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# CULT CURRENT

Vol: 8 Issue: 12 December, 2025

WE MAKE VIEWS

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Mumbai, India, showing severe flooding. In the foreground, a large, ornate mosque with a prominent dome and minaret is partially submerged in murky, brown water. A multi-lane highway bridge with several overpasses curves through the flooded area, with some vehicles visible on it. In the background, a dense urban skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings is visible under a hazy, orange-tinted sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene conveys a sense of environmental crisis and urban vulnerability.

# THE SINKING METROPOLIS



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## # POSITIVE INDIA

### UNSUNG HERO

#### FROM SWISS DREAMS TO SOIL SUCCESS



**Prince Shukla**

**A**t the age of 24, Prince Shukla never imagined his greatest triumph would be born from a failure. Caught between preparing for a scholarship to Switzerland and starting a new job in Bengaluru, everything came to a halt when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Plans shattered, interviews froze, and he was forced to return to his small village in Bihar—a move viewed by those around him as a step backward. Back home, he gained a close-up view of the deficiencies that had plagued farmers for decades: outdated methods, weak market linkages, poor-quality seeds, and a severe lack of basic tools. Determined to bring about change, he borrowed ₹1 lakh from his father and launched 'Agreet'. Agreet's mission was to provide small farmers with affordable resources such as better seeds, drip irrigation systems, and eco-friendly fertilizers. Simultaneously, Prince focused on boosting farmers' yield and income by training them in advanced techniques like grafting, multi-cropping, and sustainable farming. In a short time, Agreet reached thousands of farmers, forged partnerships with major companies, and transformed Prince's once-ridiculed 'village' identity into a multi-crore business that has fundamentally changed the lives of local farmers.





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# THE SINKING METROPOLIS

12

## AIR IN DESPAIR

Where is the Rep*air*?



18

## EASTERN FRONT

The Unfolding Strategic Crisis



## DELHI BLAST

14

# 10/11



## THE EXPLOSIVE TRIANGLE

**THE RISE** of a Beneficiary-Based Polity 22

**SIR THE** 'REVERSE EXODUS' IN BENGAL 26

**PAKISTAN** DEMOCRACY IN UNIFORM 40

**IND-PAK-AFG:** THE EMERGING TRIANGLE 46

**THE DESERT** ALLIANCE RECALIBRATES 50

**MINING** FOR POWER.. 54

**PUTIN, OIL,** AND TRUMP 58

**THIRSTY NATION:** FIXED MINDSET 62

**RIISING TIDES,** NAVAL STRIDES 66

**CORRIDOR** OF POWER 68

**DHARMENDRA:** HE-MAN'S FINAL SCENE 72

**TEEN BAHNE:** ...UNFINISHED DREAMS 74

76

## Malaika Arora

Spotted Again with Rumored Boyfriend



CONTENT

## Small talk



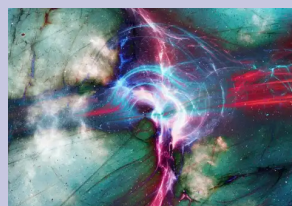
### RADHIKA APTE'S FILM TO RELEASE ON OTT

**B**ollywood actress Radhika Apte and actor Divyenndu, famous for 'Mirzapur', are all set to make a splash on OTT. The trailer for their much-anticipated upcoming film, 'Saali Mohabbat', has been released. With this film, actress Tisca Chopra is stepping into the world of direction. The film is produced by Jyoti Deshpande, Manish Malhotra, and Dinesh Malhotra. The producers unveiled the film's release date while dropping the trailer for 'Saali Mohabbat'. 'Saali Mohabbat' is a crime-thriller in which Radhika plays Smita, a small-town woman. The film is fully spiced up with emotions, betrayal, and deceit. ●

## The discoveries that will create a stir in 2025

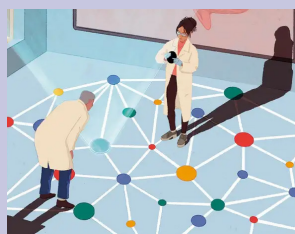
### Memory Editing!

Boston University neuroscientist Steve Ramirez writes: "When my late colleague Xu Liu and I first shone light onto the brain cells (engram) storing a specific memory, it was like seeing an idea spring back to life. We stimulated a group of neurons in the hippocampus of mice, which is the physical basis of memory. We didn't realize then that we were stepping into neuroscience's most exciting frontier." ●



### New Challenge for Dark Matter!

This is a surreal time for dark matter researchers. Despite funding cuts from governments worldwide, dark matter remains the biggest unsolved puzzle in physics. Most of our universe's mass is invisible—for every kilogram of visible matter, there are approximately 5 kilograms of dark matter. We only know this because we have observed its effect on the structure of the visible elements of the cosmos. ●



### Modern AI Concerns!

Socrates, famous for leaving no texts of his own, believed that writing would weaken memory. Although writing actually improves memory, his spirit of distrust toward cognitive technologies remains alive today. Psychologists and philosophers are now concerned that generative AI tools like ChatGPT will diminish our power to recall information. The concern is that excessive reliance on these tools for convenience may impact the fundamental capabilities of human intelligence. ●



## COLD WATER SWIMMING - BENEFICIAL FOR BOTH MIND & BODY



Research into the physical benefits of cold water swimming is constantly growing. Now, scientists are also exploring whether it can permanently improve our brains. At 8 a.m., standing by our local lake in Beckenham Place Park, London, my friend and I head in despite the single-digit water temperature. The first step into the water is breath-taking, but after the body adjusts and we complete a large lap, a new energy and freshness are felt. This practice can positively change the brain. ●

## Mahindra XEV 9S Launched: 7-Seater Delivers Full Enjoyment

Mahindra launched its new seven-seater electric SUV, the XEV 9S, in India on November 27, 2025. Its starting ex-showroom price is ₹19.95 lakh. The XEV 9S is a 7-seater and is built on the company's INGLO electric platform, giving it ample space, a modern design, and advanced features. ●





## APPOINTMENTS



**Surya Kant** *Chief Justice of India*

Justice Surya Kant has been sworn in as the 53rd Chief Justice of India. His tenure will last 15 months, and he succeeds CJI Bhushan R. Gavai, who, following tradition, recommended his name before retirement. President administered the oath of office to Justice Surya Kant.

**Varun Berry**, *CEO, Britannia*

Britannia Industries announced that its Vice Chairman, Managing Director, and Chief Executive Officer, Varun Berry, has resigned. Britannia Industries Limited informed that the company has appointed Rakshit Hargave as its Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer.



**Donald Trump**  
**President, USA**

he continuation of human rights violations in South Africa is an absolute disgrace, and it is utterly shameful that the G20 is being hosted there.

## THEY SAID IT...

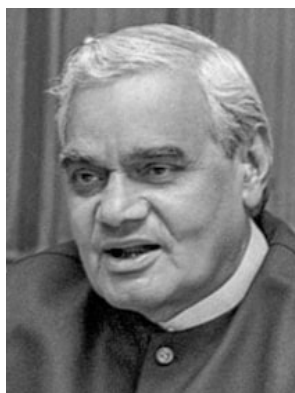


**Cyril Ramaphosa**  
**President, SA**

The politics of boycott never work. Even if the United States chooses to stand outside, we will keep the door open for dialogue, trust, and cooperation.

## THE TRIBUTE

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was an Indian statesman whose voice carried vigor, whose thoughts held clarity, and whose conduct displayed restraint. Born on December 25, 1924, in Gwalior, Vajpayee went on to become the representative of a stream in Indian politics where both nationalism and democracy existed in perfect balance. An eloquent orator, sensitive poet, brilliant thinker, and a person of immense simplicity in demeanor, Vajpayee mastered politics through struggle and governed through dialogue. He served as the Prime Minister of India three times, with the 1998–2004 term being the most influential. It was under his leadership that India showed the courage to acquire a new identity of strength and self-confidence by conducting the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. He attempted to build a bridge of communication with Pakistan through the bus service, which remains



**ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE**  
(25/12/1924-16/08/2018)

a unique hallmark of his peaceful diplomacy. Basing his governance on 'Rajdharm' (ethical governance) and good administration, he emphasized development, infrastructure, and economic liberalization. The Golden Quadrilateral Project, rural road schemes, and radical changes in the telecommunications sector were significant achievements of his tenure. The dignity of his words and the respect for his opponents defined his political culture. His speeches offered a wonderful blend of poetry, politics, and sensibility. Even while struggling with illness in his final years, he remained an inspiration to the nation. With his passing on August 16, 2018, a bright era of Indian politics drew to a close, but the light of his thoughts, poetry, and work continues to immortalize him today. Vajpayee was not just a star of the political stage, but also a poet of the Indian soul. ●



## US Official Warns Europe on Protracted Ukraine Conflict

A senior U.S. official warned European diplomats in Kyiv last week that Russia's capacity to manufacture long-range weapons is increasing, according to a New York Times report. He stated that the lack of a swift resolution to the Ukraine conflict will only increase the likelihood of its escalation. U.S. Army Secretary Dan Driskill said that Russia's production capacity will allow it not only to continue striking Ukrainian targets but also to build up a surplus of weapons. Those present at the briefing took these comments as an implication that the conflict could spread unless it is resolved through Washington's proposed peace plan. European governments, while supporting Ukraine, have operated on the assumption that Ukrainian soldiers are protecting the West from Russian aggression. ●

## Coup in Guinea-Bissau: Military Seizes Power



A group of soldiers in Guinea-Bissau forcibly seized power, leading to the suspension of the electoral process just before the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections were due to be announced. On the morning of November 26, the incumbent President Umaro Sissoco Embaló was being projected to lose the election, with the opposition's Fernando Dias widely expected to win. It was at that point that gunfire was heard from the Presidential Palace and the Electoral Commission building. ●

## Jakarta Becomes the World's Largest City

According to a new United Nations report, Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, has become the world's largest city with 41.9 million people. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has risen to the second position with a population of 36.6 million. Tokyo (33.4 million), which was the world's largest city in 2000, has now slipped to the third spot. The UN estimates that Dhaka will become the world's largest city by 2050. According to the report, the number of megacities worldwide has now increased to 33, of which 19 are located in Asia. ●



## Could Trump Bar South Africa from G20 Summit?



Amidst deteriorating relations between the United States and South Africa, U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that he will ban South Africa from participating in next year's G20 Summit. Trump had previously called this year's G20, hosted in South Africa, "an absolute disgrace" and accused the country of engaging in "white genocide" against white farmers—a claim South Africa dismisses. Since the G20 presidency will be held by the United States next year, this gives the U.S. considerable leverage. ●

## Hong Kong's Deadliest Fire in 100 Years: 65 Dead, 279 Missing



At least 65 people have been killed and 279 are missing after a fire broke out in several high-rise buildings in Hong Kong's Tai Po area on December 27. Officials have described it as the city's deadliest fire in over a century. The blaze, which began on a bamboo scaffolding, spread rapidly. By Thursday morning, firefighters had brought the fire under control in four buildings, but work was still ongoing at three others. ●



## Rumours of Imran Khan's Death Dismissed



**A**mid speculation regarding the status and rumored death of former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, the Adiala Jail administration issued a statement on Wednesday, labeling the conjectures as baseless. Officials at the Rawalpindi jail clarified that Imran Khan has not been shifted from the jail and is “completely healthy and receiving full medical facilities.” These rumors spread after Khan’s sisters and supporters demanded a meeting, stating that the jail administration had prevented them from meeting him for the past three weeks. ●

## Record Economic Devastation in Gaza: 69 Years of Progress Erased



**G**aza is facing its worst economic collapse following two years of war between Israel and Hamas, according to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The report states that in 2024, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) plummeted by 83% compared to the previous year, while the GDP per capita fell to \$161 (less than 50 cents per day), placing it among the lowest levels globally. UNCTAD estimates that Gaza’s economy has shrunk to only 13% of its 2022 size. Inflation stands at 238%, unemployment is close to 80%, and all 2.3 million residents have been pushed below the poverty line. UNCTAD stated that the military operations have destroyed Gaza’s economic foundations, leaving it ‘totally ruined’ and erasing 69 years of progress. ●

## China Launches Shenzhou-22 Emergency Spacecraft

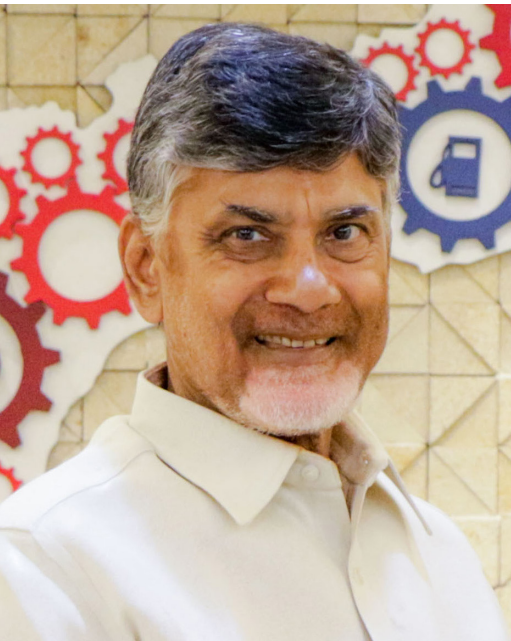


**C**hina launched Shenzhou-22, a replacement vessel, to its crewed Tiangong space station, ensuring that astronauts have a means to return to Earth in an emergency. The Shenzhou-20 transport vehicle was deemed unfit for flight due to a crack caused by space debris in its window, leaving the astronauts without a return vehicle on the station for 11 days. The China Manned Space Agency executed this first-ever rapid emergency launch to fill this gap. ●



## Pension Reform Crisis Threatens German Coalition Government

**L**eaders from German Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s party, the CDU, allied party CSU, and the SPD will hold a coalition committee meeting in Berlin. The pension reform package is the biggest point of contention in this meeting, which seeks to link retirement payments to wages until 2031. Younger parliamentarians within the CDU/CSU bloc are opposing this package. If they reject it, the coalition’s majority in parliament could be jeopardized. Chancellor Merz has already acknowledged that cutting the social welfare budget with the centre-left ally SPD will not be easy. ●



## Grand Venkateswara Temple to be Built in Amravati Modeled After Tirumala

**A**ndhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for the expansion of the Venkateswara Swamy Temple at Venkatapalem in Amravati. The temple's expansion will be undertaken at a cost of ₹260 crore, modeled after the famous Tirumala Temple. The project is targeted for completion in just two and a half years. The expansion, which the Chief Minister laid the foundation for, is a major undertaking for the Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Venkatapalem, Amravati. The project, modeled on Tirumala, is targeted to be completed in just two and a half years. ₹140 crore will be spent in the first phase and ₹120 crore in the second. ●

## India Launches New Anti-Submarine Warfare Vessel INS Mahe



**T**he Indian Navy has inducted INS Mahe for coastal defense and anti-submarine operations. The vessel is equipped with advanced sensors, weapons, and communication systems, enabling it to conduct long-endurance missions in shallow waters and accurately detect submarine threats. 80% of the ship has been manufactured in India and it was designed by Cochin Shipyard. Under the 'Make in India' initiative. ●

## Technology's Growing Dominance Towards a Military Revolution in India

**C**hief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, speaking at the Chanakya Defence Dialogue, stated that innovation, research, and strategic alignment are essential for future warfighting capability. He explained that warfare is constantly changing and emerging technologies are becoming central to strategy. According to Chauhan, technology, more than geography, will be the decisive factor in warfare, and the integration of multiple emerging technologies will define the upcoming military revolution. ●



## RLM Rocked by Nepotism Charges — Seven Leaders Resign



**A** decision by Upendra Kushwaha has triggered significant political turmoil within the Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM). The expectation that Sneh Lata Kushwaha would be appointed as a minister in the Nitish Kumar government was bypassed in favor of her son, Deepak Prakash, who has been assigned the Panchayati Raj department—despite not being a member of the legislative assembly or council. ●

## Increased Workload on BLOs Over SIR Process



**T**he matter regarding SIR (Special Integrated Revision) in Bihar is currently pending before the Supreme Court, but in the meantime, the Election Commission has announced the implementation of SIR in 12 other states as well. Under this second phase of SIR, which began on November 4, the work must be completed within one month, that is, by December 4. SIR is a special procedure for updating electoral rolls, under which BLOs (Booth Level Officers) are required to go door-to-door to verify voter information. ●



## Siblings Must Stay Together After Parental Divorce: Supreme Court



The country's Supreme Court, while hearing a case, remarked that if a couple has disputes and the matter proceeds to divorce, the siblings must stay together and grow up alongside each other. The Court expressed concern during the hearing, noting that when a couple with two children separates due to marital discord, the children also often become separated, with one residing with the mother and the other with the father. The bench stated, "We are saddened to know that the minor siblings are living separately. ●

## Arunachal Dispute Flares Up Again—New Spark Ignited by Shanghai Airport Incident



The Arunachal Pradesh dispute has been a subject of contention and diplomatic tension in India-China relations for decades. China claims it as its territory, calling it 'Southern Tibet,' while India unequivocally maintains it as an integral part of its territory. A recent incident has reignited this old dispute. Prema Wangzhom Thongdok, a citizen of Arunachal Pradesh traveling from London to Japan, was detained for hours at Shanghai Airport by Chinese officials who claimed her Indian passport was invalid because Arunachal Pradesh belongs to China. During the detention, she missed her connecting flight. She was released only after the intervention of the Indian Embassy, following which India lodged a formal protest, citing the incident as a violation of international rules and aviation conventions. Previously, a controversy also arose when China issued 'stapled visas' to residents of Arunachal, leading India to bar several athletes from traveling to China. ●

## Aadhaar Card Will Not Be Valid as Birth Certificate



The governments of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have issued an important order stating that the Aadhaar Card will no longer be considered a valid proof of date of birth. An official order to this effect has been released. The order states that the date of birth recorded on the Aadhaar Card is not determined based on any certified document, which is why it cannot be accepted as an official certificate. Aadhaar Card does not have any certified document attached to verify the date of birth. ●



## India's GDP Grows by 8.2 Percent in Second Quarter

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate surged by 8.2 percent in the second quarter. According to government data, this figure was 5.6 percent in the corresponding quarter of the previous fiscal year. The data released by the government shows that the Indian economy achieved a growth rate of 8.2 percent during the July-September quarter. This marks the highest level in six quarters. This surge occurred because factories increased production in anticipation of higher consumption driven by cuts in the GST rate. The GDP growth rate for the second quarter surpassed the 7.8 percent recorded in the previous three months and the 5.6 percent of the same period a year ago. ●



**SRIRAJESH**, Editor

## GLOBAL FINANCIAL POWER SHIFT

*This convergence of the Rupee and Ruble is not merely a payment bridge, but a new geopolitical fault line in the balance of power. While the West builds walls, India and Russia construct corridors—the entire global map is now being written in a different script.*

Global power balances were once determined by armies and battleships, then by oil, gas, and maritime control. But a new determinant of global power is emerging in today's world—digital payment systems, currency settlement, and financial sovereignty.

The decisive steps taken by Russia and India to integrate their respective national payment networks—Mir and RuPay—is the most vibrant signal of this transformation. This is not merely technical convenience; it is the establishment of an alternative financial axis challenging the dollar-centric global framework.

President Vladimir Putin's upcoming visit to New Delhi may formalize this process. Just a few years ago, the world of international payments was dominated by Visa, Mastercard, and SWIFT, and that was considered the final word. However, Western sanctions inadvertently punched holes in their own structure. Financial penalties imposed on Russia, instead of crippling Moscow, forced it onto a new path—developing its own payment network and shaping its own digital sovereignty, much like India. India's RuPay and UPI are no longer just domestic payment systems; they are among the world's fastest and most comprehensive digital infrastructures. The goal of both nations is now to integrate these systems so that trade and transactions no longer depend on a third country or currency.

This move is not limited to tourism, ATM cards, or QR payments. The real upheaval is occurring at the level where control over currency exchange becomes the measure of power. Today, over 90 percent of trade between Russia and India is conducted directly in Rupee-Ruble or other friendly currencies—effectively bypassing the dollar. Oil, coal, fertilizer—all these transactions are passing through channels beyond the West's control. This is not merely a financial arrangement; it is a demonstration of sovereignty—a right that was once dependent on the grace of Washington's banking system.

The situation could change even more dramatically once Russia and India's payment networks are integrated. Experts suggest the first phase will involve connecting Mir and RuPay, followed by the integration of Russia's



Faster Payment System with India's UPI. Once that level is achieved, payments will not be settled in dollars, nor will they be contingent on permission from any American system. Transaction costs could plummet by nearly thirty percent, and traders will be able to settle payments using simple QR codes or mobile wallets. When the flow of trade is independent, the equations of power also become independent.

