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► GROK'S GIBBERISH
Is a NATIVE CHATBOT the Answer?

► DELIMITATION
Reshaping India's federal future?

CULT CURRENT

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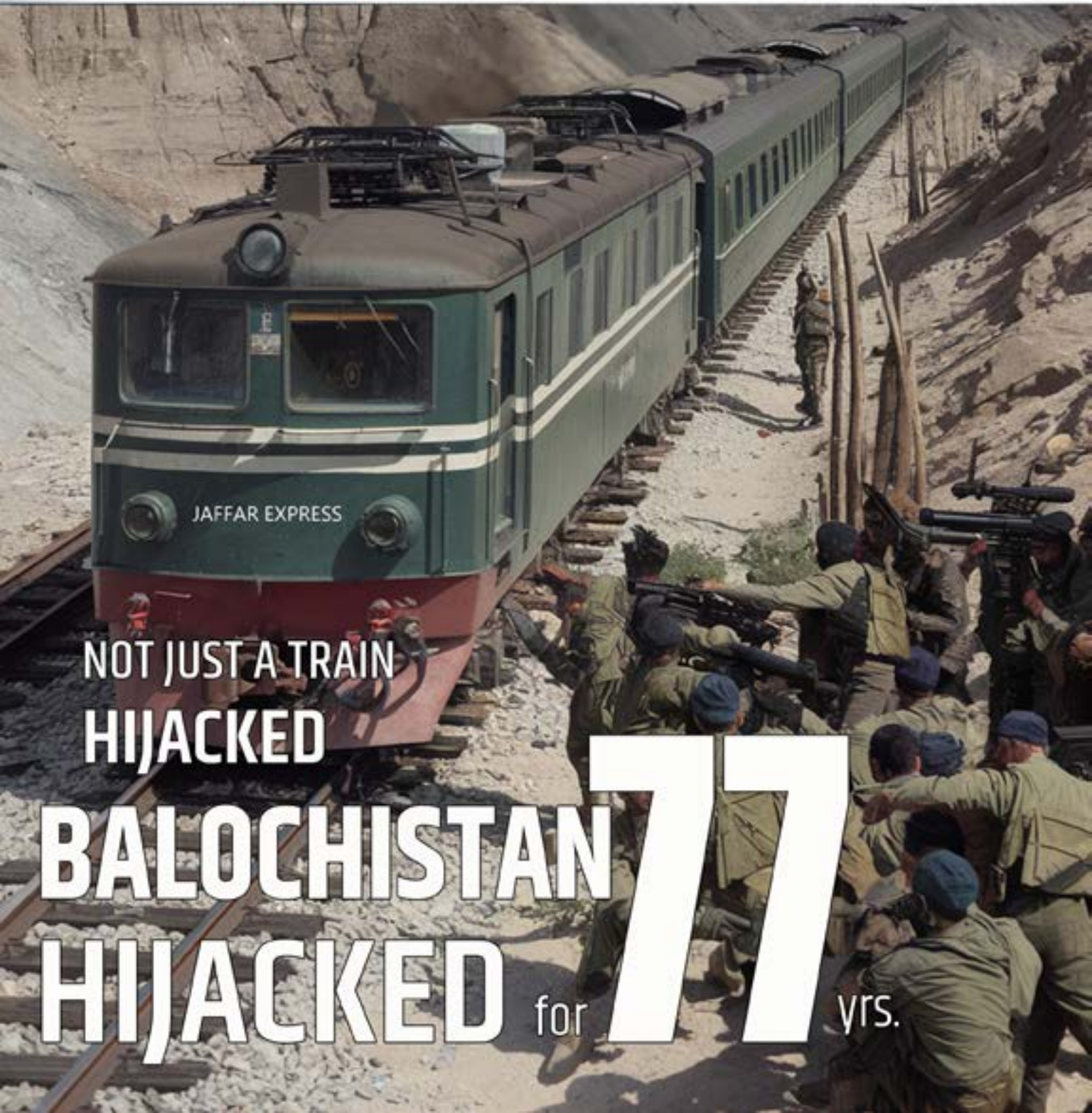
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POSITIVE INDIA

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THE JOURNEY OF SITA DEVI



Sita Devi

Difficult times may bring hardship, but they also teach valuable lessons that can shape our future. Sita Devi, a resident of Gaya, Bihar, is a testament to this truth. Once a homemaker looking after her children, today she is a well-known female electrician in her town. Fifteen years ago, she started repairing electrical devices out of necessity, but it has since become her passion and source of pride. Running her shop at Kashinath Mod, Gaya, she now fixes everything from light bulbs to ACs and microwaves. In an interview with The Better India, Sita Devi shared, "I can repair any machine that comes to my shop, and because of this, I never run out of work."



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Small talk



SANA KHAN'S SPIRITUAL U-TURN

Former actress Sana Khan, who once called Bollywood “the devil’s abode,” is making headlines again. After a surprise exit from acting in 2020 and marrying Islamic scholar Mufti Anas Sayed, she’s now dedicated to promoting Islam. Despite leaving her glamorous career behind, Sana lives lavishly in Mumbai, runs her own brand and podcast. Her husband, a diamond merchant from Gujarat, ensures a comfortable life as she embarks on this spiritual journey. ●

The discoveries that will create a stir in 2025

Sun-Kissed Success: NASA’s Parker Probe Wins Top Aerospace Honor!

The Parker Solar Probe team, made up of engineers and scientists from NASA, the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, and more than 40 partner organizations across the U.S., has been awarded the 2024 Robert J. Collier Trophy by the National Aeronautic Association (NAA). This prestigious annual award honors the most outstanding achievement. ●



Urine Luck: Sustainable Fertilizer Cuts Emissions!

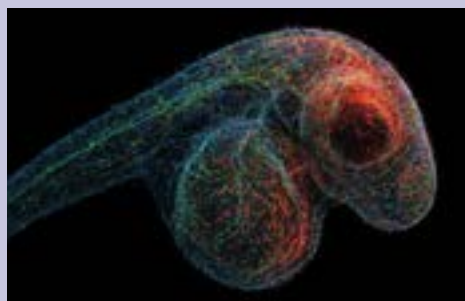
Barcelona researchers find recycling human urine for fertilizer slashes carbon emissions and water use, boosting sustainable urban farming. “Yellow water” nitrogen recovery proves environmentally friendly. Think green, think pee! ●

Drones Can Now Listen to Underwater Messages

The team created a device that uses radar to eavesdrop on underwater acoustic signals, or sonar, by decoding the tiny vibrations those signals produce on the water’s surface. In principle, the technique could also roughly identify the location of an underwater transmitter, the researchers said. ●



DNA MICROSCOPY: 3D MAPS UNLOCKED!



Traditional genetic sequencing can reveal a lot about the genetic material in a sample, such as a piece of tissue or a drop of blood, but it doesn’t show where specific genetic sequences are located within that sample, or how they relate to nearby genes and molecules. ●

Volkswagen Teases Tiguan R-Line: Launching April 14th!

Ahead of its April 14th launch, Volkswagen revealed the Tiguan R-Line’s features! Expect a sporty ‘R’ themed design inside and out. Highlights include massaging seats, 3-zone climate control, park assist, wireless charging, 30-color ambient lighting, and stylish 19-inch alloy wheels. This SUV blends performance with premium comfort. ●



APPOINTMENTS



Justice Joymalya Bagchi
Judge, Supreme Court

On March 10, 2025, Justice Joymalya Bagchi of the Calcutta High Court was appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court of India. This appointment puts him in line to potentially become the Chief Justice of India.

Resignation

Nitin Patel, *Former Head, Sports Science Wing, BCCI*

Nitin Patel, the head of the BCCI's Sports Science Wing, resigned from his position on March 15th. During his 3 year tenure, Nitin played a key role in the rehabilitation of several domestic and international cricketers.



Kyriakos Mitsotakis
Prime Minister of Greece

Greece is India's natural gateway to Europe and beyond. Greece is at the very center of this new IMEC corridor.

THEY SAID IT...



Christopher Luxon
Prime Minister of New Zealand

India has to play its decisive role in the Indo-Pacific, because New Zealand is looking to partners like India for its strategic interests in this region.

THE TRIBUTE

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, often hailed as the Father of the Indian Constitution, was an unparalleled social reformer, jurist, economist, and politician whose relentless pursuit of equality and justice irrevocably shaped modern India. Born into the marginalized Mahar caste in 1891, Ambedkar experienced firsthand the brutal realities of caste discrimination, which fueled his lifelong crusade against social injustice. A brilliant scholar, he earned doctorates from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, making him one of the most highly educated Indians of his time.

Ambedkar dedicated his life to advocating for the rights of Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables"), challenging the deeply entrenched caste system and advocating for their access to education, employment, and political representation. He believed that true equality could only be achieved through legal and constitutional



DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR
(14/04/1891-06/12/1956)

reforms. This conviction led him to play a pivotal role in drafting the Constitution of India, where he enshrined principles of social justice, equality, and fundamental rights for all citizens, regardless of caste, creed, or gender.

Beyond his constitutional contributions, Ambedkar was a visionary leader who founded numerous institutions and organizations aimed at empowering Dalits. He championed education as a tool for social mobility and encouraged them to assert their rights and dignity. His conversion to Buddhism in 1956, along with thousands of his followers, was a

powerful statement against the discriminatory practices within Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar's legacy continues to inspire millions in their fight against oppression and inequality, solidifying his place as one of India's most influential and transformative figures. ●



Vance's Greenland Pitch: Protection or Takeover?

During a visit to Greenland, US Vice-President JD Vance delivered a stark message. While seemingly softening past annexation aims, Vance emphasized the threats posed by China's expansionism and the changing Arctic climate. He suggested Greenland's traditional security partnerships are outdated. Vance pitched a vision where Greenland abandons its perceived "weak and miserly Danish overlords" and embraces the "muscular and protective embrace" of the US. He argued that only by aligning with the US can Greenland safeguard its security, values, and mineral wealth amid global shifts. The visit highlighted Greenland's hopes and challenges in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. ●

Strained India-Canada Ties: Further Discord



Indian-Canadian MP Chandra Arya is in the spotlight ahead of Canada's upcoming elections. Reports suggest Arya, a Liberal Party member and three-time MP, has been barred from running due to alleged close ties with India. Sources claim concerns about foreign interference prompted the decision. Arya, who met with PM Modi last August without reportedly informing the Canadian government, denies wrongdoing. ●

Yunus' China Trip: Implications for India

During a China visit, Bangladesh interim government advisor Mohammad Yunus invited Chinese companies to participate in the Teesta River project. Agreements were also made to further China's Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning highlighted the meeting between Yunus and President Xi Jinping, reaffirming China's commitment to a friendly and trustworthy partnership with Bangladesh. ●



AI Tools in the Crosshairs: Politics and Chatbots Collide



AI tools like Grok, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek are becoming increasingly controversial as they get smarter. These platforms, while entertaining, are also turning into political battlegrounds. Concerns arise around data security, democratic principles, neutrality, and biases within these systems. Explored these issues with Professor Akash Sinha of Shiv Nadar University and Supreme Court lawyer Khushboo Jain. Discussions centered on AI's implications and India's pivotal role. ●

Myanmar Earthquake: Death Toll May Exceed 10,000



The death toll from the Myanmar earthquake has reached 1,644, with 3,400 injured. Myanmar's military junta calls it the worst disaster in a century. US geological services predict fatalities could reach 10,000, causing economic losses exceeding Myanmar's GDP. The UN reports damaged infrastructure hinders relief efforts. ●

Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Hopes Revived Amid New Negotiations



Hamas has signaled support for a new ceasefire proposal brokered by mediators, offering to release five more hostages for a 50-day truce. Senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya confirmed their approval of the Egyptian and Qatari-mediated draft deal. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's office acknowledged receiving the plan and submitting a U.S.-coordinated counter-proposal. ●

Nepal's Monarchy Movement Falters After Violent Protests



Nepal's pro-monarchy movement faces an uncertain future after a violent "people's movement" resulted in two deaths. With leader Durga Prasai reportedly wanted by police and organizer Navaraj Subedi under house arrest, the movement lacks clear leadership. The arrest of senior leaders from the pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) further complicates matters. The movement aims to reinstate the monarchy and return former King Gyanendra Shah to the Narayanhiti Palace. Despite promises of continued protests, leaders are unclear about who will lead future actions. Analysts suggest a lack of consensus among pro-monarchy groups hinders the emergence of a single leader, with no one claiming responsibility for the recent violence. ●

US Imposes Export Restrictions on Pakistani Companies



The US Commerce Department has placed 70 companies from eight countries, including 19 from Pakistan, on an export restriction list. Other countries affected include China (42), UAE (4), Iran, France, South Africa, Senegal, and the UK. These entities are added to the "Entity List," comprising organizations deemed to be acting against US national security, foreign policy, or interests. ●



Is Erdoğan Steering Turkey Towards a Russia-Style Autocracy?

The arrest of Turkish President Erdoğan's political rival, Ekrem İmamoğlu, is generating widespread criticism. Gonul Tol, director of the Middle East Institute's Turkish Program, sees it as a turning point, driven by Erdoğan's desire to remain in power after 22 years. Tol believes Erdoğan aims to transform Turkey into a Russian-style authoritarian state, manipulating elections and choosing his enemies. İmamoğlu, as a potential presidential contender, poses a threat to Erdoğan. Tol suggests the opposition CHP must continue protesting İmamoğlu's arrest, despite the risk of repression. ●

Petition Challenges Rahul Gandhi's Citizenship



A petition concerning the citizenship of Congress MP Rahul Gandhi was heard at the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court on Monday, March 24th. The court has granted the central government additional time to present its response in the matter. News organisations reports that the Lucknow bench of the court ordered the case to be listed for the week of April 21st. The order was issued by Justices AR Masoodi and AK Srivastava while hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Karnataka-based BJP worker S. Vignesh Shishir, who alleges that Gandhi also possesses British citizenship. The petitioner claims to possess documents proving Rahul Gandhi is a British citizen and therefore ineligible to contest elections in India. ●

Microplastic Action Plan Implemented by Environment Ministry



Following National Green Tribunal (NGT) directives, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's action plan addressing microplastics is now being implemented. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) informed the NGT on March 26, 2025, that it is executing the plan. The plan includes guidelines for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for plastic packaging. EPR holds producers accountable for managing their products environmentally until the end of their life cycle. ●

Is India's Judiciary Truly Impartial?



A recent fire at Delhi High Court Justice Yashwant Verma's residence, revealing burnt cash, has reignited concerns about corruption within India's judiciary. While Justice Verma claims it's a conspiracy, Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna has formed a committee to investigate. This incident highlights ongoing questions about accountability, independence, and appointment processes within the judicial system. ●

RSS @ 100: Evolving Views on India's Constitution, Flag, and Caste

As the RSS approaches its centenary, scrutiny intensifies on its historical stances towards the Indian Constitution, national flag, and caste system.



Critiques highlight past statements questioning the Constitution's origins and relevance. M.S. Golwalkar, a prominent RSS leader, deemed it a "cumbersome and heterogeneous combination" lacking uniquely Indian elements. Post-independence, the RSS publication 'Organiser' reportedly opposed the tricolor flag. ●

Keeping Cool: The Challenge of Cooling Homes



As temperatures rise, keeping homes cool is crucial for health, productivity, and even survival. A 1.5°C increase could expose 2.3 billion people to extreme heat, a threshold potentially reached by the 2030s if carbon emissions aren't curbed. Heat already causes roughly 12,000 deaths annually. Air conditioners offer a seemingly simple solution, but their high energy consumption exacerbates the problem, coupled with refrigerants that contribute to global warming. ●

Delhi Budget Focuses on Yamuna Cleanup, Women's Welfare



Delhi's Finance Minister Rekha Gupta presented a ₹1 lakh crore budget for 2025-26, a 31.5% increase from last year. The budget prioritizes 10 sectors including electricity, water, and roads, doubling capital expenditure to ₹28,000 crore. A significant ₹500 crore is allocated for cleaning the Yamuna River, with plans to build 40 sewage treatment plants at a cost of ₹500 crore and replace old sewer lines for ₹250 crore. ●

Protests Disrupt Mamata Banerjee's Oxford Speech; BJP Blames "Bengali Hindus"

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee faced disruptions during her speech at Oxford University's Kellogg College, with attendees shouting "Go away." The



SFI, a left-wing student organization, claimed responsibility, while the BJP attributed the protest to "Bengali Hindus." Heckling began when Banerjee discussed West Bengal's industrialization, with questions raised about Tata's Nano plant relocation. The situation escalated when questioned about the rape and murder of a trainee doctor. Banerjee accused the leftists of politicizing the event, blaming "ultra-left and their communal friends," while the TMC alleged a BJP-CPM alliance against them. ●

Naxal Influence Shrinking in Chhattisgarh



At least 16 Maoists have been killed in an encounter with Indian security forces in Chhattisgarh, where operations against Maoists have intensified in recent months, resulting in hundreds of deaths. Police reported the Maoists died in Sukma district after security forces raided forests based on intelligence about Maoist hideouts. Sukma police chief P. Sundarraaj told AFP, "We have recovered 16 Maoist bodies so far." ●



Bihar Bans Obscene Bhojpuri Songs: Jail Time for Violators

Bihar police will now jail those playing Bhojpuri songs with double meaning or obscene lyrics in public. The initiative aims to protect women's dignity and safety. Actress Neetu Chandra is helping Bihar Police raise awareness and urges women to report such incidents at their local police station, promising confidentiality. Journalist Kajal Sharma notes the rise of vulgarity in Bhojpuri music, contrasting it with earlier, cleaner films. Bank employee Sandipa Ojha says women often face harassment on public transport due to such songs. She emphasized the need for police enforcement to ensure compliance and deter offenders. ●



SRIRAJESH, Editor

THE QUAD

India's Emerging Bulwark of Security

The prospect of transforming the Quad into a robust security mechanism during the third term of the Modi administration looms on the horizon.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprehending India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, stands as a singular assembly. Its manifest purpose is to assure stability and impregnable security within the Indo-Pacific region. The conception of the Quad owes itself to the prescience of Shinzo Abe, former Prime Minister of Japan, who apprehended the necessity of a multilateral platform to confront the challenges stemming from China's burgeoning military might. The Quad serves not merely as a conduit for economic and technological co-operation, but has also emerged as a puissance of consequence from a strategic security perspective. Albeit, the Modi administration has hitherto exercised circumspection in depicting it as a military alliance, which, notwithstanding the continuing tensions with China, stands as a testament to India's mature and well-considered diplomacy.

