great grandfather was the head astrologer to the King of Jaipur, and authored over 200 books on astrology and astronomy. Following in his footsteps, Ridhi took to the study and discipline of Astrology and Vastu Shastra at a time in her life when she found herself searching for answers. She was going through a prolonged difficult phase in life that affected her health and overall wellbeing.**

by PRIYAANKA BERRY IDNANI

She broke away from her corporate job and decided to look deeply into these sciences that were very much a part of her life growing up. Around 2002, "everything that could go wrong

in a person's life was going wrong in my life. I started looking for answers to my problems. And the best possible way I thought was going to an astrologer. I went to everyone I could find! And did all the remedies. Because I wanted a solution. I wanted the answers for all those 'whys' that I was struggling with. But nothing worked". She realized soon enough that this was perhaps not the most logical educated way to go about finding a solution, more so as someone who has a deeper understanding on the subject. She eventually decided to take matters into her own hands and enrolled herself at Bhartiya Vidhya Bhawan under the tutelage of Shri K.N. Rao, a renowned astrologer. She did a 2-year course on Astrology and got the degree of Acharya. Today it has been 18 years of practicing and studying and being a part of various research studies. Catch the highlights of her conversation.

How did you move from astrology to Vastu Shastra?

I started with astrology and I never thought I'd do it professionally. I just did it for my own personal benefit. I wanted to know the answers of those 'whys'. Overtime, friends got to know, then from them others got to know and slowly the word started spreading. My predictions were also coming true. There were a couple of people who really benefited from the predictions. Then there were people who were taking consultations from me on a regular basis. A relationship developed.

These people would come and say we are buying a house. Why don't you tell us about that? Why don't you come and check? And then I said, I don't do Vastu. They said, no, no, no, we want you only to come. So, then I researched about Vastu and learned what it's all about. Then I found a great link between Vastu and astrology. They both work on the same principles of five elements, and they both come from the same school of thought, that is from the Vedas. I found Vastu also as logical and scientific as astrology. And so, I decided to study it in-depth and again did a two-year course on it. Again, I am a part of a lot of research on the subject.

To begin with, as starters, can you explain in a simple way what Vastu Shastra is and what is the purpose of it in our lives?

Vastu comes from the Vedas and these are the oldest written scriptures, and they have no religious connection. We all are aware of the five elements, right? Every one of us in this universe is made up of the five

elements. Ayurveda, which is also a part of the Vedas talks of vata, kapha, and pitta. Kapha is water, vata is air and pitta is fire. Whenever there is any kind of illness that we have, it is basically an imbalance in any of these elements.

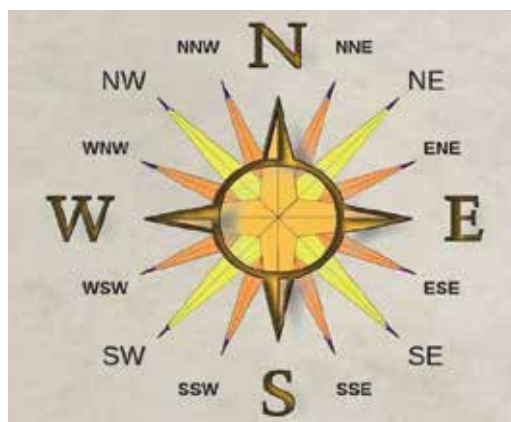
So, the way these elements, that is air, water, fire, earth, and sky have an impact on us, our body, not just we humans, anything on this planet. Similarly, they have an impact on a structure. Now, the structure can be your house, your factory, your office, or your commercial shop.

So, what is Vastu dosh? It is basically an imbalance of any of these elements. The role of the Vastu expert is to try to create a balance so that you get the benefit of all the elements. These elements play a very important role.

I'll just give you a little brief from a layman's point of view. Now, what is fire? Fire is action. If there is no fire in a person, the person will not work. He will be very lazy, and will lack 'fire in the belly'. For example, water makes you calm. When you go on vacations to beaches, how do you feel? You feel relaxed, you feel calm, you feel peaceful. So, you need that calmness also in life. You need that action fire also in life, right? Air is movement. You need that movement. You can't just be stagnant in life. So, this is how these elements play up in our life. Earth is stability, right? The balance of these elements is what makes a place Vastu compliant. If a structure is imbalanced, it'll have an impact on the inmates of that place, be it your house, or be it your commercial place.

