

Freedom is in Peril. Defend it with all you might Jawaharlal Nehru

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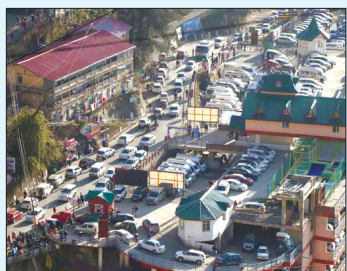
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Are we a republic of fools for the ECI?

Is the Election Commission, in effect, admitting that every election held after 2003 used a flawed voter list?

Yogendra Yadav

Exactly what we'd feared has come to pass. A mad, mad decree—surely Tughlaq's envy—is issued in Delhi. It lands in Bihar, and all hell breaks loose. Now that the genie is out of the bottle and the Election Commission of India's 'special intensive' mess impossible to contain, it's busy fabricating a cover-up story.

In the morning papers, the ECI puts out an ad. In the evening, it issues a denial. Reports pouring in from various parts of Bihar are deeply troubling. But instead of addressing the problem on the ground, the Commission wants to shoot the messenger—and brazen it out by advertising absurd numbers. An institution once counted among the most trusted in the country has become a joke. Time to ask the eminences currently heading the Election Commission of India some blunt questions:

#1

When the new CEC (chief election commissioner) took charge, the ECI made quite a song and dance about its commitment to 'consultation and dialogue', about holding more than 4,000 meetings with political parties in two months. Question: in any of those meetings, did you even hint that you were planning a 'special intensive revision' of the entire country's voter list? Before taking such a dramatic step, should you not have consulted political parties across the country—especially in Bihar, where elections were to be held soonest?

#2

Since 2003, the Election Commission had put an end to intensive revisions—i.e., creating an entirely fresh electoral roll. What prompted you to reverse that decision? The reasons you've offered—urbanisation, migration, duplicate entries—couldn't those be addressed through a special and thorough revision of the existing rolls? Why throw out the old list and start from scratch? Did the Election Commission assess the pros and cons before taking this decision? Was there even an internal consultation? Can that file be made public?

#3

You've chosen to base this fresh revision

on the 2003 voter list. But that list too was created by revising an older list. Back then, voters weren't asked to produce proof either. So what makes the 2003 list 'authentic' and the ones after that suspect? By that logic, is the Election Commission admitting that every election held after 2003 used a flawed voter list?

#4

For those not on the 2003 list, you're asking for one of 11 specific documents. Is the Election Commission confident that every Indian citizen possesses at least one of these documents? Has the Commission examined what percentage of people in Bihar actually have them? If yes, why not release that data? And if not, why ignore the word of experts who've shown—using government data—that not even half of Bihar's population have these documents?

#5

Why doesn't the Election Commission accept common documents like Aadhaar, ration cards or MGNREGA job cards—the ones most common folk have? What's the difference between these and the 11 'valid' documents? If a residence certificate issued against Aadhaar is valid, why not the Aadhaar card itself? And why won't the Commission accept its own photo ID card?

#6

Why did you choose Bihar to launch this 'special intensive revision' exercise—and that, just four months before elections? Hadn't you already completed a revision of Bihar's voter list in December? Were there any major complaints of fraud about that list from any political party? Did Bihar, like Maharashtra, see a sudden, inexplicable jump in voter numbers? Did any party or group demand that the list be scrapped?

#7

Why was this B.I.G. directive to be implemented at just 12 hours' notice? Did you really believe that you could issue an order from Delhi in the evening and start distributing forms the next morning at 97,000 polling booths in Bihar? Do you not know how long it takes to print forms for 8,00,00,000 (eight crore) names? Or that 20,000 of those 97,000 booths didn't even have Booth Level Officers—and still don't, two weeks on?



NOTE TO READERS

Thanks to the ECI's dodgy 'clarifications' and shifting narrative, confusion reigned among voters in Bihar when the edition went to press. We paused production to take note of the Supreme Court's intervention on Thursday, 10 July. The court allowed the SIR to continue even while questioning the timing of the exercise and the locus of the ECI to verify citizenship. The court also urged the ECI to admit Aadhaar, Voter ID and PDS ration cards as valid documents—or explain why not. The ECI has to respond by 21 July and the next court hearing is on 28 July.

Barely half the population of Bihar has received enumerations forms

Photo: Getty Images

#8

Why only one month to complete such a massive and complex exercise? Has anything of this scale—affecting crores of people—ever been pulled off in a month? The Bihar caste survey, which didn't even require people to fill forms or submit documents, took five months. And now you think you'll pull off a miracle in one month—in the middle of the monsoon and flood season? What world do you live in?

#9

Let's say you made a mistake—whether in haste or under pressure. Why not just admit it? Why these endless excuses? You know very well this revision has nothing to do with weeding out duplicate voters. So why trot out such flimsy arguments? How many complaints has the Commission received about illegal foreign nationals in Bihar's new 2025

voter rolls? If none, why use that as a pretext?

#10

You know full well that of the 4.96 crore voters on the 2003 Bihar list, some 1.5 crore are either dead or have left the state. Why keep repeating that 4.96 crore people won't have to show documents? Do these lies befit an institution like the ECI?

#11

You've lately been releasing outrageous statistics every day—and people are laughing at you. Barely half the population has even received forms, yet you claim that 36 per cent have already filled and submitted their forms! If that is true, why not publish the names? If not—who are you trying to fool? Or as they may say in snippy Bihari style: का बाबू, पब्लिक को बुझक मानते हो? ■

Why there's no stopping the genocide in Gaza

Over 60 MNCs have big stakes in what UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese calls the 'economy of genocide'

Ashok Swain

As Israel's military campaign in Gaza enters its 22nd month, the world faces a defining test of our collective commitment to international law and human rights. A new report by UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese lays bare a chilling reality: over 60 multinational corporations—including big-tech like Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), defence manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Elbit Systems, even online travel agency Bookings.com and homestays and tourism experiences firm Airbnb—are deeply enmeshed in what she terms an 'economy of genocide'.