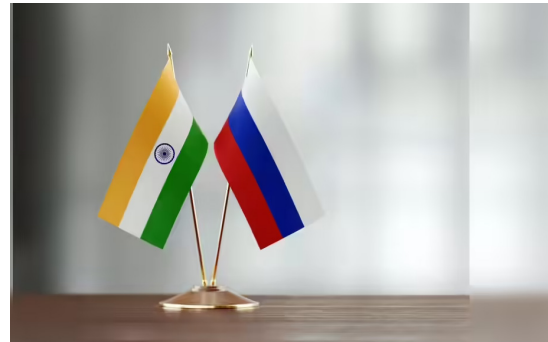
This shift is uncomfortable for the Western world. Its entire financial power has historically rested on three pillars: energy being priced in dollars, payments passing through the SWIFT network, and private systems like Visa/Mastercard being applied globally. The Russia-India payment bridge is the first crack in these pillars. China has already developed its own alternative payment system. If India and Russia successfully establish this digital financial nexus, the West's financial dominance will not just be challenged; it will gradually lose its centrality. This is not a sign of the future—it is the blueprint for it.

India's role in this entire process is particularly crucial. This nation is neither a shadow of Moscow nor a pupil of Washington. It is a pole unto itself, with a clear geopolitical objective: to prioritize its own interests, its energy security, and its financial sovereignty. This is why the Russia-India payment link is not just a technical connection but a realignment of the power map, where Asia is emerging not just as a market but as a decision-maker.

This move by Russia and India sends three clear messages to the world: financial independence is no longer a diplomatic appendix but the core of power; digital payments are an ocean that old empires cannot fence in; and the Global South is now a creator, not just a consumer.

In summary, the West is still erecting walls of sanctions, while India and Russia are building new corridors. The future belongs not to the walls that divide the world, but to the paths that connect two continents and fundamentally change the entire system. This is not merely financial convenience—it is the initial sketch of a new world order.

*Ajesh*



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# AIR IN DESPAIR

## Where is the Repair?



Sanjay Srivastava

***China has promised to support us in tackling air pollution. While many countries and their cities have successfully rid themselves of toxic air through their efforts, will their treatment system suit us? Will their medicine be effective on us? Or will we have to search for a cure that aligns with our own system, government, society, and temperament?***

Our capital possesses the most toxic air on Earth, and the city ranking next is nearly three times behind it. "Poison permeates New Delhi's air"—this headline is repeated in the media almost daily every year from October to February. Its continuity is proof of our apathy toward this poison. When the WHO released the list of the world's 15 most polluted cities for 2016, 14 were in India. Delhi, with its brown, grey skies instead of blue, topped the list. Even today, in 2025, we have retained this position.

There is no parallel in the world for the air in our capital. In winter, its air remains ten times worse than World Health Organization standards and three times worse than national standards. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in the capital often crosses 500, and in some areas, it frequently exceeds 700. Once, out of 177 polluted countries, our rank was 155th; then 176th out of 180; today, it is 177th out of 183. There is a strong perception in the public mind that only the air in Delhi or large industrial cities is toxic, or that apart from a few small and large cities occasionally mentioned in the news,

the rest are fine. But this is not the case.

Hardly any city in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, or even the southern states appears below the 100-mark on the Air Quality Index. While this falls in the 'poor' category, it is deemed 'satisfactory' compared to indices of 500 to 700. Most of the country's urban population lives amidst extremely poor and lethal air ranging between 200 and 400. They cannot even imagine that the average AQI of Oslo, Norway is merely 1 to 2; Detroit, once notorious for auto-industry pollution, is 8; Algiers, a busy coastal city known for heavy vehicle traffic and industrial activity, is 11; Sydney, Australia is 16; and Salt Lake City can be 17.

Citizens of Indian cities—and perhaps even villagers—may never feel what such clean air is like. If this continues, the atmosphere of the country's industrial cities will become suffocating in a few years. Like Beijing, Hebei, and Tianjin a decade and a half ago, hospital beds will be filled with patients suffering from air pollution; people will carry their own clean air in cans or pouches. The market for pollution-related products—

air purifiers, humidifiers, electrostatic precipitators, catalytic converters, dehumidifiers, advanced filtration systems, specialized masks, and portable oxygen cans—will be booming.



Whether on the part of the government or society, this negligence is suicidal. But the question is: what should be done? Is there an infallible cure for this air? Why is our government not adopting the measures taken by countries that brought their urban air pollution from triple-digit indices down to double digits? Will those measures not suit us, or do we simply not want to implement them?

Generally, in China, Europe, and America, immediate corrective measures are initiated as soon as the AQI crosses 100. Norway massively reduced fossil fuel vehicles and encouraged electric vehicles, while Colombia controlled air pollution in its capital, Bogota, by electrifying the public bus network and promoting the use of bicycles.

However, China appears to be a potential model for us because development and urbanization are common factors for air pollution in both nations. It implemented a mix of long-term policies and immediate actions. Under geographical measures, wind-ventilation corridors were created in cities so smog wouldn't accumulate. Heavy polluting industries like steel and cement production were shut down, upgraded, or relocated far away, and industries were forced to adhere to environmental protocols.

Cities were incentivized to improve their air quality standards. Promoting renewable energy and clean technologies, coal usage was minimized while the use of clean energy like natural gas and solar power was increased. Old vehicles were removed from roads to promote electric vehicles. Not only were stricter standards introduced, but strict penalties were also imposed for deviations under a rigorous monitoring system. The punitive approach fostered a culture of accountability. It launched massive plantation projects like the "Great Green Wall." Furthermore, its three-year "Blue Sky" plan, which improved energy systems, pollution control in industries, and clean energy usage, proved extremely successful.

This reduced air pollution in many cities by almost 60 percent. Chinese policies reduced air pollution in several cities, including Beijing, by up to 35 percent annually within four years.

In China, air quality data is released in real-time without manipulation; predictions regarding pollution levels are made 72 hours in advance. Pollution emergencies trigger school closures, bans on vehicles, and the issuance of public health alerts to citizens. The Chinese government has invested heavily in wind and solar energy. As a result, the AQI, which used to be in the hundreds, has reached double digits.

China's success is remarkable. It has also promised to cooperate with us in tackling air pollution. The government will surely welcome its proposal, putting aside border and other disputes. But the question is, will its treatment system become a cure for our air too? Will we be able to adopt a restrained, strict air-pollution control strategy like China?

Will curbing industrial development at the cost of environmental health be possible? Will the practice of giving leeway to corporates in environmental regulations stop? With the reduced budget of the Ministry of Environment, will scientific research increase? Apart from forcing states to spend the allocated budget, will the Center provide resources to run long-term plans in this regard? How prepared is the government to provide power supply and millions of charging stations to promote electric vehicles? How easy will strict environmental monitoring and a harsh penalty system be against the corporates and industries that manage votes and electoral funds, as seen in China? The general public is neither aware nor worried or alert about its magnitude. Moreover, since this is not a voting issue for the government, how will the level of governance accountability and citizen awareness increase?

It is also clear that unless the public suffering from air pollution agitates and strives for change themselves, it is difficult to bring about a major transformation with anyone's help or by adopting any model. We cannot classify and supply air like drinking water or utility water. To make the entire atmosphere breathable, instead of a borrowed model, we must become self-reliant and formulate a plan suited to our country's social system. We must run a campaign with honesty and complete willpower. That is the only cure for this air.

# DELHI BLAST

# 10/11



Santosh Kumar

*On the evening of November 10, it wasn't just gunpowder that exploded on the ramparts of the Red Fort; the nation's trust was left bleeding. When doctors, hailed as 'Gods on Earth,' transform into merchants of death, where does society turn? This 'White-Collar Terror' is the new laboratory of the Turkey-Pakistan-Bangladesh nexus, one that has shaken the very foundations of India's security policy.*

# THE EXPLOSIVE TRIANGLE





**O**n the evening of November 10, 2025, as the Delhi sky was bathed in a haze of smog and the lights of the historic Red Fort, a massive explosion didn't just rattle the capital's ground but pushed the discourse on India's national security into a new and terrifying chapter. The attack, unfolding in the shadow of the Red Fort—the symbol of India's sovereignty and power—was not merely a blast; it was an open challenge to Indian democracy and its security agencies. As the Hyundai i20 car was blown to smithereens, 14 innocent lives were lost. Yet, as the plume of smoke settled, the truth that emerged was far more toxic than the smell of gunpowder.

This conspiracy was not hatched by unlettered, misguided youths, but by individuals from society's most prestigious profession—Doctors. When hands trained to hold stethoscopes grip detonators instead, it is a sign that terrorism has fundamentally altered its strategy. Security agencies have termed this 'White-Collar Terror.' However, as the layers of this incident peel away, the needle of suspicion does not stop at Pakistan alone; it traces the map of a vast international conspiracy stretching from Ankara in Turkey to the borders of Bangladesh.

### The Doctor Module: 'Gods on Earth' or Merchants of Death?

The most disturbing aspect of this tragedy is the 'Faridabad Doctor Module.' The role of the main accused, Dr. Umar un-Nabi (whose body was shredded

in the blast), and his associates—Dr. Muzammil and Dr. Shaheen Shahid (known as 'Madam Surgeon')—has proven that radicalization has moved out from the four walls of madrasas and infiltrated the air-conditioned rooms of medical colleges and universities.

Al-Falah University in Faridabad, which should have been a center of education, became the 'nerve center' of this terror network. It is deeply alarming that Dr. Umar, who had been terminated from a hospital in Anantnag, Kashmir, due to a patient's death, drove a car laden with explosives across Delhi-NCR for 11 hours without fear. This fact points to a grave failure in both our Human Intelligence (HUMINT) and technical surveillance.

The inclusion of doctors in terror networks is part of a calculated 'Talent Hunt' strategy by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Being medical professionals, they have easy access to chemicals (like Ammonium Nitrate), they attract less suspicion in society, and they can even fund the organization through their earnings. Dr. Shaheen Shahid leading the women's wing as 'Madam Surgeon' demonstrates that the old parameters of gender and professional profiling in terrorism have been demolished.

### The Web of 'Ukasa': The Turkey Connection and Erdogan's Vision

The most explosive revelation in the Red Fort blast probe is the Turkey Connection. A handler named 'Ukasa' (Arabic for Spider) was directing this entire

## TERRORISM

network from Ankara. According to investigative agencies, the accused traveled to Turkey in 2022, where they met their foreign masters.

Turkey's involvement in this conspiracy is not just a criminal matter for India, but a geopolitical warning. In recent years, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey has harbored ambitions of positioning itself as the new Caliph of the Islamic world. From vocal support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue to now allowing Ankara to be used as a logistical and financial hub for terror attacks on Indian soil, this marks a 'turning point' in India-Turkey relations.

Turkey is being used like a 'remote control.' Instructions were being beamed from Ankara to Faridabad via high-encryption apps like 'Session.' This proves that Turkey is no longer just a diplomatic friend to Pakistan but has become an active participant in hybrid warfare against India. India must now accept that a new and capable adversary is rising in West Asia, one that exploits the shield of being a NATO member.

### Pakistan: Old Enemy, New Tricks, and 'Digital Spikes'

Even if the handler sits in Turkey, the source of the terror ideology and the smell of gunpowder remains Pakistan. The 68 suspicious mobile numbers active in the Red Fort parking area at the time of the blast were linked to 'IP Clusters' in Pakistan and Turkey. By using "Server Hopping" and "Virtual Numbers," Jaish-e-Mohammed attempted to ensure that all digital footprints were erased.

The reference to a response to "Operation Sindoor" in posters and plans for a major attack around December 6 (the anniversary of the Babri demolition)—dubbed the "D-6 Mission"—indicates that Pakistan's 'Deep State' (ISI and the Army) is now resorting to communal symbols to disrupt India's internal stability. This attack is a desperate attempt to tarnish India's economic progress and global image.

### Bangladesh: The Third Front and the Threat of 'Encirclement'

Lashkar-e-Taiba commander Saifullah Saif's claim that "Bangladesh will be used as a launchpad" is a ringing alarm bell for India. Taking advantage of political instability and the rise of radical elements in Bangladesh, Pakistan is deepening its roots there.

If we view this Turkey-Pakistan-Bangladesh nexus collectively, it presents a severe strategic threat to India's 'Chicken's Neck' (Siliguri Corridor) and eastern borders. This can be termed a strategy of 'Encirclement.' With Pakistan in the West, Turkey providing digital and logistical support from the Northwest, and Bangladesh as a potential launchpad in the East—this triangle could create a "Three-Front War" scenario for Indian security agencies, one fought not with traditional armies, but through terror and insurgency.

### Technical Warfare and Intelligence Failure: A Self-Analysis



This attack has also exposed that we are living in the era of 'Fifth Generation Warfare.' Intercepting terror communications via apps like Telegram, Signal, and Session is becoming increasingly difficult. Handlers like 'Ukasa' sit in Turkey and turn a doctor in India into a suicide bomber, while our agencies remain in the dark.

300 kilograms of explosives are still missing. A car laden with explosives passed through the capital's most sensitive zones (India Gate, Kartavya Path) and was not intercepted. This highlights a lack of coordination between 'Beat Policing' and 'Electronic Surveillance.' The question is inevitable: Are we technically capable enough to decode 'Server Hopping' and 'Data Spikes' in real-time?

### Emotional and Social Impact: A Crisis of Trust

From the perspective of an Indian citizen, this event is heartbreaking. If a doctor, whom society regards as a 'Messiah,' becomes bent on taking lives, who can





the common man trust? This is not just a security crisis; it is a social crisis of trust. When the highly educated class—engineers, doctors, professors—chooses the path of radicalization, it dismisses the argument that poverty and illiteracy are the roots of terrorism. This is an ideological virus that is now infecting the intellectual class.

### Future Direction: India's Response and Diplomatic Challenges

Following this incident, a paradigm shift is required in India's foreign and security policy. India must review its relations with Turkey. A diplomatic message must be sent that the use of Ankara for anti-India activities will not be tolerated. India should deepen its strategic partnerships with Turkey's adversaries (such as Greece, Cyprus, and Armenia).

Simultaneously, beyond surgical strikes or air strikes, India must continue the policy of diplomatically and economically isolating Pakistan. The time has come to develop offensive capabilities against Pakistan in the 'Cyber and Space' domains. Furthermore, regardless of who is in power in Dhaka, India must work with the security apparatus there to ensure that Bangladeshi soil is not used against India.

Post-incident, a thorough investigation of institutions like Al-Falah University is mandatory. A strict surveillance mechanism must be established to

prevent the infiltration of radicalism into educational institutions. Moreover, finding the missing 300 kg of explosives must now be a national priority; otherwise, the danger has not yet passed.

### Conclusion

The smoke marks on the walls of the Red Fort may wash away with the rain, but the questions raised by this attack will not be easily erased. The explosion of Dr. Umar un-Nabi's car was not just a blast of RDX; it was an explosion of the illusion that we are safe.

Today, India stands at a crossroad where it must fight not only to protect its borders but also battle the 'sleepers' breeding within its own society. To slash through this web spreading from Turkey to Pakistan, India must adopt an unprecedented blend of 'Chanakya Niti' and modern technology. This battle is no longer just for soldiers, but for every aware citizen, intelligence officer, and policymaker. We must ensure that the sound echoing from the ramparts of the Red Fort is always that of 'Jai Hind,' and never that of a terror blast.

This is a time to be emotional, but also a time to be ruthless. The sacrifice of our 14 citizens must not go in vain. This bloodshed cannot bow India down; rather, it will forge our resolve into steel—to break every hand of terror, whether it is in a bunker in Rawalpindi, a plush office in Ankara, or a clinic in our own neighborhood.

# EASTERN FRONT

## The Unfolding Strategic Crisis

***The Eastern Front is heating up once again. Rising radical tides in Dhaka, a renewed Pakistan–Turkey–China axis, and unsettling eyes on the Siliguri Corridor have pushed South Asia to a volatile strategic inflection point. India is no longer in reactive posture—it is shifting decisively towards calibrated strategic counterforce.***



Sandeep Kumar

South Asia's geopolitical landscape is passing through one of its most volatile, transformative and explosive phases in recent history. Bangladesh—India's eastern neighbour that once stood as a proud model of secular nationalism and linguistic identity after the Liberation War of 1971—is today grappling with a severe existential crisis. The political shift in Dhaka has triggered chaos, radicalisation and a sharp resurgence of anti-India sentiment, setting off alarm bells in New Delhi's South Block. The death sentence handed down to Sheikh Hasina and the wave of retribution unleashed against the Awami League leadership are not merely internal political developments; they represent an emerging strategic challenge to India's national





security architecture.

In this shifting landscape, the increasing presence of Pakistan and other foreign intelligence actors in Bangladesh has reshaped the balance of power. At the same time, India has quietly begun recalibrating its eastern security doctrine—from the Siliguri Corridor to the Bay of Bengal—in ways that reflect a far more proactive and assertive strategic posture.

## Bangladesh: The New Wave of Radicalisation

To describe Bangladesh's current condition simply as "political instability" would be an understatement. What is underway is nothing short of an ideological upheaval. The interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus, instead of restoring equilibrium, appears increasingly vulnerable to the influence of radical forces. Dhaka's invocation of the 2013 extradition treaty to demand Sheikh Hasina's return may outwardly resemble diplomatic pressure, but it is driven more by political vengeance than by legal argumentation.

Even more troubling is the resurgence of groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which now openly rallies on the streets of Dhaka demanding the establishment of a "Caliphate." Once confined to the margins, Jamaat-e-Islami is rapidly regaining relevance by aligning itself with mainstream political factions and student bodies.

The immediate and most vulnerable victims of this radical upswing are minority communities—particularly Hindus. Between August 2024 and June 2025, more than 2,400 hate-crime incidents were recorded, signalling either the state's incapacity or its tacit approval of extremist activities. Bangladesh's

foundational principle of secularism is being systematically eroded.

This social and demographic churn represents a direct threat to the security of India's Northeast. History is replete with examples: whenever radicalisation has gained ground in Dhaka, it has spilled over into India in the form of illegal migration and militant resurgence.

## Pakistan's Return and Bangladesh as an Intelligence Battleground

India's most significant strategic concern today is the strengthening of ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Whether the wounds of 1971 are being consciously ignored, or whether a new anti-India axis is taking shape, the reality is undeniable: Pakistan's military establishment and the ISI have intensified their activities in Dhaka.

In the last year alone, high-ranking Pakistani officials—including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Naval Chief—undertook official visits to Bangladesh. These are not routine diplomatic courtesies. They signal the formation of a new strategic compact.

Historically, Pakistan used Bangladesh as a launchpad for providing shelter and operational support to insurgent groups in India's Northeast. The renewed ISI presence, coupled with the heightened activities of the CIA, Turkish intelligence, and Chinese security operatives, has transformed Bangladesh into a crowded arena of international intelligence rivalry.

From New Delhi's perspective, this is not merely



## NEIGHBORING PLOT

foreign manoeuvring; it is part of a coordinated effort to encircle India. Bangladesh's territory could once again serve as a staging ground for a proxy conflict or a "shadow war" against India's eastern flank.

### Crisis Around India's 'Chicken Neck'

At the heart of this geopolitical turbulence lies India's narrow Siliguri Corridor—famously known as the "Chicken Neck." This slender stretch is the only link between mainland India and the entire Northeast. Recent statements by Muhammad Yunus reviving the idea of a "Greater Bangladesh," accompanied by maps depicting Indian territories within Bangladesh's supposed sphere of influence, represent a direct affront to India's sovereignty.

Such claims are not merely rhetorical flourishes. They reflect deeper ambitions—possibly encouraged by external actors—to destabilise the Siliguri Corridor and sever India's connection to the Northeast.

Sensing the threat, India has shifted decisively from defensive vigilance to offensive preparedness. The high-level meetings held in Siliguri in recent days—attended by top military leadership, Military Intelligence, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and the Intelligence Bureau (IB)—are anything but routine. The deployment of Rafale and Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter jets, the positioning of the S-400 missile defence system, and the forward placement of BrahMos batteries convey a clear message: India will not remain limited to diplomatic protests.

The heightened activity at the Eastern Command headquarters in Sukna, along with continuous military exercises scheduled through January, reflect a larger doctrinal shift. India is adopting a "zero-tolerance" policy towards any threat to the Siliguri Corridor.

### India's Counter-Move

If Bangladesh—or the foreign powers influencing it—seek to exert pressure on India through the Siliguri Corridor, India has identified two of Bangladesh's strategically vulnerable points: Rangpur and Chattogram (Chittagong). Together, they form what Indian security analysts are calling the "Two-Neck Strategy."

### Chattogram: A Strategic Window to the Northeast



Chattogram, historically and culturally linked to India's Northeast, is today struggling with its own internal tensions and rising demands for autonomy. Growing resentment among local communities against Dhaka—especially regarding alleged plans to lease port infrastructure to Chinese entities—has created a unique opportunity for India.