India's policy of holding the Quad aloof from military intervention was manifestly exhibited during the Doklam dispute of 2017, when relations between India and China were at their nadir. Despite this grave confrontation, India did not directly involve the Quad in military action, which evinces India's commitment to upholding her strategic autonomy and maintaining the regional balance of power. India seeks to fortify her role as an independent and balanced power, rather than being constrained within a specific faction.

Notwithstanding the maintenance of a distance from the militarization of the Quad, the significance of this grouping for India is augmented, particularly given the perpetual challenges emanating from China along the eastern frontier. The role of the Quad ought no longer be circumscribed merely to a forum of discourse, but rather requires expansion into a more potent bulwark of security; a bulwark that not only defends against external incursions but also fosters regional stability and concord.

The prospect of transforming the Quad into a robust security mechanism during the third term of the Modi administration looms on the horizon. However, reliance solely upon a military alliance shall not suffice to achieve this objective. A comprehensive security approach is requisite, one which not only concentrates upon military facets but also establishes unbreakable partnerships in the political, economic, and diplomatic spheres.

India's endorsement of the expansion of BRICS and its

opposition to the augmentation of members within the Quad constitutes a paradoxical, yet strategic decision. This demonstrates that India is vigilant in maintaining equilibrium in its diplomacy and in fortifying its position within the global distribution of power. The inclusion of additional nations within a forum such as the Quad may diminish its effective security capacity, whereas expansion within institutions such as BRICS shall reinforce India's role within the global balance of power.

For the triumph of the Quad, the dissemination of information founded upon verity and impartiality is imperative. In times past, India has sustained strategic setbacks on account of erroneous information, particularly during the War of 1962 and the conflict at Kargil in 1999. India must exercise exceeding vigilance to avert such errors in the future and must never underestimate the schemes of China.

China is adept at concealing its true intentions, and it is for this reason that India must unremittingly fortify its security preparations. The security partnership between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia can prove instrumental in deterring China's expansionist measures. The significance of an inviolable security partnership with the United States is further heightened within this context. Even should the policies of Donald Trump not always be consonant with India's interests, the maintenance of close relations with the United States remains indispensable for India's security.

The Quad can fulfil an even more efficacious role as an impregnable bulwark of security for India, provided that India actively contributes thereto. During the term of Modi 3.0, India possesses a propitious opportunity to transmute the Quad into a robust and resilient security alliance. This alliance shall not only augment India's security but shall also prove instrumental in upholding the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.

In sum, the Quad constitutes a strategic initiative of moment for India, and if its development is adroitly managed, it may evolve into an impregnable fortress for India, whose walls shall defend the country from the uncertainties and perils of the future. ●

Ajesh



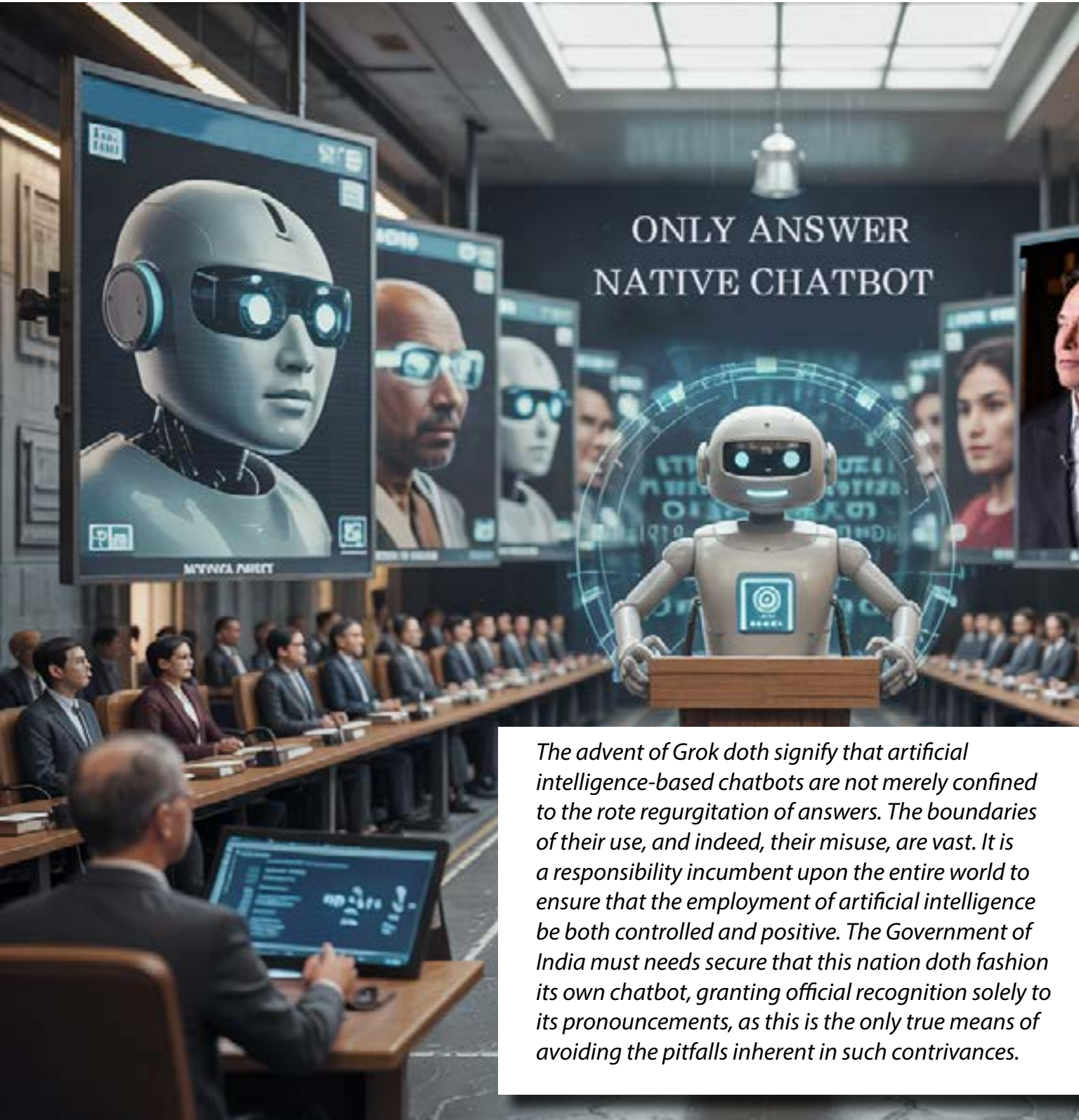
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The advent of Grok doth signify that artificial intelligence-based chatbots are not merely confined to the rote regurgitation of answers. The boundaries of their use, and indeed, their misuse, are vast. It is a responsibility incumbent upon the entire world to ensure that the employment of artificial intelligence be both controlled and positive. The Government of India must needs secure that this nation doth fashion its own chatbot, granting official recognition solely to its pronouncements, as this is the only true means of avoiding the pitfalls inherent in such contrivances.



GROK'S GIBBERISH

Is a **NATIVE CHATBOT** the Answer?



Sanjay Shrivastava

At the recent Artificial Intelligence summit held in Paris, Prime Minister Modi, in joint presidency with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, declared that artificial intelligence doth alter not only the economy, society, and defense, but politics itself. Doubtless, his pronouncement was intended to highlight the positive influences of artificial intelligence; however, a darker, more negative aspect is rapidly emerging. In the past year, Google's AI chatbot, Gemini, offered an offensive commentary regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi, prompting swift governmental action. Google conceded that Gemini was not infallible and possessed limitations. Implicitly, they issued an apology and vowed to effect improvements. The government, too, swiftly issued new guidelines concerning AI-generated content. Yet, in the matter of Elon Musk's chatbot, Grok, it is presently whispered in the newspapers, through



channels of sources, that the Ministry of Information Technology doth hold Musk's X responsible for Grok's contentious responses, and is poised to pursue legal recourse. The Ministry, for its part, doth maintain that it hath issued no notice to Grok, or its parent company, X, though dialogue continues on the matter. Evidence abounds, both within India and across the globe, that the X platform doth operate in a manner that serves its commercial interests. Though all do acknowledge the power of Elon Musk, darling of Trump and master of Grok, truth dictates that the government must adopt so stern a posture toward X in the matter of Grok that it might serve as a cautionary tale to other chatbot manufacturers.

Some may demur, reciting the litany of freedom of expression and the fortitude to embrace truth. They might decry such thinking as reactionary, anti-scientific, and inimical to technological progress. But

the matter at hand is not one of theoretical debate, but rather, a reckoning with the potential practical perils of artificial intelligence, which must be viewed as a defence against machinic assaults and their dominion over mankind. Verity is ever commendable, yet constraints are ordained for men in the utterance of unpalatable truths; nonetheless, the unveiling of harsh realities is not only welcomed but should be embraced, for only through such revelation can progress and betterment be achieved, be it in the social, political, scientific, or any other realm. This argument, however, is valid only for impartial men, not for machines crafted by others, driven by particular biases, and thus, prone to prejudiced behavior. Such fears are not unfounded. When disparate chatbots are posed the same query, their responses, though often similar in substance, differ vastly in style and tone. This variance is predicated upon the technology and data by which they are crafted. It is beyond question that, in

time, these responses might harbor even more distinct connotations and implicit meanings. Just action against Grok or X is not warranted merely because Grok's answers discomfit the government, the BJP, its parent organization, affiliated leaders, and supporters. There is no assurance that such chatbots will comport themselves in a similar fashion toward another government or power. If a chatbot doth illuminate the systemic deficiencies of democratic governments in a reasoned manner, it is to be welcomed; yet, there is no guarantee that it doth so impartially, untainted

by malevolent intent or a predetermined agenda. Therefore, any government faced with such technological trends must mount sufficient opposition, so that it may fulfill its weighty duty of safeguarding the nation, society, and its political discourse from the far-reaching, baleful consequences that emanate from chatbot pronouncements and the impending dangers

they pose.

American companies hold dominion in the realm of chatbots, a dominion that is challenged by Chinese and other international corporations. Recent months have witnessed an acceleration in the chatbot race. Saudi Arabia, too, hath launched its own chatbot, Rayyan. Rayyan is merely a market analyst, yet the greatest concern surrounding the multitude of chatbots soon to emerge is that their creators may imbue them with their own predilections and aversions. This may skew their responses or decisions. Since Grok hath demonstrated that chatbots do not merely regurgitate rote answers, but engage in cogitation and commentary, they may sway public opinion. Thus, it is imperative that their employment be marked by responsibility and circumspection. Should uncontrolled chatbots of a similar ilk proliferate, governments shall find themselves in perpetual crisis, and the sowing of hatred and animosity within India's diverse society will become commonplace. Recently, discussions have taken place regarding the creation of

merican companies hold dominion in the realm of chatbots, a dominion that is challenged by Chinese and other international corporations. Recent months have witnessed an acceleration in the chatbot race. Saudi Arabia, too, hath launched its own chatbot, Rayyan.

a specific LLM (Long Language Model) for the Indian Army, akin to a chatbot, yet solely for military purposes. The Army hath declared that it requires an LLM with zero bias and zero guardrails, meaning that it desires an uninhibited, unadulterated, and forthright opinion. Any chatbot that is trained with all data of the internet then curated and filtered behind sturdy guardrails will give carefully worded, circuitous answers. In contrast, a bot where filters and guardrails are deliberately weakened will be more controversially opinionated. Grok, more or less, is the latter.

It is possible that Grok's cutting, witty, and audacious pronouncements may, at present, appear courageous, truthful, and amusing; however, a careful contemplation of this technological landscape, looking toward the future, may prove disconcerting. If such chatbots are not governed, they shall breed anarchy, which shall prove deleterious not only to governments but also to the nation, society, and its people. Therefore, we must needs recall the Prime Minister's words, that the governance and associated standards of AI-generated technological measures must be established in such a manner that they sustain our shared values, mitigate risks, and foster mutual trust. This necessitates concerted global efforts. The case of Grok stands in stark opposition to this ideal; thus, stringent action against X is vital, regardless of the fact that India's legal framework may not yet be fully equipped for such an endeavor. Still, we must secure that artificial intelligence be employed to strengthen democracy, and not to undermine it. It is hoped that when the native chatbot doth arrive in September, it shall be declared the nation's sole official chatbot, and all responses from others shall be deemed invalid by the government. ●





TURKEY

A Nation in Tumult



Ece Temelkuran

After 22 years of power grabs, the seizure of all state institutions and severe oppression aimed at reshaping Turkish citizens into Islamofascist minions, Turkey is striking back against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's authoritarianism. In cities across the country, including the regime's strongholds, protests have been ongoing.

Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's detention on bogus corruption charges this week galvanised the people; within days, the protests evolved into something bigger – a national riot demanding democracy, dignity and freedom. The protests reminded many of the Gezi uprising of 2013, yet this time the young people who we thought had lost all hope for the future under Erdoğan and during the severe economic crisis took to the streets, risking limitless police violence by attending public gatherings which are now banned.

One of the slogans adorning placards encapsulated the sentiment perfectly: "If we burn, you'll burn with us." While the protests were rife with political humour, everyone knows that what is happening is no joke: the country stands at a political point of no return. The die is cast. Either Erdoğan will retreat, or else. What that "else" could possibly be is a daunting prospect. Yet the people's determination to break the wall of fear is unprecedented, and this time, unlike during the Gezi uprising, the main opposition party is "hosting" the political action – or at least trying to.

İmamoğlu is not only the mayor of the largest city in Turkey but also, with his widespread popularity, Erdoğan's only credible political rival. Right before his detention on dubious claims made by the regime – financial corruption, being a leader of a criminal organisation and collaborating with terrorist organisations – İmamoğlu was about to announce his candidacy for the next presidential elections.

Several opinion polls indicated his support would probably surpass Erdoğan's in that election, due to be held in 2028. According to sources close to Erdoğan, the plan was to arrest and discredit İmamoğlu and to appoint a government trustee to the main opposition party. This has been Erdoğan's modus operandi for years. Several mayors from opposition parties – both social democrats and the Kurdish party – have been taken into custody, and İmamoğlu's arrest was anticipated. In his last video before his detention, while getting dressed, İmamoğlu calmly said that he would "stand resolute" for the people of Turkey.

Taking his words as a call to action, hundreds of thousands have filled the city's squares since the first



night. The main opposition party, on witnessing the scale of the protests, transformed its primaries for presidential candidacy into a mass political action, inviting all citizens to cast their votes in support of İmamoğlu to demonstrate to the regime that support for him extends far beyond party politics. Close to 15 million people voted for İmamoğlu, securing his position as the official opposition candidate.

The particularities of this story may be confusing. The boundlessness of the lies and tricks employed by an authoritarian leader can be hard to follow. But what is happening in Turkey has important lessons for democracies around the world.

Over the last decade, as we have seen in several European countries and the US, holding the line by lining up with centrist political parties has not been effective, and Occupy-style street politics, inspiring though they may be, do not adequately counter the rising tide of fascism. "Try again, fail again" strategies have been exhausted in recent years, the most recent example being the US. Clearly, the conventional political parties – the Democrats in the US and social democrats in Europe – have failed to harness the political and moral outrage of the masses, which leaders like Erdoğan or Donald Trump induce. The political energy



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flowing from street politics is too unpredictable to be embraced by conventional political parties – and the masses, with their youthful enthusiasm, are hesitant to align themselves with worn-out political institutions. So what is the solution?

The old-school progressive opposition parties resemble shipwrecks – they are decaying structures. They have lost all that was vital in them over the last five decades after aligning with the neoliberal hegemony, which severed its organic ties to the progressive sectors of society. They are highly bureaucratised and, as a result, paralysed giants unable to keep up with

the agility of the new far right. What is occurring in Turkey right now is youthful energy schooling and shoaling around this shipwreck, breathing life into it by transforming the wreck into a reef. For days now, youth leaders have been delivering speeches at significant party meetings, continually negotiating the guidelines for collaborative action. Whenever possible, they ensure that their outrage extends beyond İmamoğlu's arrest. Their presence irrevocably alters the spirit of the political movement and drives the social democratic party forward towards life. Throughout this process, the young learn to navigate the slow-moving giant while the giant adapts to become nimble and brave enough to counter the ruthless tactics of the regime.