These corporations, Albanese argues, are not passive bystanders—they are enablers, profiting from Israel's war on Gaza and its decades-long illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

From weapons manufacturing to cloud computing, biometric surveillance to real estate listings in illegal settlements in the West Bank, the involvement of these companies constitutes not just moral indifference but legal complicity.

Albanese's report is not simply a human rights document; it is an indictment of a



Photo: Getty Images

Throughout history, corporations have profited from war and conflict, with the tacit approval or active encouragement of powerful nation-states

global corporate order in which mass violence becomes a market opportunity. This is not a new story. Throughout history, corporations have profited from war and conflict, with the tacit approval or active encouragement of powerful nation-states.

During both World Wars, companies such as Krupp and IG Farben in Germany, General Motors in the US and Vickers in the UK scaled up production to arm militaries and fuel the machinery of violence. In Nazi Germany, industrial firms supplied the regime with everything from tanks to Zyklon-B gas. Some, like IBM, have been accused of facilitating genocide by providing the punch-card systems used to catalogue and target Jews.

In apartheid South Africa, multinationals supported the regime by supplying vehicles and surveillance tools used to repress the Black majority. In Iraq and Afghanistan, firms like Halliburton/ KBR and Blackwater raked in billions in no-bid contracts, turning reconstruction and private security into corporate windfalls.

Russian companies like the Wagner Group have exploited conflict zones in Sudan and across Africa to generate substantial revenue through a mix of military, political and economic activities. In Sudan, Wagner secured lucrative gold mining concessions by providing military support, weapons and training to the RSF forces in exchange for privileged access to natural resources. Likewise, Chinese defence firms, particularly state-owned giants like Norinco and Chengdu Aircraft, profited significantly from the recent India-Pakistan military escalation.

The Gaza case, however, offers a uniquely modern iteration of this historical pattern. Lockheed Martin leads the F-35 fighter jet programme, supplying aircraft used extensively in Israel's bombing campaigns. These jets, capable of carrying over 18,000 pounds of ordnance, have helped turn Gaza's neighbourhoods into rubble. Between 2023 and 2024, Israeli military spending surged 65

per cent, with major arms manufacturers reporting record profits.

Palantir, IBM and Hewlett Packard have supplied software, databases and predictive policing tools that aid in identifying targets and controlling Palestinian movement. The result is a digital architecture of war—automated, scalable and highly profitable.

Big Tech has become a pillar of this economy. Amazon and Google, under the \$1.2 billion Project Nimbus contract, provide cloud and AI services to the Israeli government and military. When Israel's internal military cloud collapsed in October 2023, Microsoft Azure stepped in to provide critical infrastructure. These services, once marketed for logistics or customer support, now enable automated kill lists and battlefield analytics. The deployment of these dual-use technologies, Albanese warns, is more than a violation of human rights—by testing them on real populations, Gaza has been turned into a laboratory for future military applications.

Beyond software and sensors, the physical infrastructure of occupation is also deeply commercialised. Caterpillar and Volvo supply bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian homes. Booking.com and Airbnb list vacation rentals in illegal West Bank settlements, profiting from what is effectively the tourism of colonisation. Meanwhile, companies like Orbia and Glencore provide irrigation and fuel, sustaining illegal agricultural developments on confiscated land. Banks and asset managers like BlackRock and Vanguard hold major stakes in many of these corporations, reaping returns from their war-linked portfolios.

This vast supply chain of complicity is not some accident of globalisation. It reflects structural incentives within corporate architecture itself: war, displacement and repression are profitable. From the colonial

► Continued on page 2

No stopping the genocide in Gaza



Photo: Getty Images

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exploitation of rubber and minerals in Africa to the recent mining of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo, often using forced labour and fuelling conflict, corporations have consistently found ways to monetise suffering. Surveillance and cybersecurity firms like Palantir have thrived during the ‘War on Terror’.

Media houses see revenue spikes during conflict. Financial institutions profit from war bonds and defence stocks. Even food and logistics companies like Nestlé and Cargill have operated in zones of mass violence, sometimes accused of tolerating or benefiting from forced labour.

And yet, accountability remains rare. Some firms have faced legal and reputational consequences. Volkswagen and Siemens, for instance, eventually acknowledged their use of forced labour under the Nazis. But far more often, corporations evade justice through complex supply chains, lobbying and legal loopholes. In Gaza, Albanese’s report makes it unequivocally clear, international law places obligations not just on states but on private actors too. Corporate entities and their executives can be held criminally liable for aiding and abetting war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

What must be done is clear. First, the UN Security Council must impose sanctions on the companies named in the report, freezing their assets, and asking member-states to cancel government contracts. There is precedent: sanctions

helped bring down apartheid in South Africa and curtailed corporate involvement in Balkan war economies. Second, financial institutions of member-states must divest from these firms. Pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and asset managers cannot claim neutrality while profiting from genocide. Third, courts in the West must begin proceedings against executives under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Several European countries have already used such laws to try alleged war criminals. They can, and should, apply the same standard to corporate leaders.

The international community must go further. The Rome Statute must evolve to explicitly include corporate liability. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should investigate not only generals and ministers but also CEOs who knowingly supply the machinery of mass violence. Reparations must be considered, not just from states but from companies that have profited from the suffering of Palestinians. An apartheid wealth tax, akin to proposals in post-apartheid South Africa, could fund reconstruction and support displaced communities.