If Chattogram were to move closer to India's sphere of influence, it would fundamentally alter the strategic geography of the region. India's Northeast would gain direct access to the sea through Tripura—eliminating its landlocked status and transforming the region's economic and geopolitical destiny.

Political voices such as the Tipra Motha have openly advocated deeper integration with Chattogram, reinforcing the region's long-standing civilisational and ethnic ties with Northeast India.

### Rangpur: Bangladesh's Northern Pressure Point

The Rangpur Division, adjoining the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam, is culturally far more aligned with North Bengal than with Dhaka. Should Dhaka





escalate tensions in the Siliguri Corridor, India has the strategic option of leveraging Rangpur's internal discontent to push back.

The recent statement by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma—"Do not cast an eye on Siliguri, or we will take both your necks"—is not a mere political remark. It reflects India's new security doctrine, which is no longer bound by the assumption of static borders.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's comment regarding Sindh—that "borders can always change"—was a calibrated message, not only to Pakistan but also to Bangladesh.

### Security First, Diplomacy Reconfigured

The situation in Bangladesh is likely to become even more unstable as the expected elections in February approach. For India, the meaning of its "Neighbourhood First" policy has fundamentally shifted. The principle now is "Security First."

As anti-India forces consolidate their presence on Bangladeshi soil and the interim government in Dhaka

continues to challenge India's strategic interests, New Delhi has begun sharpening its responses across multiple axes.

The unprecedented intelligence coordination and military deployments in the Siliguri Corridor indicate India's determination to eliminate any possibility of strategic surprise. Whether it is the new radar installations at Lalmonirhat Airbase, increased vigilance against cross-border infiltration, or stronger internal security via SIR mechanisms and enhanced border fencing—India is preparing for every contingency.

Ultimately, India's stance is now unmistakably clear:

If Bangladesh remains a cooperative neighbour, India will extend all support. But if it threatens India's territorial integrity or security, New Delhi will not hesitate to activate its strategic levers in Chattogram and Rangpur to neutralise the threat.

This marks a new chapter in the power equation of South Asia—one in which India is willing to project strategic depth beyond its borders to protect its vital interests. The message is unequivocal: this is a new India—fully capable, and fully willing, to break the hand that attempts to tighten a grip around its 'Chicken Neck.'

## THE BIHAR MANDATE

# THE RISE

## of a Beneficiary-Based Polity

*The predictions of electoral pundits turned to dust, the old citadels of caste equations crumbled, and every roaring voice of dissent faded into an unheard whisper. The 2025 mandate in Bihar has unleashed a political tsunami, beneath whose waves the decades-old foundations of social structures have shuddered. This is not merely the victory of a coalition; it is the roar of an invisible electorate, once counted only in statistics, but whose silence concealed a decisive power.*



Jalaj Srivastava

In a dust-laden village of Mithila, an old woman, her back bent with the weight of decades, leans into a journalist's microphone and says, "Baua, neemakharami nay karbai!" (Son, I will not be ungrateful.) This sentence is not a complex theory from a political analyst; it is the very essence of the 2025 Bihar mandate. It is the epicenter of the silent earthquake that installed the NDA in 202 of 243 seats and drowned the continents of the Mahagathbandhan's social equations in the deep

sea of history. This woman is not an individual; she is the face of a vast, invisible, and hitherto silent female power that has forever changed the grammar of Bihar's politics.

We often measure political change by the noise of slogans, the swell of rallies, and the heat of debate. But the change that Bihar birthed in 2025 was 'silent.' It arrived on padded feet, like a geological tremor whose vibrations are not felt on the surface but which permanently displaces the tectonic plates





below. When unprecedentedly long queues of women formed at polling stations, analysts mistook it for a wave of 'anti-incumbency.' They saw it as a sign of imminent change. But this was a 'pro-incumbency' tsunami, born from the confluence of Nitish Kumar's two decades of social investment and Narendra Modi's 'beneficiary' model. This was an invisible war, fought not with the traditional weapons of caste, but with ration cards, enhanced pensions, and ten thousand rupees transferred directly into bank accounts.

Let us embark on a detailed exploration of the invisible fissures that have appeared not just in the foundations of the opposition, but in the very bedrock of Bihar's social and political structure.

### When Chemistry Overpowered Arithmetic

To grasp the intensity of this political earthquake, we must first look at the cold, unforgiving truth of the numbers. The NDA's 47% vote share against the

Mahagathbandhan's 38%—a colossal 9% gap—is not the result of a minor swing. It is evidence of a social re-engineering. For decades, Bihar's politics rested on solid 'continents': the RJD's impregnable fortress of 'M-Y' (Muslim-Yadav) and the BJP's bastion of upper-caste voters, between which Nitish Kumar carved out his empire by uniting the scattered islands of Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), Mahadalits, and non-Yadav OBCs.

The 2025 election redrew this map entirely. The NDA not only held its traditional upper-caste citadel but planted a victory flag upon it while forging a new social supercontinent. The foundation of this landmass was laid with the bricks of the vast non-Yadav OBC and EBC populations. A surgical analysis of the data reveals that a massive 15% of the NDA's vote came from the EBC community, demonstrating the fusion of Nitish Kumar's social base with the BJP's organizational machinery into a formidable force. Simultaneously, a large section of the Dalit



community became part of this supercontinent, with the NDA securing 13% of the SC/ST vote, while the Mahagathbandhan languished at a mere 4%.

The most significant shift was the breach in the RJD's 'M-Y' citadel. Although the Mahagathbandhan retained the bulk of Yadav and Muslim support, the NDA successfully chipped away 3% of the Yadav and 2% of the Muslim vote. This small incursion symbolized the cracking of a psychological wall that had long proclaimed these communities would never vote for the BJP. This was not mere arithmetic; it was a new social chemistry. Prime Minister Modi gave it a new name—the 'MY' combination of "Mahila-Yuva" (Women-Youth)—an equation that transcends the boundaries of caste and religion to rest squarely on aspiration and benefit.

### A Feminist Democracy: Two Decades of Silent Investment

This was the dividend from two decades of silent investment, a debt that millions of women in Bihar repaid in this election with a vote of faith. While political analysts debated Nitish Kumar's health and his waning political power, they forgot that for two

decades, he had been quietly investing in Bihar's largest and most silent vote bank—its women.

The journey began in 2005 with the revolutionary step of 50% reservation for women in Panchayat elections. This was not just about reserving a seat; it was about making women partners in the sanctum of power. Then came the 'Cycle Yojana,' which gave girls mobility and access to education. The image of girls cycling to school became a symbol of patriarchy's chains breaking in Bihar. It was followed by the audacious decision of prohibition, a move directly linked to the well-being of women in the household. The vast network of 'Jeevika' didis became the backbone of this 'feminist democracy.' This self-help group of over 1.4 crore women evolved from an economic program into a social and political force. These women were no longer mere beneficiaries; they were the architects of governance.

The transfer of ten thousand rupees under the 'Chief Minister's Women Employment Scheme' right before the election was the crescendo to this two-decade-long symphony. The opposition called it a 'bribe,' but for these women, it was a return on their long-held trust. This kind of faith cannot be bought





## The Rise of a New Politics

The deepest lesson from this mandate is that Bihar's politics has arrived at a decisive turning point. This is not the end of 'Mandal' politics, but its metamorphosis. Politics will no longer be fought solely on the basis of 'who you are,' but on 'what you have received.' The 'beneficiary class' has emerged as a new, powerful political identity, one that transcends the walls of

in a day; it must be earned. The 2025 mandate was proof of that earning.

### The Opposition's Self-Destruction

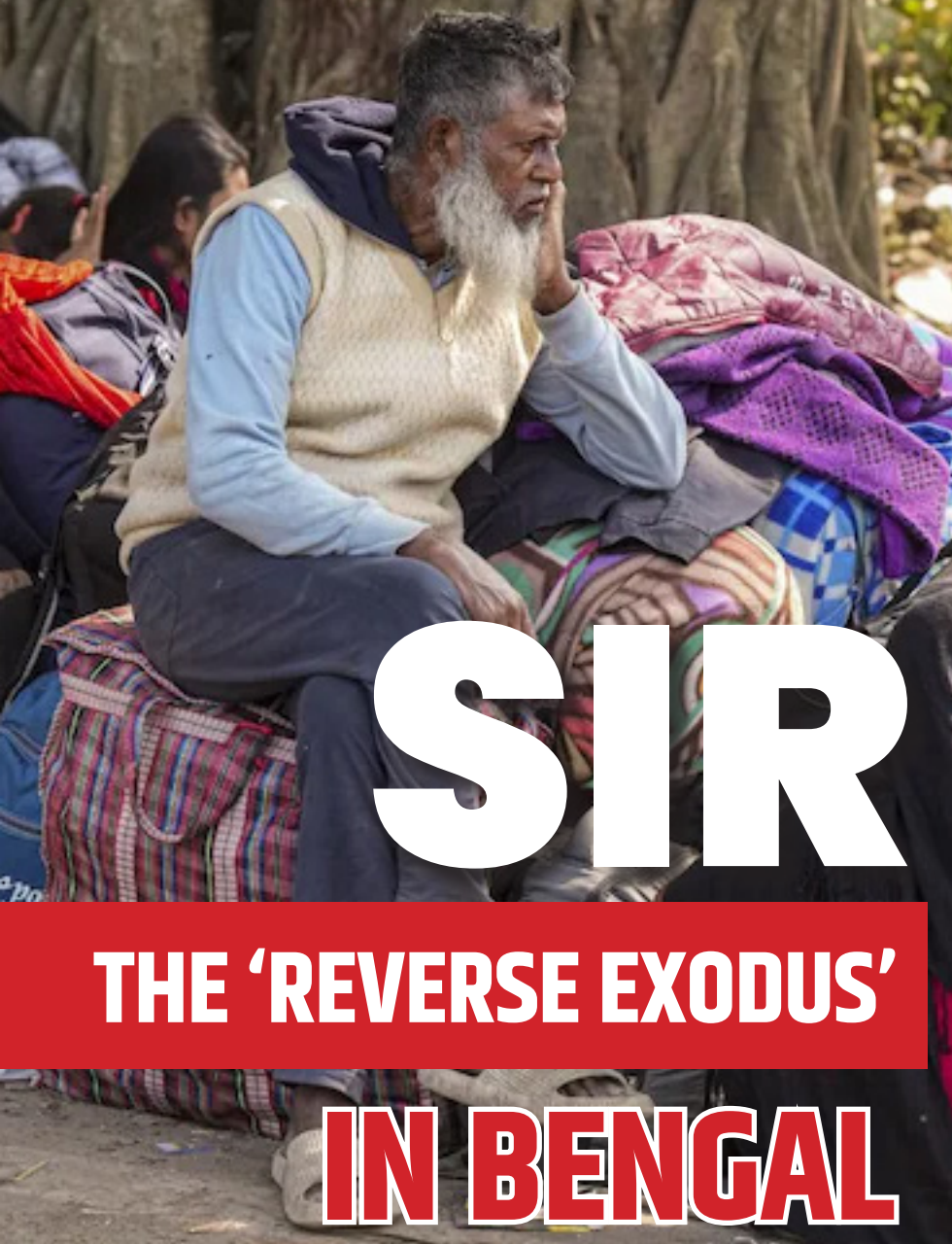
If the NDA's victory was a well-orchestrated epic, the Mahagathbandhan's defeat was a tragic saga of self-destruction. They were preparing to fight a war that was already over, with weapons that had become obsolete. Tejashwi Yadav and the RJD leadership remained under the delusion that their 31% core vote bank would carry them to the threshold of power. They made no serious attempt to venture beyond this fortress to build a broader, rainbow coalition with EBCs, Dalits, and other communities. The NDA, in contrast, forged a more socially inclusive alliance by bringing Chirag Paswan, Jitan Ram Manjhi, and Upendra Kushwaha together. While Amit Shah camped in Patna to quell rebellions, the Mahagathbandhan was plagued by 'friendly fights' and internal discord. Tejashwi Yadav's strategic blunder of not allying with Asaduddin Owaisi's party led to a split in the Muslim vote in Seemanchal, inflicting heavy damage. And looming over it all was the specter of 'Jungle Raj,' a memory the NDA skillfully invoked to strengthen its narrative of development and security.

caste. For the person who has received free rations, an Ujjwala cylinder, and the Kisan Samman Nidhi, their primary identity is no longer their caste, but that of a 'beneficiary.' It is a direct, personal, and transactional relationship forged with the government. In the face of this bond, the old allegiances of caste are weakening.

### The Roar of the Silent Electorate

The 2025 Bihar mandate is not just an election result from one state; it is a message for the politics of all of India. It is the proclamation of the power of the 'silent voter,' who is often ignored in elite discourse. Is this outcome healthy for democracy? Will immediate benefits overshadow long-term issues like employment, education, and healthcare? These are questions for the future.

But one thing is clear. The Bihar mandate is a symbol that the voter's consciousness has changed. They will no longer vote on identity alone; they will decide based on the tangible changes in their lives. The path Bihar has forged could write the script for India's future politics—a future where the largest caste is the 'Beneficiary,' and the greatest religion is 'Development.' The choice is ours, but Bihar has made its preference clear.



# SIR

## THE 'REVERSE EXODUS'

## IN BENGAL



Anwar Hussain

*When long-familiar shadows on the India–Bangladesh border begin retracing their steps homeward in broad daylight, it signals more than migration—it marks a historic rupture. The quiet churn at Hakimpura reveals a collapsing political architecture, where vote-bank alibis crumble before a nation finally enforcing its sovereign truth.*

**W**hen the sun sets over the India-Bangladesh border, a peculiar restlessness begins to float upon the layers of sand and dust wrapped in the crimson sky. The Hakimpura border outpost, a silent witness to infiltrators creeping in under the cover of darkness for decades, is today witnessing an unprecedented historical reversal. Where shadows once crossed

barbed wires to step onto Indian soil and vanish overnight into the nation's crowds, today, those same paths are clogged with footsteps of return in the broad daylight. This scene is not normal. It is not merely a migration; it is the sound of the cracking of a political and social structure that had held West Bengal's demographics in its grip for years.

Thousands of people, clutching not old receipts





but small bags containing their entire existence, now stand in queues to leave the country they had come to call home. BSF officials are calling it a 'Reverse Exodus,' but is this term sufficient to explain the deep political earthquake currently shaking the soil of Bengal? Is this a voluntary return? Is it the fear of the law? Or is it the manifestation of a political reality before which the illegal fortress of appeasement, standing for decades, is finally crumbling?

At the center of this turmoil lies an administrative process—Special Intensive Revision (SIR). While the term sounds technical and mundane, its impact is explosive. Initiated by the Election Commission of India, this process of revising the voter list has unleashed a storm in West Bengal politics. The opposition labels it 'politics of fear' and 'dictatorship,' sharp attacks are being launched against Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, and pleas for 'human rights' are being made. Yet, amidst this political cacophony, the silence prevailing at the borders of Hakimpura and Ghoadanga is the most vocal. It is a silence written on thousands of faces that were Indian voters until yesterday, but today, are forced to return to Bangladesh with their true identities.

Viewed through a deeply analytical lens, this development is not just an electoral tug-of-war. It is a moment in the history of Indian democracy where the blurred line between 'Vote Bank' and 'National Security' is beginning to fade. For right-

wing thinkers and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), this moment marks a historical correction. They believe this is not an administrative exercise, but the restoration of India's sovereignty as a nation. For years, it has been argued that infiltration in Bengal was not merely a problem born of poverty, but a planned political industry. Today, when the SIR process has pressed the pulse of that industry, the entire ecosystem is writhing.

The scenes described in reports by The Indian Express and other media outlets diverge from traditional narratives of human tragedy. People like Abdul Momin, sitting under trees with their life's savings stuffed in plastic sacks, waiting for the border to open, are not refugees of war. They were beneficiaries of a system that has now broken. Momin and thousands like him, who were engaged in domestic work here for years, sweating in factories, and most importantly—queuing up to vote in elections—are today saying, "We can no longer stay here. The risk is too great." This sentence tells the whole story. What is this risk? It is the risk of being caught. It is the risk of answering the question that Bengal's politics suppressed for decades—"Who are you, and by what right are you here?"

For the first time, SIR has shown these people a mirror. This process is not just checking papers; it is breaking the back of the illegal economy that thrived on infiltration. Reports from The Economic





Times reveal that crossing the border and becoming an Indian citizen was an organized business. Crossing the border cost five to seven thousand rupees, and for fifteen to twenty thousand, fake Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and Voter IDs were prepared. The statement of 29-year-old Manirul Sheikh exposes this entire corruption—"I paid about twenty thousand rupees to get the papers made, but SIR changed everything." This confession reveals how Indian citizenship and franchise were turned into commodities for sale. As long as there was political patronage, this business flourished, but the moment the administration showed firmness, it began to scatter like a house of cards.

It is essential to understand the unease in the opposition parties and the leftist camp at this time. They term SIR a weapon against the poor and minorities. Their argument is that this process is designed to target and intimidate a specific community. But a fundamental question arises here—Does a sovereign nation not have the right to verify the sanctity of its voter list? If the names of millions of deceased voters remain alive on the list, if thousands play a role in choosing the country's policies and governments based on fake documents, is this not a betrayal of democracy? A BSF officer's statement that "They came in the

dark, now they are going back in the light through the right path" reflects both the gravity and irony of the situation. This is not oppression, but the re-establishment of the 'Law of the Land.' For years, the border of Bengal was ruled not by the law, but by the 'Rule of the Vote.' SIR has reversed this equation for the first time.

This exodus can be termed 'Operation Silent Cleanse.' According to reports, over twelve hundred people have returned in the last few days. Queues stretch for two to three kilometers. Police stations and BSF camps are filled beyond capacity. These scenes can be heart-wrenching. When a child says he will miss his friends in New Town, it stirs human emotions. But emotions cannot be a substitute for national security. This situation exposes a bitter truth: illegal settlement, no matter how old, cannot gain legitimacy. This is not a human rights crisis, but the logical conclusion of an illegal arrangement.

The noise in the political corridors right now is actually the echo of fear born from shifting power equations. Leaders of the Trinamool Congress and the INDI Alliance are accusing the Election Commission of acting like a BJP spokesperson. However, viewed impartially, this accusation seems laughable. If the Election Commission's job is to





deflected using scenes of poverty, helplessness, and fear as shields. But the nationalist perspective is clear—poverty does not give anyone a license to cross borders and break another country's laws. India's constitution grants illegal immigrants neither the right to citizenship nor political participation. These people may be economically destitute, but in the eyes of the law, they are not innocent. They have violated not just a country's borders, but its democratic system as well.

This scene at Hakimpura is not merely a local event; it is also a mirror of geopolitical reality. The Bangladeshi government has often questioned India's border management, but the SIR proceedings have proven that the problem was not just in the border fence. The problem lay in the internal mechanism that welcomed infiltrators, provided them documents, and made them part of the system. Today, when this internal mechanism is under scrutiny, there is turmoil across the border too. Dhaka can no longer turn away from the reality that its citizens were living illegally in India in large numbers.

Slogans written on walls can be erased, but the cracks emerging on the wall of history cannot be ignored. The way SIR is unraveling the truth layer by layer in West Bengal sends a clear message—Politics is changing. The voter is changing. And the country is reconfiguring its democratic DNA. Infiltration is no longer just an electoral issue; it has become a question of national identity. This process is breaking the decades-old illusion that India is a 'Soft State' where anyone can come and become part of the system.

In conclusion, considering SIR merely an administrative exercise would be a mistake. It is a 'Surgical Audit' of India's security and sovereignty. If the voter list is purified, the benefit will accrue not just to one party, but to Indian democracy as a whole. The queues of departing people, the despair on their faces, and the silence stretching across the border—all signal the dawn of a new era. This is the era of an India that does not view its borders merely as lines drawn on a map, but as the guardian of the nation's soul. Today, that soul is being cleansed—slowly, silently, but decisively. And in this process, the politics of Bengal is about to change forever.

conduct fair elections, removing fake voters is its primary duty. The question should be asked not to the Commission, but to those parties that kept these illegal migrants alive as their 'Vote Bank' for decades. The opposition alleges this is 'Voter Deletion' and 'Political Cleansing.' To this, a large section of analysts believes that yes, this is cleansing—but not of any religion or caste, but a cleansing of fake identities that had infiltrated democracy.

The biggest and most far-reaching question is whether SIR is already writing the script for the 2026 Bengal Assembly Elections. If illegal voters are ousted from the list, if the network of infiltrators that influenced local politics breaks, it will directly impact the vote percentage. The TMC, a large base of which rests on these demographic equations in rural and border areas, may suffer heavy losses. On the other hand, the BJP's aggressive nationalist narrative will find a new edge. This process reinforces the BJP's claim that demographic change in Bengal is a reality and strict steps were needed to stop it.