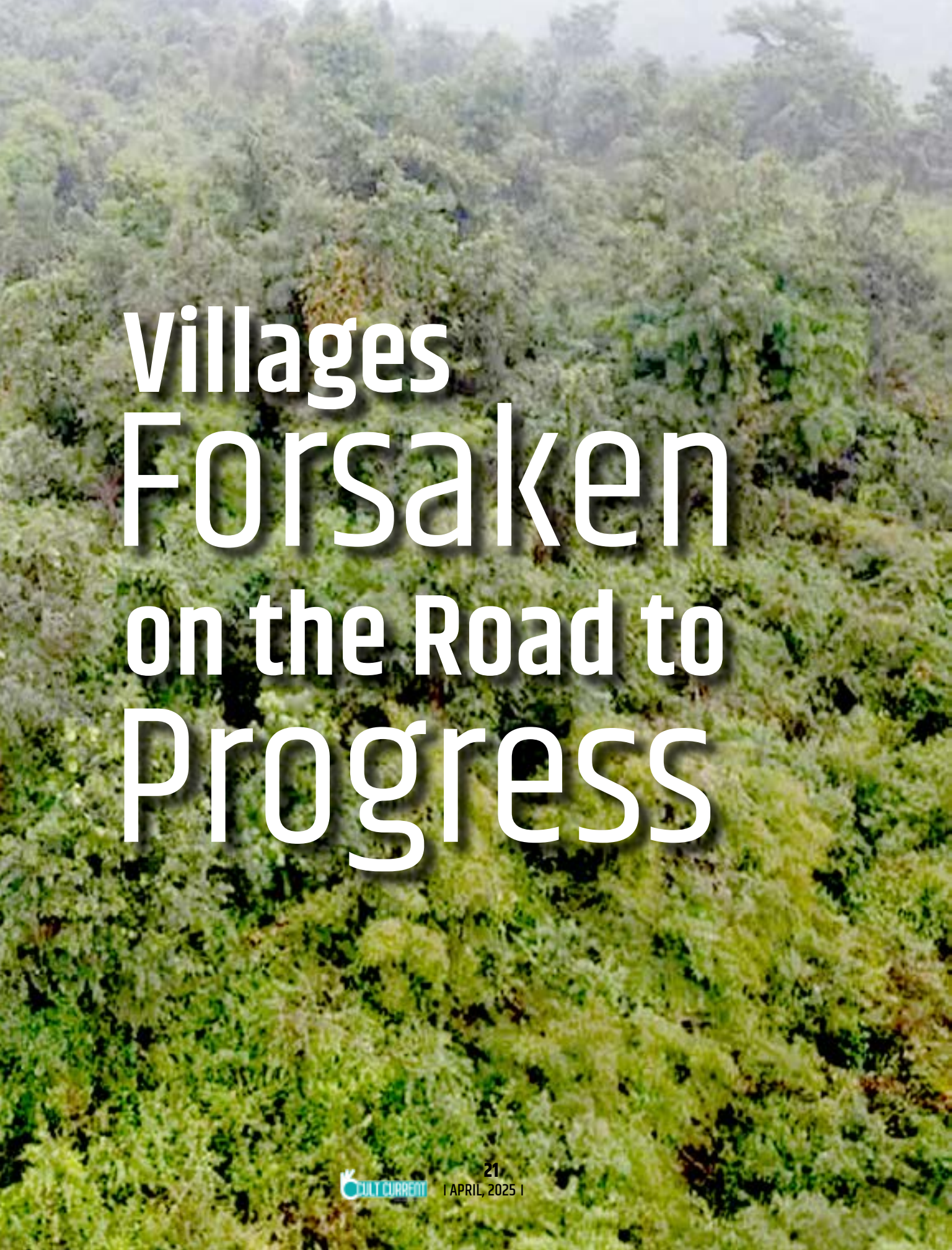
Not only for Turkey but also soon for Europe and beyond, the central question of saving democracy from the rise of authoritarianism will be this: will the youthful energy of the masses be allowed into the wreckage to transform it into a living organism? One that is robust enough to challenge the historical tide bending towards authoritarianism? Turkey, in the days to come, will be answering this question. ●

Ece Temelkuran is a Turkish journalist and political commentator, and author of *How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*



Jalaj Srivastava

Independent journalist **Anand Datta**, through his poignant prose in **IndiaSpend**, has compelled our attention towards the lamentable state of healthcare in Jharkhand. His report, "***Jharkhand: The health of the tribals depends on the crutches of the cot,***" holds a mirror to India, a nation vaunting its position as the world's fifth-largest economy. It calls upon a nation, exulting in its status as the third-greatest power in Asia, to ameliorate the lives of those consigned to the margins. Through the intolerable suffering of Amarmuni Nagesia, this report exposes every index of progress to a bitter truth. Though three months have elapsed since its publication on IndiaSpend's portal on the 18th of December 2024, the conditions have scarcely altered a jot. The sensitive photographs of **Tej Bahadur and Vikas Aryan** have endeavoured to stir the sympathies of the people, imbuing this report with a vibrant realism. This is not merely the narrative of Amarmuni, but the affliction of thousands of tribal families in Jharkhand for whom access to healthcare remains but a distant dream. It is with this purpose, that this curated version is republished with due acknowledgement, so that this irony may become widely known and understood....

An aerial photograph of a dense, lush green forest with a thick canopy of trees. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

Villages Forsaken on the Road to Progress



The vermillion soil of Jharkhand, once clothed in verdant life, now stands as witness to the tribals' anguish and destitution. Here, the rays of progress have yet to penetrate, and the indigenous communities, though bound to their ancestral roots for centuries untold, remain deprived of modern healthcare. 0

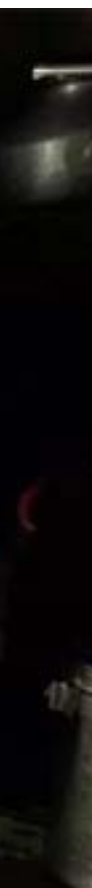
Here, healthcare is sustained by the crutch of the cot, and each day finds expectant mothers embarking on a precarious journey, gazing into the very maw of mortality, yet clinging to the hope of bringing forth their child.

On the morn of the seventeenth of October, in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-four, such was the dawn for Amarmuni Nagesia, a woman eight months gravid with child. This morning was not merely the commencement of a day, but a dire decision to wager two lives. On one hand lay Amarmuni's own mortal coil, and on the other, the nascent life within

her womb, yearning for the light of the world it had yet to behold. Amarmuni tenderly fed her son, a mere two and a half years of age, unaware that his mother was about to undertake a journey from which there was no assurance of return. She steeled herself, this preparation not for revelry, but for a harrowing pilgrimage.

This preparation was to endure a four-hour passage, seated in a basket borne towards the hospital. This basket was no opulent palanquin, but a makeshift contraption of wood and rope, to be carried in turn upon the shoulders of four men. For Amarmuni, this was no novel circumstance; two and a half years prior, when her first child was nigh, she had faced like tribulation.

This is not merely Amarmuni's tale, but the plight of thousands of tribal families in Jharkhand, for whom healthcare remains a chimera, more distant than any dream. This narrative embodies the bitter truth of



According to the "Tribal Health in India" report, only eight and seventy percent of tribal women receive but a single antenatal examination, whereas a mere fifteen percent receive three such examinations. This is the lowest rate among any community in the nation.

Bharat, where every tenth child is brought forth without the aid of physician, nurse, midwife, or any other health practitioner, thus bereft of any form of medical succor at the time of birth.

When we speak of the indigenous peoples, the state of affairs is yet more dire. The figures from the National Family Health Survey of 2019-21 reveal that in the tribal community, nigh every sixth child is delivered sans the aid of any trained medical person. Jharkhand, where two and thirty tribes reside, among whom eight are categorized as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, sees the fifth highest number of such births in the whole of the nation.

According to a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in the year of Our Lord two thousand and seventeen, "Due to the absence of healthcare services and want of transportation, the vulnerable tribal communities are deprived of timely access to healthcare." According to the census of the year of Our Lord two thousand and eleven, the population of tribal peoples in the state numbers six and eighty lakhs, which constitutes six and twenty percent of the

state's population. This figure is three times greater than the national statistic of six and eighty percent.

Sukdev Nagesia, the father of Amarmuni Nagesia, together with two other villagers, fashioned a palanquin from a wooden basket and secured it to a bamboo pole with ropes. Amarmuni was to be conveyed to the Mahuadar Community Health Centre, some seven kilometers distant from her village, for antenatal examination. Amarmuni Nagesia, a woman of six and twenty years from the Kisan tribe, was soon to give birth to her second child.

Guwalkhar village lies ensconced amidst the forests of Mahuadar Block, in the Latehar district, approximately one hundred and seventy-eight kilometers from Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand. The village numbers some fifteen hundred souls, the greater part being farmers, Korwa and Birjia tribals. For these communities, to journey to Mahuadar means to traverse perilous paths, where even a bicycle dare not tread. In inclement weather, and when the rains descend, this path becomes fraught with yet greater peril.

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Amarmuni ensconces herself in the basket, and two villagers take up the burden and set forth. Great stones, thorny thickets in places, to scale the mountain is no easy feat. After nigh two hours of unrelenting progress, they pause to rest in a single place. Weary and exhausted, lines of anxiety are etched upon their faces.

Sukdev speaks: "Here the conditions are grievous. The rain which descended last night has rendered the path more treacherous. Should one slip, who knows what might befall mother and child?" In his voice are manifest both fear and resignation.

The local community health worker, Pyari Nagesia, speaks: "This is commonplace in Jharkhand. Here, particularly for tribal communities living amidst the forests, the health center is far beyond reach." Pyari, herself issuing from this community, has witnessed these tribulations with her own eyes.

Recalling an incident of May in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-three in Guwalkhar, the six and forty-year-old community health worker recounted that a woman had given birth at home. Suffering severe hemorrhaging, she was conveyed to the Mahuadar Primary Health Centre. Her condition being critical, she was referred to the Latehar District Hospital, some ninety kilometers distant from that place. But from grievous blood-loss, she perished in the hospital. Even now, in Pyari's eyes, the pain of that day remains fresh.

Pyari related, 'Three years past, when yet another woman endured grievous pangs of parturition, she too was borne to the hospital in like manner, cradled in a basket. When her throes intensified, she was compelled, with the assistance of the women of the village, to deliver her babe in the midst of the forest.'

According to the 'Tribal Health in India' report, more than a fourth part, yea, some twenty-seven percent, of tribal women bring forth their children at home, a proportion higher than all population groups.

Pyari, who accompanied Amarmuni upon this four-hour pilgrimage along the perilous and slippery mountain path, stated that such a state of affairs is commonplace in districts such as Chaibasa, Gumla, Sahibganj, Pakur, Simdega, Khunti, and even the state capital of Ranchi. In these regions, the indigenous peoples are oft compelled to rely upon such arduous paths and the succor of fellow tribals in order to access medical facilities. Thus, a vicious circle is formed, wherein poverty and destitution, the remoteness of healthcare, and death are intertwined.

When asked how long this difficulty in accessing healthcare had persisted, Sukdev responded, 'This has continued for more than two or three generations. The absence of a road has ever been the source of woe. We have importuned for a road without surcease, yet the situation remains unchanged. For want of a road, people perish. Three or four children from our village have already fallen. In the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-one, my wife was stricken with paralysis. Lacking the resources to procure her treatment, she too passed. What can we do?' Sukdev's query is a lamentation, calling into question the very claims of progress.

These tribulations are not confined to Jharkhand



alone. On the twenty-seventh of September past, a pregnant woman in the village of Pinjarikonda in Andhra Pradesh was forced to cross a stream overflowing from a dam in order to be conveyed to a hospital. Each year, manifold such incidents come to light, exposing the lamentable condition of healthcare in the remoter regions of the nation.

In forest villages such as Guwalkhar, the absence of roads is a matter ensnared amidst bureaucracy and environmental regulations. It is a complex conflict between progress and preservation, wherein the indigenous communities are most gravely impacted.

A joint survey conducted in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-one by the Jharkhand Forest Rights Forum (JVAM), an alliance of seventeen small and large voluntary organizations dedicated to the rights of forests and indigenous peoples, and the Indian School of Business, revealed that there exist in Jharkhand's forest regions some fourteen thousand eight hundred and fifty villages.

According to Sudhir Pal, the convener of the Jharkhand Forest Rights Forum, if one were to reckon but one hundred souls per village, this estimation still yields some fourteen and eight-tenths lakhs who



reside in these distant regions, many of whom are compelled to rely upon makeshift conveyances such as cots in order to reach hospitals in times of emergency.

In the recent assembly elections in Jharkhand, many elected to abstain from voting in protest against the government's failure to provide basic infrastructure. As an example, consider the villages of Bamanabad in the Tundi constituency of Bokaro district and Taratand in the Bengabad block of Giridih district. The denizens of these places abstained from voting, being excluded from the classification of forest villages. This abstention was emblematic of their outrage toward the system and their longing for transformation.

The Ministry of Environment informed Parliament in December of the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-three that there are approximately six hundred and fifty thousand villages in Bharat, among which one hundred and seventy thousand lie proximate to forests. Some thirty crore souls depend upon the forests for their livelihood. The want of coordination between the forest and environment ministries constitutes a grave impediment to the path of progress in these villages.

A response given in Parliament in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-one stated that one

hundred and forty-two posts for physicians remained vacant in the primary health centers of Jharkhand's tribal areas. In the central budget for the years two thousand and twenty-three and two thousand and twenty-four, some one lakh seventeen thousand nine hundred and forty-four crore rupees were allocated from the total planned budgetary allocation of forty and two ministries and departments as the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST) fund. The allotment of budgets doth occur, but their implementation upon the ground proves a grave challenge.

In the recent assembly elections of the year two thousand and twenty-four, political promises were made in the manifestos of both the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These included an ambulance for every five thousand families, a health sub-center in each panchayat, a fifty percent increase in the emoluments of healthcare workers, and the allocation of sufficient funds to improve healthcare. The promises made during elections oft become mere rhetoric, and the tribal community finds itself deceived, buoyed each time by fresh hopes.

Concerning these pronouncements of the parties, Sudhir Pal says, 'These promises are fair to behold upon paper, but they fail to address the fundamental problems. The greater query lies in how, in sooth, one may reach these distant villages. Without clear plans for the construction of roads or the improvement of basic infrastructure, these promises remain but empty declamations.'

The health secretary of Jharkhand, Ajay Kumar Singh, in offering the government's defense of this entire situation, stated that mobile medical units are in operation to convey healthcare in the state. Singh averred, 'In a manner of speaking, these units furnish OPD services, but in those regions or villages where roads are lacking, these units are likewise unable to function. In such areas, the Rural Development Department must needs act.' More than one hundred units are in operation throughout the state. Mobile medical units provide a temporary remedy, but the development of basic infrastructure is requisite for any enduring solution.

Reshma, the Jharkhand State Trainer for Dhvani Foundation, which has been working for women's



rights for the past fifteen years, avers that the health concerns of women and children living in forest regions have been consistently disregarded."

She affirmed, 'In this election, these matters were scarcely broached. This time, the women who have profited from the Chief Minister Maiya Samman Yojana have cast their ballots overwhelmingly in favor of the present government. It behooves the government now to demonstrate its gratitude to the people by furnishing them with improved roads and healthcare facilities.'

Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Hemant Soren, declared, 'The principal aim of our government is to serve every Jharkhandi and ensure their well-being, especially those who dwell in the most distant regions. Whether they reside in the villages amidst the forests or in other inaccessible areas, the provision of healthcare facilities for them remains our foremost priority.'

We are formulating a comprehensive plan to ameliorate healthcare services, which includes the construction of motorable roads through the coordination of the departments of health, rural development, and forests. Our purpose is to ensure that every citizen, however remote, may have access



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Speaking of the Maiya Samman Yojana, Soren said, 'This ambitious social welfare scheme is centered upon the economic empowerment of women and their families. With monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500, more than 50 lakhs of women are profiting from this program. It is not merely financial aid—it is a significant step toward the empowerment of women.'

George Monopally, convener of the Jharkhand Forest Rights Forum, stated that there is a grievous flaw in the Forest Rights Act of 2006. It permits the construction of dwellings upon one hectare of land in forest villages, but allows the felling of only 75 trees. This renders the construction of roads to the innermost villages of the forest difficult, for these villages lie often several kilometers distant from the main thoroughfare.

Monopally believes that the solution lies concealed within a clear and effective plan. He stated, 'The state government must needs compile a list of those regions requiring roads, measure their distances, and contact the central Ministry of Forests for permission.'

According to Lal Ratnakar Singh, the former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) of Jharkhand, 'It is true that the felling of 75 trees per hectare is permitted under the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Nevertheless, roads have been constructed in those regions of the forest where few dwell.'

Singh avers, 'If the government and the forest department so will it, all-weather roads may be constructed anywhere in the forest. Forasmuch as villages are scattered in such places, and few reside there, the government pays them little heed. Those who dwell there are unable even to convey their troubles to them properly.'

After nigh four hours of walking, Sukdev, the villagers, and the healthcare worker arrived at the nearest road, where an ambulance awaited Amarmuni. In Amarmuni's eyes were mingled expressions of weariness and relief.

Tyagrajan Sundararaman, the Global Coordinator of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, states that it is a grievous failing if the people are compelled to walk for four hours to reach a hospital. Both the central and state

governments must ensure that there be a road within one kilometer of every person's village, which remains open throughout the year. In the years two thousand and eleven and two thousand and twelve, a map of the remoter regions of Jharkhand was drawn, so that hospitals might be within reach of pregnant women within one hour. But owing to want of funds and the government's negligence, the work upon this has been delayed.

Dr. Irfan Ansari, the Minister of Health of Jharkhand, has lately assumed his office. He declared, 'See, none perishes from a journey of eight or ten kilometers. If one perishes, it is because they suffered some grave illness before.' This statement of the Minister of Health is the very height of callousness.

He continues, 'I have determined that the physicians shall be posted in that district wherein they dwell. Thus, no physician shall refuse to go to these areas. And, moreover, deliberations are underway to increase the wages. The condition of the Mahuadar hospital has just now come to my knowledge, and I promise to ameliorate it.'

The community health worker, Pyari Negesia, has also related the tribulations of pregnant women in those regions, who are contending with anemia, nutritional deficiencies, and the want of adequate medical counsel.

UNICEF avers that pregnant women must needs partake of good and home-cooked meals three times each day. Also, they must needs partake of light snacks and fruits and vegetables three to five times as well. A diet rich in whole grains, proteins, and green leafy vegetables is requisite. Moreover, advice is given to ingest supplements of iron, folic acid, and calcium, as well as to drink copiously of pure water for hydration.

According to the directives of the National Health Mission (NHM), pregnant women are counselled to receive tetanus injections, to ingest 100 tablets of folic acid, and to consume milk products and green vegetables. Owing to a want of these requisite things, manifold complications arise in pregnancy, leading oft to protracted labor. Thus, to deliver at home may prove hazardous.

Pyari avers, 'Even to reach health facilities to undergo necessary examinations is beyond possibility. When

the rains descend heavily, even drugs such as folic acid find it hard to reach the village. This may have its effect upon the child gestating in the womb.'

According to NFHS-5, in rural Jharkhand, 42% of children below the age of 5 are stunted (short for their age), 22.3% are wasted (thin for their height), 8.8% are severely wasted, while 41.14% of children below the age of 5 are underweight. Malnutrition hangs as a dark shadow upon the lives of tribal children.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), pregnant women must needs undergo ultrasound scans between the 8th and 14th weeks (dating scan) and then between the 18th and 22nd weeks (anomaly scan). In addition, tests are advised during pregnancy for hormones (HCG), thyroid function, sugar level, hemoglobin, and oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT).