Francesca Albanese’s report is not just an exposé, it is a roadmap. It names the corporations, tracks their investments, and exposes the contracts. It demands that we stop pretending that economic violence is somehow separate from physical violence. If we are serious about ending the horrors in Gaza and preventing future genocides, then the corporate machinery behind them must be dismantled. ■

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With Takhts in turmoil, SGPC faces scrutiny

The churn in Sikh religious bodies points to a deeper power struggle

Herjinder

This isn’t just another chapter in a long-running story. It marks a significant shift in the dynamics of panthic politics. A fresh conflict between the Akal Takht in Amritsar and Takht Sri Patna Sahib in Bihar has revealed a deeper crisis, an institutional erosion, with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)—already mired in controversies over the appointment and removal of Jathedars—at the centre of the latest conflict.

The current controversy erupted with the removal of Jathedar Giani Ranjit Singh Gauhar of Takht Sri Patna Sahib over allegations of financial misconduct. Gauhar, known for his proximity to the Badal family, was reinstated shortly thereafter by the Jathedars of the three Punjab-based Takhts—Akal Takht, Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib and Damdama Sahib—an action widely seen as influenced by the Badal family.

This reinstatement, however, violates a 2008 agreement between the five Takhts, reached after an earlier dispute between Patna Sahib and the Akal Takht. That pact allowed autonomy to each Takht over local affairs but mandated joint decision-making—or deference to the Akal Takht—on major panthic matters. The current breach of that understanding hints at deeper fissures and a power struggle within the



Jathedar Giani Ranjit Singh Gauhar

Sikh religious leadership.

The reversal of their decision did not sit well with Takht Sri Patna Sahib. In what appeared to be a retaliatory move, the *Panj Pyare* (council of five Sikh devouts who strictly observe the Sikh code of conduct) responsible for making decisions, convened and declared the acting Jathedar of Akal Takht, Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj and Tek Singh Dhulana of Takht Damdama Sahib *tankhaiya* (guilty of religious misconduct), along with the Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal.

In quick response, the religious heads of the three Punjab Takhts declared that those who had issued the Patna Sahib order were *tankhaiya*. Patna Sahib dismissed this move, arguing that those already branded *tankhaiya* had no authority to pass judgement on others. One has to wait and watch whether this conflict will escalate or whether, as in the past, it will be resolved through mediation. What it has exposed is deepening cracks within Sikh religious politics—rifts that have been widening since the beginning of this year.

In March, the SGPC abruptly removed Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh and appointed Gargaj as acting Jathedar. This decision was met with sharp criticism from various quarters, including the Nihang factions, who openly vowed to oppose the appointment. In a move seemingly aimed at avoiding confrontation, Gargaj was quietly installed at 2.50 a.m. The entire sequence

of events poses a threat of credibility for the SGPC, which is responsible for appointing Jathedars and managing all gurdwaras in Punjab, along with several historic shrines across the country. Till recently, it also oversaw gurdwaras in Haryana, but that responsibility now rests with a separate state-level committee.

Traditionally, the SGPC has been heavily influenced and aligned with the Akali Dal. However, as the Badal family gradually took full control of the party, the SGPC too came under their influence. This became starkly evident in 1999 when, after a rift, Parkash Singh Badal replaced Gurcharan Singh Tohra with Bibi Jagir Kaur as SGPC president. Tohra was only able to return after reconciling with Badal.

With the Akali Dal’s political fortunes on the decline, tensions have intensified within the SGPC as well. But it’s not just the Akali Dal that is struggling. The SGPC itself is in the midst of a severe credibility crisis. Once hailed as one of the most democratic religious institutions, it has been nearly one-and-a-half decades since it last conducted elections. Among the reasons for this prolonged delay is the removal of voting rights from *Sahajdhari* Sikhs, a matter currently under judicial review. Additionally, voter rolls are yet to be updated. After Haryana formed its own gurdwara committee, constituencies needed be redrawn, but this process too remains incomplete. Above all, there seems to be a complete lack of urgency or political will to resolve these issues and hold fresh elections.

The escalating conflict among the Takhts, coupled with the SGPC’s deepening crisis of legitimacy, underscores a larger malaise within the Sikh leadership. What was once a unified, robust and democratic religious structure now appears mired in factionalism, political interference and inertia. Sukhdev Singh Bahur, former general secretary of the SGPC, captures the mood when he says, “When the Shiromani committee itself has deviated from its duty, then who all should be blamed?”

Whether this crisis will culminate in further division or lead to meaningful reform remains to be seen. ■

With the Akali Dal’s political fortunes on the decline, tensions have intensified within the SGPC as well

Is Kejriwal the ‘super CM’ in Punjab now?

As the former Delhi chief minister tightens his hold on Punjab, critics wonder whether it’s a move for survival or revival

Herjinder

Like every other state, Punjab is also seeing its share of back-to-back government events and party shows. On 7 July, for instance, a thanksgiving rally was organised to celebrate Aam Aadmi Party’s victory in the Ludhiana West by-election. That same day, a sewage treatment plant was inaugurated in Mohali. Punjab’s top rank in the National Achievement Survey 2024 was marked by a gathering of teachers. On 8 July, health cards were distributed under the government’s health insurance scheme. Later, the Punjabi edition of Jasmine Shah’s book *Kejriwal Model* was launched.

As per protocol, chief minister Bhagwant Mann was present at all these events. But it was clear that he was not the central figure. That role belonged to Arvind Kejriwal, former Delhi chief minister and AAP’s national convenor. Over the past several months, Kejriwal has taken centre stage in nearly every major event in Punjab. Be it the inauguration of a development project or the launch of a government initiative like the campaign against addiction or the unveiling of new rules for land registry or the rollout of an industrial portal—he is the one grabbing the headlines.

Kejriwal’s political focus appears to have shifted almost entirely to Punjab. His visibility in Delhi has sharply declined, a fact reflected on the party’s official X and YouTube accounts, where Punjab-related content dominates. At several of these events, former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia is also seen on stage.