Some human rights organizations and intellectuals are presenting this as a battle of Humanity vs. Sovereignty. Arguments are being



Srirajesh

*The Earth speaks even in its silence—we simply fail to listen. Between 2015 and 2023, satellites have recorded its slow groan across more than 50 urban hotspots. This groan is the sound of groundwater's fading veins and the oppression of concrete. If we do not listen now, our metropolises, while reaching for the sky, will lose their faith in the ground beneath.*

# THE SINKING METROPOLIS





**O**n the coast of North Jakarta's Muara Baru district, where life once pulsed with vibrant activity, an eerie silence now reigns. Amidst that silence, the 'Waladuna Mosque' stands like a shipwreck—lonely, desolate, and half-submerged. Its walls are no longer inscribed with verses, but with thick, slippery layers of moss. Where the foreheads of the faithful once bowed in prayer, the brackish, murky water of the Indian Ocean now sways. At high tide, the water reaches the mosque's windows, as if the sea is staking its claim, declaring that this edifice no longer belongs to man, but to it. This mosque was not the victim of wartime bombing, nor was it fractured by a sudden earthquake. No foreign army razed it. It was swallowed by the very ground upon which it stood with faith. Today, this mosque is a "ghostly monument" of the 21st century—a testament to the bitter reality that when the Earth groans under the weight of its thirst and the burden of concrete, it spares not even the most sacred of sites.

This scene from Jakarta is not a sequence from some distant horror film or a part of a fictional dystopia. It is the transparent mirror into which India's metropolises are now gazing, even if they refuse to recognize their own terrifying reflection. We often associate disasters with noise and spectacle. The roar of a tsunami, the rumble

of an earthquake, the fury of a cloudburst, or the siren of a cyclone—they all grant us at least a few moments to fear, to flee, to react. But the disaster that has besieged our cities in the age of modern urbanization is 'silent.' It arrives on padded feet, like a thief. Millimeter by millimeter, with the pace of a tortoise, it is hollowing out the foundations of our cities. In scientific parlance, it is called 'land subsidence.' But if we view it through a geopolitical and social lens, it is "Infrastructure Warfare"—an invisible war we are waging against our own existence, a war in which our defeat is all but certain until we bring about a revolutionary change in our water and land management strategies.

Recent research published in the prestigious journal *Nature Sustainability*, based on InSAR satellite data collected between 2015 and 2023, has unveiled a truth that is not merely an environmental concern. It is an existential threat to India's national security, economic stability, and social fabric. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, and Bengaluru—the five colossal engines of India's economy—are running on ground that is slowly, but inexorably, sinking. Let us embark on a detailed exploration of the invisible fissures appearing not just in the foundations of our buildings, but in the very framework of our future security and civilization.

### The Infallibility of Data:

To comprehend the depth of this crisis and the veracity of its claims, one must first understand how scientists measure this invisible process. This is not conjecture or guesswork; it is the result of precise surveillance from space. For this study, researchers used InSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar) data from the European Space Agency's (ESA) 'Sentinel-1' satellites. This technology can detect millimeter-level changes in the Earth's surface by using the phase shift of radar waves. It is akin to measuring a change in the thickness of a coin on the ground, from space.

In parallel, data from NASA's GRACE-FO (Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-On) satellites was analyzed to understand groundwater conditions. These satellites measure minuscule changes in the Earth's gravitational field, which are primarily caused by the depletion or replenishment

## The World's Sinking Cities- What the Satellites See

Global data reveals that land subsidence is now a multi-continental crisis.

- **Jakarta (Indonesia): 25–30 cm/year**  
*(World's fastest-sinking city; capital being relocated as rescue is deemed impossible)*
- **Mexico City (Mexico): 9 meters (total 1900-2023)**  
*(Historic city sinking into its old lakebed)*
- **Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam): 20–60 mm/year**  
*(Result of soft deltaic soil and heavy urbanization)*
- **Shanghai (China): 10–30 mm/year**  
*(Compressed by the weight of its skyscrapers)*

**Conclusion:** Asia is the global 'hotspot.' India, China, and ASEAN nations are home to the world's largest 'subsidence-prone' population.

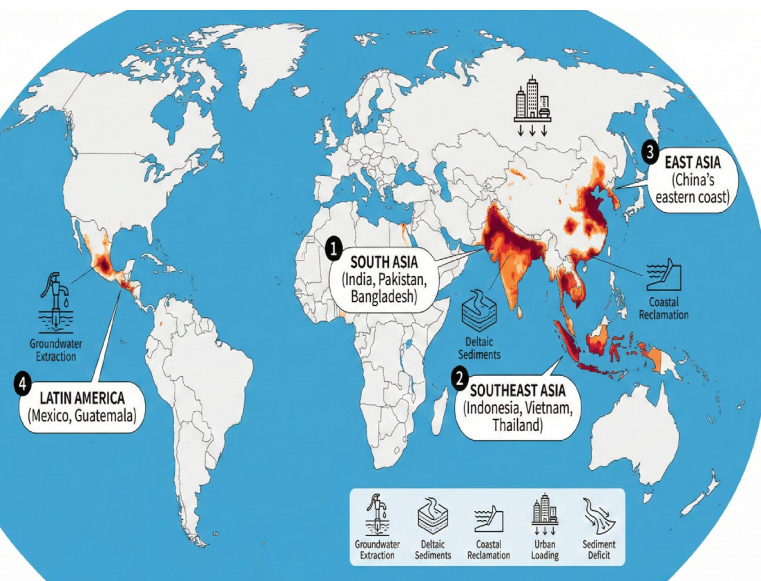
*(Source: InSAR Datasets 2015-2023 & IPCC Reports)*

of underground water reserves. When these two datasets—surface measurements from InSAR and groundwater measurements from GRACE—were combined, a stark correlation emerged: the very areas where aquifers are emptying the fastest are precisely where the ground is subsiding most rapidly. While scientists clarify that InSAR has limitations in densely vegetated areas or on rapidly changing surfaces, for urban concrete jungles, this data is the most concrete evidence currently available to policymakers.

### When the Earth Dries Up Like a Sponge

To understand the process of this disaster is as terrifying as its consequences. We must imagine the





**'OVER 150 MAJOR CITIES WORLDWIDE LIE IN ACTIVE SUBSIDENCE ZONES.'**

world beneath our feet. The soil, sand, and rock under our cities are not a solid block but a vast, complex 'sponge.' For millions of years, the microscopic pores between these layers were filled with water. This water was not just a means to quench thirst; it was a structural pillar. The 'hydraulic pressure' of the water kept the soil particles apart, supporting the immense weight of the land above. It was nature's own engineering.

In the past few decades, in the blind race of unchecked urbanization and population explosion, we have mercilessly squeezed this sponge. According to global studies, particularly research published in the journal *Science* (2021), the over-extraction of groundwater is directly responsible for approximately 59% of land subsidence cases worldwide. We are pumping out water faster than nature can replenish it. As water is drawn from the aquifer, the hydraulic pressure that supported the soil structure vanishes. The result is a simple matter of physics—the soil particles move closer together, the air pockets between them collapse, and the ground becomes 'compact.' In geology, this is called 'compaction.'

Walking on the surface, we feel nothing. There is no jolt; the coffee cup doesn't fall off the table. But the geological structure beneath our feet has been altered forever. The most alarming fact is that this process is often 'inelastic,' meaning irreversible. Once the clay layers are compressed and their structure

has collapsed, you cannot simply pump water back in to re-inflate them. It is a 'one-way ticket.' In parts of Delhi and the NCR, particularly in areas like Kapashera and Bijwasan, where the land is sinking at a maximum rate of 51 millimeters per year, this is precisely what is happening.

This rate might sound small—merely the thickness of a credit card. An ordinary person might wonder, what difference does 5 centimeters a year make? But when you project it over decades, the math becomes horrifying. A rate of 50 millimeters per year means we are losing a meter of ground every twenty years. And the problem isn't just the sinking; it's the inequality of it. The real devastation begins when this subsidence is not uniform across a city but is 'differential.' When the left side of a massive building sinks by 10 millimeters and the right side by 40, it creates stress in the structure. Concrete and steel are not flexible; they tolerate stress up to a point and then they break. Engineers call this 'angular distortion.' This is the point where science turns into disaster.

## Infrastructure Warfare

The problem of land subsidence has thus far been viewed primarily through the lens of environmentalists, hydrologists, or urban planners. This is a monumental error. If we shift our perspective and look at it through the eyes of a defense expert or a national security analyst, the picture becomes deeply alarming. To call it "Infrastructure Warfare" is no literary hyperbole.

In traditional doctrines of war, the enemy's objective is to destroy your 'critical infrastructure.' They target your airport runways, port docking capacities, the levelness of railway lines, and underground oil, gas, and communication cables to paralyze your logistics and response capabilities. In India's metropolises, by over-extracting groundwater unscientifically, we are doing exactly this to ourselves. It is a form of 'self-sabotage' that appears on no radar.

Consider this empirically: the integrity of airport runways is paramount. Pavement analysis shows that if the ground subsides unevenly, it can cause subtle changes in the runway's slope. In peacetime, these

can be repaired, but during a national emergency or war, this could pose a fatal risk for the landing and take-off of heavy military transport aircraft (like the C-17 Globemaster) or high-speed fighter jets. A millimeter of undulation can cause a tire burst or landing gear failure at high velocity.

Similarly, consider energy security. A web of high-pressure gas and oil pipelines lies beneath our cities. 'Pipe fracture modeling' studies show that as the soil shifts unevenly, immense 'shear stress' is exerted on the pipe joints. This can lead to leaks, explosions, or supply disruptions. In coastal cities like Mumbai and Chennai, home to naval dockyards, submarine bases, and strategic coast guard installations, land subsidence and sea-level rise are a double blow. The level of jetties and docks changes relative to the water, affecting the loading, unloading, and maintenance of naval vessels.

Furthermore, modern cities run on 'data.' Underground optical fiber cables are the city's nervous system. The stretching of the ground can snap these delicate glass wires. Banking networks, stock exchanges, and military communications—all depend on them. A metropolis's communication blackout or the rupture of its pipelines is not merely a civic inconvenience; it is a direct assault on the national economy and a grave threat to internal security.

## Internal Displacement and the 'Urban Refugee'

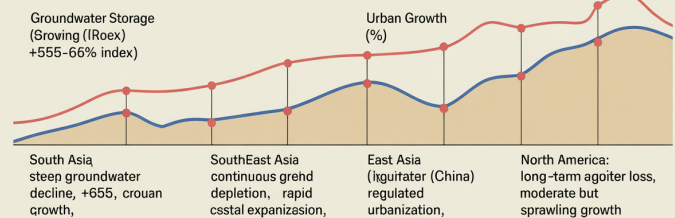
The recent crisis in Joshimath, Uttarakhand, shook the entire nation. We witnessed how cracks appeared in people's homes, forcing them to abandon everything overnight and flee to relief camps. Joshimath gave us a glimpse of the human face of a land that is no longer habitable. But Joshimath was a small hill town. When we speak in the context of mega-cities like Delhi, Mumbai, or Kolkata, the scale becomes so vast it is difficult to even imagine. We are looking at the potential displacement not of thousands, but of millions.

Global assessments indicate that over 80 million of India's urban population reside in areas potentially prone to subsidence. According to the Nature Sustainability research, densely populated areas like Delhi's Bijwasan, Faridabad, parts of Mumbai's Dharavi



## Groundwater Depletion vs Urban Growth

(2000-2025)



Asia shows the strongest corowdwater that grontionn depletion and subsidence risk,

and Wadala, or Chennai's T. Nagar are at the highest risk. These areas have some of the highest population densities in the world. Millions live here. When the cracks in the buildings in these areas transition from 'cosmetic' to 'structural,' and municipal engineers declare them 'unsafe' or 'unfit for habitation,' where will these people go?

This will be a new, complex, and brutal form of 'internal displacement.' We often use the term 'climate refugee' for those who flee floods or droughts. But here, the term doesn't tell the whole story. These people will not be fleeing rising waters or parched fields; they will be fleeing the very ground disappearing from under their concrete homes. This displacement will deepen class divides. The affluent have resources—they can





a living, terrifying example of the famous "tragedy of the commons," where the unbridled pursuit of individual gain leads to collective ruin.

Morally, should one person have the right to extract so much water for their swimming pool or to wash their car that their neighbor's house begins to sink? The current legal framework is incapable of answering this question. Until groundwater is redefined not as private property but as a 'national heritage' and a 'community resource,' and its extraction is brought under strict regulation, stopping subsidence will be impossible. This battle is not just against nature, but against our own archaic and irrelevant legal dogmas.

### The Geo-Economic Bubble

Real estate is a massive pillar of the Indian economy and is considered the safest investment for the middle class. We often hear that land prices in a particular area are skyrocketing. 'Location, location, location'—that is the mantra of real estate. But what happens when the market discovers that the "prime location" is, in fact, sinking? The economic impact of land subsidence could be more devastating and permanent than any stock market crash.

This phenomenon can reduce property values to zero. Apartments selling for crores of rupees today could see their market value plummet overnight if they are scientifically identified as future 'high-risk zones.' This would be a classic case of "stranded assets"—property with no buyers. The global finance and insurance sectors, masters of risk calculation, are beginning to take note. In the US and Europe, insurance companies have either stopped offering policies in flood and subsidence-prone areas or have raised premiums so high that they are beyond the reach of the common person. In India too, insuring properties in 'subsidence-prone' zones may become impossible in the future.

The ripple effects will be far-reaching. If banks stop issuing home loans in these areas because the future of the mortgaged asset is uncertain, the entire housing market could collapse. People who have taken 20- or 30-year loans will find themselves paying EMIs for an asset whose value is now less than their outstanding loan. Furthermore, imagine the financial burden on municipal corporations. Repeatedly filling

retrofit their foundations, use piling techniques, or move to safer, more expensive parts of the city. But the lower and middle classes, often living in unauthorized colonies, slums, chawls, or old, dilapidated buildings, will be the first and worst hit. Mumbai's old chawls or Delhi's unplanned colonies, already precarious due to weak infrastructure and poor construction, could collapse like houses of cards. This will be a humanitarian tragedy whose management would be a nightmare for any government.

### Whose Water Is It Anyway?

At the root of this entire crisis lies not just a technical failure, but a profound legal and moral question: to whom does the water beneath the ground belong? In India, under the colonial-era 'Easements Act, 1882,' it is assumed that the owner of the land has absolute rights to the water beneath it. This law may have been suitable for the 19th century, but for the mega-cities of the 21st, it is proving to be catastrophic.

From a hydrogeological perspective, water is not private property; it is a 'shared resource.' Aquifers do not recognize property lines. When an individual or an industry drills a deep borewell on their private land and extracts water around the clock, they are not just taking water from under 'their' land. They are drawing from a common bowl, an act that affects their neighbor's land, the foundations of the entire locality, and ultimately, the stability of the whole city. This is

# Dwarka's Ancient Warning Echoes



*The seas have long memories. Beneath the waves, not only do ripples rise, but so too do the stories of civilizations, emerging to face us. A few miles off the coast of Western India, beneath the calm surface of the Arabian Sea, a city slumbers—Dwarka. Yes, the very Dwarka that was once the capital of Krishna, now lies scattered in the ocean depths, like a broken past.*

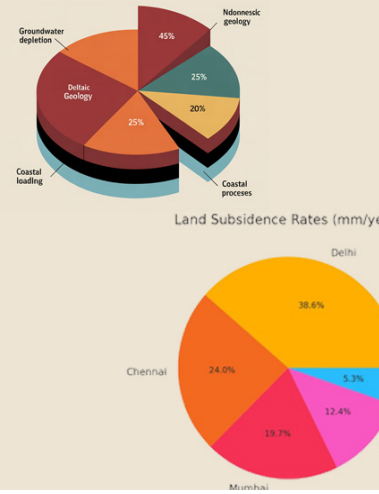
*The submergence of Dwarka is not just a myth; it is a geological reality. Walls, stone harbors, anchors, and a grid-like urban layout found beneath the seabed are silent proofs that a vibrant, well-planned, powerful metropolis once thrived here. Marine archaeological expeditions by the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) found structures 70 to 120 meters deep that were so modern and geometrically precise that even science was forced to acknowledge the mythological account. NASA satellites have also confirmed the presence of human-made structural patterns beneath the sea—as if the map of a forgotten city was being retraced from the heavens. But Dwarka did not sink because the sea suddenly turned cruel. It sank because time, rising sea levels, and coastal instability collectively shattered its golden arrogance.*

*Today, global metropolises like Jakarta, Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Mexico City, and Shanghai stand before the very same question that Dwarka faced millennia ago: Is any city great enough to defy the balance of nature? And can any civilization escape its own mismanagement and greed?*

*A direct link is hidden between the sinking of Dwarka and the subsiding of today's metropolises—a thread that warns that civilizations are not destroyed from the outside; they are hollowed out from within. Dwarka succumbed to the sea, and today, Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata are sinking into the ground.*

*An ancient, mythological city sleeps beneath the ocean, while modern metropolises groan under the weight of future seas and sinking land. Our challenges are new, but nature's message is the same: arrogance—whether mythological or modern—cannot stand before the sea.*

## Why India Matters: 80 Lives On Sinking Terra



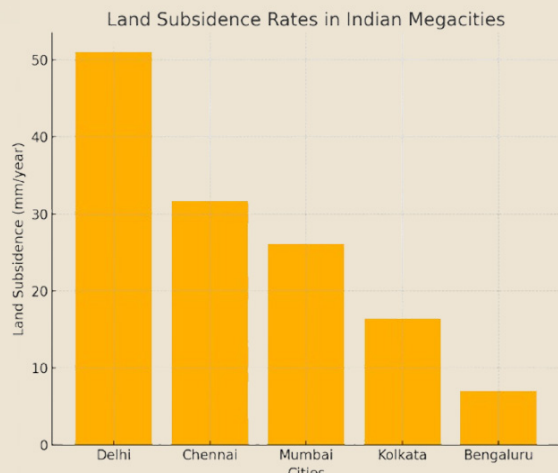
cracked roads, replacing underground sewage lines clogged due to altered slopes, jacking up metro pillars—all this will demand billions of rupees. It is an 'invisible tax' that every citizen will pay, whether directly for repairs or through increased taxes.

### A Tale of Five Cities

A micro-analysis of India's five metropolises reveals that while the root cause is the same—the greed for water and mismanagement—the symptoms and threats vary according to geographical conditions.

Delhi-NCR's case is perhaps the most severe and complex. Its soil is primarily 'alluvial,' deposited over thousands of years by the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. This soil is a boon for agriculture but





India has the largest urban population living on sinking land

a challenge for engineering. It contains layers of silt and clay that are highly 'compressible.' When water is extracted, it compacts rapidly. In Delhi, the groundwater level is plummeting. In posh areas of Dwarka, Kapashera, and South Delhi, home to large farmhouses and societies, borewell motors run day and night. It is an irony that the Yamuna's floodplains, which should have been left to naturally absorb water and recharge the city, are now concrete jungles. The load of heavy construction from above and water extraction from below—this is a double jeopardy for Delhi.

The story of Kolkata and Chennai is linked to their coastal soil structure. Kolkata is built on the delta of the Hooghly river. Its soil has a very high content of 'clay' and organic matter. A characteristic of clay is that it shrinks significantly when water is withdrawn, much like a sponge. Kolkata's old, historic buildings, built on shallow foundations, are now tilting under their own weight and the settling of the soil beneath them. In Chennai, uncontrolled construction in the floodplains of the T. Nagar and Adyar river and the nature of coastal sand make it vulnerable. Here, the threat is twofold: as the land sinks and sea levels rise due to climate change, saltwater intrusion will follow.

Mumbai's crisis is one of man-made land. The city was created by joining seven islands. A large part of the city—from Nariman Point to Bandra

## India's 'Red Alert': 5 Megacities at Risk

India is one of the only countries where 5 megacities are simultaneously at 'high risk.'

### Maximum Rates of Land Subsidence:

- **Delhi (InSAR): 51 mm/year**  
(Kapashera, Bijwasan - severe aquifer decline)
- **Chennai: 31.7 mm/year**  
(Adyar basin - risk of coastal saltwater intrusion)
- **Mumbai: 26.1 mm/year**  
(Reclaimed land - flood risk and drainage failure)
- **Kolkata: 16.4 mm/year**  
(Clay consolidation - threat to historic buildings)
- **Bengaluru: 6-7 mm/year**  
(Localized depressions - impact of unplanned borewells)

**Global Context:** According to GRACE-FO satellite data, India is among the top 3 countries in the world for groundwater depletion.