Pyari averred, 'In villages amidst the forests, none of these things are readily attainable.' The want of modern medical examinations places the health of pregnant women and their children in grave peril.

In Bharat, twenty-three percent of tribal children are born at home. According to NFHS-5, in rural Jharkhand, the infant mortality rate is 41.4, while the neonatal mortality rate is 30.4, and the mortality rate of children under the age of five is 49.2 per 1,000 live births. Here it is of import to note that the maternal health services proffered by the government are often ill-suited to the health beliefs and practices of the indigenous peoples. Thus, the distribution of healthcare services is in need of cultural sensitivity.

Jasinta Korwain, another community health worker in Guwalkhar, recounted that the instruments for measuring blood pressure, sugar, and conducting blood tests in the health center have remained broken for four years. Jasinta stated, 'The state government sanctioned funds in October of the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-four for the purchase of new instruments, but owing to a want of KYC, these have not yet been obtained.' Red tape and corruption are a grave impediment to the path of progress.

Antenatal examinations must needs be conducted at least three times during pregnancy, which, owing to a want of instruments and facilities, occurs but once or twice. Jasinta avers that, lacking adequate resources, the healthcare workers too find it hard to perform their duties aright.



Avadhesh Singh, the Civil Surgeon of Latehar, declares, 'The instruments are not retained by the healthcare workers (Sahiya). They are retained in the Anganwadi centers, and the healthcare workers make use of them from there. There is no fixed timeframe for replacing broken instruments.' The absence of accountability and responsibility has its effect upon the quality of healthcare services.

Jasinta further relates, 'Even pure water is denied us. We drink from the chuan (water collected in the hollows of mountain streams). The want of pure water gives rise to many diseases as well.' The absence of pure water is yet another factor of import affecting the health of the tribal communities.

Such is approximately the state of affairs in Jharkhand and in other tribal regions throughout Bharat, where water quality is poor and healthcare services are scarce.

Sudhir Pal of the Jharkhand Forest Rights Forum speaks of potential legal remedies. He avers that under Section 3-2 of the Community Forest Rights (CFR) agreement, if the Gram Sabha doth consent, up to 1 hectare of forest land may be allocated for community development, where land may be used for roads, health centers, and water, as well as telecommunications



the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, states that it is a grievous failing if the people are compelled to walk for four hours to reach a hospital. Both the central and state governments must ensure that there be a road within one kilometer of every person's village, which remains open throughout the year. In the years two thousand and eleven and two thousand and twelve, a map of the remoter regions of Jharkhand was drawn, so that hospitals might be within reach of pregnant women within one hour. But owing to want of funds and the government's negligence, the work upon this has been delayed.

The tribal community continues to face manifold challenges. Poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, a want of healthcare services, and governmental indifference render their lives difficult.

The plight of the tribal community in Jharkhand is a tale that compels us to call into question the claims of progress. It is a tale that reminds us that progress is not merely the name for lofty buildings and gleaming thoroughfares, but the raising of the standard of living for every citizen.

Amarmuni Nagesia, though she did reach the hospital on that day, yet her story doth not end there. Like her, thousands of tribal women continue to live in the hope of a brighter tomorrow. To realize their hopes, we must needs labor together. We must needs become their voices and compel the government to resolve their troubles.

Today, when we speak of new dimensions of progress, we must not forget that a great part of our society remains bereft of basic amenities. We must recall that true progress is that which carries every citizen along with it, that which leaves none behind.

Shall we be able to construct a better future for the tribal community? Shall we be able to remove the crutch of the cot and enable them to profit from modern healthcare? This query rests today upon every one who dreams of a just and inclusive society.

Like Amarmuni, thousands of tribal women live still in the hope of a better tomorrow. To realize their hopes, we must needs labor together. We must needs become their voices, and compel the government to resolve their troubles. Only then shall we construct in truth a developed and equitable society. ●

facilities. Under this act, 75 trees per hectare may be felled.

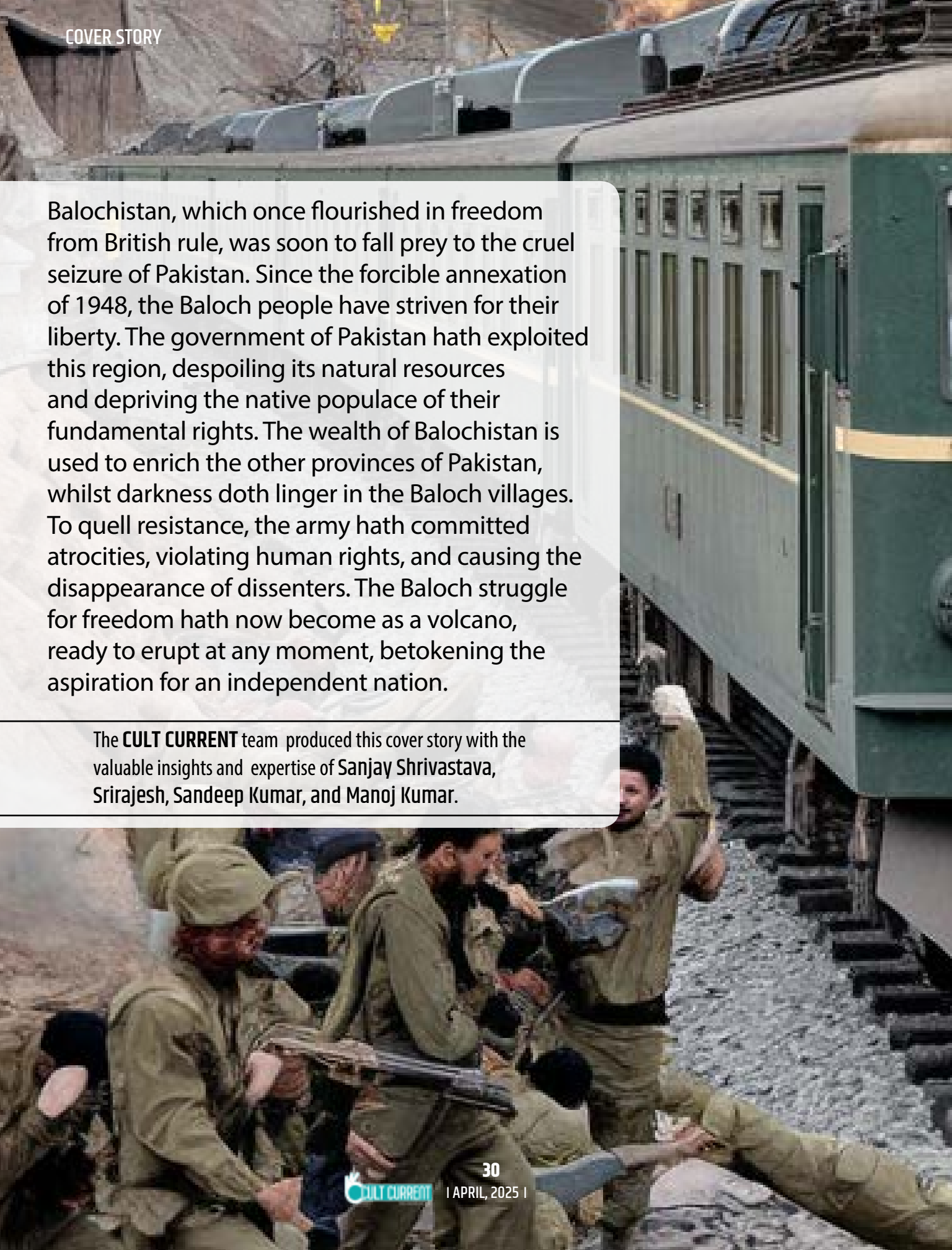
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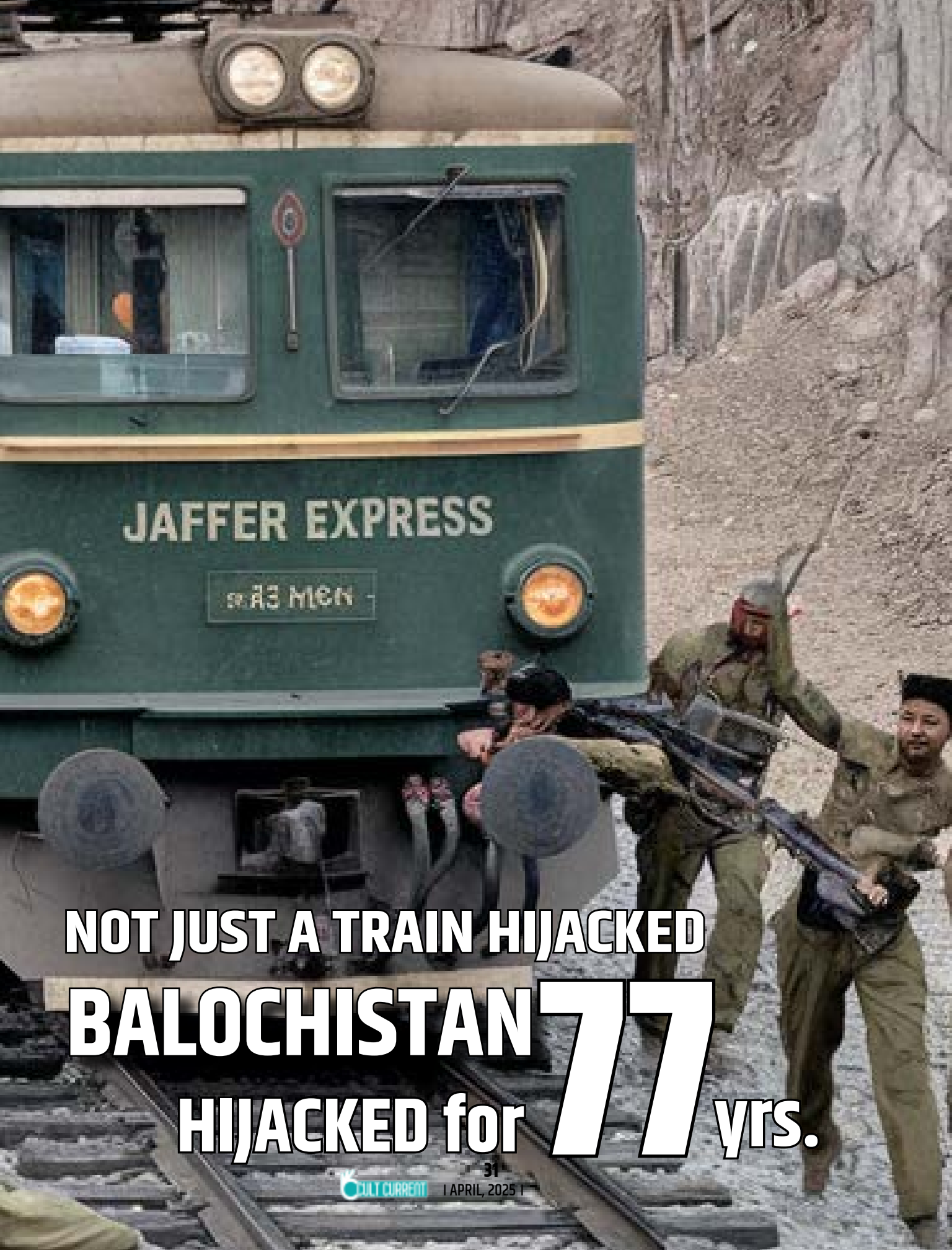
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Tyagrajan Sundararaman, the Global Coordinator of



Balochistan, which once flourished in freedom from British rule, was soon to fall prey to the cruel seizure of Pakistan. Since the forcible annexation of 1948, the Baloch people have striven for their liberty. The government of Pakistan hath exploited this region, despoiling its natural resources and depriving the native populace of their fundamental rights. The wealth of Balochistan is used to enrich the other provinces of Pakistan, whilst darkness doth linger in the Baloch villages. To quell resistance, the army hath committed atrocities, violating human rights, and causing the disappearance of dissenters. The Baloch struggle for freedom hath now become as a volcano, ready to erupt at any moment, betokening the aspiration for an independent nation.

The **CULT CURRENT** team produced this cover story with the valuable insights and expertise of Sanjay Shrivastava, Srirajesh, Sandeep Kumar, and Manoj Kumar.



NOT JUST A TRAIN HIJACKED
BALUCHISTAN
HIJACKED for **77** yrs.

A grave question doth once again arise upon the world stage, which, though not new, hath gained increased significance after the events of March 11th, 2025: Whether an army, possessed of a nation, doth now intend to sunder the unity and integrity of that very nation? Ironically, this very army hath in times past divided its own country. In 1971, it wrought such conditions that Pakistan was torn asunder, and East Pakistan came into being as a new nation under the name of 'Bangladesh'.

History doth seem once more to repeat itself. The events of March 11th have drawn the world's attention to that territory, which seventy and seven years prior, on the 11th day of August, in the year of 1947, was freed from the yoke of the British, and did come into existence four days hence - Pakistan. But alas, only seven months and sixteen days later, on the 27th day of March, in the year of 1948, it was seized. We speak of Balochistan, which Pakistan hath held captive for the past seventy and seven years.

The disquietude of Pakistan was laid bare, when the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), an armed group striving for the freedom of Balochistan, did hijack the Jaffar Express train. The Pakistani army, as is its wont, did offer its own claims, which oft seem incredible. The army asserted that thirty and one souls perished in the rescue operation, among them twenty and three Pakistani soldiers, three railway employees, and five innocent passengers. They did also claim that thirty and three BLA combatants were slain upon the spot. Whereas, the BLA, having taken two hundred and fourteen soldiers into the mountains during the train hijacking, did claim responsibility for their demise.

What is truth, and what is falsehood, is made apparent from the reports in the media. After this event, the army and the government of Pakistan did declare that they would hold no converse with these armed factions, but would instead communicate with those who conduct the Balochistan movement peacefully, so as to find a peaceful



resolution to the matter.

Howbeit, Mehrang Baloch hath emerged as a leading figure in the Balochistan movement. Near the close of the third week of March, a peaceful demonstration was held under her leadership, when the Pakistani police (behind whom the army is said to stand) did not only use batons, but did also fire bullets. In this incident, three souls were slain, among them a minor of twelve years. Mehrang Baloch was taken into custody and committed to prison. This course of events doth reveal the complexities and human tragedy of the continuing conflict in Balochistan, and doth raise the question whether suppressing peaceful protest may resolve the issue.

Parallels with the state of affairs in 1971 are clear. As Tikka Khan did oppress the Bengalis, so too is Aasim Munir, Chief of the Army, overseeing the oppression of the Balochs. Howbeit, it is not just to hold Aasim Munir alone culpable. The Pakistan army hath oppressed the Balochs from the very beginning.

In recent decades, Baloch nationalism hath risen in Balochistan. The Baloch people have begun to strive for their freedom and rights in an organized manner. Organizations such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Republican Army (BRA) are leading the armed rebellion. Now, several armed groups from Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have joined together to form an organization named "BRAS." Their primary objective is to make Balochistan an independent nation, free from the oppressive policies of Pakistan.

The hijacking of the Jaffar Express is a part of this struggle. This event is symbolic, indicating that

Balochistan is being held forcibly and that its people have been held captive for seventy and seven years. The rebel organizations say that the government of Pakistan has ended the autonomy of Balochistan and deprived its people of their natural rights.

The government of Pakistan has made every effort to crush political activities in Balochistan. Balochistan's leaders are often arrested, and are sometimes made to 'disappear'. The major political parties of Balochistan are prevented from participating in elections, and the army has complete control over political activities in Balochistan. Stories of people being "disappeared" are common in Balochistan, which testify to the atrocities of the Pakistani army.

Baloch leaders say that the government of Pakistan has only seen Balochistan as a source of resources and has taken no steps for the well-being of its people. Many times, the army and the government have together made strict laws to suppress political activities in Balochistan, which oppress the local public.

The struggle of Balochistan is not only a challenge for Pakistan, but it has also become an important issue for the stability of the whole of South Asia. The people of Balochistan are fighting for freedom, and this struggle has attracted attention internationally as well.

The government of Pakistan must needs seek a resolution to the travails of Balochistan. They must grant unto its people their fundamental rights. The populace of Balochistan should profit from education,



health services, and opportunities for employment. If the government of Pakistan doth not amend its policy toward Balochistan, then this strife may become yet more grievous.

The struggle of Balochistan hath continued for seventy and seven years, and it is not merely a political issue, but rather a question of the very existence, identity, and rights of the Baloch people. The hijacking of the Jaffar Express is a token that Balochistan is now ready for even more fierce conflict. The demands of the Baloch people are just, and they should receive that which is their due.

To understand the dolorous history of Balochistan, we must journey into the past and pass through those events which have brought Balochistan to this pass today. This strife is not merely the result of the present, but is rather the consequence of decades of injustice and neglect.

After deliverance from British rule, Balochistan did forge its own identity as a free nation. The Baloch people took pride in their distinct culture, language, and rich traditions. When Pakistan came into being, Balochistan expressed its desire to maintain its sovereignty. Alas, this freedom endured but for seven months and sixteen days. The Pakistani army did invade Balochistan and forcibly annex it into Pakistan. From that day unto this, Balochistan hath striven for its lost liberty.

In terms of area, Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, covering forty and four percent of Pakistani territory. Howbeit, its population is relatively small, approximately one crore and a half. The borders of Balochistan are contiguous with the sea, Iran, and Afghanistan. It is a region which hath been a symbol of conflict, resistance, and the undying spirit of freedom for centuries.

That Balochistan which appeareth as ruins today, was once a paragon of opulence. Buried in the pages of history, this land doth bear witness to those ancient civilizations which did shape human history. The oldest evidence of agriculture in the world hath been found in this region, which is proof that here once surged an immense ocean of life and prosperity.