When the AAP government assumed office in Punjab in 2022 and Mann took oath as CM, the buzz across the state was all about the ‘Delhi model’. Everywhere, officials were talking about free electricity, world-class schools and mohalla clinics. It was said that the Mann government was fixated on replicating this model. Mann himself began frequenting Delhi, prompting opposition leaders to allege that Punjab was being governed by

“remote control” from the national capital.

That “remote control” seems to have shifted physically to Punjab after AAP’s defeat in the Delhi Assembly elections in February this year. It began with Arvind Kejriwal’s 10-day Vipassana retreat in Hoshiarpur, during which much of the state government machinery was reportedly deployed to accommodate him. Since then, Kejriwal has been practically invisible in Delhi, attending more and more programmes in Punjab. AAP’s Delhi unit is effectively being run by Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj. When Atishi was arrested during a protest against a slum demolition drive in Kalkaji, Kejriwal limited his response to a social media post. There was no protest, no press conference. A marked shift indeed for someone who was once proactive on Delhi issues. Kejriwal now appears reactive, if not indifferent.

The turning point can be traced to 8 February, the day AAP suffered a defeat in Delhi. Three days later, all AAP MLAs in Punjab were summoned to a meeting at Arvind Kejriwal’s residence. The meeting was attended by all 91 MLAs, including CM Mann, signalling a marked shift of power centre.

Two significant announcements were made that day. Manish Sisodia was appointed in charge of Punjab with Satyendar Jain as co-in charge. Both, like Kejriwal, had lost the Delhi elections.

They now reside in Chandigarh’s Sector 39A in government bungalows meant for Punjab cabinet ministers. Sometime back, the Punjab government set up the Punjab Development Commission (PDC) modelled after the Niti Aayog. Mann chairs the commission, while Seema Bansal, originally from Haryana, is the vice-chairperson. This move has sparked a controversy with senior Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa alleging that most of the top appointees to the PDC are outsiders, closely aligned with AAP’s Delhi leadership.

He further accused the government of



Photo: Getty Images

Wherever Arvind Kejriwal is present, even state chief minister Bhagwant Mann is relegated to the sidelines

A BJP leader claimed that cabinet meetings are held at Mann’s residence, giving Kejriwal and Sisodia an opportunity to be present and, in effect, preside over them

bypassing the legislative process and operating in a non-transparent manner.

BJP leader Sunil Jakhar went a step further and claimed that cabinet meetings were now being held at Mann’s residence—giving Kejriwal and Sisodia an opportunity to be present and, in effect, preside over the proceedings. Not surprising then that several opposition leaders refer to Kejriwal as the “de facto CM” or the “super CM”.

Delhi’s hand was also quite apparent during last month’s by-poll to the Ludhiana West Assembly seat. The entire campaign was reportedly taken over by AAP’s Delhi media team, headed by Vijay Nair—an accused in the Delhi liquor policy scam. According to media reports, several members of AAP’s Punjab media team were sidelined through the

campaign. Following his victory in the bypoll, AAP’s Sanjeev Arora resigned from the Rajya Sabha, fuelling speculation of Kejriwal’s entry to the upper house of Parliament, though both he and the party have publicly denied this.

Irrespective of whether or not Kejriwal enters the Rajya Sabha, the moot question is: does he now see his political future rooted in Punjab? His activities and sustained presence in the state certainly suggest so.

With Delhi slipping from its grip, AAP’s political fate now hinges on the 2027 Assembly elections in Punjab. Ironically, the very team that suffered a resounding defeat in Delhi is now steering the campaign in Punjab—where AAP hopes to script its next chapter of survival, or perhaps revival. ■

When tourism becomes toxic

Sustainable solutions must replace the car-centric chaos in Himachal and Uttarakhand

Avay Shukla

The deputy commissioner of Shimla announced in mid-June that 300,000 vehicles had already entered Shimla in the first two weeks of the month. That’s 15,000 vehicles per day. Shimla has parking for just about 5,000 vehicles, and if we assume that a tourist family/ group stays for just two days, the daily parking requirement is for 30,000 vehicles—six times what is available. (This does not include locally registered vehicles which total around 70,000!)

The situation is no different in Dehradun, Nainital, Mussoorie, Manali, Dharamshala and other hill stations. And it’s getting worse every year.

The tourists, of course, suffer—stuck in traffic jams for hours, sometimes overnight, without food, water or toilet facilities. Half their vacation time is spent on the roads.

The real and continuing price, however, is paid by the permanent residents of these once quiet, idyllic, British-era towns, who are practically imprisoned in their houses for half the year, with no space left on the roads for pedestrians.

I live near Mashobra, about 12 km from Shimla, for six months every year and have decided to never, but NEVER, drive into Shimla during my stay here—there’s no telling if I’ll ever be able to make it back to my house!

States like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand bear the brunt of this vehicle-driven overtourism. Their proximity to the northern states is their undoing, while Kashmir is spared the deluge because of its distance and the on-again, off-again security situation.

The state governments should have foreseen this, with tourist numbers growing by 43 per cent (2023 figure, over the previous year), rising incomes and the desperation of families to escape the heat and pollution of our deteriorating cities. But the governments never planned for this nightmare, content with collecting their GST and luxury taxes.

And when they did start making some plans, they were all the wrong ones.

The biggest planning blunder has been the construction of expensive, environmentally disastrous four-lane highways and expressways in the mountainous terrain of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to reduce driving time and make access easier for tourists.



An overview of traffic in Shimla

This has led to an explosion in the number of vehicles coming to these destinations. Before the Kalka–Shimla four-lane highway was built (it is still not complete), the average number of cars entering Shimla every day was about 4,000–5000; that number is now 15,000–20,000. And when these vehicles enter Shimla, there is just no space for them to park.