Often when you consult Vastu experts for a particular house or a plot, there are differing views, doshas and remedies suggested. It can get very confusing. Is Vastu open to interpretation?

Well for that, I would say that is half-baked knowledge. Now, sadly, the thing is in India is that we don't have any standard accreditations and nobody will go and ask an astrologer or ask the consultant, where have you studied from? What is your qualification? So, they're picking up knowledge from here and there. And that is why the confusion is being created. So, somebody who's qualified, who has studied and who has full knowledge, they will



“Vastu comes from the Vedas. Ayurveda, which is also a part of the Vedas talks of vata, kapha, and pitta. Kapha is water, vata is air and pitta is fire. Whenever there is any kind of illness that we have, it is basically an imbalance in any of these elements.”

not have a difference of opinion. The difference of opinion comes out of half knowledge and sadly, in this subject, that is the worst part. And that is why these sciences have got a bad name, that people who are following it, or people who are practicing it, have no knowledge. Because I can say this with so much assurance, because I've been in this field and I meet so many people who are practicing these sciences, and I have half-baked knowledge.

How does someone know that they are in fact consulting with someone who is well qualified?

That's a very important question. I would tell people that you need to talk to somebody whom you are consulting. Ask his or her qualification. So before seeking anybody's services, please research first. Secondly, the most important point, don't go to somebody who tries to create any kind of fear in your mind. Because these sciences have nothing to do with fear. These are just guiding sciences. Thirdly, don't go to somebody who advises you elaborate pujas or expensive remedies, because that is never a part of Vastu or Astrology. If you read the classical text of these subjects, nowhere the word remedy is mentioned.

Yes, I would say 10 out of 10 times. And that is how they're able to sell their services. But firstly, there's nothing to be scared of. Like any big health issue starts from a small thing only, if we cure it at the very initial stage, we get the right kind of treatment with a good lifestyle. We can prevent it.

You mentioned fear, this I feel is really common. Most cases some element of fear is planted. But to what extent can a Vastu dosha affect someone's health or work?

Similarly with these sciences also. I'll go back again to the five-element theory. Vastu is all about the five elements and its balance. For example, if there is more fire element in the house. What happens? The inmates of the house will be more aggressive, they will fight more. They might become more quarrelsome. What will a Vastu consultant do here? He or she will see how to minimize the fire element and how

to increase the other elements so that the inmates of that house are not so aggressive. For instance, I go to many places where people say, oh, you know, my kids are very lazy. They don't get up. They do nothing. They really procrastinate. So that means a water element is dominating that house more. So now tell me again, what is there to be scared about now?

But a person with half knowledge or trying to only market himself will try to scare you. Might say, oh, you know, there are too much fire element in the house, there can be a murder of somebody in the house or somebody can indulge in some killing. See there is a difference in how they're presenting it.

You also mentioned that if you read the classical text of these subjects, remedies are not mentioned.

Try to understand this and look at these subjects with a very open mind. When these subjects, these sciences were written, that time society was very different from what it is now. Now we are talking about Vastu, which is a science of structures. The way structures were made way back then, it was very different from the way we have been living now and the way the structures are made now. When Vastu was written, there was no concept of apartments or floors. There would be a courtyard in the centre of the house. There would just be one toilet in the house, there would be one kitchen, and these two things would be really in opposite directions.

But nowadays, the way we are living, it's very different. Now, every room has an attached bathroom. Earlier, the toilet and the bathing area would be separate, but now it is not practically possible. Now they are in one space. If three families are living in a house on three floors, they all have a separate kitchen. So, with changing times we need to bring about some changes in the existing age-old principles. Now this is important. The element theory is the same. But then with changing times and with the research that we do now, it is all about applying those same age-old principles, but in the modern context. And that is where the remedial part comes in. But then again, they are logical and practical remedies. Putting gemstones somewhere or putting a silver wire, these are not remedies to be very honest.

Could you share with us a few essential things to keep in mind – for a residential space.

So, first, please don't have this thing in your mind that if a property is north facing, northeast facing, it is good and rest, the other direction, property facing is not good. Especially when it comes to the south. So, people have this very strong myth that if it's a north facing property, it's very good. It's not like this. Nowhere in any of the Vastu classic texts, something like this is

mentioned, all the directions are equally good. All the directions have certain very good points and certain not so good points. So please don't limit yourself or get stuck with this. I have seen people, in real estate, in garments and jewellery, if they have a south facing property, they have done wonders. These are just to name a few sectors.