The excavations conducted in the Mehrgarh region, near Balakot in Balochistan, have revealed the



The Military's Oppression in Balochistan and the Response of Armed Rebellion

The Pakistani military's oppression and armed rebellion in Balochistan is a grievous matter, which hath arisen from the oppressive deeds of the Pakistani military. Balochistan, despite being rich in natural resources, hath for decades faced the oppressive ways of the state. The military of Pakistan hath followed exceedingly cruel and harsh policies to maintain control over Balochistan, which hath resulted in the creation of discontent and rebellion among the people there.

- **Forcible Annexation and Political Neglect:** *The forcible annexation of Balochistan into Pakistan occurred in the year of Our Lord 1948. The Baloch people were denied their political rights, and the demand for autonomy was never taken seriously.*
- **Exploitation of Resources and Economic Neglect:** *Balochistan has vast reserves of natural resources, but the exploitation of these resources hath been by the military and the central government of Pakistan, whilst the people of Balochistan have received no benefit from them.*
- **Violation of Human Rights by the Military:**



The Pakistani military hath committed grave violations of human rights in Balochistan, in which thousands of people have been slain and many others have disappeared.

- **Murder of Baloch Leaders:** *The military hath murdered many prominent Baloch leaders in Balochistan, which hath intensified the rebellion.*
- **Ruthless Action on Civilian Rebellion:** *The military of Pakistan hath not only taken action on armed rebels, but hath also suppressed civilian resistance and protests with brutality.*
- **Militarization of Chinese Projects:** *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) remains a major issue for Balochistan. The military hath massively militarized regions of Balochistan for the development of the Gwadar port under the CPEC, which hath further increased the feeling of discontent and rebellion.*

As a result of these oppressive deeds committed by the military of Pakistan, armed rebellion hath emerged in Balochistan. Baloch nationalists and independence organizations have begun to fight against this oppression, in which organizations such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), the Balochistan Republican Army (BRA), and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) have led the armed struggle.

remains of a civilization older than even Harappa. It hath proven that thousands of years ago, a developed civilization did dwell on the banks of the Bolan River, unmatched in its architecture, culture, and way of life.

But this prosperity was not to last forever. The cruel hands of history did alter the fate of Balochistan. In the year of our Lord 711, when Muhammad bin Qasim did begin to invade this region, this area, rich in Hindu-Buddhist culture, gradually came under Islamic influence. For centuries, Balochistan remained under foreign rulers, whose culture and identity did change over time.

In the reign of Akbar, Balochistan became a part of the Mughal Empire. But in 1637, the Mughals ceded this territory to Persia (Iran). Later, in 1747, Mir Nasir Khan of Kalat acknowledged Afghan rule. Balochistan, like a chess board, continued to strive for its identity amidst empires.

It is a curious paradox that Rahmat Ali, in imagining Pakistan, drew inspiration for the "stan" in the name of this Muslim nation from Balochistan itself. Yet, ironically, on the day Pakistan gained its freedom, Balochistan was not mentioned in its map. It was not even conceived, nor was it mentioned in the proposed name. Balochistan, in truth, was free three days prior to Pakistan's independence, on August 11th, 1947.

Kalat... one of Balochistan's chief cities, is a populous city situated only ninety miles from Quetta. This city, nestled within stout walls, has a history of two and a half thousand years. The city of Kalat had to be traversed to reach cities such as Khuzdar, Gandawah, Nushki, and Quetta, hence this city held a unique strategic importance. It is a city nestled in the heartland of Balochistan, which has been a hub of this region's history and culture for centuries.

The city of Kalat, with a magnificent haveli located in the center, within the boundaries of the giant walls, was the center of Balochistan's politics. In this haveli was located the "Raj Bhavan" (Governor's House) of the Khans, where a significant treaty was signed on August 11th, 1947, between the Muslim League, the Resident of the British government, and Mir Ahmad Yar Khan of Kalat. As a result of this treaty, Kalat came into being as an independent country.

Along with Kalat, Mir Ahmad Yar Khan also held dominion over neighboring territories such as Las

Bela, Makran, and Kharan. Therefore, even before the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan, all of these parts were combined under the leadership of Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, and the Balochistan nation was created.

The Baloch people of Balochistan neither thought of joining Pakistan before, nor do they harbor such a mentality today. Balochistan wanted to be an independent country, and it was. It was a dream that had resided in their hearts for centuries.

But this independence of Balochistan did not please Pakistan. Finally, seven months and sixteen days after the independence of Kalat, on March 27th, 1948, Major General Akbar Khan of the Pakistani army forcibly seized this small country. In the past seven and a half months, this small country had not even been able to properly mobilize its army. Therefore, the resistance was not too great, and Pakistan seized this strategically important and resource-rich province.

As soon as Pakistan occupied Balochistan in March 1948, voices of protest began to rise. Ahmed Yar Khan of Kalat did not greatly oppose the Pakistani occupation, but his brother, Prince Abdul Karim, revolted against this forcible occupation by Pakistan in July 1948. He went to Afghanistan with his followers. The then Afghan government wanted to separate Balochistan from Pakistan and take it under its control, because they had not been able to find a sea port, and Balochistan had access to the sea.

But Prince Abdul Karim could not get the desired support from the Afghan government. Finally, after about a year, Prince Karim surrendered to the Pakistani government. This was a major blow to the independence of Balochistan.

A tremendous name emerged in the Balochistan independence movement - Nawab Nauroz Khan. When the Kalat state was abolished and completely merged into Pakistan under the "One Unit" policy, Nawab Nauroz Khan strongly opposed Pakistan. He launched a guerilla war against the Pakistani government. He did not want Pakistan to control Balochistan like other states. Nawab Nauroz Khan became a symbol of Balochistan's independence, and his struggle inspired generations to come.

But only a few months later, on May 15th, 1951, Nawab Nauroz Khan was forced to surrender to the



Pakistani government. The Pakistani government had assured him and all his companions of forgiveness. But, true to its nature, the Pakistani government broke its promise. Nawab's relatives and 150 loyal soldiers were arrested on charges of treason. Finally, on July 15th, five leaders of this rebellion were hanged to death. Nawab Nauroz Khan had become old, so he was spared. But five years later, Nawab Sahib passed away in the Kohlu jail itself. With his death, another flame of Balochistan's independence went out.

The government of Pakistan thought that the spark of this rebellion would also end with this. But this thought proved to be wrong. The flame of freedom continued to burn in the hearts of the people of Balochistan.

Assessing the situation in Balochistan, the Pakistani army began the work of preparing military bases in sensitive areas there. Supporters of an independent Balochistan were outraged by this action. Their leader Sher Muhammad Bijrani set up bases for his guerilla fighters in an area of 72,000 kilometers. There are



BALUCHISTAN

A Chronicle of Liberty Writ in Blood

Balochistan, being Pakistan's largest and westernmost province, hath for centuries been a land striving for its rights and freedoms. This chronology reciteth the tale of that unending struggle, a narrative woven from courage, sacrifice, and unwavering resolve:

1947 - A Nation Born, An End to Hope

From British India was formed Pakistan, which did alter the map of the subcontinent. Balochistan, especially the Khan of Kalat (the principal state of Balochistan), refused to join this new nation, expressing a desire to remain independent. This was a moment when the Baloch people did dream of determining their own future.

August 11th, 1947 - A Banner of Independence

The British Empire did recognize the state of Kalat in Balochistan as an independent nation. Kalat became a sovereign state and this was a symbol of Balochistan's autonomy. It was a day when the light of freedom did shine upon Balochistan.

March 27th, 1948 - Forcible Annexation

This dream of independence was soon shattered. The army of Pakistan did invade Kalat and forcibly annex it into Pakistan. After this annexation, Baloch leaders began a rebellion, as they considered it a violation of Balochistan's liberty. This is a wound that remaineth fresh even today.

1958-1959 - A Spark of Rebellion:

The second stage of the rebellion in Balochistan began when the Khan of Kalat revolted against Pakistan. This was a courage for which the Khan had to pay a price. The army of Pakistan did crush this rebellion with brutality and the Khan of Kalat was arrested.

1962-1969 - Tension and Oppression:

In this period, there was constant tension between Baloch leaders and the government of Pakistan. Rebel

many reserves of gas in Balochistan, and these rebel leaders wanted the government of Pakistan to share some of the income from these gas reserves with the tribal leaders as well. This war lasted for six years, but in the end the rebel soldiers wanting the independence of Balochistan got tired, and agreed to a ceasefire with President Yahya Khan. This glimpse of peace was fleeting, because the seeds of conflict were still buried in the ground.

In these elections of 1970, where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won a massive majority in East Pakistan, Zulfikar Bhutto's PPP managed to win in almost all provinces in West Pakistan – except Balochistan and North West Frontier Province. The National Awami Party, which was the party of pro-independence Balochs, won in Balochistan. Out of 300 seats in the National Assembly, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won 167 seats, while Bhutto's party won only 71 seats.

In the year of Our Lord 1971, a year of tumultuous upheaval in the annals of Pakistan, ere the close



of that year, Pakistan was sundered into two, and a new nation did arise, under the name of 'Bangladesh', erstwhile known as 'East Pakistan'. The tragedy of Pakistan's fragmentation did embolden yet more the hope for freedom in the hearts of the people of Balochistan.

In the Pakistan that remained, General Yahya Khan did greatly resent the triumph of the 'National Awami Party' in Balochistan. He did apprehend that these Baloch folk, in league with Iran, were about to foment a great conflict.

Taking no lesson from the error of Bangladesh, Pakistan did repeat the same ruthless stratagem in Balochistan – grievous oppression! All routes into Balochistan were closed. Aerial assaults were also made in some regions of Balochistan, where the Pakistani army did suspect the presence of Baloch insurgent bases. In sundry places, a fierce conflict did ensue between Baloch rebels and the Pakistani army. Thousands on both sides were slain. Many rebel Baloch leaders did succeed in reaching Afghanistan.

After this dreadful atrocity, repression, and conflict, there came a transient lull in the Baloch freedom movement. But this lull did give birth to a new form – an organized armed movement – the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). The rise of the BLA was the commencement of a new chapter in the freedom of

General Yahya Khan
feared that these Baloch
people were going to start
a major conflict along
with Iran.

Balochistan.

The people of Balochistan do believe that the government of Pakistan hath exploited their resources and denied them political and social rights. This is a grievance that hath taken root in the hearts of the people of Balochistan for decades.

The chief use of the wealth of Balochistan hath been by the army and the government of Pakistan. This region is one of the largest provinces of Pakistan, and its natural wealth is a significant contributor to Pakistan's economy. But the benefit of this doth not accrue to the local populace. The people here are still deprived of basic amenities such as electricity, water, health services, and education.



The natural gas of Balochistan hath been exploited to enrich the other provinces of Pakistan, but darkness lingers in the villages and cities of Balochistan. Whenever its people raise their voice for their rights, they must endure the oppression of the army.

Until the government and army of Pakistan are prepared to understand the real problems of Balochistan and seek a solution thereto, the struggle of the people of Balochistan shall continue. Although the present actions do indicate what the government, which is a puppet of the army, shall do, and the attitude of the army is progressing towards the opposite direction instead of progressing towards solving the problem. The recent arrest of Maharang Baloch is proof of this. In such a situation, the army itself appears to be preparing the ground for breaking its country apart again.

The Jaffar Express, was not merely the hijacking of a train, it was the call for freedom of an independent nation, which it hath now become necessary to hear and understand. Balochistan is a volcano, which may erupt at any moment, and the world should be prepared to face its consequences. This is a warning, and ignoring this warning can prove to be a great mistake. ●

activities increased in Balochistan, and the government of Pakistan arrested many Baloch leaders. This was an era when every attempt was made to crush dissent.

1973-1977 - The Greatest Rebellion, The Cruellest Oppression:

The greatest phase of rebellion in Balochistan began in 1973, when the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, ended Balochistan's autonomy and dissolved its assembly. This was a step which added fuel to the fire. To crush this rebellion, the army of Pakistan deployed more than 80,000 soldiers. Thousands of Baloch rebels and civilians were slain in this struggle. This was a massacre that can never be forgotten.

2004-2006 - The Rise of Unbroken Nationalism:

Rebel activities accelerated in Balochistan after 2004. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and other organizations took up arms against the government of Pakistan. The army of Pakistan took strong action against the rebels, in which prominent Baloch leaders such as Akiber Bugti were slain.

August 26th, 2006 - The Murder of a Symbol:

Nawab Akiber Bugti, a senior leader of Balochistan and a symbol of Baloch nationalism, was killed by the Pakistani army in a military operation. His murder further ignited the Baloch nationalists and gave a new direction to the rebellion in Balochistan. This was a sacrifice that strengthened the people further.

2009 - The Murder of Leaders, A Wave of Outrage:

Three major Baloch leaders - Sultan Baloch, Ghulam Muhammad Baloch, and Sher Muhammad Baloch - were arrested by the intelligence agencies of Pakistan, and later they were murdered. After these murders, there was even more instability in Balochistan. This was an atrocity that can never be forgiven.

2010-2013 - Missing Persons, Violation of Human Rights:

In this period, serious allegations were made against the army and intelligence agencies of Pakistan for



Balochistan: Assessing the Future

The assessment of Balochistan's future hinges upon several factors, among which are the attitude of the military, the internal political state of Pakistan, international geo-political circumstances, and the direction of the armed rebellion within Balochistan. In this discourse, we shall analyze Balochistan's future, focusing upon all these aspects. In beholding the future of Balochistan, three possibilities do emerge:

Whether the Struggle for Liberty and Autonomy Shall Continue?

The ongoing armed rebellion in Balochistan doth indicate that the demand for freedom there shall never wane. The rebel organizations and the Baloch populace shall continue to strive for their resources and political rights. If international support be forthcoming, steps towards the independence of Balochistan may be taken.

Further Oppression by Pakistan

The continuation of oppressive policies by the military and government of Pakistan in Balochistan is also a possibility. For Pakistan, maintaining control of Balochistan is strategically crucial, especially in the context of the CPEC. If the rebellion in Balochistan continues to grow, the military may take even harsher steps, which could worsen the situation there.

International Intervention and Regional Stability

If the conflict in Balochistan draws attention at the international level, then the involvement of America, China, India, and other nations may increase. Diplomatic intervention may be undertaken by the international community, which could open the path for talks to resolve the issue of Balochistan. ●

'disappearing' Baloch people. Thousands of Baloch activists, students, and rebels were disappeared. There were widespread protests against this all over Balochistan. This was a crime that humanity can never forget.

2018 - Opposition to CPEC, Exploitation of Resources:

Large scale protests were held in Balochistan against the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Baloch rebels believed that this project would further exploit their natural resources, whilst the local populace would not get any benefit from it. This was a fear that was coming true.

2020-2021 - Attacks by Rebels, Retaliatory Attacks by the Army:

Baloch rebel organizations launched several attacks on Pakistani army bases and CPEC-related projects. In response to this, the Pakistani army took strong action in Balochistan, which increased the conflict between civilians and rebels. This was a war in which there was no victor.

2022-2023 - Political Instability, The Rise of Rebels:

After the fall of Imran Khan's government in Pakistan, the Baloch rebels increased their attacks, taking advantage of the weak position of the government. Attacks were made on CPEC projects, railways, and army bases in Balochistan. This was an opportunity that the rebels did not let go.

2025 - The Hijacking of the Jaffar Express, The World's Attention:

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express. This event once again brought the struggle of Balochistan into the headlines at the international level, and showed that the fight for Balochistan's freedom is still continuing. This chronology shows that the people of Balochistan have been continuously fighting for their rights and freedom for the last 77 years, but the army and government of Pakistan have made every effort to crush this rebellion. ●

BALUCHISTAN

An Arena for GREAT POWERS

Balochistan, Pakistan's southwestern bastion, is not merely a treasury of mineral wealth for Pakistan alone, but is also a region of geo-political significance to the great powers of the world. It is a crossroads where ambitions collide, where the dreams of empires are shaped and shattered, and where strategies for future wars are quietly devised. Owing to its strategic geographical position and its natural resources, this region is more than a mere pawn on the international chessboard, but rather a linchpin where every move matters. Nations such as China, America, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia have been constantly making diplomatic moves to safeguard and expand their interests here, like skilled players engaged in a complex game. This significance of Balochistan relates not merely to its economic resources, but this region is also of extreme strategic importance, being situated near waterways such as the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

The unique geographical position of Balochistan, its abundant natural resources, and the adjacent sea routes render it highly attractive to the world's great powers. Imagine a treasure surrounded by empires, each yearning to secure the most precious piece. For this reason, Balochistan has become a hub of global power struggles, where each great power is striving to strengthen its presence and establish its dominion in the region. It is a game where the stakes are high and the rewards are even more alluring.

The geo-political significance of Balochistan is due to a number of reasons, which render it a prized jewel in the eyes of the great powers:



Geographical Position

Balochistan is located along Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast and is home to important maritime bases such as the Gwadar port. The Gwadar port, which is being developed by China, is situated near the strategic waterways of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, which are the main routes of the world's oil transport. Imagine this port as being like a locking point which controls access to the global energy markets. This increases the strategic importance of Balochistan.



Natural Resources:

Major minerals such as natural gas, oil, coal, copper, and gold are found in Balochistan. These resources not only make Balochistan economically significant, but this region is also a source of economic power for many nations. It is a treasure that attracts nations, each hoping to boost its economy and expand its sphere of influence. However, the benefit of these resources is not reaching the local populace of Balochistan, because the government and army of Pakistan are exploiting the natural resources of this region. It is an irony where the abundance of the land does not benefit its own people.



China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

The importance of Balochistan has increased even more due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This corridor connects China's western province of Xinjiang to the Gwadar port, and provides a vital route for China to reach the markets of Central Asia, West Asia, and Africa. It is a modern Silk Road, providing a land-based shortcut for trade and influence. Along with this, it also assists in securing China's energy supply routes.

China has strengthened its presence in Balochistan, especially through the Gwadar port. Gwadar is of extreme strategic importance to China, because this port provides China with a direct and quick route to reach the oil routes of the Persian Gulf. This port is like a lifeline for China, providing energy security and economic development. In addition, the CPEC project is a vital part of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), which helps China to reach global trade routes.