It’s even worse in Manali, with 25,000 vehicles crossing the Atal tunnel (below Rohtang pass) every day during the peak season. The state government is a silent spectator. The National Green Tribunal had to step in and impose a daily cap of 1,500 vehicles to limit traffic to Rohtang Pass and prevent it from becoming another Karol Bagh, in more ways than one.

The mistakes of Shimla and Manali are being repeated, this time with Mussoorie as the victim.

A 26-km elevated expressway has been approved to connect Dehradun and Mussoorie. We are told this will reduce driving time to just 26 minutes. This is a

disaster in the making, quite apart from the 17,000 trees that will be felled and the 250 families who shall be displaced by the project.

The Shimla/ Manali experience shows that the number of vehicles headed for Mussoorie will likely triple or quadruple; what happens to them once they reach Mussoorie? The town has even less parking space than Shimla and can barely accommodate those who come just to meet Ruskin Bond!

Bureaucracies are loath to think out of the box and politicians are happy to sanction capital intensive projects such as roads and multi-storeyed parking to their favoured contractors.

But this comfortable, parabolic arrangement has to change. Given the geology and terrain, one cannot keep ‘widening’ roads and excavating more parking spaces indefinitely—the limits have already been reached.

What our mountain destinations actually

need are fewer highways and more cable cars/ ropeways—that way, they can keep attracting more tourists but fewer vehicles.

A Dehradun–Mussoorie cable system would have served the purpose, at one-tenth the cost of an elevated highway. It is to Himachal’s credit that it has seen the light and has approved four major ropeway projects: Parwanoo–Shimla, Dharamshala–McLeodganj, Manali–Rohtang and Kullu–Bijli Mahadev. Many more are needed, including one from Parwanoo/ Kalka to Kasauli.

The Union government too needs to play a role in curbing this vehicular overtourism:

- It should never again approve a monstrosity like the Char Dham Highway, which is effectively a death warrant for Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.
- It should put a hold on all four-laning projects in these states (even at the risk of annoying Mr Gadkari) and fast-track central approvals and funding for ropeways.
- More flights should be started to these states—in Himachal, currently all four airports are being utilised at below 50 per cent of their capacity. More helicopter services should be introduced, and not just to religious places.
- Most important, the government should expand the skeletal rail network in all mountain states that have tourism potential—and not just for strategic reasons. In 75 years, not an inch of railway line has been added to what the British left behind. Doing this will not only reduce the vehicular tsunamis that lash the mountains, but also add an entirely novel experience for visitors.

Harsh physical or fiscal barriers such as e-passes, capping the numbers of vehicles entering a state or even excessive tolls or entry fees should be avoided, as they cause inconvenience and will not serve the purpose in the long run.

It is better to provide tourists attractive alternatives to using their cars rather than simply taxing or embroiling them in red tape. Lazy solutions are usually the worst. (Though these tough measures will become inevitable if the numbers continue to expand at the present rate.)

The vision should be: we welcome tourists, but not their cars. ■

AVAY SHUKLA is a retired IAS officer and author of Holy Cows and Loose Cannons—the Duffer Zone Chronicles

Kashmiris feel the heat, quite literally

Haroon Reshi

Har sokhta-jāni ke bā Kashmir dar āyad
Gar murgh-e-kabāb ast ke bā bāl-o-par āyad
(Every scorched soul that enters Kashmir, If it’s a roasted bird, it grows wings, flies again)

That couplet by the 16th-century Persian poet Urfi Shirazi is a lovely paean to Kashmir’s fabled climate. Not any more, though.

This July, temperatures across the Kashmir Valley shattered all records. On 5 July, Srinagar recorded 37.4 degrees Celsius, the hottest day in over 70 years.

Dr Mukhtar Ahmad, director of the Meteorological Centre in Srinagar, told *National Herald*, “The 37.4 degrees recorded on 5 July was the third-highest July reading since 1892, after 38.3 on 10 July 1946 and 37.7 on 5 July 1953.” The tourist resort of Pahalgam, thronged by people who come here to escape the summer heat in the plains, also saw its hottest July day ever (on 5 July), with the temperature hitting 31.6 degrees.

These record-breaking temperatures are not isolated events but part of a changing pattern. According to a 2019 study published in *Environmental Research Letters*, a peer-reviewed journal of environmental science, Kashmir’s annual average temperature rose by 0.8 degrees between 1980 and 2016. This is why the region is experiencing more frequent and intense heatwaves, affecting the environment and the lives of its residents.

The rise in temperature can be attributed to the usual suspects—global warming, deforestation and urbanisation. Experts fear that future heatwaves could lead to frequent extreme weather events such as flash floods and cloudbursts.

It’s not even just the heat. In recent years, the Valley has also experienced a deficit of rainfall and a lack of snowfall. A 60–99 per cent rainfall deficit has been recorded between December 2024 and June 2025, resulting in a 30 per cent drop in the water levels of the river Jhelum, severely impacting irrigation, agriculture and hydropower generation, a key source of energy in the Valley.

As for winters, last year’s Chillai Kalan—the harshest 40 days of cold—saw alarmingly low snowfall. On 9 January,

Chief minister Omar Abdullah wrote on X: “I’ve never seen Gulmarg so dry in winter... If we don’t get snow soon, summer is going to be miserable.”

Impact on daily life and agriculture

The recent surge in temperatures has taken a harsh toll on the daily life of residents. The administration has changed school timings in the Valley, with classes now commencing at 7.30 a.m. in Srinagar (compared to 9 a.m. earlier) and 8 a.m. in the rural areas instead of 9.30 a.m.

Local newspapers in Srinagar have reported a surge in the sales of air-conditioners (ACs), coolers, fans and refrigerators, and Kashmir Power Distribution Corp. has witnessed a 25 per cent rise in demand during peak hours.