(Source: Nature Sustainability, 2024 & GRACE-FO Data)

Kurla Complex—was built by pushing back the sea and filling in swamps. This reclaimed land is naturally unstable and continues to settle slowly over decades. Constructing skyscrapers on this unstable ground is a risky gamble. In areas like Dharavi, where population density and construction load are at their peak, even slight subsidence disrupts drainage. This is why the flooding situation in Mumbai worsens with every monsoon. There was a misconception that Bengaluru was safe because it sits on the hard granite rock of the Deccan Plateau. But recent data has shattered this illusion. Newly developed IT hubs like Hebbal, Bellandur,

## Why Does the Earth Sink? The Scientific Reasons

- **Groundwater Over-extraction (Cause in 59% of cases):**

*When aquifers are depleted, water pressure decreases, and soil particles compact. This process is often irreversible.*

- **Soft Sedimentary Land:**

*70% of the world's sinking cities are built on deltas or floodplains. This soil is naturally compressible.*

- **Urban Load:**

*The weight of a concrete jungle is millions of tons, which pushes down on weak ground.*

- **Climate Change:**

*Droughts increase demand for groundwater, while sea-level rise delivers a double blow to coastal cities.*

*(Source: Science Journal, 2021 & USGS)*



and Whitefield, where lakes and ponds once existed, now host massive glass buildings. In these areas, lakes have been filled in, and the water supply is entirely dependent on tankers and thousands of feet deep borewells. The layer of soil above the rock is drying out and subsiding. This shows that even a rock-bed cannot keep you completely safe if you tamper with the ecology.

### Lessons from History and the Present

India is not alone in this battle. This is a global pandemic that questions the very model of human development. Indonesia's example is the most stark. Its government has made the historic and bitter decision to abandon its capital, Jakarta, primarily because 40% of it has already sunk below sea level, and floodwaters cannot be pumped out. They are now building a new capital, 'Nusantara,' in the jungles of Borneo, at a cost of over \$30 billion. But can India

afford to relocate its capitals? Can we leave Delhi and move elsewhere? No. We have neither the land nor the resources. Mexico City, built on an ancient lakebed, has sunk by up to 10 meters over the last 100 years. Its historic cathedrals now stand askew. But there are also rays of hope. Tokyo, the capital of Japan, has shown us the way. In the 1960s, Tokyo was also sinking rapidly. The government took decisive action. They imposed strict restrictions on groundwater use by industries and arranged for alternative water sources. The result was that within a decade, the rate of subsidence dropped to near zero. This proves that with political will and the right policies, this disaster can be averted.

### Policy Interventions and Reforms

So, is all lost? Are we helpless at the hands of fate? Scientists and policy analysts say—no, it is not entirely too late. The satellite data has also revealed a surprising and positive sign. In some parts of Delhi's Dwarka, where rainwater harvesting has been strictly implemented since 2012 and societies have used water from sewage treatment plants to fill parks and lakes, a slight 'uplift' or stabilization of the ground level has been observed. This is proof





that change is possible with the right policies. India must immediately implement a multi-pronged action plan:

First, we must establish a 'National Subsidence Monitoring Unit.' A central, real-time dashboard using InSAR and GRACE-FO data should be created, accessible to every municipal corporation and urban planning department in the country. This dashboard would indicate which areas are in the 'red zone.' This data should not be confined to scientists but must be integrated into city master plans.

The second crucial step is a 'Mandatory Subsidence Audit.' Before any major infrastructure project—be it a metro, a flyover, or a skyscraper—is approved, an audit of the soil stability and potential future subsidence of that area must be made mandatory. Floodplains should be legally declared 'no-construction zones,' as riverside sediment is the most compressible.

Third, we need a radical overhaul of groundwater extraction regulations. Licensing and digital metering for private borewells must be made mandatory. A 'water budget' should be fixed for industries and large housing societies. Simultaneously, technologies like drip irrigation must be aggressively promoted to reduce water use in agriculture, as water extracted for farming in peripheral areas also affects urban water levels.

Fourth, mere rainwater harvesting is not enough; we must move towards 'Managed Aquifer Recharge.' Cities need to be transformed into 'Sponge Cities.' This means reducing concrete surfaces and reviving parks, lakes, and wetlands so that rainwater seeps into the ground instead of flowing into drains. The example of Dwarka in Delhi shows that this strategy works.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to adopt

'Differentiated Building Codes.' For areas identified as 'high risk' (like Mumbai's reclaimed land or Kolkata's clay zones), construction standards must be different and stricter than in normal areas. The use of lightweight construction materials, deep foundations, and flexible pipelines should be made mandatory there.

## The Final Peacetime Warning

History bears witness that the downfall of great civilizations was often not due to external invasions but to the mismanagement of their own resources and ecological suicide. A major reason for the decline of the Indus Valley's Harappan civilization is believed to be the changing course of rivers and the failure of water management. The Mayan civilization also ended due to severe drought and a water crisis. Today, in the 21st century, with modern technology, satellites, and supercomputers, we are repeating the same mistake, but on a much larger and more devastating scale.

Land subsidence is nature's final 'show-cause notice' sent to us. It is a 'peacetime warning.' We still have a small but critical window of opportunity to take stock, to reform our policies, and to redefine our relationship with water. It is a window that is slowly closing.

The question is not if our cities are sinking—the scientific data has proven beyond a doubt that they are. The real question is whether we, as a civilization and a nation, possess the capacity to hear the voice of this silent disaster. Can we change our definition of 'development'? Can we control our thirst today so that our children have solid ground to stand on tomorrow?

Or will we bequeath to future generations a legacy of broken foundations, tilted buildings, defunct pipelines, and monuments submerged in brackish water? Just like that Waladuna Mosque in Jakarta stands today—silent, desolate, moss-covered, and half-drowned. That mosque is telling us something. It is telling us that the Earth's patience is not infinite. The choice is ours, but time, like the subsiding sand beneath our feet, is slipping through our fingers.



# PAKISTAN

## Democracy in Uniform



Rajiv Sinha



Saral Sharma

*In Pakistan, a 'silent coup' has fully materialized beneath the layers of governance, pushing civilian rule to the margins while tightening the military establishment's stranglehold on power.*

*Amidst regional instability, economic chaos, and internal repression, the General's grip has brought Pakistan's future to a decisive and precarious precipice.*

**T**herecent passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment in the Pakistani Parliament will further solidify the military's dominance over the country's fragile democracy. This latest modification grants unprecedented power and legal immunity to the Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir. In effect, the amendment makes it clear that the military has once again outmaneuvered the nation and its civilian leadership. The amendment weakens key democratic institutions,





including not just the government but also the judiciary. It is another attempt to overturn the 1973 Constitution and shift the balance of power decisively in favor of the armed forces, severely diminishing the civilian leadership's role while granting the already powerful military virtually unlimited authority. Crucially, the amendment ensures that Munir's powers will remain undiminished even after any future change in government. Asim Munir is now untouchable by law, and has been officially placed above the heads of all other military branches—the Pakistani Navy and Air Force.

### Seizing Power Without a Coup

Article 243 of Pakistan's Constitution has been rewritten to create a new, supreme military post: the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF). Significantly, the current Army Chief, Asim Munir himself, will occupy this new role. According to the constitutional amendment, the establishment of this new office will effectively abolish the post of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), which was intended to foster coordination among the three services. On November 27, 2025, when the current CJCSC retires, Field Marshal Munir, as Army Chief, will also assume the role of CDF, formally subordinating all service branches to his command. This means the Army will

now dominate the entire military structure in a way never before seen in Pakistan's history. This change risks placing the Pakistani Air Force and Navy under the Chief of Army Staff, which could, however, spark dissatisfaction and increase inter-services rivalry.

If this constitutional amendment were limited only to changes in the military command chain, it would be acceptable, but it also weakens civilian oversight over the country's nuclear arsenal. A new position, the Commander of the National Strategic Command (CNSC), will be created to oversee Pakistan's nuclear forces. The Prime Minister, on the advice of the Army Chief/CDF, will appoint a CNSC from among the Army Generals. Although theoretically the Prime Minister is involved, practically, Asim Munir and the future Army Chief will select the officer in charge of Pakistan's nuclear forces themselves. This commander will then report to Munir through the Army's chain of command. This could undermine the control of the National Command Authority (NCA), which was established to include civilian leaders and all service chiefs in nuclear program decisions. Under the current NCA system, strategic decisions, especially those concerning the use of nuclear weapons, require collective deliberation and are chaired by the Prime Minister. The recent amendment places the nuclear command under a General chosen by the Army, consolidating tighter

control at the Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi.

### Munir Rises Above the Law

Furthermore, in an unprecedented move, top military officers have been granted extensive personal privileges, essentially making them unaccountable in a 'democratic' country. They are now above the law and cannot be prosecuted in any court. The amendment provides lifelong constitutional protection to any officer who reaches the five-star rank. The five-star ranks include Field Marshal (Army), Marshal of the Air Force (Air Force), or Admiral of the Fleet (Navy). These ranks have been rarely used in Pakistan, but Asim Munir was hastily promoted to the rank of Field Marshal following a military conflict with India in May 2025. The latest amendment to Article 243 is a step taken to secure Munir's promotion in the Constitution and ensure his status for life. Under the new amendment's provisions, a five-star rank officer will 'hold the post, privileges, and uniform for life.' He can only be tried under impeachment proceedings. Simply put, legally, Asim Munir will be acquitted and beyond the reach of the courts. This is because no court or future civilian government can charge a five-star rank officer with a crime or remove him from office without a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Similarly, the Navy and Air Force Chiefs have also been given a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for their role in Operation Banyan Al Marsous in May 2025, like Field Marshal Munir. They too will wear the Khaki uniform for life as four-star Generals and will also enjoy immunity from any legal action.

### Judicial Independence Undermined

Another alarming aspect of this constitutional amendment is that it further weakens the independence of the judiciary in Pakistan. The efforts to undermine the autonomy of the courts, which began at the start of the Shehbaz Sharif government's term, continue unabated. The amendment establishes a new Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) to handle constitutional matters, thereby diminishing the Supreme Court's role as the ultimate legal authority of the Constitution. The Chief Justice of the Pakistani Supreme Court will be junior in status to the Chief Justice of the new FCC. The Chief Justice of the FCC can hold office until the age of 68, while the retirement



age for a Pakistani Supreme Court Justice is 65. The gradual erosion of judicial independence has been a notable achievement for Asim Munir and the coalition government led by Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad. However, this achievement is likely to be considered a major failure for democracy in the future.

The process of reducing the authority of courts in Pakistan began in 2024 when Parliament passed the controversial 26th Amendment. This amendment changed the process of judicial appointments and eliminated the Supreme Court's power to take suo motu cognizance of any case. There was a time when the courts played the biggest role in removing General Musharraf from power in 2008, but the proposed changes will make Pakistan's judiciary completely politicized and under the control of the executive. Indirectly, the judiciary will now be under the control of the military establishment. Pakistan's Supreme Court is now a weak shadow of its formerly powerful self. Pakistan's good fortune, for now, is that Munir and Shehbaz Sharif have decided to keep Chief Justice Yahya Afridi in his position as Chief Justice of Pakistan until his scheduled term. After that, the position of Chief Justice of Pakistan will be held by the Justice who is senior among the Federal Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.



## Bilawal Forgets the 'Sacrifices' of his Grandfather and Mother

The most tragic part is that Pakistan's political leadership has bowed by agreeing to these constitutional amendments that strengthen the military and Asim Munir. This is a clear indication of how weak and powerless Pakistan's democratic institutions have become over the last three years. The Shehbaz government introduced the amendment in the Senate amidst near-silence from major political parties. The amendment passed with a two-thirds majority in the Senate after symbolic protests and minor disruptions. The Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) were the orchestrators of this amendment as part of the ruling coalition. Surprisingly, the Pakistan People's Party has historically been a critic of military dominance at various times. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto paid the price for this opposition with their lives. Today, the same Pakistan People's Party is justifying this constitutional amendment, which strengthens the military, through technical arguments and nationalist rhetoric. It appears that PPP leader Bilawal Bhutto is more focused on maintaining Munir's favor than considering the long-term damage this amendment will cause to Pakistan. Pakistan's 'hybrid' system has now deteriorated to the extent that civilian government interference is barely noticeable.

Asim Munir's apparent lust for power can be compared to military dictators like General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s and General Pervez Musharraf in the early 2000s. There are several clear similarities among the three. Both Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf bypassed Parliament and the courts, issued their own decrees, and then resorted to constitutional amendments to institutionalize their dominance. The Eighth Amendment was passed during Zia's rule, while the Seventeenth Amendment was executed during Musharraf's time. Like Munir, they concentrated power in their hands for many years. Despite these similarities, there are some major differences in Munir's approach. Unlike his predecessors, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf, Munir has neither imposed complete martial law nor has he formally assumed any civilian office like the presidency. Instead, Munir is operating from behind the scenes, controlling power according to his will, and allowing the civilian-led

system to function for show.

## Munir Gains Power at Home, Respect Abroad

Munir has taken advantage of a compliant government to pass laws that strengthen the military. This provides him with two direct benefits. The first is that Munir avoids the international stigma associated with a coup, and the second is that he is easily achieving his goals without facing the fatigue of day-to-day governance. For appearances, at least, Munir is operating under a nominal constitutional framework, although he is changing policies according to his will whenever he chooses. Most importantly, Munir has created a status for himself that will benefit him in many ways in the future. Following the recent constitutional amendment to the Field Marshal rank, the law can no longer touch him. Neither Zia-ul-Haq nor Musharraf received such a status, at least not with such explicit privileges. Over the past three years, Munir has employed every tactic—persuasion, temptation, punishment, and manipulation—to consolidate his power. Where necessary, he has acted cleverly. On many occasions, he has worked on behalf of the government. The military played a significant role in neutralizing the political opposition led by Imran Khan's party, PTI. In return, the government has gifted Munir with curtailed judicial independence and a legislature that is essentially subordinate to the military. Munir has been guaranteed his term and his legacy. This is a military establishment coup achieved without deploying tanks on the streets of Islamabad or activating the notorious 111th Infantry Brigade.

Over the past three years, the democratic decline in Pakistan has reached an unprecedented level. The passage of controversial constitutional amendments, the weakening of the judiciary, widespread human rights violations, rigging of national elections, and the excessive use of force against citizens and the political opposition have severely weakened democracy in Pakistan. Yet, interestingly, the international reaction to the demise of democracy in Pakistan has been indifferent. Western countries, who are usually vocal in support of democratic norms, have limited their response to mild diplomatic whispers in Pakistan's case. Surprisingly, the acceptance of the military, which is undermining democracy in Pakistan, is growing in Western capitals, especially with support coming from Washington for the

Pakistani military and Asim Munir. U.S. President Donald Trump openly praised Munir, calling him his 'favorite Field Marshal,' and officially welcomed him to the White House. However, it is a reality that the U.S. has always encouraged military rule in Pakistan, largely because it finds it easier to deal with military rulers, who are more pliable to U.S. policy demands. This U.S. acceptance has further strengthened Munir's confidence. It is believed that with the U.S. backing, Munir will take bold domestic steps and adopt a more aggressive stance towards neighbors, especially India and Afghanistan.

This constitutional amendment that strengthens Munir is a severe blow to Pakistan's democratic credentials. Munir's influence remains immense because he still wears the epaulets—the strips on the military uniform showing rank stars. The judiciary, which was once a symbol of resistance in Pakistan, has also been silenced through changes in laws. The Pakistani Supreme Court's power to act as the final interpreter of the Constitution in cases of violation of the basic structure of the Constitution has also been weakened. It is important to note that the Parliament does not have the absolute authority to amend the Constitution. The Parliament has compromised its integrity under military pressure, making a mockery of parliamentary authority, while mainstream political parties have demonstrated immaturity by either giving tacit consent or allowing themselves to become powerless. The establishment has undermined the foundations of democracy to control and protect its privileged status. It has used the symbiotic patron-client relationship between the political and military elite through pressure and incentives.

### Why Do Politicians Surrender to the Army in Pakistan?

Although the surrender of civilian institutions to the military in Pakistan is not surprising, the over-centralization of power in one person and one institution pushes the country towards long-term instability. Historically, Pakistan has ample evidence that when institutional balance is disrupted, a reaction eventually flares up in some form, whether from within the military, on the streets, or through unexpected crises. However, in an environment lacking transparency and inclusiveness, Munir's

dominance currently faces no visible challenge

Overall, while the common people of Pakistan are witnessing the curtailment of their democratic rights under the guise of the Constitution-clothed martial law, the Pakistan Muslim League has compromised with the military to ensure the continuity of its governments led by Maryam Nawaz in Lahore and Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad. The Pakistan People's Party has also secured immunity for Asif Ali Zardari, who is entangled in countless corruption cases. Although Imran Khan remains a popular figure in Pakistani politics, he and the PTI still have few concessions. Munir's rise to power is not a new development, but according to analysts, the goodwill and support Munir received from the public after Operation Banyan Al Marsus has diminished. A large section of the Pakistani public is unhappy with Asim Munir, especially Imran Khan's supporters, who believe their leader was jailed at the behest of the military.

From an Indian perspective, the strengthening of the military establishment in Pakistani politics, foreign policy, and strategic interests will only be detrimental. Relations between the two countries have remained strained since the India-Pakistan conflict in May 2025. The military's firm grip on power will increase tensions. Along with the warming relations between Washington and Rawalpindi, the Pakistani military's nationalistic fervor is at its peak. Furthermore, India will maintain its tough stance towards Pakistan. India does not want any kind of relationship with the military regime of Pakistan. The recent terrorist attack on the Red Fort in Delhi on November 12, 2025, has further deepened the mistrust in relations. This attack was carried out by Kashmiri radical elements, and India believes Pakistan had a hand in it. Following this attack, the already tense India-Pakistan relations have become even more volatile, with no scope for improvement.

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# India-Pak-Afghanistan

# The Emerging Triangle



Santu Das



***The pace of geopolitical movements within the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan triangle has accelerated unexpectedly. Amidst border closures, air strikes, and high-profile seek alternatives. And that alternative has emerged in the form of India. India, too, shedding its past hesitations, has displayed realistic diplomatic visits, South Asia is moving towards a new balance of power. This shifting triangle will determine the direction of regional stability in the coming months.***



History often arrives at a juncture where geopolitical equations spin entirely on their own axis, and South Asia is currently witnessing precisely such a decisive and ironic moment. The month of November 2025 has emerged as a classic example of paradox in international diplomacy. On one hand, the 2,600-kilometer-long Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan is diplomacy. The reception of Azizi by Joint Secretary Anand Prakash of the Ministry of External Affairs and giving him prominence at the echoing with the smoke of gunpowder, air strikes, and the screams of innocent children. On the other, in the quiet and secure corridors of New Delhi, the Taliban administration's Minister of Industry and Commerce, Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, was being India International Trade Fair (IITF) signals India's altered Afghan policy.





to restore its economic and strategic breath.

For Pakistan, this situation is nothing to Delhi and Amritsar are not just trade routes; they are an 'air bridge' that breaks Pakistan's geographical blockade. short of a nightmare. When US forces were departing Afghanistan in 2021, then-Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Dry fruits, asafoetida, carpets, and gemstones, which earlier fell victim to Pakistan's whims at the Wagah border Khan had described it as a moment of "breaking the shackles of slavery." The Pakistani establishment believed they had finally secured "Strategic Depth" on their western border and that Afghanistan, freed from Indian influence, would become a satellite state of Pakistan. However, are now reaching Indian markets directly. Simultaneously, the strategic importance of the Chabahar port has returned to the center stage., four years later, the picture is completely reversed. Today, Pakistan is grappling with the most severe existential crisis in its history on Although US sanctions pose challenges to trade via Iran, both Kabul and New Delhi are committed to keeping this 'multimodal corridor' active that very western border. Attacks by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—whom Islamabad terms \*. This is a major economic blow to Pakistan, as the Afghan leadership has clearly directed its traders to reduce the use of Pakistani routes and focus on alternatives in India and Central Asia.

On the other hand, the tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan has transformed'Fitna al-Khawarij'\*—are spilling the blood of Pakistani security forces. Suicide attacks in Peshawar, Islamabad, and South Waziristan are proof that the snake Pakistan nurtured in its sleeve is now biting the hand that fed it into a 'Hot War.' The death of women and children in airstrikes conducted by the Pakistani Air Force in Khost and Kunar provinces has pushed anti-Pakistan sentiment in the Afghan psyche to its peak. The Taliban, once considered an.

Amidst this bloody conflict, Afghanistan's pivot towards India is not a routine diplomatic development, but a profound ally of Pakistan, is now accusing Pakistan of violating its sovereignty. The statement by Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid that "Pak strategic shift. When Minister Azizi arrived in New Delhi on November 19 for a five-day visit, theistani invading forces targeted civilians"

By upgrading its mission in Kabul to full embassy status in October 2025, India has made it clear that looking beyond the nature of the regime there, it will remain engaged with the Afghan people and its own strategic interests.