Another thing is that northeast is considered as a very auspicious direction. Now why is it considered so? Because the sun rises in the east and because of the tilt of the earth, the first sunlight, the first sun rays fall in the northeast direction. And the rising sun rays have a lot of health benefits. Therefore, in the classical text of Vastu, the northeast corner is considered as very aus-

picious and therefore having a toilet in the northeast is not good. If you have a choice, please try and avoid having a toilet in the northeast direction.

Now the third point is not to have a pit in the south or the southeast direction, any of the south directions. It should not be at a lower level, especially if you have a farmhouse, for example. Don't plan your swimming pool in any of the south directions. So, the south direction always has to be higher, or at least at the ground level.

To what extent are Vastu and Astrology interlinked and how relevant is the date of birth here?

Vastu and Astrology certainly are linked because the element theory that I spoke about has a connection in astrology also. Zodiac signs are divided on the basis of those elements, like Aries of fiery sign. Leo is a fiery sign. Virgo is an earth sign. Even the planets are linked with these elements. So somewhere they're connected. But when someone asks for the birth details, it is relevant for the head of the family; the bread earner of the family. Astrology is very individual specific while Vastu applies to the entire family.

So, there for certain decisions, for certain things in the family, we take into consideration the horoscope of the head of the family. We try to match things with that person. For example, there's a family of four, and they want to make a major investment in buying a property. So, they might ask in whose name should we buy a property, then we can check the horoscopes and suggest. Vastu can be done separately but there can be a correlation. 



ABOUT

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PM MODI RECALLS THE LEGACY OF RAJ KAPOOR, THE ETERNAL SHOWMAN



It was his 100 birth anniversary, an event that celebrated the iconic achievements of Raj Kapoor, the film star, director, producer- the all in one rolled into RK Films. A family that has or will see few equals, if any? The PM met the extended family that has stars of today and tomorrow, celebrating the 100th birthday of the perennial 'joker' who identified himself with the common man in his daily grind, aspiring to do good, be big, always remaining rooted to his own inner self!



Journey to Optimal Health: The Importance of a Good Sleep

Deep sleep is not just a component of a healthy lifestyle; it's a foundation. When we improve sleep quality, it reduces stress, helps people make better food choices, and gives them more energy to stay active. Our goal with this campaign is to raise awareness about sleep and its immense benefits, emphasizing that optimal health isn't just about medicine, food, and exercise—it's also about getting the deep, restorative sleep your body needs.

*In conversation with LUKE COUTINHO,
Integrative Lifestyle Expert*

Why this title for your campaign #SleepDeeperIndia? What motivated you to start this initiative, and what were your main goals?

The vision behind #SleepDeeperIndia is quite simple yet profound. Over the past 13 years, I've seen countless patients dealing with cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and rare syndromes, and a common factor I've observed in most of them is sleep deprivation. Medically and scientifically, we know that poor sleep is linked to inflammation and numerous health issues. While many people understand the importance of exercise and nutrition, they often overlook the critical role of deep sleep in achieving great health.

What led you to pursue a career as an Integrative Lifestyle Expert? What inspired you to choose this path for your life and career?

There were two points in my life where I could choose to continue in the space of nutrition and holistic health. At one point in my life, I also considered medical school, and I was confused about where I wanted to be, then I decided that I wanted to be in a space in between. I was fascinated by anatomy and wanted to identify the root causes of why people fall ill. I realized that traditional healthcare often scratches the surface, and I wanted to go deeper, beyond medicine and nutrition, to address the root causes of sickness. My mentor at Yale guided me toward integrative and lifestyle medicine, a field that bridges medicine and lifestyle practices. This approach allows me to work alongside medical professionals while utilizing skills in nutrition, exercise, sleep, and emotional wellness. I believe in looking at patients holistically, investigating root causes, and piecing together the puzzle of health. This path allows me to address not just symptoms but the underlying issues, leading to more sustainable and impactful health solutions.

How is deep sleep is connected to various health issues such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes,



mental health, and immune function?

There's a reason why sleep is such an integral part of our biology; it's far from useless. Many people often underestimate sleep, saying things like, "I'll sleep when I'm dead," or "Successful people don't sleep"; But if sleep was unnecessary, it wouldn't be such a fundamental aspect of our health equation. Sleep is when critical processes occur within our bodies. It all starts with the hormone melatonin, which prepares our body for rest. Melatonin is not just about sleep; it's crucial for repair, rejuvenation, metabolism, and growth.