Farmers and orchardists are also anxious. Experts warn that the unseasonal heat could severely impact the region’s staple crops like apples, paddy and saffron. “Temperatures above 25 degrees can trigger hormonal changes in apple trees, reducing both yield and quality,” says Prof. Raihana Habib, an agrometeorologist at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. “The hailstorms during April–May have already inflicted substantial damage on apple and cherry orchards in Shopian and Kulgam. The heatwave poses an additional threat.”

“Two other thermosensitive crops,” she added, “are paddy and saffron, both of which rely on precise hydro-thermal regimes during their growth phases.”

Lack of adequate snowfall resulted in the postponement of the Khelo India Winter Games, scheduled to be held in Gulmarg’s ski resort in February



People jump into a canal to beat the heat in Pulwama; (inset) tourists in Gulmarg in June 2025



Saffron, pivotal to the region’s economy, with the foreign exchange it brings in, has also seen a continuous decline for the past several years. It was in 2010–11 that then prime minister Manmohan Singh introduced the National Saffron Mission with a budget of over Rs 400 crore, aimed at increasing production and improving quality.

That year, saffron production was reported at 8 metric tonnes. By 2024, output was down to 2.7 metric tonnes. Last year, Union agriculture minister Arjun Munda said in the Lok Sabha that saffron yield had dropped 67.5 per cent between 2010–11 and 2023–2024. “For saffron, which does best at temperatures of 15–27 degrees, the mean temperature rise of 1.3 degrees over the past 40 years has put this heritage crop at risk,” says Prof. Habib.

June, J&K minister for agricultural production Javed Ahmad Dar told reporters that the eagerly awaited crop insurance scheme for farmers in J&K had stalled for lack of interest from insurance firms. “The volatility of the climate makes crops uninsurable for these companies,” an official told *National Herald* on condition of anonymity.

Tourism too takes a hit

It’s not just farmers. The tourism industry is equally vulnerable. “In the past two years, the extreme heat in June and July has kept many tourists indoors during the day,” said Farooq Ahmad, a Srinagar hotel manager.

Lack of adequate snowfall resulted in the postponement of the Khelo India Winter Games, which was scheduled to be held in

Gulmarg’s ski resort from 22–25 February this year. This is worrying, Kashmir risks losing the natural charm that once drew visitors,” said Ahmad.

Experts believe that human negligence is worsening the crisis. Raja Muzaffar Bhat, a prominent social activist, told *NH*, “We must accept that we too have played a role in aggravating the problem—with rampant deforestation, haphazard urbanisation and ill-conceived infrastructure projects.

“In the name of development, thousands of trees have been cut over the years. The government is preparing to build a 77 km railway line to Pahalgam, neither required nor demanded by residents. This line will pass through fertile farmland and forested areas, and without a doubt, thousands of trees will be felled. This is how we are ruining our environment.”

In reply to an RTI application, the government has admitted that Kashmir has lost nearly 5.84 lakh trees along the Jhelum and its tributaries over the past five years. “The felled trees were identified as ‘encroachments’ by the irrigation and flood control department. How can we expect that these actions will not disturb our weather patterns?” Bhat asks.

Kashmir’s changing climate mocks Shirazi’s proud verse. ■

Photos: Getty Images

Trade policy on a wing and a prayer

How long will India persist in its strategic timidity to save its neck from Trump’s tariff guillotine?

Ashis Ray

United States President Donald Trump’s 9 July deadline passed without any fireworks—maybe he was busy threatening “anti-America” BRICS, of which India is a member. At the time of writing, neither side had commented on the current status of the India-US trade talks.

Past the 9 July deadline, India was to enter steeper tariff territory (26 per cent on exports to the US), but there was no confirmation of this from the US administration. Emails to the White House, Department of Commerce and Department of Trade went unanswered. Chances are the door for negotiations is still ajar.

On 7 July, while hosting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for dinner at the White House, Trump told reporters the US and India were close to an agreement. In a 6 July post on his social media platform Truth Social, he warned: ‘Any country aligning themselves with the anti-American policies of BRICS will be charged an *additional* 10 per cent tariff. There will be no exceptions to this policy.’ Brazil’s Lula shot back: ‘The world does not want an emperor who lashes out over the internet.’ South Africa’s Ramaphosa was more restrained: ‘The powerful should not seek vengeance against those working for good in the world.’ India remained timidly silent.

Trump thinks BRICS is planning to ditch the US dollar in bilateral trade. When Trump first raised the matter, India hastened to plead that it does not support de-dollarisation, even though it has local currency arrangements in some cases. *Bloomberg* reported on 9 July that Trump’s démarche added a new twist to the

If the Modi government has been spared Trump’s browbeating of trade partners, it is only because it hasn’t had the courage to call Trump’s bluff



domestic product (GDP) second only to the US, even after Britain’s exit from the EU. Trump says the EU is, “in many ways, nastier than China”.

The acrimony between the EU and Britain after the Brexit referendum of 2016 spelled disunity in Europe. The return of a Labour government in the UK has generated better vibes and a reset in ties, promising smoother trade. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forged a bond, and the UK has taken the lead in creating a military ‘coalition of the willing’.

On 8-10 July, Britain hosted French President Emmanuel Macron, the first visit by a European Union head of state since the UK officially exited the confederation on 31 January 2020. Addressing a joint session of the UK parliament, Macron said, “We will never accept the theory that might is right. And I want to be clear, this is why, together with you, Mr Prime Minister (Sir Keir Starmer), we decided to launch this coalition last February.”

Musk clearly has the means to bankroll his party. Trump, on his part, has hinted at destroying Musk’s businesses and deporting him to South Africa

negotiations, which have been ongoing for months. But it is just as likely that Trump is bargaining hard with a wider pool of players, not specifically India.