The axis of this new relationship is 'Connectivity,' which bypasses Pakistan. The primary objective of Azizi's visit was to strengthen alternative routes that can end Afghanistan's dependence warmly welcomed. This was not merely a visit; it was a bitter reality check for the Generals in Rawalpindi, who in 2021 had declared the Taliban's takeover of Kabul as a strategic victory. Today, that same Kabul is looking on Pakistan. India and Afghanistan are now moving towards launching air trade at full capacity through two dedicated cargo flight routes. Direct flights from Kabul not towards Islamabad, but towards New Delhi

seems to eliminate any possibility of bridging the chasm between the two nations. Ceasefire message was clear: Kabul is tired of Pakistan's 'blackmail.' Pakistan's strategy of repeated border closures, leaving efforts mediated by Qatar and Turkey in Doha and Istanbul have failed because the fundamental issue remains unresolved. Pakistan wants the Taliban to act Afghan traders' fruits and vegetables to rot in trucks, and exerting political pressure has forced the Afghan leadership to seek alternatives. And against the TTP, while the Taliban maintains that the TTP is Pakistan's internal problem and that it will not raise that alternative has emerged in the form of India. India, too, shedding its past hesitations, has displayed realistic diplomacy. The reception arms against its own Pashtun brethren. This deadlock has become a structural fault line that now seems impossible to bridge.

In this of Azizi by Joint Secretary Anand Prakash and his prominence at the India International Trade Fair (IITF) signals a shifted scenario, India's role is that of a 'stabilizer' and a reliable partner. The 'Soft Power' Afghan policy. By upgrading its mission in Kabul to full embassy status in October 2025, India has made it clear that India earned by sending 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat, medicines, and humanitarian aid to the Afghan people since 2021 is now converting into strategic gain. The Afghan minister inviting Indian traders to invest in mining, hydropower, and it will look beyond the nature of the regime to engage with the Afghan people and secure its own strategic interests.

The pivot agriculture, and proposing tax exemptions, indicates that the Taliban administration has realized that while power can be seized with guns, running of this new relationship is 'Connectivity,' which bypasses Pakistan. The primary objective of Azizi's visit was to fortify alternative routes that can end Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan. India and Afghanistan are now moving towards launching air trade at full a country requires an economy—and that economy is drowning by attaching itself to Pakistan, while it can float by aligning with India.

capacity through two dedicated cargo flight routes. Direct flights from Kabul to Delhi and Amritsar are not just trade routes; they are an 'Air Bridge' breaking Pakistan's geographical blockade. Dry



fruits, asafoetida (hing), carpets, and gemstones— From a diplomatic perspective, India has astutely shifted its policy from 'Wait and Watch' to 'Active Engagement.' India has established functional relations with the Taliban without granting them formal recognition. This is imperative for India's security. A combination of a hostile Pakistan and an unstable Afghanistan could have been dangerous for India. However, the hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan has provided India an opportunity to revive its influence in Kabul and ensure that Afghan soil is not used for anti-India activities (especially in Kashmir). Pakistan's accusation that India is supporting the TTP and Baloch insurgents is merely a reflection of its own frustration and failure which once fell victim to Pakistan's arbitrariness at the Wagah border—are now reaching Indian markets directly. Simultaneously, the strategic importance of the Chabahar port has returned to the center stage. Although US sanctions pose challenges to trade via Iran, both Kabul and New Delhi are committed





Pakistan the Afghan psyche to its peak. The Taliban, once considered an ally of Pakistan, is now accusing Islamabad of violating its sovereignty, it will mark the end of Pakistan's dream of becoming a 'Connectivity Hub.' During Azizi's visit. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid's statement that "Pakistani invading forces targeted civilians" seems to eliminate any possibility of bridging the chasm between the two nations. Ceasefire attempts mediated by Qatar and Turkey in Doha and Istanbul have to India, the discussion regarding the return of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus and assurances of their safety also aligns with India's cultural and humanitarian interests.

In conclusion, the warmth of the Afghan delegation in Delhi and the fire burning along the Durand Line bear witness to the fact failed because the fundamental issue remains unresolved. Pakistan wants the Taliban to act against the TTP, while the Taliban maintains that the TTP that a new chapter of the 'Great Game' is being written. Pakistan attempted to make Afghanistan its strategic depth, but is Pakistan's internal problem and refuses to raise arms against their own Pashtun brethren. This deadlock has become a structural today Afghanistan has become a strategic quagmire for Pakistan. Meanwhile, India, which had withdrawn its diplomats from Kabul in fault line that now appears impossible to bridge.

In this scenario, India's role is that of a 'Stabilizer', has emerged today, without firing a single bullet, as the most significant economic partner in the court of India and a trusted partner. The 'Soft Power' India earned by sending 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Kabul. This is a patient and visionary victory of Indian diplomacy. In the coming days, as Pakistan grapples with its internal violence of wheat, medicines, and humanitarian aid to the Afghan people since 2021 is now converting into strategic gain and economic bankruptcy, the relationship between New Delhi and Kabul will emerge as a new pole of security and stability in South Asia. It is clear that when Kabul seeks hope, it no longer looks towards the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, but towards India. The Afghan Minister's invitation to Indian businessmen to invest in mining, hydropower, and agriculture, along with offers of tax exemptions, towards the Raisina Hills of New Delhi.

to keeping this 'multimodal corridor' active. This is a massive economic blow to. The truth is that Pakistan is trapped in the web of its own policies. The distinction it drew between 'Good Taliban' and 'Bad Taliban' has now been erased.

Looking towards the future, this region is heading towards a major Pakistan, as the Afghan leadership has explicitly directed its traders to reduce the use of Pakistani routes and focus on Indian and Central Asian alternatives.

On the other hand, tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan has transformed into a 'Hot War.' The deaths of women and geopolitical realignment. If the India-Afghanistan air corridor and the Chabahar route succeed, Pakistan will become irrelevant on the trade children in air strikes conducted by the Pakistani Air Force in Khost and Kunar provinces have pushed anti-Pakistan sentiment in map of South Asia. If Afghanistan, often called the 'Heart of Asia,' leans towards India and Central Asia instead of



Michael Froman

# Washington–Riyadh

# The Desert Alliance

# Recalibrates

*Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's high-stakes Washington visit has redrawn the contours of U.S.–Saudi relations. From defense pacts and AI cooperation to nuclear frameworks and trillion-dollar investment pledges, the week marked the most ambitious reboot of the partnership since the historic FDR–Ibn Saud meeting aboard the USS Quincy eight decades ago.*



**M**ohammed bin Salman the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, was in Washington this week to formalize the most significant enhancement of the U.S.–Saudi strategic relationship in recent memory. There is much to be said about the visit, from the remarkable press availability in the Oval Office to the deal fever evident across business and investment forums throughout the week.

I thought I would focus on the major issues discussed between the two countries, the deals that were struck (and the ones that remain stuck), and try to provide some historic context.

Some eighty years ago, in the twilight of World War II and fresh off the Yalta Conference, President Franklin D. Roosevelt first attempted to strike a grand bargain with Saudi Arabia's founding ruler, King Abdul Aziz Al Saud. FDR and Ibn Saud, as he became known, convened aboard the American cruiser USS Quincy while it sat on the Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal. It was Ibn Saud's first time at sea and one of his first times outside the fledgling nation.

Much has changed since then—and much hasn't.

Dinner was certainly different. According to the account of FDR's Saudi envoy William A. Eddy, Ibn Saud "had not yet...had any experience with refrigeration in his country" and adhered strictly to Islamic dietary laws. He therefore insisted to the Quincy's commodore that—against Navy regulations—seven of the "best and fattest sheep" from his personal flock be brought aboard and slaughtered daily for the enjoyment of his retinue and the crew. It was a far cry from the lavish dinner President Donald Trump threw in the East Room of the White House, complete with Elon Musk and Cristiano Ronaldo.

However, what I find most striking about the talks aboard the Quincy, which took place in a tent pitched on its deck, is that the substantive agenda was nearly identical to the agenda discussed at the White House this week.

Cruising through the Suez on the Quincy, FDR made three pitches to Ibn Saud: allow the Jewish people to form a state in the Holy Land, let Saudi oil flow freely, including—and especially—to the

United States; and, finally, embrace the United States as the Kingdom's principal strategic partner. Ibn Saud agreed in broad strokes with the second and third points, but disagreed over Israel, suggesting instead that, since Germany lost World War II, the Jewish refugees ought to get, as reparations, Bavaria as their homeland.

This week, Trump and MBS brought the United States and Saudi closer than ever to realizing FDR's vision for a strategic partnership. Trump also received vague assurances on oil production. But, while MBS expressed general interest in Saudi Arabia one day joining the Abraham Accords, the lack of a clear path toward a two-state solution made normalization with Israel an item of unfinished business.

Nonetheless, Trump elevated Saudi Arabia to the status of a major non-NATO ally, and the two sides signed a new Strategic Defense Agreement that expands U.S. military access rights, formalizes Saudi burden-sharing commitments to defray U.S. costs associated with defending the Kingdom, and clears the way for major arms transfers, including future F-35 deliveries and nearly three hundred U.S. tanks. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia also signed a civil nuclear cooperation declaration establishing the United States—and U.S. firms—as Riyadh's preferred partners for the Kingdom's burgeoning civil nuclear program. A critical minerals framework was concluded to channel Saudi capital into U.S. supply-chain projects, and a landmark AI memorandum granted the Kingdom structured access to advanced American systems and hardware—including leading edge chips from firms such as Nvidia and AMD—while imposing safeguards to prevent diversion or leakage of U.S. technology to countries of concern (e.g., China). The arrangement, coupled with Saudi Arabia's rapid buildout of AI infrastructure, positions U.S. firms to play a central role in the Kingdom's model-training and high-performance computing ecosystem. In turn, MBS increased Saudi Arabia's commitment to invest in the United States to nearly \$1 trillion, up from the \$600 billion pledged in May, though the nature, timing, and feasibility of this pledge remained unclear.

In plain terms, the Saudis got most of what they wanted, barring a mutual defense treaty with the United States—which, by all accounts, remains contingent on Saudi-Israel normalization and would require Senate ratification. The bilateral relationship

has stabilized from its generational low in 2021, when President Joe Biden declared MBS a pariah, after the U.S. intelligence community implicated the Crown Prince in the brutal murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

Did the United States get what it wanted? More or less, yes. The Kingdom doubled down on the United States as its strategic partner in the military and technological domains. The Saudis promised to invest substantial capital in the United States. And the issue of normalizing relations with Israel remains on the table, albeit



unlikely in the near term. But one thing is clear: it is easier to announce a deal than it is to fully execute one. Let's assess each on its own merits.

The likelihood of the arms deal being fully implemented is open to question. Traditionally, U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia (and other Arab states) have been constrained by Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME)—a de facto U.S. policy later codified into law in 2008, which stipulates that the United States must ensure Israel maintains superior military capabilities to its neighbors in the Middle East. When asked about QME directly, Trump put it this way: "As far as I'm concerned, I think they are both [Israel and Saudi Arabia] at a level where they should get top of the line." Will the United States end up selling Saudi Arabia the top-of-the-line F-35s? And, if not, will the sales materialize? Whether they do or not, (a similar deal with the UAE collapsed in part due to U.S. restrictions on exported F-35s) the reality is

that the real win for the Saudis already took place: the prestige of a sitting U.S. president publicly declaring that they could buy F-35s in the first place. Trump appears to put Saudi Arabia on par with Israel as a strategic partner of the United States.

The AI deal may be the most viable of the lot. It turns on whether the U.S. trusts the Saudis to protect American advanced technology from falling into the hands of its competitor and potential adversary. The Saudis have too much to lose by becoming a conduit for Chinese firms looking to circumvent U.S. export controls. After all, the Kingdom's entire economic transformation hinges on unfettered access to Western technology, capital, and talent. While there is some risk that Saudi could misuse AI applications it develops, the President appears comfortable with this tradeoff. The agreement also fits neatly into a broader strategic shift in the United States' international AI policy toward maximizing American market share and the diffusion of U.S.-designed AI





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the Kingdom's economy. And while the Kingdom is rich in oil wealth (pumping some \$500 million per day), oil prices are slumping and production is constrained by output caps agreed to by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Kingdom's main sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), is also low on cash, having invested it abroad, and more recently, poured tens of billions into Neom and other ill-fated domestic megaprojects. On balance, it's unlikely that the Kingdom can afford to meet its commitment to Trump and deploy hundreds of billions of dollars directly into the United States every year for the next several years without compromising some of its domestic economic agenda—something MBS is neither willing nor politically able to do. The far more likely outcome is creative accounting, repackaged commitments, or a shortfall against the headline number which might become evident only after President Trump leaves office.

Some of these deals had been in the works for over a year, from when the U.S.-Saudi relationship stabilized during the latter half of the Biden administration. Still, clearly the personal relationship between President Trump and the Crown Prince played an important role in their advancement this week. To ensure the enduring stability in this strategic relationship, Saudi Arabia would be well advised to work to prevent U.S.-Saudi relations from being defined along partisan lines and to build strong support among Democrats as well as Republicans. Otherwise, what might be viewed as strategic today could be reviewed as only transactional later.

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systems. The real execution risk is whether or not the Kingdom can stand up the physical infrastructure, workforce, and domestic applications ecosystem required to productively deploy tens of thousands (or more) leading-edge GPUs.

Finally, the investment pledge is the least plausible of this week's agreements. The math doesn't pencil out. On Wednesday, I had a chance to speak with Michael Ratney, a CFR member who served as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 2023 to 2025. He just published an op-ed for the New York Times on MBS' new set of priorities. In our conversation, he pointed out something obvious but often overlooked: both sides are keenly focused on attracting foreign direct investment and less focused on doling it out.

On the Saudi side of the ledger, after years of massive outbound foreign direct investment by various state-owned investment vehicles, MBS is now determined to focus his country's resources domestically and to attract Western capital to finance Vision 2030, his strategic transformation of

# Mining **for** Power

*The global climate conversation has pivoted from carbon emissions to the minerals powering the green transition. As lithium and cobalt become the 'new oil,' India is seizing the initiative at COP30. New Delhi is no longer content being a mere buyer; it aims to be the architect of the new global energy order.*



Manish Vaid

**A**t the ongoing COP30, where decision-makers negotiate how much money should flow from where to keep global warming under control, India has called on developed nations to “deliver on promises.” India's minister for environment, forest and climate change, Bhupender Yadav, delivered a statement at Belem, Brazil this week asserting that “developed countries must reach net zero far earlier than current target dates and deliver new, additional, and concessional climate finance at a scale of trillions, not billions.” He further stressed the need for affordable, accessible climate technology and stated that climate technology must be free from restrictive intellectual property barriers.

Speaking at another event, Yadav also highlighted achievements in renewable energy, saying that India has crossed 500 gigawatts of installed electricity capacity – and more than half of it is clean energy.

But the global conversation on climate transition is expanding beyond emissions and finance. Attention is shifting to a less-visible but decisive factor: the minerals powering the clean-energy revolution. For India, still heavily dependent on imports of lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare-earth elements, this marks a strategic turning point.

In 2025, New Delhi launched the National Critical Mineral Mission to secure long-term supplies,



boost domestic processing, and create value-chain linkages with like-minded economies. The logic is simple: without access to the building blocks of batteries, solar panels, wind turbines, and hydrogen electrolyzers, India's low-carbon ambitions risk supply insecurity. The stakes are large. A World Trade Organization analysis shows trade in energy-related critical minerals surged from \$53 billion in 2000 to \$378 billion in 2022.

At the same time, India is 100% import-dependent for at least ten essential minerals, including lithium and cobalt.

In that context, this COP30 offered India a diplomatic opening to link domestic industrialization with multilateral governance of mineral supply chains, moving from a buyer to a co-architect of global rules.

Domestically, India is scaling its exploration footprint. The Geological Survey of India increased critical-mineral exploration projects from 118 in 2021-22 to 196 in 2024-25 (fiscal). Internationally, India has begun building partnerships beyond its traditional suppliers, engaging with Brazil, Argentina, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Australia for access to lithium, cobalt, and rare earths.

One emblematic example is the Altmin-Brazil project, which will refine spodumene ore into 32,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate annually and became the first Indian project listed under the Minerals Security Partnership. Such ventures represent a shift

from commodity procurement to shared industrial capacity. India's limited reserves of key lithium-ion battery minerals, as much as 12-60% of the value chain currently depends on imports, underscoring the urgency to build local processing, note analysts at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW).

At the policy level, India's national mineral mission aims to fast-track 1,200 exploration projects, attract private investment for processing facilities, and create mineral-processing parks linked to the government's Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for green manufacturing. Together, these initiatives lay the foundation for India's role as a strategic partner in an emerging global mineral order, one that emphasizes shared value creation and industrial resilience.

### Mineral Diplomacy

The mineral dimension of climate policy is fast becoming a test of economic competitiveness and regulatory foresight. As the clean-energy transition accelerates, nations are racing to secure lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare-earth supplies that underpin battery storage, electric mobility, and renewable integration. Analysts warn that these minerals could become the new oil, not for their price volatility, but for their potential to re-create geopolitical asymmetries if governance fails to evolve.

For India, this surge in demand is both a warning and a window of opportunity: a chance to establish



frameworks before they ossify under others' influence.

Its strategic leverage lies in combining market size, industrial ambition, and diplomatic engagement to shape emerging norms around equitable mineral access, environmental safeguards, and value-chain transparency, all critical to ensuring that the next energy order is built on sustainability, not substitution.

Geo-economically, India's position combines scale and timing. With energy demand projected to grow nearly 3% annually to 2030, and a goal of 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by that year, securing mineral inputs is essential. Meanwhile, China still dominates the mid-stream: over 90% of global rare-earth magnet processing occurs there. India's strategy to diversify through Brazil, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific is therefore an act of long-term de-risking.

India's projected annual requirement of critical minerals such as cobalt, nickel, lithium, neodymium underscores why India's mineral diplomacy can no longer be incremental. Between 2025 and 2030, domestic demand for lithium and cobalt alone is set to rise more than two hundredfold, while nickel use will nearly sixfold. These trajectories mirror India's accelerating electrification, but also its deepening import exposure. The trend transforms minerals into what oil once was, a strategic currency of power. If unaddressed, it could replace hydrocarbon dependence with mineral vulnerability.

### From Policy Participant to Rule-Shaper

If India is to turn its mineral ambitions into lasting strategic autonomy, a few refinements could sharpen its framework further. Comparing India's approach with other Global-South leaders offers perspective. Brazil is moving from raw exports to local value-addition; its industry blueprint for a National Policy for



Critical and Strategic Minerals places emphasis on domestic processing and governance, while new partnerships and financing aim to build rare-earths capacity. South Africa's community-inclusive model links mining rights to local welfare via mandatory social and labor plans.

Yet structural constraints remain. India's domestic refining base is limited, and technology partnerships for beneficiation, separation and recycling must be accelerated. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis urges India to expand

joint research and secure technology licenses to avoid mid-stream dependency. Governance frameworks also need to evolve.

The forthcoming National Mineral Policy 2025 should institutionalize environmental and social standards across new projects, ensuring the drive for autonomy does not come at ecological cost. Finally, advancing a Global Minerals Equity at COP30, echoing civil-society calls to embed transparency, equity, environmental safeguards, and labor rights into mineral governance would elevate India from policy participant to rule-shaper in the emerging mineral order.

Hence, India's engagement at COP30 is not about resource acquisition but about reshaping value chains: securing technology partnerships, investing in refining, and co-designing global mineral governance. The steepness of the curve itself justifies India's shift, from a passive importer to an active architect of the next energy order.