When we talk about the benefits of sleep, it's vital to understand that deep sleep triggers several essential functions. For instance, growth hormones are predominantly secreted during sleep, and our gut undergoes repair and healing. Believe it or not, the fat you lose during workouts is actually burned during sleep because that's when your muscles repair and grow. Being in a state of deep sleep means your body is in the

parasympathetic nervous system, which is essential for bringing your body back to homeostasis. This state is where true healing and rejuvenation happen. Consider brain health—during sleep, your brain undergoes a cleansing process where cerebrospinal fluid bathes the brain, washing away metabolic waste and plaque. This is your glymphatic system. This cleansing is crucial, and chronic sleep deprivation is commonly linked to cognitive decline and early-onset Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Sleep also plays a vital role in hormone balance. Hormones like cortisol, which spikes with sleep deprivation, can disrupt other hormones like thyroxine and ghrelin, creating a cascade effect. Hormones work in synchrony, much like a band, so a disruption in one affects the others.

Furthermore, one more critical point to note is that even one night of sleep deprivation can reduce our natural killer (NK) cells, which are vital for a robust immune system. With weakened immunity, we become more susceptible to viruses and bacteria. That's why athletes and trainers, who push their bodies to the limit, prioritize sleep to repair and recover. Without adequate sleep, they risk injury, increased inflammation, infections and muscle soreness.

Moreover, our digestive system needs rest, too. Melatonin receptors in our gut suggest we aren't meant to digest food at night, yet many of us indulge in late-night meals, disrupting our sleep and digestive health.

Sleep is foundational for health. It's one of the first diagnostic questions we ask our patients because getting sleep right sets the stage for everything else to fall into place.

What are some common factors that disrupt our sleep and what steps can we take to mitigate them?

Great question! The first step to improving our sleep is changing our mindset. Many people mistakenly view sleep as a waste of time, but it's crucial for hormonal health, fat loss, metabolic repair, cognitive health, longevity, immune function and overall well-being. We need to see sleep as an investment in our health—a time when our body kicks into gear to repair and rejuvenate itself.

Another common disruptor is having late dinners. Our bodies are designed to align with the circadian rhythm, meaning our digestion slows as the sun sets. Eating closer to sunset allows for better digestion and optimal cleansing. Eating late can leave you feeling lethargic and bloated in the morning because your body doesn't have the chance to properly digest and eliminate waste.

Screen time before bed is another significant factor. Sleep is a light-sensitive process, and melatonin, the sleep hormone, is secreted in the absence of light. It's essential to reduce exposure to screens and gadgets before bedtime. Consider investing in blue light blockers or engaging in non-screen activities as the



day winds down. Scrolling through social media or binge-watching shows can disrupt your sleep cycle. Lastly, an overactive mind can hinder restful sleep. Our minds need to be calm so that we can fall asleep peacefully. Establishing a wind-down ritual can help; try disconnecting from daytime chaos, practicing deep breathing, or setting firm work-life boundaries. Allow your mind to relax, and you'll find it easier to transition into a restful state.

By addressing these issues, we can improve our sleep quality and, in turn, enhance our overall health and well-being.

Also, you often emphasize the importance of the five fundamental pillars: cellular nutrition, adequate exercise, quality sleep, emotional detox, and spiritual wellness. Can you elaborate on these pillars and explain how each one contributes to overall health and well-being? How can our readers integrate these principles into their daily lives?

In integrative and holistic health, we emphasize a comprehensive approach to well-being, which is rooted in five fundamental pillars: cellular nutrition, adequate exercise, quality sleep, emotional cleansing, and spiritual wellness. These pillars form the foundation of a balanced lifestyle and are essential for achieving optimal health.

■ **Cellular Nutrition:** This pillar focuses on feeding your body the right nutrients at a cellular level. Consuming whole, nutrient-dense foods provide the building blocks for energy, growth, and healing. Think of food as fuel that powers your body and supports cellular repair and regeneration.

■ **Adequate Exercise:** Regular physical activity is vital for maintaining muscle mass, boosting mood, and enhancing cardiovascular health. Exercise releases endorphins, which are natural mood lifters, and it also supports weight management and metabolic function. Find an exercise routine that suits your lifestyle and stick with it consistently.

■ **Quality Sleep:** Sleep is the cornerstone of recovery and balance in the body. It is during deep sleep that our bodies repair and regenerate, ensuring we wake up refreshed and ready to tackle the day. Aim for consistent



sleep patterns and create an environment conducive to restful sleep.