China has invested more than \$62 billion in the development of Gwadar and is putting pressure on the government and army of Pakistan to maintain stability in Balochistan. China, like a master strategist, understands the need for political stability to secure its investments. However, the security concerns of China have increased due to the repeated attacks by Baloch rebels on China's investments and workers and engineers. China's aim is that political stability should be maintained in Balochistan, so that its projects can be completed without any hindrance.

On the other hand, Balochistan has strategic importance for America because it is situated near Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf. The Shamsi Airbase in Balochistan was at one time used for drone attacks, which was a vital part of the American campaign against terrorism. This region acts as a convenient platform for counter-terrorism operations. Although America does not directly intervene militarily in Balochistan, it remains diplomatically active to counter China's increasing influence.

America is continuously holding Pakistan to account for human rights abuses in Balochistan, and is putting

pressure on Pakistan regarding the activities being carried out by China in Gwadar. America, like a vigilant sentinel, is committed to controlling the expansion of China in the region. America considers Balochistan to be strategically important because it is situated near the Persian Gulf and this provides easy access to the energy resources of West Asia.

As far as India is concerned, Balochistan is a sensitive issue for India. India has, on many occasions, criticized Pakistan for violations of human rights in Balochistan. Accusations have also been made against India for supporting the rebels of Balochistan, although India has never admitted this. India sees the Balochistan issue as a diplomatic weapon to put pressure on Pakistan. It is a complex game where the line between sympathy and strategic interests often becomes blurred.

India's main objective is that instability should be maintained on Pakistan's western borders, so that the attention of the Pakistani army remains focused on internal problems. It is a classic strategy where securing one's own benefits can be done by keeping neighbors occupied. Along with this, the CPEC project is a cause for concern for India, because it passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The development of the Gwadar port is also a security challenge for India, because it provides a strategic advantage to Pakistan and China.

Incidentally, Iran is situated adjacent to the western part of Balochistan and the Baloch population also resides in its southeastern region. Iran is concerned that the Baloch rebellion may not spread from





Symbolic Image

Pakistan to its region. It is necessary for Iran to maintain stability in Balochistan so that instability does not spread to its border region. As a regional player, Iran focuses on maintaining stability in its neighborhood.

Furthermore, Iran's Chabahar port is also situated near Gwadar and is supported by India. The aim of the Chabahar port is to provide an alternative to Gwadar, whereby an economic and strategic partnership has developed between Iran and India.

The situation in Balochistan is important for Afghanistan because it has been a safe haven for the Taliban and other terrorist organizations. The Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI, has for long been using Balochistan to protect its interests in Afghanistan. It is easy to provide military and logistical support in Afghanistan via Balochistan. Afghanistan, a country stricken by conflict, sees Balochistan as a source of both stability and instability.

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have increased after the rule of the Taliban, and Balochistan is playing an important role in this diplomatic tussle. Pakistan is trying to maintain stability in Balochistan so that its interests in Afghanistan are protected.

Albeit, Russia is not directly involved in Balochistan, yet it is strengthening its position in the region through its relations with Pakistan and China. The growing proximity of Russia with China and Pakistan doth render it a key player in the geo-political game in this region. This is a game where allies are ever-shifting and the balances of power are constantly changing. Furthermore, Russia aims to further strengthen its diplomatic presence in Central and West Asia.

Balochistan today remains a focal point of diplomatic contention for the world's leading great powers. Its natural resources, strategic position, and proximity to global trade routes render it immensely important. China, America, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia have all been pursuing diplomatic moves here to protect their respective geo-political and economic interests. It is a dance where each is trying to advance, but none is entirely in control.

The situation in Balochistan may become even more complex in the coming years, especially as the growing tensions among the great powers and the competition for economic interests continue. In this geo-political arena, the future of Balochistan is uncertain, and its fate is bound to the intricate interplay among the powers in the region and beyond. ●



HARD STATE, SOFT STATE

*OUR violence is counterterrorism;
theirs is terrorism.*



Ashraf Jahangir Qazi

Recently, the army chief addressed parliament after the Jaffar Express train attack in Balochistan. He said Pakistan had to become a “hard state” to fight militancy and asked how long would countless lives be sacrificed in a soft state, and how long would governance gaps be filled by the blood of soldiers and martyrs.

The global community also condemned the incident as an act of terror. Nevertheless, human acts, including criminal acts, have context and cause which need to be understood to ensure they are not repeated. This has never happened in Balochistan. Since independence, it has been overtly and/or covertly ruled by the

centre. Protests against all kinds of exploitation and denial of human and political rights are equated with disloyalty, and when in desperation they lead to insurgencies they are mercilessly crushed as acts of rebellion, treason, and terror.

The number of Baloch killed, Baloch crippled and wounded, Baloch tortured, Baloch missing, Baloch families forever traumatised, and the Baloch intelligentsia almost irretrievably alienated has, over the decades, added up to maybe millions. Akhtar Mengal, former chief minister of Balochistan who is a political moderate and son of the revered Baloch leader, Ataullah Mengal, has warned the situation in



Balochistan today is the biggest threat to Pakistan. Moreover, Baloch alienation has linked up with increasing Pakhtun alienation. This enlarges the problem beyond any military solution. Accordingly, continued military action will only provide neighbours with increased opportunities and incentives to interfere which would eventually render the situation beyond control.

Cynical politicians in Punjab used to say “Balochistan yahan se nahin dikhta” (Balochistan is not seen from here.) With this attitude the problem has metastasized, and today the whole of Pakistan has become Balochistan while Pakistan is being transformed into ‘Greater Punjab’. The last time a ‘Greater Punjab’ was attempted in the form of One Unit it led to the breakup of Pakistan. Accordingly, our national decision-makers need to be aware that ill-considered policies may have short-term gains but far more severe and irreparable longer-term consequences. Unfortunately, as a country, we never learn or are never permitted to learn from our many disasters.

The concept of a “soft state” was coined by Swedish economist and sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, who wrote his famous Asian Drama in 1968. The concept has now evolved into that of a “failing state”. Myrdal defined a soft state as one “characterised by weak governance, a lack of effective law enforcement, and a general societal and political indiscipline”. This almost exactly

Akhtar Mengal, former chief minister of Balochistan who is a political moderate and son of the revered Baloch leader, Ataullah Mengal, has warned the situation in Balochistan today is the biggest threat to Pakistan. Moreover, Baloch alienation has linked up with increasing Pakhtun alienation. This enlarges the problem beyond any military solution.

describes the political state of Pakistan today. Reliance on the use of force to resolve complex political challenges is not an indication of a strong or hard state. It is, on the contrary, a demonstration of a weak soft state shying away from seriously addressing such issues with an irrelevant show of state power against its own citizens.

Myrdal notes that in South Asian countries, despite talk about the need for social and economic revolutions, policymakers “tread most warily in order not to disrupt the traditional social order”. As a result, “they remain soft states that cannot accomplish what



they need to." What is true of society and the economy applies also to nation building. A military 'unity of command' approach can never resolve complex historical, identity, class conflict, resource sharing, sociopolitical, and institutional challenges. The pretence that it can is actually symptomatic of a soft 'no can do' state pretending to be a hard 'can do' state. Sixty years later, India is the only South Asian state to have substantially emerged — if neither completely nor irreversibly — from this soft state syndrome. Tragically, Pakistan remains stuck in it.

In 2011, Prof Anatol Lieven published his book *Pakistan: A Hard Country*.¹ Interestingly, he considered 'Requiem for a Country' as an alternative title. His description of Pakistan still applies, ie, "divided, disorganised, economically backward, corrupt, violent, unjust, often savagely oppressive towards the poor and women, and home to extremely dangerous forms of extremism and terrorism". While Pakistan's participation in America's 'war on terror' alleviated the



According to Lieven, while the state of Pakistan is soft, its society is hard and enduring. It is resistant to radical change.

immediate threat of terrorism, it addressed none of its deeper causes. As a result, we are where we are.

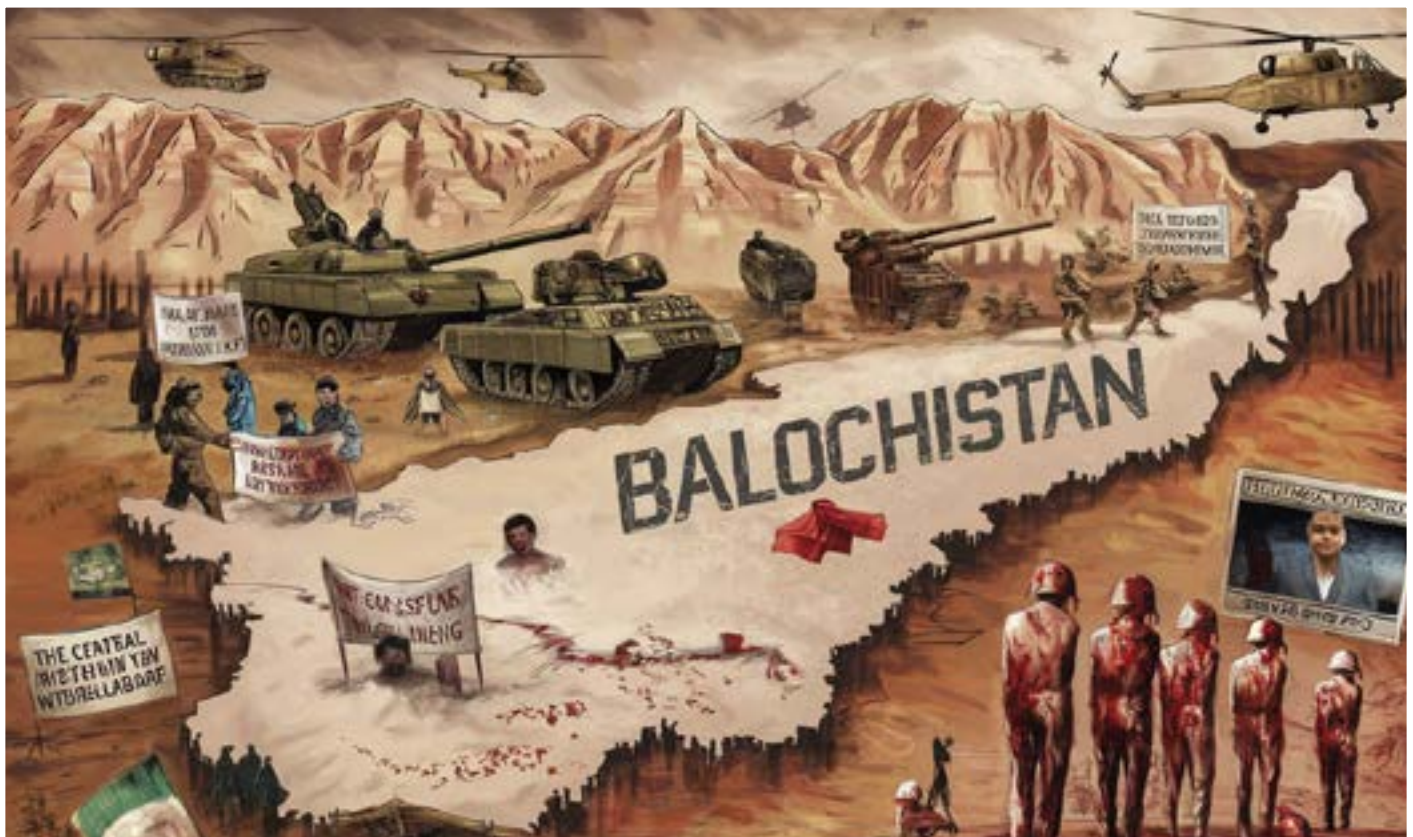
According to Lieven, while the state of Pakistan is soft, its society is hard and enduring. It is resistant to radical change. He suggests it is stuck in some kind of low-level equilibrium and oddly enough this low-level resilience ensures Pakistan's survival rather than anything the state attempts to do. One might ask whether this is a blessing or a curse. It reminds one of the Chinese saying "May you live in interesting times!" And in Pakistan we are indeed living in interesting but treacherous times.

The interconnected challenges facing the world today, as listed in the annual reports of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, include climate heating and its consequences; the threat of nuclear war; pandemics waiting to happen; unregulated artificial intelligence development; democratic deficits widening as a result of fascist, racist and far-right takeovers in the US and Europe; genocidal policies unleashed on the Middle East by Israel, and threatened in South Asia by India according to two 'genocide alerts' by

Genocide Watch; etc. A failing state, whether caused by a weak state or a hard society, or the reverse, has almost no chance of longer-term survival.

What is absolutely required is a Nelson Mandela-like initiative to help heal the country and bring about a national reconciliation. The emphasis would be on putting our tragic past behind us and holding people accountable, but not on prosecuting responsible individuals for their past crimes. This may be unacceptable to many victims, but it should remove any fear of redressing the deep wrong done to the nation on Feb 8, 2024, and begin the process of restoring the image of the military without compromising on civilian supremacy, judicial and parliamentary independence, essential socioeconomic reforms, and undiluted constitutional and democratic governance. There need not be any losers on this road to Pakistan's liberation. ●

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Sandeep Kumar

PAKISTAN'S ARMY

From Protector to Oppressor?

On the occasion of Pakistan Day, the 23rd of March, the Pakistani Army staged a display of its might, yet behind this facade of power lies a stark truth. Today, the Pakistani Army finds itself internally divided and increasingly weakened, primarily due to its brutal treatment of its own citizenry and its misguided policies in combating terrorism.

Of late, terrorist attacks against the Pakistani Army have increased, but even more grave is the fact that the military has begun to oppress its own people, igniting the flames of dissent amongst the lower ranks. Discontent within the ranks is swiftly rising, with various reports indicating deep resentment among the rank and file. Many soldiers are now openly



demanding the resignation of the Army Chief. This internal division and such a state of dissension have cast serious doubts upon the effectiveness of the military.

The Pakistani Army's 'anti-terrorism' campaigns appear to be utterly failing. These campaigns, founded solely on repression and tyranny, have neither eradicated terrorism nor garnered popular support. The arrest of peaceful protesters, such as Mehrang Baloch in Balochistan, on charges of terrorism only serves to escalate discontent among the local populace. This brutality has further incensed the people of Balochistan, and the number of protests there is on the rise.

One of the Pakistani Army's greatest failures lies in its treatment of Balochistan. The Army has regarded Balochistan as a colony, treating its people in much the same way as colonial powers treated their subject populations. Despite the deployment of the 11th Corps and other military forces in large numbers throughout Balochistan, the region has spiraled beyond the government's control.

A major factor contributing to this failure is that the Pakistani Army has consistently used terrorism as

a strategic tool, but this strategy is now rebounding against it. Terrorist groups supported and trained by the Army are now launching attacks against the military itself. The manner in which the military has approached the task of combating terrorism—through bombings, shelling, and the oppression of its own citizens—has proven to be utterly ineffective.

Serious questions are also being raised about the situation in Balochistan within the Pakistani Parliament. Senior leaders, such as Maulana Fazlur Rehman and former Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, have warned that Pakistan's geographical boundaries may soon shift. This statement clearly reflects the government's diminishing control in Balochistan and the growing rebellion there.

Once renowned for its professionalism, the Pakistani Army is now seen by its own citizens as an oppressive force. Accusations of extorting money from merchants in Islamabad, violations of human rights, and violence in Balochistan have severely tarnished the military's reputation. Even the international media is now beginning to focus on the issue of Balochistan.

The Pakistani Army stands today at a juncture where its strength and effectiveness are being seriously questioned. The military's approach to combating terrorism is not only failing, but also resulting in even greater discontent among the population. The Army's brutality in Balochistan and its colonial treatment of the people there have further aggravated the situation. Simultaneously, dissent within the ranks and resentment among the rank and file have cast a shadow on the military's unity and discipline.

The Pakistani Army, once known for its professionalism and discipline, has become an oppressive force for its own people. Unless this situation is rectified with haste, Pakistan may face grave challenges to its internal stability and national unity. The Army must understand that the solution to terrorism lies not in repression and tyranny, but in winning the trust and support of the people. If the Army treats its citizens with respect and adopts a just and inclusive approach to combating terrorism, it can not only defeat terrorism, but also regain its reputation and the people's trust. Otherwise, the growing discontent within the military may shake the very foundations of Pakistan. ●

DELIMITATION

Reshaping India's Federal Future?



Santu Das



The Republic of India, a federal union as defined by Article 1 of its Constitution, finds itself at a critical juncture. While this federal structure serves to weave the nation's diversity into a tapestry of unity, it also gives rise to enduring challenges concerning the balance of power between the central government and the constituent states, as well as the equitable representation of regional interests. Through constitutional articles and amendments, efforts have been made to ensure substantial autonomy for the states, yet ultimate authority remains vested in the Union government. The matter of delimitation emerges as a significant facet of this federal framework, wielding considerable influence over the distribution of

power and political representation between the states and the center.

The primary objective of delimitation lies in the redrawing of parliamentary and assembly constituencies according to population figures, ensuring a uniform representation across electoral districts. However, in 1976, the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution, enacted to encourage population control, deferred delimitation based on the 1971 census until the year 2026. As this date draws ever closer, the question of delimitation has resurfaced, with the likelihood of a Delimitation Commission undertaking this task anew. Yet, should this process be improperly executed, it could rekindle dormant regional tensions, echoing the linguistic and statehood movements of times past.

A hallmark of the Indian federal structure is the division of powers and responsibilities between the central government and the states, as enshrined in Article 246 and the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. The process of delimitation is governed by Articles 81 and 170. Article 81 regulates the allocation of Lok Sabha (lower house) seats, ensuring equitable representation based on population within each state. Similarly, Article 170 regulates the readjustment of seats within state legislative assemblies.

The formation of the Delimitation Commission seeks to redraw electoral boundaries in accordance with population shifts, with the aim of according each citizen's vote equal weight. But when, in 1976, delimitation based on the 1971 census was postponed to promote population control, it was stipulated that no new delimitation would occur until 2026. This decision sought to safeguard those states that had vigorously pursued population control measures from being penalized for their efforts. Now, as this moratorium nears its end, the debate concerning fresh delimitation has flared anew.