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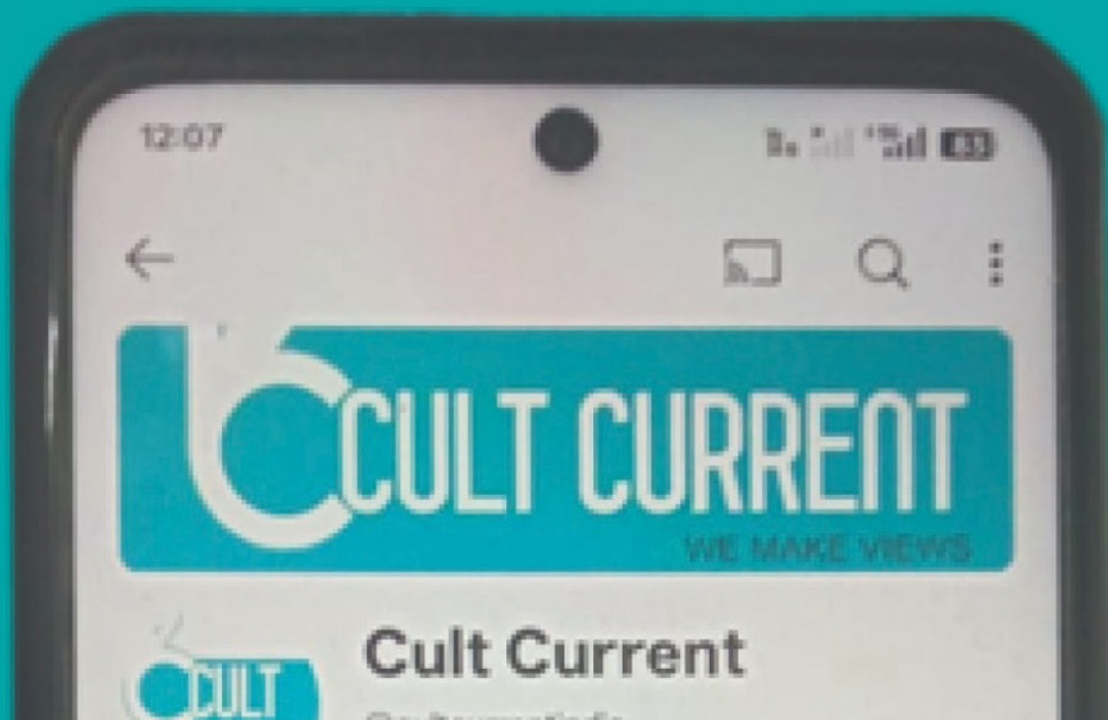
*Manish Vaid is a Junior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, with his research interests primarily encompassing strategic energy studies and green energy transitions. This article of his, originally published in RT, is being reproduced here with due acknowledgment.*



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Sergei Strokan

# PUTIN, OIL, AND TRUMP





**W**ith the onset of winter, a distinct diplomatic restlessness can be felt in the atmosphere of Moscow. On November 17, when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov welcomed his Indian counterpart, Dr. S. Jaishankar, the meeting was far more than a mere formal ritual, nor was it just a routine conversation on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) gathering. In diplomatic corridors, the whisper is unmistakable: the two veterans were, in fact, laying out the vast chessboard for a meeting between two of the world's most powerful leaders next month—Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This meeting serves as the prelude to the mega-event scheduled for early December in New Delhi, an event upon which the hawk-like eyes of not just Asia, but the entire Western world, are fixed.

This is no ordinary era. It is a time when geopolitical equations are shedding their old skins daily. On one side stands Moscow, intent on piercing the unprecedented fortification of Western sanctions to give a new dimension to its relationship with an old ally. On the other side, following a shift in power in Washington D.C., stands a new and aggressive America. President Vladimir Putin's upcoming visit to India is historic and sensitive in many ways. It will be the first time since the onset of the Ukraine war that Putin sets foot on Indian soil. This visit occurs at a delicate juncture, just as Donald Trump, sitting in the White House across the seven seas, appears determined to break India's 'strategic autonomy' on his own terms. Amidst this whirlwind of external pressures, the convergence of Moscow and New Delhi is not merely a bilateral dialogue, but a geopolitical manifesto declaring that an old friendship cannot be shaken by American interference or threats.

*Along with the winter chill, the breath of power has also begun to blow hot and cold. The chessboard is set on the tables of Moscow and Delhi; the pieces are silent, yet every move hints at the strategy ahead. This December meeting is destined to decide—will India honor an old friendship, or will it bow before the weight of American pressure?*

The script for this diplomatic grand conclave in December began writing itself on November 7, during a marathon meeting between Jaishankar and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko in New Delhi. In diplomacy, signals hold immense weight. The statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry following that meeting, and the subsequent remark by Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov that "we are actively preparing for Putin's visit," are indicators of just how seriously Moscow views this trip. Peskov's cryptic assertion that "agreements will be announced at the appropriate time" suggests that the text of significant accords has already been drafted behind the curtains—accords that may well surprise the world.

The upcoming 'Russia-India Forum' and the 23rd Annual Summit, slated for December 4-5 in New Delhi, will not be a stage merely for handshakes and photo-ops. It is essential to understand the depth of the agenda. An analysis of statements by Roscongress and Russia's Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Alexey Gruzdev,



reveals that Russia no longer wishes to remain solely a seller of weapons and crude oil. With the doors to Western markets closed, Russia views India as a long-term economic partner. They intend to introduce heavy machinery, technical products, and even agricultural goods into the Indian market. In return, they seek not just currency from India, but digital services, pharmaceuticals, and most crucially—human resources.

Perhaps the most intriguing and far-reaching aspect of this summit could be the 'Labor Mobility Agreement.' Russia is grappling with a demographic crisis and is in dire need of workers to run its industries, while India possesses the world's largest youth workforce. If this agreement comes to fruition, the coming years could see a significant number of Indian professionals and laborers making their presence felt in Russia's construction, energy, and service sectors. This step would transform the relationship from a buyer-seller dynamic into a deep socio-economic integration.

However, a significant American hurdle looms like a dark chapter over this rosy picture of the Indo-Russian future. Since

Donald Trump assumed office in January, Washington's stance toward New Delhi has become aggressive and transactional. Sidestepping diplomatic niceties, the Trump administration has begun to speak the direct language of economic warfare. Trump's explicit statement that he would compel India to stop purchasing Russian oil was not an idle threat. On August 6, the imposition of an additional 25 percent tariff on India for purchasing Russian oil, followed by new sanctions on 34 major Russian entities including Rosneft and Lukoil on October 22, proves that America is in no mood to spare even friends who trade with its 'enemies.'

The direct impact of this is already visible on the Indian economy and energy security. Indian oil companies, which had been reaping heavy profits by purchasing cheap Russian oil and keeping domestic fuel prices under control, are now cowering under the fear of American sanctions. Finding alternatives in the spot market is not only expensive but also poses a challenge to India's energy security. The gravity of the situation can be gauged by the fact that nearly \$300 million in dividends belonging to the Navratna company Oil India Corporation are stuck in Russian





banks, rendered impossible to repatriate due to international sanctions. These companies are now looking toward the upcoming summit with hope, anticipating that Putin and Modi might devise a financial mechanism to bypass the hegemony of the dollar and the reach of American

sanctions.

Putin's argument from the Valdai Discussion Club carries immense weight and economic realism: if India turns away from Russian energy products under American pressure, it faces a direct loss of 9 to 10 billion dollars. The irony is that even if India were to obey the American dictate, the US would not compensate for that loss; instead, it would extract more money in the form of tariffs. Putin's question—"What, then, is the rationale for doing so?"—is echoing in the minds of Indian policymakers as well.

On the other hand, Donald Trump and his team are working on a strategy to ramp up the pressure to its breaking point. Trump's support for a bill in the US Congress that includes provisions for 'Secondary Sanctions' is a warning bell for India. By brandishing the fear of import tariffs as high as 500 percent, America seeks to force India to its knees. This is not just about oil; it is a direct assault on India's sovereignty and independent foreign policy. America wants India to abandon its old policy of non-alignment and stand entirely in its camp, even if it means sacrificing its old and reliable friend, Russia.

Turning back the pages of history, exactly twenty-five years ago in October 2000, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Vladimir Putin signed the Declaration of Strategic Partnership, the world was changing

then too, yet India and Russia stood together. That agreement dictated that annual meetings of top leaders would occur without interruption. Over the last five years, particularly following the Ukraine war and COVID, this tradition has indeed been disrupted. Since Putin's last visit to India in 2021, the world has changed drastically. Putin's absence during the G20 in 2023, where Lavrov represented him, was a sign of the practical complexities that had crept into the relationship. But now, with Putin himself coming to Delhi, it is an attempt to bridge that 'hiatus'.

Seemingly dry issues on the agenda of the upcoming summit—such as logistics, payment systems, and trade imbalances—are, in reality, the lifeline of this relationship. Until both countries develop a solid payment mechanism other than the dollar (such as digital currency or a new version of the rupee-ruble arrangement), their strategic partnership will remain hanging under the sword of American sanctions. The visit of the Russian Deputy Minister to Visakhapatnam and the emphasis on the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor are part of this very strategy: to open trade routes that are far from Western scrutiny.

In conclusion, this December summit will prove to be a difficult diplomatic examination for India. On one side lies decades of trust with Russia and the question of future energy needs; on the other, the growing commercial relationship with America and the fear of its wrath. Prime Minister Modi and his team will have to walk a fine line where they can deepen ties with Russia while escaping the net of American economic sanctions. The chessboard laid out from Moscow to Delhi, and the crooked gaze of Washington, suggest that the coming month will determine the direction and state of Indian foreign policy. Will India be able to preserve its strategic autonomy, or will it be forced to choose a side in the clash of superpowers? The answer lies in the womb of the future, but one thing is certain: this winter, the diplomatic temperature is set to rise significantly.

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*This article is based on the facts and context of the original piece written by Sergei Strokhan, a senior columnist for the Russian newspaper Kommersant. Cult Current republishes this with gratitude for his diligence and research.*



Kamyar Kayvanfar

*Iran is currently grappling with a severe water shortage. This situation is not merely the result of drought, but rather the consequence of its old policies and thinking. During the Shah's era, the focus shifted from agriculture to industry, and after the revolution, water was treated as a fundamental right, leading to a massive increase in its use. These collective decisions have brought the country to a point of thirst that can only be quenched by a new mindset, not just new policies.*

# Thirsty Nation Fixed Mindset



The roots of Iran's current water crisis are deeply embedded in its political journey. During the Pahlavi regime, the country placed its entire emphasis on industrialization and modernization. Through the White Revolution (1963), the Shah sought to transform Iran into a modern, industrial state capable of strongly competing with Western economies. At the time, agriculture was not merely neglected but was intentionally deprioritized. This was a calculated decision where capital, labor, and infrastructure were directed toward factories, oil, and heavy industry.

Land reforms fragmented large estates into small holdings, severing the traditional landlord-peasant relationship. While aiming for equality, these reforms disrupted agricultural practices and alienated the rural elite. Due to the lack of capital and irrigation infrastructure, many small farmers viewed the Shah's modernization as an assault on Iran's traditional agricultural system.

This resentment proved crucial for political rebellion. These dissatisfied villagers and small-town residents formed the initial base of support for the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Religious leaders, including Ayatollah Khomeini, who came from a modest rural background, capitalized on this discontent. Following the revolution, a major policy shift occurred: agriculture was no longer just an economic sector but became an ideological symbol of national truth and revolutionary justice.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) further solidified this change. Wartime self-sufficiency promoted the concept of *Khodkafa'i* (self-sufficiency). Food grain production became a symbol of resilience against foreign dependence. The government decided to massively expand agriculture. Dams were constructed, and water-intensive crops like wheat, rice, and sugarcane were subsidized, even in drought-prone areas.

In the Shia tradition, the denial of water to Imam Hussein, his family, and supporters during the Battle of Karbala is a powerful moral symbol. After the revolution, this symbol took the shape of a welfare policy, and the state declared that no one would be denied access to water. Barriers to supplying water to homes were lowered, ensuring that water was not a commodity but a human right. However, this religious commitment encouraged excessive water use and fostered public indifference toward conservation,

creating conditions for long-term water scarcity.

## Cultural and Ideological Dimensions

In Iran, water is not merely a natural resource but an ideological construct tied to the identity of the revolution. The Islamic Republic views the provision of water and bread to all as divine justice and governmental compassion. Consequently, agricultural subsidies, especially in villages, became a tool for political inclusion and loyalty. Farmers, long considered the 'guardians of the revolution,' began to benefit excessively from cheap electricity and irrigation water.

This is more than just a means of appeasement; it reflects the government's deep-seated roots in the villages. The early leadership viewed farming as a sacred duty and a revolutionary obligation. They saw self-sufficiency as a moral virtue, prioritizing social equity over industrial efficiency and loyalty over competence.

Thus, bread has become an ideological issue. This is evident in countless Persian proverbs centered on bread as the foundation of dignity, livelihood, and divine blessing. Therefore, suggesting that bread or the water used to produce it should be treated as a valuable commodity is politically suicidal. This is why proposals for water price reforms are usually dismissed as 'anti-Islamic' or 'elitist.'

The symbolic significance of bread in Persian and Islamic culture has reinforced this commitment. Ensuring that 'bread is always on the table' and 'does not come from another country' has become both a social contract and a religious duty.

This mindset has also led to policy paralysis. Decision-makers, many of whom emerged from revolutionary and wartime institutions rather than the bureaucracy, view the water crisis through a wartime lens—where endurance, not conservation, is required. Water scarcity is considered another source of tension requiring citizens to show patience. Such thinking undermines the reform process. As a result, subsidies persist, consumption continues, and the narrative that once unified the nation is now obstructing the strategic planning necessary for stability.

## Current Challenges

All of this has a negative impact. Iran's water crisis is

now affecting structural, administrative, and social aspects.

### Structural and Industrial Conflicts

Early post-revolutionary governments spent heavily on dams and canals, but 'water mafias' constructed dams that were rarely fully filled. This led to a drop in groundwater levels in plains since the 1990s, turning once-fertile lands into dust. More seriously, the state is both a regulator and a competitor. Many of Iran's water-intensive industries, including steel, petrochemicals, and the energy sector, are entirely state-owned or controlled by semi-military establishments. Thus, the government benefits from the very deficiencies it is supposed to fix. Any reform curbing industrial water use would also threaten state revenue.

### Corruption and Illegal Water Extraction

Large-scale illegal well-digging has exacerbated the water shortage. Thousands of unauthorized wells are extracting water without control, often with political patronage. Corruption and weak law enforcement mean that even existing laws are applied arbitrarily. Officials have little incentive to impose fines and often profit from this nexus.

### Technical Deficiencies and Policy Inertia

After the Iran-Iraq War, many former soldiers joined the civil service. They were deemed loyal due to their revolutionary background but lacked a technical perspective. Water policy is determined not by hydrologists or economists, but by military and like-minded figures. Consequently, solutions to the water crisis are sought in a wartime context—reactive, short-term, and focused on resistance rather than reform.

### Emergency Governance

Iran's broad political culture reinforces this complacency, as the government constantly grapples with emergency situations—sanctions, inflation, energy shortages, and social unrest. This prevents water crisis management from being prioritized. There is also a lack of consensus on investment strategy, with highly visible, quickly completed projects like dam construction being favored over long-term catchment area management.

### Social and Security Impact

Rural areas, once the core of the revolution, are now centers of discontent. Farmers have repeatedly protested the drying up of rivers like the Zayanderud in Isfahan, demanding government accountability. In Khuzestan, similar protests turned violent due to destructive dam construction and river diversion for industrial use, which ruined agriculture. The drought is accelerating rural-to-urban migration, increasing unemployment, housing shortages, and public dissatisfaction.





## The Way Forward

Iran possesses the scientific capacity to make its water resources more sustainable, but its political and ideological framework obstructs reform.

### Diversification and Importation

Iran can reduce pressure on its water resources by importing water-intensive crops like rice and sugarcane and focusing on drought-resistant varieties. However, this contradicts the principle of self-sufficiency, which is integral to the revolution's identity. Politicians fear that promoting imports would be a symbolic betrayal of the revolutionary promise. Beyond crop diversification, Iran could modernize its irrigation systems by replacing flood irrigation with efficient drip irrigation Shutterstock, maximizing water use in agriculture. Small-scale groundwater recharge projects and soil moisture monitoring systems, if implemented alongside, could help sustain rural livelihoods without the heavy expense of new dams.

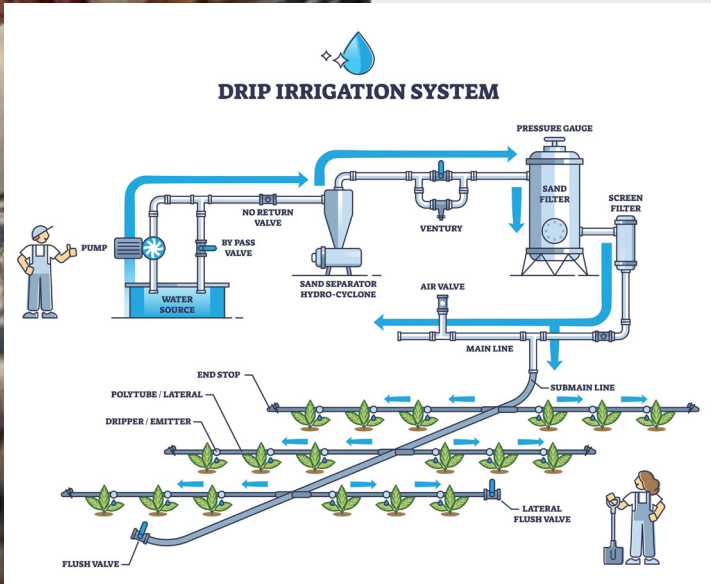
### Subsidy and Governance Reform

Better pricing mechanisms could curb water wastage, but removing subsidies risks alienating the government's most loyal base: rural farmers. The experience of 2019, when rising fuel prices triggered nationwide unrest, serves as a stark warning. The real problem is the state's own massive water consumption; for any rule to be effective, it would first have to restrict its own industries, which it has consistently resisted. Alongside pricing reform, investment in urban wastewater recycling and industrial water reuse is essential to reduce fresh water consumption. Desalination can create strategic reserves for coastal cities like Bandar Abbas and Bushehr, easing pressure on local water resources.

### Technical Empowerment

Bringing in technically trained administrators instead of military and religious figures to decision-making roles would ensure a more sustainable approach to water management. However, such a change requires a shift in power that the Islamic Republic is unlikely to support. As long as critical decisions are determined by an 'adversarial mindset,' policy processes will prioritize short-term control and suppression of protests over advancing major structural reforms.

*Kamyar Kayvanfar is a communication and public relations expert fluent in original Persian and English. This article was originally published in the Middle East edition of ORF, and we are republishing it with gratitude.*



# Rising Tides

## Naval Strides

***A wave of naval renaissance is sweeping through South Asian nations and the Global South. China is emerging as a massive wave, followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh, yet our silent and solid preparations are not lagging behind either.***



Sanjay Srivastava

**A** new trend is visible among the maritime nations of the Global South. It seems as though the navies of these countries have entered an era of renaissance. These nations appear so intent on grooming and modernizing their naval forces that they overlook whether these exercises are excessive in proportion to the actual threats at their maritime borders. The primary goal for most is to elevate their maritime power to a new level through the development of naval capabilities.

South Africa, Brazil, Iran, Thailand, and others are adding state-of-the-art frigates, submarines, and multi-role warships to their fleets, thereby increasing geo-strategic competition in the Indian Ocean and southern maritime regions. In this landscape of naval renaissance, the continuous expansion of the Chinese Navy, the cooperation between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi navies, and the manner in which China is aiding both, is noteworthy.

India must keep a close watch on the naval preparations of China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in South Asia, and prepare itself accordingly. Given the naval expansion in the global scenario, it must also stay apprised of developments in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other nations in the region.

The Pakistani warship that reached Bangladesh on a goodwill visit—passing through the Bay of Bengal for the first time in 54 years to strengthen defense cooperation—departed on November 12, leaving India with a pressing question: Why and how is a plot for naval strengthening brewing between these two countries?

The Chittagong port is near the country's eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal; China wishes to establish a base here, so the movement of Pakistani and Chinese ships will increase the threat to India's maritime security. Under 'Forces Goal 2030', the Bangladesh Navy is not only purchasing new warships but also enhancing capabilities in submarines, ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance), and indigenous manufacturing. The country's largest naval base is being constructed in Rabnabad to augment submarine and maritime aircraft operations.

Pakistan is engaged in a 9-year modernization program for warships and submarines with the help of China and Turkey, alongside purchasing several vessels made by them. Its first Hangor-class submarine, developed with Chinese assistance, will join its navy next year, with plans to increase this number to eight by 2028. There are reports that the Babur-class frigate, built in Turkey and equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and stealth





features, will be inducted this year.

The Pakistan Navy is conducting joint exercises with the Maldives, which is inducting the Dogan-class fast attack craft donated by Turkey into its navy. Behind these exercises, Pakistan's objective is not only the security of maritime resources and strategic sea routes but also a show of force. The Sri Lankan Navy is also trying to increase its strength in collaboration with Chinese, Russian, and Western partners.

China recently launched its third state-of-the-art aircraft carrier, the Fujian, and with the announcement of a fourth, it has sounded the bugle of its maritime ambition and power projection in the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, and the Strait of Hormuz. With the arrival of the Fujian, featuring an electromagnetic catapult system, the Chinese Navy has become the second navy in the world after the US to possess a carrier fleet equipped with such modern technology. Modern aircraft like the J-35 stealth fighter, KJ-600 warning aircraft, and J-15 can be deployed on a large ship like the Fujian, capable of taking off and landing even on shorter runways. This will enhance its navy's capacity to sustain long-range strike capabilities for days without interruption. It can conduct defense, rescue, attack, and surveillance operations simultaneously for extended periods. Consequently, China can project its power in Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

Now, China can combine its three carriers—the Russian-designed Liaoning and Shandong, and the indigenous Fujian—to form a Carrier Strike Group, and India will be the sole nation in this region significantly affected by this. India's trouble is that its fuel supply and trade routes pass through here. Although it remains to be seen how quickly the Fujian will be war-ready, its arrival will undoubtedly increase pressure on the Indian Navy to modernize its ships, aircraft, and radar systems.