■ **Emotional Cleansing:** Releasing negative emotions and stressors can improve mental clarity and emotional resilience. Practices like journaling, therapy, or meditation help clear the mind of clutter and foster a sense of peace. Emotional cleansing allows us to process and let go of what no longer serves us.

■ **Spiritual Wellness:** This pillar encourages connecting with your inner self and finding peace through practices such as meditation, prayer, or spending time in nature. Spiritual wellness provides a sense of purpose and connection, grounding us in times of uncertainty.

Now, I'm also introducing our sixth pillar, which is Breath. Every conscious breath is like a healing pill, providing essential information to our body's trillions of cells. Breathwork helps shift our body from the sympathetic nervous system, which is the 'fight or flight' mode, to the parasympathetic nervous system, where true healing and repair occur. Techniques such as yoga and pranayama train us to breathe effectively, bringing balance and homeostasis to our system.

Health is about being in the right system to heal. While life's challenges may not disappear, conscious breathing puts you in the right state to handle them effectively, promoting recovery and healing. Remember, balance is critical in health, and breath is a beautiful way to achieve that balance.

How do you maintain a healthy lifestyle, and what major tips or do's and don'ts would you recommend to our readers?

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is all about balance and being mindful of your habits. I often emphasize that sleep is my linchpin. I need eight to nine hours of deep sleep to be my best self—physically, mentally, and spiritually. This is crucial for recovery and rejuvenation, especially if you're pushing your body with workouts or daily stress.

■ **Movement is another key aspect.** You don't always need a gym; find ways to stay active daily. Whether it's micro-workouts, practicing Surya Namaskar, or simply walking enough steps, make movement a part of your routine. Always ask yourself, "Am I fit to sit?" before you

Luke Coutinho being felicitated with the Maharashtra Leadership Award 2022 for his contribution in the field of Integrative and Lifestyle Medicine by Hon. Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari

settle into a chair. If you haven't moved enough, walk a hundred steps, and then sit again.

In today's world, information overload is real, especially on social media. I see so many people scrambling for answers, looking for quick fixes. But remember, only you know what works best for you. Take time to reflect, whether after a meal or a workout, to understand how your body responds. This self-awareness is key to making informed choices.

■ **Building meaningful relationships is vital.** We thrive in communities, so foster connections outside of your immediate family. Whether it's a mentor, friend, or support group, find people who uplift you. Express your emotions; if you're not comfortable speaking, try writing. Suppressing feelings only leads to more stress.


■ **Sunlight and nature are powerful healers.** We're products of nature, and when we align with it, we thrive. If you are living in a city like Mumbai, make an effort to get sunlight and spend time in nature whenever possible. You can also connect with nature through breathwork, visualizations, or even sounds of the ocean or forest.

■ **Harness the power of your mind.** Our thoughts can create or destroy our reality. Reprogram your mind by exposing it to positive influences and focus on the life you want to lead. The mind is limitless, and investing time in its health is crucial.

■ **Regarding nutrition,** aim for the 80-20 rule: 80% wholesome foods and 20% for treats and reward meals. Overconsumption is the problem, not sugar or alcohol itself.

■ **Maintain balance** by being disciplined during the week and allowing yourself some freedom on weekends. Eat as close to nature as possible and avoid refined products.

■ **Keep things simple.** There is luxury in simplicity, and often, the most complex problems have simple solutions. Focus on the fundamentals before chasing exotic supplements or treatments. Sleep, exercise, and nutrition are the real game-changers.

Remember, a healthy lifestyle is not about perfection; it's about making small, consistent changes that align with your goals. 



ABOUT

A Wellness Champion for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Fit India Movement, Luke is a pioneering figure in the field of integrative and lifestyle medicine in India. Over the past 13 years, he has achieved remarkable success in addressing lifestyle-related conditions.

The 3rd Asean-India Music Festival



A DI REPORT

As the Delhi chill picked up, and winter jackets rolled out, bands from 15 ASEAN countries took to a majestic stage set against the backdrop of the Purana Qila, a centuries' old fort that stands in the heart of New Delhi.