CNN reported on 9 July, ‘India has long been viewed as the most likely major partner to sign onto a framework with the US. But Indian trade negotiators have hardened their positions in recent days, according to US officials.’

In late April, after his first 100 days in office, Trump falsely claimed he had completed trade deals with 200 countries. Nearly two and a half months later, he has announced only three—with Britain, China and Vietnam. Realising perhaps that not all trading partners are cowed by his aggressive posture, he has effectively extended the negotiations, by sending out letters—apparently coercive but actually face-saving—to a number of countries, including Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, setting higher tariffs. Most of them have assessed Trump as more bark than bite—and are waiting for him to climb down.

The Narendra Modi government is among the few who haven’t had the courage to call Trump’s bluff. So, it has escaped his browbeating. But if India capitulates in the negotiations and grants American agricultural and dairy products unfettered access to the Indian market, it will be the

death-knell for India’s still heavily agriculture-dependent population.

If Trump doesn’t relent on this, it will show what kind of priority he is willing to accord India—despite years of appeasement by Modi. In turn, it will affect Quad, the US-India-Turn-Australia partnership essentially created to contain China.

The Trump-Musk soap opera

Trump recently disclosed he didn’t like electric cars (which billionaire Elon Musk’s Tesla manufactures) and prefers the traditional oil-guzzlers. Buddies till the day before, their relationship has spiralled southward with astonishing speed.

Reading between the lines of a Trump statement, it seems Musk, while a ‘special employee’ of the US government and a close advisor to the President, was pushing for an ‘electric vehicle mandate’. Much to Musk’s chagrin, Trump’s ‘big, beautiful bill’ (now law) ended tax breaks for electric vehicles. “People are now allowed to buy whatever they want—gasoline-powered hybrids or new technologies as they come about—no more EV mandate,” Trump said.

Musk quite vocally opposed the legislation. He argued it would increase US national debt by trillions over Trump’s four-year term in the White House. He has now founded a new political party to

oppose Trump.

Reacting to Musk’s proclamation of the America Party, Trump said, ‘I think it’s ridiculous to start a third party... I am saddened to watch Elon Musk go completely off the rails.’ He has even hinted at destroying Musk’s businesses and deporting him to South Africa.

Musk, the world’s richest man, clearly has the means to bankroll his party. Posting on his social media platform X, on 7 July, he said: ‘Backing a candidate for president is not out [of] the question, but the focus for the next 12 months is on the House [of Representatives] and the Senate.’ Musk owns X, which has 600 million active users, including over 50 million in the US.

He also cautioned ruling Republican lawmakers, who voted in favour of the bill, that they ‘will lose their (pre-nomination) primary (contest) next year if it is the last thing I do on this earth’.

The America Party may select a presidential candidate for 2028, but Musk cannot run, for he was born in Pretoria and, therefore, does not qualify.

UK-France entente cordiale

Europe does not keep you on tenterhooks the way Trump does. But the 27-nation European Union (EU) is a de facto United States of Europe, its gross

He highlighted that Britain and France were Europe’s only two nuclear powers; “the leading armed forces of the continent” shouldering 40 per cent of Europe’s outlay on defence. Macron went on to affirm that European countries must end their “excessive dependency on both the US and China”, slamming China’s use of subsidies and Trump’s abuse of tariffs.

The Macron-Starmer chemistry has raised hopes of greater cooperation between the two countries to tackle asylum seekers who cross the English Channel from France to Britain. This has been a major political issue in the United Kingdom for years, which the previous Conservative government failed to remedy because of its fractious relationship with the EU, including France. ■

ASHIS RAY can be found on X @ashisray

The ‘integral humanism’ spin on the meaning of dharma

The BJP’s problems with ‘secularism’ could additionally be semantic, if you go by their constitution

Aakar Patel

The BJP’s constitution (Article 3) says, ‘Integral Humanism shall be the philosophy of the party’. The party’s membership form bears a pledge which members are required to take. The first line of this pledge is: ‘I believe in Integral Humanism which is the basic philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party.’

‘Integral humanism’ is a term many Indians are familiar with but few know much about. It comprises the text of four lectures by Deendayal Upadhyaya between 22 and 25 April 1965 in Mumbai. Upadhyaya held a bachelor’s degree in arts and was a journalist with the RSS’s in-house publication, *Panchjanya*. He was around 50 years old when he delivered these lectures, and became president of the Jana Sangh a couple of years later.

Let us go through the message of the BJP’s philosophy, which we can then analyse at a future date. What follows is a summary of the argument that Upadhyaya presents in his speeches, and it is presented as neutrally as possible.

The cause of the problems facing Bharat is a neglect of national identity. The nation is like an individual and becomes ill if its natural instincts are disregarded or suppressed. Despite Independence, India was still undecided about the direction it would take to realise development. Independence is meaningful only if it is the instrument to express culture.

The focus in India was on episodic problems: economic, social and political. This was because India adopted a Western

way of looking at economic, social and political doctrines along with Western science. Westernisation was synonymous with progress for Indians.

However, the West was unable to reconcile nationalism, democracy and socialism. These were essentially Western ideals and they were all in conflict with one another. These ideologies were not universal and not free from the limitations of the particular people and cultures which gave birth to these ‘isms’. Ayurveda said

we need to find local cures to local diseases. Could Bharatiya culture provide a solution for the world?

It is generally thought that Bharatiya culture thinks of salvation of the soul and does not bother about body, mind and intellect, but that is untrue. Dharma is given foremost place in Bharatiya culture. Dharma is the natural law that is eternal and universally applicable.

Dharma is higher than the executive, legislative and the judiciary, and it is also

higher than the people. If out of 450 million Indians, all except one voted for something, it would still be wrong if it was against dharma. The people have no right to act against dharma. The words ‘secularism’ and ‘*dharmanirapeksha*’ used in the Constitution are wrong and bad because dharma is a necessary condition for the State.