India currently possesses two aircraft carriers, INS

Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant. Both utilize ski-jump ramp technology, whereas the opponent possesses technology far superior to this, placing their navy miles ahead of the enemy during war. Although India is considering building next-generation warships equipped with electromagnetic catapult systems, judging by today's pace, achieving this goal will take many years.

INS Vikramaditya may be retired in 2035. To maintain strategic balance in the Indian Ocean, a third aircraft carrier is needed, preparations for which are being accelerated; there are also plans to deploy two other warships. But the question is: Will they be as modern as the Fujian?

While Bangladesh's cooperation with China and the latter's expansion through naval bases is a cause for concern, the Pakistan-China alliance, China-Bangladesh maritime intrusion in the Bay of Bengal, and China's gaze upon the Africa-Arabian Sea put India under strategic pressure. Our competitors have adopted time-bound programs; in response, we have adopted such a rapid process that our lagging behind is impossible.

However, the new naval preparations of neighbors and Global South nations will directly impact India's strategic and policy actions in the future, necessitating a vigilant, advanced, and cooperative approach. We must enhance multi-domain vigilance, surveillance, and naval power projection in the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. With the game of power projection increasing due to competitive naval expansion, maritime connectivity, resource protection, security of supply chains, and multi-lateral coordination will become essential. Therefore, we must further increase technological upgradation, international cooperation, and strategic and diplomatic proactivity to maintain a bespoke balance of power.

However, the era of naval renaissance in the Global South presents opportunities alongside challenges for India. If India implements self-reliant, indigenous new naval capabilities with stability and expansion in a timely manner, it can ensure its leadership in the Indian Ocean Region. The government and the Navy are aware that through capability development, maritime interests must be translated into actual power. Lagging in this direction could be risky. Significant concrete steps have already been taken in this regard. Undoubtedly, India's power at sea will increase, and geopolitical equations there will soon turn.



# CORRIDOR OF POWER



Ayaz Wani

*A quiet revolution is unfolding across Eurasia. The Eastern Corridor of INSTC is no longer just a line on the map—it is fast emerging as India's most strategic gateway to Central Asia, rare-earth wealth, and alternative trade lanes beyond Suez. A 12-day Moscow-Tehran cargo run marks the beginning of a new commercial order.*

**T**he Eastern Corridor of the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) achieved a significant milestone on 8 November 2025, when a cargo train originating north of Moscow arrived in Iran, carrying 62 40-foot containers through Central Asia. The 900-km journey to the Aprin dry port in Tehran took 12 days, crossing Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan before entering Iran at Incheh Borun.

Since March 2025, New Delhi has been using the same route to send cargo from the Mundra Port in Gujarat to Central Asia via Iran's Bandar





Abbas port. For India, the INSTC's Eastern Corridor not only provides an alternative to the Suez Canal but is also vital to fulfilling India's goal of achieving US\$2 trillion in exports by 2030. Additionally, given Beijing's export restrictions on specific rare earth minerals, the Eastern Corridor presents India with a significant opportunity to tap into the export potential of Central Asian markets and reduce its dependence on China for critical minerals by utilising the large reserves in Central Asian nations.

## INSTC's Eastern Corridor

Signed in 2000, the INSTC is a multimodal transport corridor connecting India with Eurasia, bypassing the Suez Canal, and involving Russia, Iran, and India. However, the corridor has been experiencing slow progress due to conflicting interests and infrastructure challenges, resulting in lower cargo volumes. However, its 928-km railway line, also known as the Eastern Route or the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) route, is set to boost the route's trade volumes. KTI's construction began in 2009, following a 2007 trilateral agreement between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. The Islamic Development Bank contributed US\$370 million of KTI's total cost of approximately US\$1.4 billion. Commissioned in 2014, KTI provided a vital link between Central Asian countries, Iranian ports, and India. The Moscow-Aprin railway line (approximately 600 km shorter than the other easterly route through Sarakhs) has further enhanced KTI's connectivity.

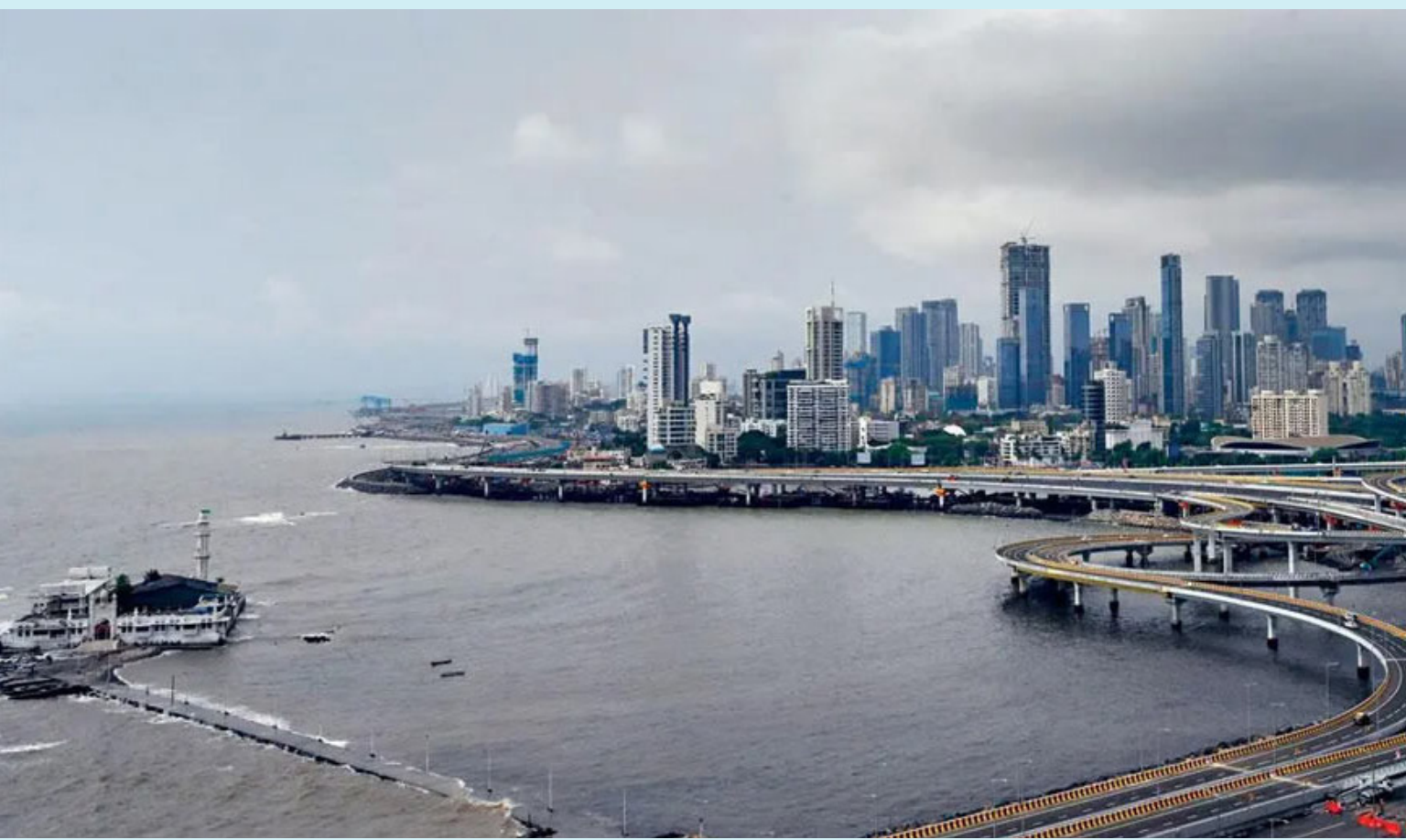
The 5,100-km Western Corridor of INSTC, which

***the INSTC is a multimodal transport corridor connecting India with Eurasia, bypassing the Suez Canal, and involving Russia, Iran, and India. However, the corridor has been experiencing slow progress due to conflicting interests and infrastructure challenges, resulting in lower cargo volumes.***

connects the most populous regions from the Russian-Finnish border to Bandar Abbas port, is the shortest route. However, sanctions on Iran and other geopolitical issues have slowed its progress, with the critical Rasht-Astara railway line remaining unfinished. The Eastern Corridor was officially launched in 2022 with the first train establishing a direct link between Russia and Iran, crossing Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In 2023–2024, the corridor delivered approximately 1.8 to 2 million tonnes of goods to Iran, nearly tripling the amount from the previous year. In 2023, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan established a new joint venture for operations on this corridor, granting transit tariff discounts of up to 20-40 percent, depending on the type of goods and route sections. The route also connects to the Trans-Caspian railways of the Tsarist era, providing access to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

## The Relevance of INSTC's Eastern Route for India

In March 2025, India shipped a cargo consignment from the Mundra Port in Gujarat



to Kazakhstan via the Eastern Route of the INSTC, travelling from Bandar Abbas Port to Central Asia. The consignment boosted India's connectivity and trade with landlocked Central Asia. India already has several agreements with Central Asia, including New Delhi's accession to the Ashgabat Agreement in 2018, which aims to establish a transit corridor between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, and the The Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975), which allows cargo transport across multiple international borders with a single document.

Furthermore, Central Asian countries have consistently promoted greater connectivity and trade with India, supporting India's efforts to lead regional connectivity projects. Both regions have engaged through bilateral and multilateral forums to enhance trade and connectivity. Since 2019, the foreign minister-level India-Central Asia dialogue has primarily focused on direct connectivity. In 2020, New Delhi launched a US\$1 billion credit line

***The region has also experienced increased global competition due to its vast reserves of rare earth and critical mineral resources. Central Asia boasts multi-trillion-dollar deposits of rare-earth minerals and strategic assets to diversify global supply chains, with Kazakhstan alone endowed with around 5,000 deposits valued at approximately US\$46 trillion.***

for infrastructure development in the region. A joint working group was established in 2023 to bolster connectivity through the Chabahar port. Central Asia has also supported the inclusion of this port within the INSTC framework. In 2024, New Delhi signed a ten-year contract with Iran to upgrade the facilities of Chabahar Port, creating pathways for "bigger investments to be made in the port".





Regional connectivity and trade between India and Central Asia will receive further impetus when the rail link connecting Chabahar and Zahedan is commissioned in 2026.

India's trade with Afghanistan via the Chabahar port has now reached around US\$1 billion, helping to counteract Beijing's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean and Eurasia. Central Asia has gained increased strategic importance for India, driven by internal economic shifts and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As a result, the region has sought closer alignment with the European Union (EU), Türkiye, India, and the United States (US).

The region has also experienced increased global competition due to its vast reserves of rare earth and critical mineral resources. Central Asia boasts multi-trillion-dollar deposits of rare-earth minerals and strategic assets to diversify global supply chains, with Kazakhstan alone endowed with around 5,000 deposits valued at approximately US\$46 trillion. Most of the critical minerals are

currently exported to China for processing, creating a strategic vulnerability for the region. Central Asia has already initiated partnerships on rare earths with the EU and the US through technological assistance, exploration, and processing, aiming for balanced geoeconomic and political ties.

Under such circumstances, New Delhi should align more closely with the Eastern Route of INSTC for resilient, reliable, and diverse supply chains, as well as sustainable transport links. The route can be a game-changer, as India, in 2025, entered into a strategic partnership with Central Asian countries focusing on rare earths and critical minerals to minimise Chinese dominance over rare earth supplies. The Eastern route can boost New Delhi's trade diversification, secure mineral supplies, and help counterbalance China's influence in Eurasia, with Chabahar port as a key logistics hub in the INSTC.

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Jalaj Srivastava

# DHARMENDRA



The Mumbai morning was different that day. An unspoken stillness hung in the air—as if the city itself had paused for a grand farewell. Look anywhere—Bandra, Juhu, Khar—the same question floated across faces: Had Dharmendra truly left?

At the age of 89, completing a dazzling, six-decade-long journey of legends, the 'He-Man' breathed his last—and India lost a son who resided not just on screen, but in its collective heart.

Dharmendra—this name is not merely that of an actor, but a piece of the Indian psyche that time has never managed to erase.

When the news broke, people froze in place. Hands paused on TV remotes, the face of Veeru from 'Sholay' flashed in someone's mind, another was lost in the melody of 'Humne Tumko Dil Ye De Diya.' It was as if every household in the country dissolved into a single frame—a large, communal frame of mourning.

Dharmendra, born Dharam Singh Deol, was the emblem of a generation that carried its dreams not in their pockets, but in the beat of their hearts. A simple boy from a small village in Punjab—whose father was a school teacher—he came to Mumbai in 1958 after winning a talent contest.

That Mumbai, whose streets offered more disappointment than hope... yet, in the young man's eyes, a sun was rising that could not be set. In 1960, 'Dil Bhi Tera Hum Bhi Tere' was released—and India found its new handsome hero.

The time that followed simply bore witness to how his face became the morning light for millions of hearts and the canteen poster for young professionals.

# He-Man's Final Scene

Dharmendra was called the 'He-Man'—not just because his physique caused earthquakes on screen—but because he brought both toughness and tenderness to every role. On one hand, there was Veeru from 'Sholay,' who could climb a water tank to declare his love; on the other, the gentle professor from 'Chupke Chupke,' who won hearts with his innocent smile.

He carried the simplicity of a farmer and the dazzle of a star simultaneously. This is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his tribute, said: "His passing marks the end of an era in Indian cinema."

1975's '**Sholay**' was more than just a film; it was the gramophone of Indian emotion, which still plays straight to the heart. The friendship between Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan—Jai and Veeru—is still considered the most cherished cinematic bond. Veeru's famous line, "Basanti, don't dance in front of these dogs!"—still shines brightly in the memory albums of an entire generation.

Today, with Dharmendra gone, half the sky of the Jai-Veeru partnership feels empty.

His last film, **Ekkees**, is scheduled for release next month. He would not have known that his last dialogue delivered before the camera might become his final communication with the audience. He continued to radiate that same old warmth toward the camera—as if saying: "I am here... and I will always be here—in your memories."

Though his health may have been failing, acting was his first and last love.

One sentence lingered on every lip— "Dharmendra is gone..."

Yet, no one could gather the courage to say he was truly gone. Losing Dharmendra is like losing a piece of our time.

He gave us romance, friendship, laughter, tears—and above all, honest acting.

Though he has departed this world today, Every time Veeru's laughter echoes on the TV screen, Every time the professor from 'Chupke Chupke' speaks his affected Hindi, Every time the innocent sadness in his eyes returns to a frame— We will understand—

***Dharmendra is here... still here...***



Srirajesh

## Teen Bahne

As a gentle winter hush settled over Kolkata's 23<sup>rd</sup> November's evening, the Usha Ganguly Manch at Rangakarmee bore witness to a rare, haunting spectacle. There, upon that revered stage, Anton Chekhov's immortal masterpiece *Teen Bahne* was revived with a new, trembling heartbeat. This was no mere performance—it was the flowering of Raw Rehearsal, Rangakarmee's earnest initiative to sculpt budding performers and gift them the courage of the stage. What unfolded was not simply theatre, but a translucent mirror—reflecting human longing, fractured dreams, and the quiet, relentless current of time. In its clear depths, the audience glimpsed their own silhouettes and found themselves pulled into the deepest

unending anticipation.

Olga, Masha, and Irina—the three sisters—wandered the bleak corridors of their confined lives, grasping at dreams that crumbled like brittle parchment. Their shared longing to return to Moscow shimmered like a distant star—radiant, beckoning, yet eternally beyond reach.

### Performances that Breathed Beyond Words

Milan Kumari Panda's Olga was a portrait of gentleness worn thin—a woman suspended between duty and quiet despair. Every shift of her expression carried the weight of unspoken sorrows, each gesture a whispered confession.

Shrishti Shukla as Masha brought to life a storm restrained—a rebellion born of unreturned love, a furnace of emotion contained within the fragile shell of innocence. Her presence made the stage throb with an almost palpable heartbeat.

## Echoes of Unfinished Dreams

alcoves of their emotional worlds.

### A Cadence, Slow and Deep

Under the subtle and poetic

Ritika Agarwal's Irina radiated the soft glow of naïve dreams clashing against the granite of reality. Her portrayal was so vivid, so unbearably honest, that each emotion she revealed felt like the unveiling of some



direction of Aniruddha Sarkar, the play unfurled like a wistful elegy—slow, deliberate, almost meditative. It moved with the grace of an old train halted at a forgotten station, its dim lights flickering between the warmth of hope and the ache of

### Aniruddha Sarkar: Architect of Emotion, Silence, & Movement

A disciple of the legendary Usha Ganguly, Aniruddha Sarkar crafted this production with exquisite sensitivity. He balanced emotion, stillness, and movement with a master's intuition—demonstrating yet again that Chekhov's plays do not speak loudly; they seep gently into the soul and ignite a quiet, smoldering flame within. Under his stewardship, *Raw Rehearsal* arises not merely as a training ground but as an inner sanctum—a crucible where artists are carved from the inside out, where voice, body, impulse, and truth are refined through a devotion almost ascetic in nature.







deeper, hidden truth.

The ensemble—Srish Dutta (Andrei), Dipanwita Sarkar (Natasha), Arindam Singh (Solyony), Raj Roy (Chebutykin), Vardhanam Daga (Tuzenbach)—brought Chekhov's world to life with such unforced grace that the very boundary between spectator and stage dissolved into a shared breath.

A performance of profound poignancy came from Urjas Pratyush as Fidoutik. The moment he realized that his entire livelihood had been consumed by flames was rendered with such raw despair that the auditorium fell into a stunned stillness. His anguish seeped beyond the stage, touching the very marrow of every watching soul.

Meanwhile, Sameer Ali, Rudraneel Paik, Shubham Tigrania, Babita Sharma, Srijan Sharma, Ankit Choudhary, and other artists further strengthened the play's texture through their small but significant characters—as if every single thread shone in its designated place.

## Raw Rehearsal: A Crucible for the Arts

For aspiring actors in Kolkata, such a space—demanding, authentic, and deeply introspective—is rare. This is why, in *Teen Bahne*, each actor did more than perform a character—they inhabited it, breathed it, surrendered to it. With its tranquil rhythm, austere staging, and delicately sculpted emotional layers, *Teen Bahne* continued to ripple across the audience's consciousness long after the final bow. Even the silences of the stage composed their own spectral symphony—a music that brushed softly against something intimate, unseen, within the soul.

For Kolkata's theatre lovers, this evening was a gentle reminder that theatre is not merely entertainment—it is a sanctified dialogue between the spirit and our shared human vulnerability.

Rangakarmee's rendering of Chekhov's *Teen Bahne* will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the most tender, resonant, and soul-stirring productions of the year.



*A Scene from Anton Chekhov's Immortal Work 'Teen Bahne,' staged by Rangkarmi, Kolkata, at Usha Ganguly Manch.*





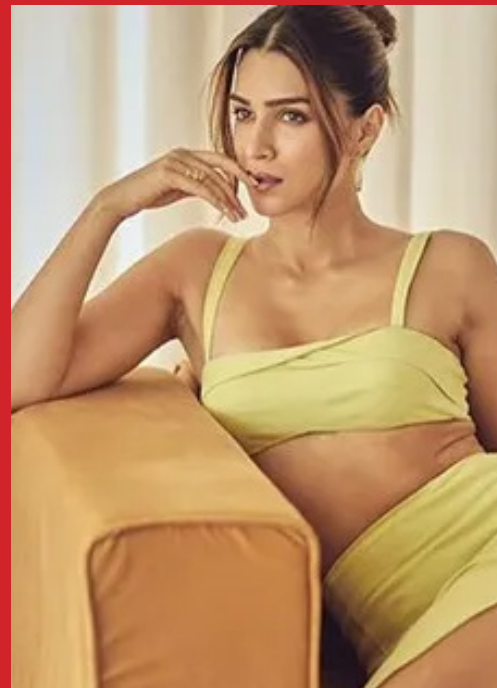
# Malaika Arora

## Spotted Again with Rumored Boyfriend

*Bollywood actress Malaika Arora is frequently spotted out and about, often getting captured by the paparazzi's cameras. Recently, she was seen at the airport, and her video is quickly going viral across social media platforms.*

*Following the appearance of this video, Malaika Arora's love life is once again in the spotlight. This is because she was seen with businessman Harsh Mehta yet again, intensifying speculations that the two are dating.*

*It's worth noting that Malaika Arora and Harsh Mehta were previously seen together at a concert in Mumbai, and news of their alleged relationship has been circulating ever since.*



## Kriti Sanon Had Already Won Hearts with These Films Before 'Tere Ishk Mein'

*Actress Kriti Sanon is one of the finest actresses in Bollywood who has shared the screen with numerous superstars. Currently, she is drawing attention for her upcoming film 'Tere Ishk Mein,' where she stars alongside superstar Dhanush.*

*In the film, Kriti is portraying a romantic girl whose character reflects passion and aggressive love. However, she has previously fully entertained audiences with her romantic films on the silver screen as well.*



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