The three-day ASEAN-India music festival, which was organized by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with SEHER from the 29th of November to the 1st of December 2024, showcased 15 bands, 10 from ASEAN member states and 5 from India. In its third edition, it attracted a crowd of thousands. The inspiration behind this free-for-all festival, was to create friendship and cultural understanding, born out of a common love for music. What's more unifying than singing together, and dancing together to songs known and familiar, and also discovering new songs that you come to love and enjoy. This year saw artists such as Shaan, Jasleen Royal, and Western Ghats from India and Buc Tuong from Viet Nam, Television Off from Thailand and Kaia from Philippines among others.

This coming together on one common platform, with music as a thread running through, joining artists and public in invisible bonds of friendship, created the most unique opportunity for connection. An opportunity to discover how one is more similar than dissimilar



to the other. How one is more alike than unlike. How "they are like us". And how, a kinship between countries. is not only possible, but perhaps inevitable? This is the power of soft diplomacy. **CS**

King Gukesh Brings Home the Crown

A Grateful Nation Celebrates the Youngest Ever World Champion

by TEAM CSC REPORT

India has made it again. Only the second Indian, and that too, after a gap of 24 years. Vishwanathan Anand won the first of his five in 2000, but he was 30 years old when he made his first kill. In a game where experience perhaps counts just as much as talent – where players are known to get into their peak stride only in the mid-30s, with Gukesh only at 18, it should be easy to imagine he has a long career ahead of him. But then, concentration can flag, one can just give up, saying the pressure is too much. There is never any surety. But for now, looks we have a global competitor in him. With his self-professed yearning to achieve more, especially his desire to contest with Magnus, the magnificent, and try his luck, as it were.

On how after losing the opening game of the match, he could muster courage to fight on, Gukesh has confessed and has been quoted extensively, "Losing the first game here was the toughest challenge. I knew it could happen, but after losing the first game, the way it went, was a bit humiliating. After the game, when I was walking back, a nice moment happened when Vishy Sir was in the lift, and he told me, 'I had 11 games, and you have 13 games'. That's the only thing he said, and I realised that it was a nice reminder that I would get my chances."

In a game where experience perhaps counts just as much as talent – where players are known to get into their peak stride only in the mid-30s, with Gukesh only at 18, it should be easy to imagine he has a long career ahead of him.

Singapore: India's D Gukesh during the Closing Ceremony of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024, in Singapore, Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating Ding Liren of China.



Not even 10 years old, he was aspiring to become the world champion; so many do, how many achieve, is the question.

Despite becoming the youngest world champion, Gukesh remained humble with an aspiration to achieve more, attain higher goals, and said Magnus Carlsen is still the best, and here

again we quote: "My aim is to be in the top level for longest time possible. I have just started my career, and I want to stay on top for a long time. Playing against Magnus in the world championship would be the toughest challenge in chess. It is up to Magnus, but I would love to test myself against the best player in the world."

Starting early, aspiring under the watchful and caring eyes of his parents, things were not exactly easy for the young champion. Not even 10 years old, he was aspiring to become the world champion; so many do, how many achieve, is the question. That calls for steadiest determination, nurturing talent, and commitment from early years – it can be seen during the course of the world championship, with Team Gukesh being so carefully crafted, dedicated, eager to win. It is this appetite that makes champions out of us, and Gukesh showed just that mettle.

Going into the final of April's Candidates chess tournament, earlier this year, the sane advice had come from none other than the 5-time champion Magnus Carlsen: "Just don't do anything crazy. Let your opponents do the crazy things." Gukesh, then 17, came out the youngest challenger ever; soon, to become the youngest ever world champion in the same year. What a year has this been for him and for Indian chess.

Gukesh had qualified as grandmaster at 12. What does this mean for Indian chess? It will inspire the youth to achieve newer goals. One can safely bet that as in the case of other sports, like cricket and tennis, this win will bring many more to the chess board. Interestingly enough, there is no recurring cost in playing chess; investments are limited to just a chess board. Playing up the ladder, the circuits, can be costly. And this is where parents come in to help, crowd funding from family and friends. Gukesh's story was no different. It is indeed a narrative in grit, hard work, ability to withstand high volume pressure – he kept his cool.

Will a new breed of corporates take up sponsorship? Yes, they should ideally, there is advantage in being the first mover. And there is vast pool of talent waiting to be nursed.

Would Gukesh take over the mantle of Captain Cool, from M S Dhoni? And, why not? Gukesh has shown a level of maturity well beyond his 18 years. All the visuals that we have seen, only once he has given way to sharing his joy, with his arms outstretched, much like Yashasvi Jaiswal on every occasion when he has scored his hundred. **DI**



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