If the 2026 delimitation process is based on current population data, it could instigate a novel form of political contention between northern and southern India. Southern states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, having successfully implemented population control initiatives, fear a reduction in their Lok Sabha seat

allocations following delimitation. Conversely, northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, with their higher population growth rates, stand to gain seats. This could generate an imbalance in political representation, disrupting the equilibrium of the federal framework.

This delimitation imbalance extends beyond mere political power, potentially exacerbating financial and developmental disparities. Given India's centralized fiscal system, where state governments derive a substantial portion of their revenue from the center, parliamentary representation plays a pivotal role in safeguarding state financial interests. If a state experiences a reduction in its Lok Sabha seats, its ability to secure central financial assistance could be compromised.

Delimitation may also exacerbate regional and linguistic inequalities. For example, should northern states gain more Lok Sabha seats, the influence of Hindi-speaking regions could increase. This situation could trigger cultural and linguistic discontent among non-Hindi speaking states, particularly in the south. Even now, Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister M. K. Stalin is voicing his opposition to this issue, viewing it as an injustice against southern states.

Furthermore, an increase in the representation of highly populous states in the Lok Sabha could also impact political and financial decisions, marginalizing the interests and priorities of southern states. Such a scenario could amplify existing fissures within the federal structure and incite regional resentment. Seeking a resolution to this delimitation quandary requires the consideration of several alternatives. The simplest solution, may involve a further postponement of delimitation, as suggested by M. K. Stalin. However, this remedy would be merely palliative, serving only to defer long-term problems. It would also contravene democratic principles, violating the principle of equal representation.

This delimitation exercise must not be viewed as merely a game of numbers, but rather as an opportunity to factor in considerations of development, progress, and the quality of governance. Only then can India strengthen its federal framework and advance towards a more robust and equitable democratic system. ●

BOOSTING FIREPOWER

India shifts towards private defense manufacturing



Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retired)

Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) in defense is the flavor of the season in India. The country's defense manufacturing sector is rapidly emerging as a cornerstone of New Delhi's strategic and economic ambitions, and government policies are focusing on making sure that modern weaponry is both designed and manufactured in India, or, at the very least, is "Made-in-India."



The Indian military has identified over 5,000 items that must be manufactured in the country rather than imported. Called the positive indigenization list (PIL), the initiative began in 2020 and aims to offer defense items to be indigenized by Indian manufacturers, including small and medium enterprises and startups. It has already yielded results, according to the Defense Ministry.

Defense production and exports are being monitored at the highest levels of the executive. Ambitious targets are being set: 75% of the defense capital budget has to be spent procuring India-made products. The private sector is being encouraged to enter defense production, which was hitherto public-dominated. Some big industrial groups have entered defense, but there are also large numbers of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups that are producing international quality components and subsystems to global manufacturers.

Historic shifts

It was different for the newly independent India. In the early 1950s, the country's economy was greatly influenced by the Soviet "socialist" approach, and evolved its five-year plans. Perhaps that was the best for those times.

Throughout the 1950s, there was Soviet assistance and technology transfer in multiple industrial sectors such as steel, defense, railways, construction equipment, metal, mining, petrochemicals, and much more to India. A very important part was the building of military aircraft, aero-engines and avionics factories. At one point the Indian armed forces had nearly 85% of military equipment of Soviet or Russian origin.

Back then, India's private sector was relatively small and primarily focused on meeting the daily needs of the masses. The government utilized public funding to establish essential infrastructure, nationalizing key industries such as banking, car manufacturing, and aircraft production. This approach may have been suitable for that time.

Over the long term, both public and private sectors exhibited distinct strengths and weaknesses. The public sector benefits from government funding but operates under the bureaucratic control of government departments. Decision-making can be complex, and progress monitoring is similarly cumbersome. With taxpayers' money at stake, accountability tends to be lower. Salaries are fixed according to government scales, and once hired, employees find it difficult to be dismissed for poor performance, resulting in generally lower productivity compared to the private sector.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, Russia realized the need to compete with the rest of the world through market forces. India too realized that it had to diversify its defense sourcing.

After the economic reforms of 1991 that deregulated markets, reduced import tariffs, and lowered taxes, India's economy began to grow. This growth enabled significant investment in the defense sector and marked the emergence of a robust private sector. Manufacturing capabilities expanded, resulting in the mass production of cars and motorcycles. Additionally, the previously protected defense sector began to open up to private players.

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The private sector attracts top talent with competitive salaries and can quickly dismiss non-performers. Its efficiency allows tasks to be completed with fewer workers, and it can easily raise funds from banks and international institutions. Unlike the public sector, which faces complex governmental approvals for joint ventures and foreign collaborations, the private sector can pursue these opportunities swiftly. Foreign corporations prefer working directly with Indian companies to avoid bureaucratic hurdles. Additionally, the private sector can acquire essential technologies and raw materials based on commercial needs, improving operational agility.

Interestingly, 41 of the top global defense companies are from the US. All are private. These companies had \$317 billion in arms revenues, which was half of the

total revenue of the top 100 companies. The top five arms companies were all US-based. Nine Chinese, three Indian, and two Russian companies are in the top 100. All these were public sector companies.

India's initiatives

New Delhi has launched a host of programs and policies in the past few years to attract private

public sector banks to develop loan schemes tailored for the defense industry, with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) already offering specific options.

The government has also insisted that state-run companies and agencies in defense, including the largest one, the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), which was created in the late



companies to participate in defense manufacturing.

This includes Innovation for Defense Excellence (iDEX), which aims to spark innovation in defense and aerospace by creating prototypes that enhance national security; and the Defense India Startup Challenge, which supports startups and small and medium companies in building prototypes and commercializing solutions for national defense. Additionally, the 2020 Defense Acquisition Procedure reserves certain orders (worth of up to 1 billion rupees or \$11.5 million) for small and medium sector companies.

The Defense Ministry has also encouraged industry bodies to create dedicated defense chapters and help connect the industry with the government and address concerns. Lastly, the government is pushing

1950s to support defense equipment research, should offer support to the private sector by providing their facilities.

Setting up an independent nodal umbrella body for testing, trial, and certification requirements of defense systems should improve access to existing facilities while reducing the need for investments to recreate the capital-intensive infrastructure.

Currently, India has 16 Defense Public Sector Units (DPSUs), over 430 licensed companies, and approximately 16,000 MSMEs. Notably, 21% of this production comes from the private sector, bolstering India's journey toward defense self-reliance.

There has long been a feeling that state-owned

defense companies are keeping their technology R&D cards very close to their chest and are reluctant to share with private sector. They also continue to treat them as competitors rather than partners. Meanwhile, the government has offered increased governance and control rights to foreign companies.

While major foreign defense manufacturers have chosen to partner with major Indian conglomerates like Tata, Reliance, Adani, L&T, and others to invest in defense in India, similar projects with the public sector have been few.

The Indian government's defense procurement policies have lured several global players, such as Airbus, BAE, Boeing, Collins Aerospace, Dassault Aviation, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Pilatus, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Rafael, Safran, and Thales, to set up operations and form joint ventures in India.

For instance, Lockheed Martin and Boeing joined with Tata group manufacturing aero-structures and sub-systems for global supplies, while Adani group is making UAVs and drones with Israeli's Elbit group.

The Airbus C295 is built by Tata group in India. This first-of-its-kind 'Make in India' aerospace program in the private sector is expected to involve more than two dozen small and medium-sized suppliers, producing over 60% of the 30,000 detail parts, sub-assemblies, and component assemblies locally.

The Defense Ministry issued an expression of interest (EoI) to the private sector to participate in the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) program through a special-purpose vehicle. The project will include ADA, HAL and a selected private company under the PPP model. The name is expected to be announced by mid-2025.

There are many private companies making defense electronics, large aero-structures components, advanced technology components, and sub-systems. Dynamatic Technologies makes assemblies of vertical fins for Sukhoi 30 MKI fighters. They are also supplying aero-structures to Airbus for its A320 family of aircraft and the wide-body 330 aircraft. Hyderabad's VEM Technologies manufactures centet fuselage for LCA Tejas.

The BrahMos is JV is a joint venture between the DRDO and Russian NPO Mashinostroyeniya, which

together have formed BrahMos Aerospace and have had significant success in missile production and exports. The AK-203 assault rifle is being produced in India through a joint venture between Russia and India. Russia has recently offered to make the fifth-generation Sukhoi Su-57 in India through a JV with Indian partners. Interestingly, the Russian Army wears boots crafted in India's Hajipur district in Bihar.

Ambitious targets

Overall, India's aerospace and defense sector has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, with the private sector contributing a staggering 20% to its turnover. Developing a strong research base in India and a robust supply chain for components and sub-systems, most currently sourced from abroad, will help create the market for civilian and defense systems in the aerospace sector.

Domestic defense production in India has already reached \$14.5 billion in the 2023-24 financial year. The target to procure 75% of all defense capital acquisitions domestically will give a huge boost to the "Make-in-India" initiative. The target is \$19 billion in the current fiscal year with aspirations to achieve \$34 billion in defense production by 2029.

Meanwhile, India's defense exports reached \$2.4 billion last year, and the government set a defense export target of \$5.7 billion by 2028-29. Currently, India exports to over 100 nations, with the top three destinations for defense exports in 2023-24 being the USA, France, and Armenia.

To move beyond traditional defense manufacturing, India needs to boost public funding for investments in key future technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, autonomous vehicles, hypersonic technology, directed energy weapons, augmented and virtual reality, and blockchain. These investments will lay the groundwork for future innovations in both commercial and military applications. Developing intellectual property is vital for India to secure a prominent place in global defense manufacturing. ●

Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retired), an Indian Air Force veteran fighter test pilot and is the former Director-General of the Center for Air Power Studies in New Delhi. This article first appeared on RT.com. We are republishing it here with due courtesy.



NITISH'S LEGACY

Succession or Dissolution?



Sandip Kumar

Of late, a question of considerable import hath arisen within the politics of Bihar: What shall become of the Janata Dal (United) following the tenure of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar? Will this party, in time, be subsumed into the Bharatiya Janata Party, or shall Nishant Kumar, son of Nitish, assume the mantle of leadership within the JD(U)?

At present, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar prepares for what may prove to be his final electoral contest, the



Bihar Legislative Assembly elections being but six months hence. His aim is to secure a fifth term as Chief Minister. Kumar's current focus lies in navigating the intricate politics of coalition with a strengthened BJP, and in achieving victory in the forthcoming Bihar elections.

In this essay, we have endeavoured to analyse the question, "Who after Nitish?" This query is not merely a matter of political discourse or academic consideration, but rather serves to redefine the very identity of the JD(U). Whereas other parties rest upon stout ideological foundations, the JD(U) is

largely identified solely by the persona and political adroitness of Nitish Kumar. Viewing the present state of affairs, it seemeth that "Nitish is the JD(U), and the JD(U) is Nitish." Though this personality-driven leadership hath been effective in consolidating power, it hath also suppressed the development of a robust second-tier leadership capable of seamlessly assuming the reins.

Here, several potential scenarios present themselves. One possibility is that Nishant Kumar, son of Nitish Kumar, shall formally enter the realm of politics and eventually emerge as the heir



apparent. The recent increase in Nishant's public appearances lends credence to this notion, suggesting a well-planned effort to introduce him to the political sphere. However, this path is fraught with challenges. Nishant's previous disinclination toward politics, coupled with Nitish Kumar's own opposition to dynastic succession, pose a significant obstacle upon this road. Moreover, declaring Nishant as the successor could ignite discontent and rebellion within the party ranks, potentially leading to a schism within the JD(U) itself, as senior leaders seek alternative political havens within the BJP, the RJD, or the Congress.

Though the possibility of internal discord cannot be discounted, elevating Nishant may prove to be the most practical option for the continued existence of the JD(U). The argument being that a clear line of succession, even if dynastic in nature, provides a central point of focus for the party and forestalls an anarchic power struggle among senior leaders such as Lallan Singh, Ashok Chaudhary, or Sanjay Jha. In the absence of a designated heir, the party

could become a rudderless vessel, susceptible to being preyed upon by rival parties, particularly the BJP, which might perceive an opportunity to strengthen its power in Bihar by absorbing the JD(U) into its own ranks.

Examples such as the smooth transition of Akhilesh Yadav within the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Lalu Prasad Yadav's strategic placement of Tejashwi Yadav as his Deputy, may illuminate the path forward. The strategic utilisation of cabinet positions and other incentives, while in power, may serve to quell potential dissent and maintain party unity. Conversely, the experience of the Congress Party, with Sonia Gandhi's transference of power to Rahul Gandhi occurring while the party

was out of power, serves as a cautionary tale against internal strife and the potential marginalisation of experienced leaders.

Therefore, should Nishant desire to enter the field of politics, now is the opportune moment. It would establish him as the de facto leader and permit Nitish to employ the power of office to control

Comparisons with other regional parties facing succession crises, such as BJD in Odisha, AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, and BSP in Uttar Pradesh, fortify the argument that a clear succession is essential for the continued existence of regional parties.



any potential insurrection. Though Nishant's lack of political experience is a legitimate concern, the long-term stability of the JD(U) may outweigh this deficiency. This strategic manoeuvre of entrusting the reins of the party to Nishant may effectively prevent an existential implosion within the JD(U) following the departure of Nitish Kumar.

However, alternative scenarios cannot be disregarded. In the absence of a designated successor, a vacuum may well arise, leading to a fierce competition for control of the JD(U). This internal discord could weaken the party and render it vulnerable to a hostile takeover by the BJP. The BJP, perceiving an opportunity to bolster its influence in Bihar, could actively encourage defections and press for a merger, effectively absorbing the JD(U) and erasing its independent identity.

Furthermore, party affiliation here is often fluid, and historical context suggests that disgruntled JD(U) leaders may find it relatively easy to switch allegiances, further destabilising the party in the post-Nitish era.

Comparisons with other regional parties facing succession crises, such as Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha, Jayalalitha's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in

Tamil Nadu, and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), fortify the argument that a clear succession is essential for the continued existence of regional parties. These parties, lacking either a strong family dynasty or a well-defined successor, are wrestling with internal conflicts and dwindling political fortunes.

In conclusion, the future of the JD(U) following Nitish Kumar is shrouded in uncertainty. Though elevating Nishant Kumar as successor presents a viable, albeit contentious, solution, it is not without peril. The possibility of rebellion and internal fragmentation remains a significant threat. On the other hand, the absence of a clear successor could lead to a chaotic power struggle and, ultimately, the absorption of the JD(U) by the BJP or other regional factions. The coming months shall prove pivotal in determining the fate of the JD(U). Nitish Kumar's capacity to navigate the complexities of succession planning whilst simultaneously securing victory in the upcoming elections shall ultimately determine whether the JD(U) faces an internal implosion or succeeds in reorganising itself for a new era. The destiny of the party hinges upon a delicate balance between dynastic succession, party unity, and the ever-shifting political landscape of Bihar. ●



A NEW GEOPOLITICAL TURN Is the Transatlantic Alliance Fracturing?



Rachel- Rizzo

Will Trump's second term forever alter the long-standing partnership between the United States and Europe? In this analysis, discover how Europe is now being compelled to take the reins of its own security and foreign policy.



Donald Trump, synonymous with controversy, delivered a statement during an election rally in South Carolina in February 2024 that sent shockwaves through political circles in both America and Europe. Referencing a conversation he had with the president of a “large European country,” he stated that if that country did not pay its share of dues to NATO, the United States would not defend it. Furthermore, Trump added that he would encourage Russian President Putin to “do whatever he wants” to countries in NATO that “don’t pay their bills.”

This statement immediately deepened the chasm of distrust between the United States and Europe. President Biden and European leaders saw it as a sign of a complete breakdown of transatlantic relations in a potential second Trump term. Although this fear may have been exaggerated, the policies of Trump’s second term have made it clear that some major changes are coming to the relationship between the US and Europe. Trump and his team are prepared to fundamentally alter and reshape US-Europe relations under a new set of rules and expectations.

Following the end of World War II and the Cold War,

the United States and Europe worked under close cooperation. European countries have long believed that the ultimate guarantee of their security rested with the United States. America’s security guarantees and its military presence on the European continent not only enabled the US to counter Russia but also helped it establish itself as a superpower across the globe. However, while this provided Europe with resilience to deal with any threat, it also benefited the US by giving it considerable influence over European foreign policy.

In the eyes of transatlantic leaders, this contract has been successful thus far. European countries share democratic values with the United States. The European Union is America’s largest bilateral trade and investment partner. Europe helps the US manage a “liberal international order.” From this perspective, the security guarantee provided by the United States to Europe is a small price to pay for all of these benefits.

But Donald Trump and those working in his administration have now changed their perspective on this. These are the people now determining America’s priorities. It is only from this way of



thinking that we can understand how US-Europe relations may evolve during Trump's second term. According to Trump's allies, America has pampered Europe too much. The US attitude towards Europe has been too lenient for the past 35 years, and European countries have been unilaterally benefiting from this. The United States spends a great deal on the security of Europe, and because of this, America cannot project its power in other places, while European countries do not have to spend as much on their own security because of the American guarantee. The European countries use the money they save to spend on their social security programs.

European countries should no longer expect that US-Europe relations will remain the same in a second Trump term. US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth made this clear in no uncertain terms during his first trip to NATO in February. He told his European allies that he

was "here to say directly and plainly that some harsh strategic realities prevent the United States from focusing primarily on the security of Europe." He also said that for their security, "European countries must step up and take the lead." This message from the United States surprised European countries, but the idea is not new. Dwight D. Eisenhower and previous American presidents have also complained that Europe has become accustomed to riding on America's back.

The big question now is how to give these changes the cloak of reality and improve transatlantic relations. During Trump's second term, European countries must be prepared for a slight decrease in American support for the security of Europe. There may also be a decrease in the presence of US troops on the European continent. Trump has already said that he wants to reduce the number of US troops in Europe to 20,000. Moreover, Trump



File Photo



The big question now is how to give these changes the cloak of reality and improve transatlantic relations. During Trump's second term, European countries must be prepared for a slight decrease in American support for the security of Europe.

access to European markets and its critical infrastructure. This gives China the power to fulfill its global economic ambitions. Although it is difficult to predict what the long-term consequences of this will be, it is certain that the European Union (and various European countries) must be prepared to face American pressure regarding China policy for the next four years. During this time, Europe may feel that it is being forced to choose a side. Europe's view on China policy is already fragmented, so American pressure may further weaken this already fractured approach.

The early months of Trump's second term have already put the transatlantic partnership in crisis. European countries have been shocked by the harsh messages that American leaders have given to Europe at the Munich Security Conference.

has also said that he wants to demand subsidies from his European allies for the remaining troops stationed in Europe.

Besides defense and security, the political landscape in the US and Europe is also cracking under the pressure of different norms and values. US Vice President JD Vance made this clear during his speech at the Munich Security Conference in February. According to Vance, Trump's team believes that Europe's threat is internal. He accused Europe of retreating from those traditional democratic values that have historically been shared with the United States, primarily including the issues of free expression, religious freedom, and migration.

This also means that Trump may now take a highly transactional approach to Europe, especially with those countries that are not politically aligned with him. Trump's stance on Europe's economic dependence on China may be clearly visible. Trump and his team believe that China is having its cake and eating it too in the case of Europe. China has direct

However, they should not have been surprised by this. When Biden gave the "America is Back" slogan after becoming president in 2020, European countries should have understood its implications at that time.

Europe is once again in its former state. European countries are now trying to understand how to deal with the United States for the next four years. Trump and his team are trying to reinvent 80 years of historical tradition. Although in the current situation it can be said that the relationship between the United States and Europe will remain intact, there may be some fundamental changes in these relations. Now Europe must prepare to stand on its own two feet. What will happen? Will Europe be ready to face this challenge? Will it be able to take control of its own security and foreign policy? These questions will shape geopolitics in the coming years. ●

(Author **Rachel Rizzo** is Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council's Europe Center.)



Manoj Kumar

CHINA'S STRATEGY

for TIBET's Future

The control of the reincarnation process of the Dalai Lama is a strategic move by China, aimed at cementing its influence over Tibet and shaping the future of Tibetan Buddhism. This issue has become a critical point in Beijing's broader efforts to maintain political control in Tibet, and its significance can only be understood by exploring the deep cultural, religious, and political weight of the Dalai Lama institution.

The Dalai Lama holds a unique position as both a spiritual leader and a political symbol for Tibetans worldwide. For centuries, the Dalai Lama has not only guided the Tibetan Buddhist community but also served as a symbol of national unity for Tibet. The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has used his international platform to advocate for Tibetan autonomy and to preserve the unique culture and identity of Tibet, often opposing China's efforts to integrate Tibet fully into the Chinese state. His global stature has made him a significant figure, not only within Tibetan society but also on the international stage, often placing him in conflict with Beijing's vision of Tibet as an integral part of China.

China perceives the Dalai Lama's influence, especially among the Tibetan diaspora and within Tibet itself,

as a threat to its control. The Chinese government, therefore, has taken steps to assert its control over the selection process of the next Dalai Lama. This is not just about managing religious matters but a deliberate move to ensure Tibet's political and cultural integration into China. By overseeing the reincarnation process, Beijing aims to curb any future Dalai Lama's potential to challenge the Chinese state's authority.

Beijing has justified its involvement in the reincarnation process by referring to historical precedents, particularly the Qing Dynasty's influence over Tibetan affairs. While the historical legitimacy of these claims is subject to debate, China's intention is clear: controlling the reincarnation process enables it to dictate the spiritual leadership of Tibetan Buddhism. Should Beijing succeed in installing a state-approved

China's strategy to control the Dalai Lama's reincarnation also has international ramifications. The Dalai Lama has long been regarded by many nations, particularly Western democracies, as a symbol of peaceful resistance and human rights.

Dalai Lama, the Chinese government could effectively neutralize any opposition that a new Dalai Lama might pose, transforming the religious figure into a pro-China voice.

This move also plays into the broader strategy of shaping perceptions both domestically and internationally. A Dalai Lama backed by the Chinese state would likely promote Beijing's narratives, aligning Tibetan Buddhism with the policies and goals of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Such a scenario could diminish the influence of Tibetan exile communities and weaken support for movements advocating for Tibetan autonomy or independence. Additionally, this state-appointed figure could undermine the legitimacy of dissident voices within the Tibetan community.

China's strategy to control the Dalai Lama's reincarnation also has international ramifications. The Dalai Lama has long been regarded by many nations, particularly Western democracies, as a symbol of peaceful resistance and human rights. His global presence keeps the Tibetan issue in the spotlight, challenging China's claims over the region. By controlling the reincarnation, Beijing aims to send a message that the Tibetan issue is resolved, potentially diminishing the Dalai Lama's role in international diplomacy and human rights advocacy.

This approach fits into China's broader policy towards managing religion. The CCP has historically sought to ensure that religious leadership aligns with state ideology, whether by appointing CCP-aligned bishops in Catholic communities or influencing other religious institutions. By controlling the reincarnation process of the Dalai Lama, China is extending this policy to Tibetan Buddhism, aligning it with what the state calls "socialist values."

However, this strategy is not without its risks. Tibetan communities, both inside Tibet and abroad, may reject a Dalai Lama appointed by the Chinese state, leading to deeper divisions within Tibetan society. The possibility of having two Dalai Lamas—one in exile and one state-appointed in Tibet—could create a schism within Tibetan Buddhism, undermining the institution itself. This could have unintended consequences for Beijing's control over the region and potentially intensify Tibetan resistance.

For China, controlling the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is a key element in its broader plan to assert dominance over Tibet. By leveraging this process, Beijing hopes to solidify its political control, align Tibetan Buddhism with state interests, and reduce the international influence of the Tibetan cause. However, this strategy carries significant risks, as it directly challenges the deeply held spiritual beliefs of the Tibetan people and could further alienate those it seeks to govern. Whether China's strategy will succeed in the long term remains to be seen, but its impact on Tibet and global geopolitics is undeniable. ●

A New **ASIAN BLOC** in the **MAKING?**



George Friedman

Senior officials from China, South Korea and Japan will soon meet in Tokyo to try to establish a more formal relationship, replete with security and economic benefits. Informal talks had already been held between China and Japan, so it appears the two found enough to agree on in principle to proceed to the next level. In practice, it's unclear what a partnership entails. Japan has said it wants to increase agriculture exports to China and to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear program. Naturally, the latter point brought South Korea into the talks.

Beijing is in a dangerous geopolitical position. The emerging U.S.-Russia entente leaves China in an isolated position at a time when its economy has weakened dramatically. Contrary to appearances, Russia and China have never been truly aligned. Russia has been a threat to China throughout history, and several wars have been fought between them. Not even the commonality of communism could unite them. Under Mao, China was outright hostile to Russia, which it accused of betraying communism during the Khrushchev era.

Geopolitically, Mao worried that a U.S.-Russia detente would preface a joint policy against China. So when Henry Kissinger visited China to open relations in the 1970s, heavy fighting broke out





Photo from CC Archive



along the Russia-China border – a significant row that lasted several months. Russia meant for the attack to pose as a warning to China about what could happen if its relationship with the U.S. threatened Russian interests. China understood it as such.

China opened diplomatic relations with the United States shortly thereafter in a move that would prove critical to China's eventual emergence as a global power. The Chinese economy was in shambles at the time of Mao's death. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, passed a series of reforms that resurrected the Chinese economy, thanks in no small part to the U.S., which first allowed Chinese products into its

massive market and later invested heavily in Chinese industry.

A two-pronged threat from Russia and the U.S. would put China in an untenable position, and because the extent of the possible reconciliation is unknown, China has to act fast. Thus followed the Chinese initiative to form an Asian security and economic bloc.

The problem was that this was not a sustainable process. China's meteoric rise was accompanied by a commensurate surge in military power. And under President Xi Jinping, China's rhetoric toward the U.S. has tended to be more hostile the worse the economy is. This rhetorical hostility, coupled with the post-COVID-19 economic downturn, has led to

declining levels of U.S. investment in China, as well as to capital flight, which has triggered crises in banking and the economically vital real estate industry.



without abandoning its military posture – including dropping its bluff to invade Taiwan. But with a possible U.S.-Russia entente, China's future becomes uncertain, and being in a security relationship with two of the United States' closest allies may make China much safer than without. And this is to say nothing of the economic opportunities that would be available to China from its new partners.

I have consistently written that, despite its gigantic military, China is not much of a military threat to the U.S. (So far, I've been right.) And a formal Asian grouping might soften the U.S. position on China. So unless South Korea and Japan want to fully break with the U.S. and become completely dependent on China for their defense, the U.S. has nothing to lose. In a best-case scenario, Japan and South Korea could have a moderating effect on China, since challenging the U.S. would put both countries at risk.

Tellingly, Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who had not met with U.S. business leaders for two years, met with a delegation led by U.S. Senator Steve Daines that included the heads of Boeing, Qualcomm, Pfizer and Cargill. He did not meet with corporate heads of any other countries. A close Trump ally, Daines is on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and has done extensive business in China. The meeting might have been driven by China's fears over U.S. tariffs, or it might be a sign that Japan and South Korea are less motivated by forging a local arrangement and more by moving into a different relationship with the United States.

To be sure, nothing could come from the meeting in Tokyo. There is tension between the U.S. and its Asian allies: Japan has resisted U.S. demands to increase military spending, and South Korea resents being designated a "sensitive nation" – that is, a nation engaged in nuclear weapons development. And diplomatic actions are just gestures. Still, even gestures can have significant meanings. In this case, they suggest China has been forced to reconsider its geopolitical imperatives and move closer to the U.S. Either way, it's further evidence that in an unanchored world, countries are searching for an anchor. ●

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Meanwhile, China's relationship with Russia stayed mostly the same. It didn't see Moscow as a threat, but neither did it see it as an economic savior. China's stance on the Ukraine war could be described as rigorously neutral; rather than siding with Russia after the invasion, it abstained from the United Nations vote to denounce it. China sold weapons to Russia but never deployed troops.

It's possible that this status quo could change. For China, even the prospect of reconciliation between the U.S. and Russia is a nightmare. A two-pronged threat from Russia and the U.S. would put China in an untenable position, and because the extent of the possible reconciliation is unknown, China has to act fast. Thus followed the Chinese initiative to form an Asian security and economic bloc.

Japan and South Korea are military allies of the U.S., and both sides want to maintain the arrangement. China cannot join a bloc with Japan and South Korea



GHOST VOTERS

A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

Kumar Santosh

The authenticity of the voter list in any electoral system is fundamental to a functioning democracy. The recent controversy surrounding “Ghost Voters” in West Bengal has raised serious questions about the transparency and credibility of this crucial process. This article undertakes an in-depth examination of the issue, analyzing the structural deficiencies present within the electoral process, the role played by political parties, and the potential consequences that may arise.

In recent years, the issue of “Ghost Voters” has become a focal point of political debate in West Bengal. With 76 million voters in the state, political parties have brought to light instances of duplicate Electronic Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) and Demographically Similar Entries (DSEs). A cycle of accusations and counter-accusations has ensued, with political parties alleging that their rivals are manipulating the voter list. While this dispute has garnered more attention in West Bengal, the problem extends across India, raising grave concerns about the



integrity of the electoral process nationwide.

Within the Indian electoral system, the responsibility for updating the voter list and correcting errors rests with the Election Commission of India (ECI). As part of this process, state government employees are deployed as Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in each assembly constituency. EROs dispatch Booth Level Officers (BLOs), typically Anganwadi workers, to conduct physical verification of existing voters and remove the names of those who are deceased or have relocated.

However, this process is fraught with vulnerabilities. BLOs often operate under pressure from local political parties, which compromises fairness and transparency. Furthermore, conducting physical verification in remote and inaccessible areas can be challenging, increasing the likelihood of fraudulent voters remaining on the voter list.

Political parties also have the right to deploy party workers known as Block Level Agents (BLAs) to scrutinize the voter list and report any irregularities. However, BLAs often provide deliberately false information to serve their political interests, further increasing the potential for manipulation of the voter list.

Another significant challenge facing the Election Commission is Demographically Similar Entries (DSEs). DSEs occur when two genuine voters share the same name, father's name, and even the same age on their EPIC. In such cases, it becomes difficult to differentiate between genuine and fraudulent voters, making it easier for fraudulent voters to remain on the voter list.

In addition, Photographically Similar Entries (PSEs) pose a serious problem. PSEs arise when the photographs of two different voters exhibit similarities, making it difficult to identify whether a voter is fraudulent.

In recent years, the Election Commission has launched campaigns to remove millions of fraudulent names from the voter list. In 2022, over 10 million duplicate entries were removed or corrected nationwide. However, this represents only a fraction of the problem. Numerous fraudulent voters still remain on the voter list, casting doubt on the credibility of the electoral process.

According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there has been an increase of over 400% in electoral offenses between 2014 and 2022. These offenses include incorporating fraudulent names into the voter list, manipulating voter identification cards, and causing disturbances at polling stations. The issue of "Ghost Voters" poses a grave threat to Indian democracy. The presence of fraudulent voters can impact election outcomes, thereby violating the mandate of the electorate. Furthermore, this issue diminishes voters' trust in the electoral process, potentially leading to political instability and social unrest.

Ghost voters in the Indian electoral process are a serious concern that undermines the very foundations of democracy. To overcome this problem, the Election Commission, political parties and citizens must work together. By reforming the electoral process and ensuring transparency, accountability and fairness, we can strengthen Indian democracy and ensure that every vote is valid and that every voter is represented. ●



ONLINE GANGS

Akul Batra

Teens as Easy Targets

The extreme material shared by online gangs of teenage boys in the UK has sounded a serious alarm. According to a warning from the National Crime Agency (NCA), these boys are joining online groups where they share sadistic and misogynistic content that fuels crimes such as fraud, violence, and child sexual abuse. This trend is not only concerning for the UK but also poses a challenge for countries like India, where internet

and social media usage are rapidly increasing. Analyzing this issue from an Indian perspective is essential to address potential dangers and protect young people.

As per the NCA, online communities promote crimes such as cyber attacks, fraud, extremism, blackmail, serious violence, and child sexual abuse. These online communities, known as “Com” networks, have increased sixfold in the UK from 2022 to 2024. The agency’s



analysts estimate that millions of messages relating to sexual and physical abuse have been shared in the UK and other Western countries.

This warning is particularly significant for India because of its large youth population actively using the internet. Due to the availability of cheap data and smartphones, teenagers and young adults are spending more time on social media platforms, making them more susceptible to such online threats. Despite the existence of laws and active law enforcement agencies related to child sexual abuse and cybercrime in India, the growing trend of online teenage gangs presents a serious challenge.

The Netflix hit series *Adolescence*, depicting the relationship between “incel” culture and real-world harm, has raised concerns about boys and young men in the online “manosphere.” Similarly, in India, online groups and communities exist that radicalize young people and influence them with negative ideologies.

India needs to take several steps to combat this threat. First, there is a need to establish robust mechanisms to monitor and remove online content. Social media companies need to be held accountable, ensuring that they take proactive steps to prevent such content from spreading on their platforms. Second, awareness campaigns need to be conducted to educate young people about online safety and responsibility. Cyber security courses should be introduced in schools and colleges to make students aware of online threats and teach them how to stay safe.

The role of parents is also crucial. They should monitor their children’s online activities and have open conversations with them so that they can avoid becoming victims of any kind of online harassment

India needs to take several steps to combat this threat. First, there is a need to establish robust mechanisms to monitor and remove online content.



or exploitation. Parents should also make their children aware of the dangers of joining online communities and groups.

Law enforcement agencies should also take strict action against these online teenage gangs. Cybercrime units need to be trained to identify these groups, track their activities, and arrest the perpetrators. International cooperation is also important, as these online gangs often operate across borders. ●



Kartik's "Ishq" Eyes for Sreeleela! Real Romance or Reel Drama?

Hold onto your popcorn, Bollywood buffs! Kartik Aaryan, the king of monologues and charm, is setting tongues wagging AGAIN! This time, it's with his co-star, the oh-so-adorable Sreeleela! Their chemistry is SPARKLING, and Kartik just fueled the fire with a dreamy-eyed pic on Insta! Are they the next big Bollywood couple? Easy there, lovebirds! Before you plan the wedding, pump the brakes! It's not (necessarily) real-life romance... yet! Kartik and Sreeleela are heating things up for their upcoming film with Anurag Basu (slated for Diwali 2025!). The pic? A sneak peek from the film. Kartik's gaze is LOCKED on Sreeleela amidst a tea plantation – pure romance, right? ●

Shruti's Silent Statement

Audition Scandal Turns Social Media into a Frenzy!

OMG! The usually quiet world of Tamil cinema just EXPLODED! A 14-minute video allegedly showing actress Shruti Narayanan's private audition - think casting couch vibes - hit the internet like a spicy masala dosa. X, Insta, Telegram - it was EVERYWHERE! Fans are FURIOUS, calling it exploitation. But hold on... some are whispering "Deepfake!" Could this be a digital deception? Shruti's response? TOTAL SILENCE... until NOW! She dropped a bombshell of a photoshoot on Insta – gorgeous white and gold saree! But here's the kicker: NO caption and comments are OFF! Is she dodging the drama or sending a subtle message? This silent act is making the scandal even JUICIER! The 'Siragadikka Aasai' starlet, who also graced 'Citadel Honey Bunny', definitely knows how to keep us guessing! ●

Hrithik's Son, a Heart-throb in the Making! Rehaan Roshan Turns 19

Hold up, Bollywood! There's a new Roshan stealing hearts! We've all been keeping tabs on Hrithik Roshan and Sussanne Khan's son, Rehaan, but his latest appearance has the internet in a FRENZY! Mama Sussanne just dropped a heart-melting birthday post for her son, who turned the big 1-9, and the comments are ALL about his dashing looks! Forget star kids... Rehaan is already a STAR! With Hrithik's genes and Sussanne's chic vibes, it's no wonder he's captivating attention. Sussanne's touching message gushed about Rehaan's strong soul, heart, and mind, calling him her best friend and "mirror of truth." Awww! ●

Shubh Navratras



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