That which is not based on dharma is unacceptable and therefore secularism was fatally flawed. National unity is India’s dharma and so diversity was problematic. For this reason, India’s Constitution needs to change from federal to unitary with no legislative powers for the states, only for the Centre. Conflict between individuals and institutions of society is a sign of decadence and perversion.

The West was wrong to see the adversarial relationship between the individual and the State as the reason for progress. The individual was made up of body, mind, intelligence and soul. A human being is born with a soul. Personality, soul and character are different from one another. The person’s soul is unaffected by

personal history. Similarly, national culture is continuously modified by history.

Culture includes all the things held as good and commendable, but they do not affect ‘*chiti*’, the national soul. India’s national soul is fundamental and central. Chiti determines the direction of cultural advance. It filters out what is to be excluded from culture. Societies are animate and a society has a body, mind, intellect and soul. Some Westerners were beginning to accept this truth. One of them, William McDougall, said a group had a mind and a psychology, its own methods of thinking and action just as an individual did.

Societies have an inborn nature that is not based on its history. Events do not affect it. This group nature is like the soul in individuals, which was also unaffected by history. This group mentality is like mob mentality but developed over a longer period. The nation needs both an ideal and a motherland and only then is it a nation. And the State exists to protect this nation, which has an ideal and a motherland.

The difference between India and the West was that we regard the body only as an instrument to achieve dharma. Our efforts were for dharma, *artha* (money), *kama* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). The mistake of the West was to treat the four separately.

You could get voting rights but then you didn’t get food. The United States had both political freedom and wealth but it also topped the list in the number of suicides and mental patients. This was puzzling—there were bread and voting rights but no peace or happiness. Sound sleep was scarce in America because they had not thought of the integrated human being. The Americans said ‘honesty is the best business policy’ and the Europeans said ‘honesty is the best policy’, but the Indians said ‘honesty is not a policy but a principle’.

This, broadly speaking, is what the BJP says is its basic philosophy. It would be interesting to see how many BJP ministers or members can explain what their philosophy of integral humanism is all about. If they believe in it, as they are required to pledge, one would be interested to know what that belief is. ■



Deendayal Upadhyaya Photo: Getty Images

It would be interesting to see how many BJP ministers or members can explain what their philosophy of integral humanism is all about

Views are personal



राजकीय शिववर्णी मेला

11 जुलाई से
09 अगस्त 2025

के शुभ अवसर पर

**बाबा बैद्यनाथ धाम एवं
बाबा बासुकीनाथ धाम**

की पावन धरा में सभी श्रद्धालुओं का
हार्दिक स्वागत एवं जोहार

महादेव सभी भक्तों की मनोकामना पूर्ण करें

सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, झारखण्ड सरकार



हेमन्त सोरेन
मुख्यमंत्री, झारखण्ड

A two-faced approach to the three-language formula

Shivkumar S.

In this country, those who speak English will soon feel ashamed!” declared home minister Shah at a book launch on 19 June 2025. “The idea of a ‘complete India’ (whatever that means) cannot be imagined through half-baked foreign languages.”

As expected, there was public outrage, giving Shah reason to track back the next time. At the golden jubilee celebrations of the Union government’s official language department, in Delhi on 26 June, he said: “I sincerely believe that Hindi can’t be a *virোধi* (adversary) to any Indian language. Hindi is a *sakshi* (friend) of all Indian languages.”

Readers will recall Prime Minister Narendra Modi mocking politicians from Tamil Nadu for signing their letters to him in English. “They are so proud of Tamil that they even sign their letters in English,” he jeered at a public meeting in April.

Earlier this year, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan accused DMK leaders of misleading the public on the New Education Policy (NEP) and neglecting the interests of the students of Tamil Nadu. He threatened to withhold central funds under the ‘Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan’ unless the southern states adopted the NEP’s three-language formula.

While the TDP in Andhra Pradesh—a BJP ally in New Delhi—responded with a diplomatic statement on accepting Hindi ‘willingly’, the other states were not so pliant. Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin refused to budge from the state’s two-language formula in primary education, and accused the Centre of imposing Hindi.

The southern states criticised the Centre for its top-down approach, pointing out that they fund 85 per cent of primary education and deserve a say in policy decisions. They also questioned the effectiveness of Hindi-speaking BJP-ruled states in implementing the three-language system, urging the Centre to first address poor learning outcomes there.

Even as the first six months of 2025 saw the language wars hotting up, initially in Tamil Nadu and then in Maharashtra, hostility against Hindi speakers who had settled in these states led to clashes on the streets and in the marketplace. Resistance or refusal was met with violence and intimidation.

Frustrated Hindi speakers (who also knew English), particularly those in transferable jobs, voiced their resentment



Children being taught Hindi in a Mumbai municipal school; (right) police detain MNS workers protesting Hindi imposition, Mira Road, 8 July

over being asked to learn a third language. “How many languages must we learn?” they asked—ironically vindicating the two-language formula favoured by the southern states.

A brief history lesson may be in order here. While many members of the Constituent Assembly (1946–49) were strongly in favour of a single ‘unifying’ language, the resolution in favour of Hindi as the official language was passed by just a single vote. It was resolved that English would remain the official language for 15 years, and continue as one of the official languages thereafter, as long as the states desired.

In 1937, C. Rajagopalachari had made learning Hindustani compulsory in the Madras Presidency. (In 1940, the British government revoked this.) In 1968, he wrote in *Swarajya*, ‘Hindi is, at best, the language of a large minority, even as Tamil is the language of a medium-sized minority... Even in its most advanced form, Hindi as a language is inadequately equipped with the technical terms required for conveying modern knowledge.’

Once Hindi was adopted as the official

The RSS-BJP’s long-term agenda of promoting Hindi as both ‘rajbhasha’ (official language) and ‘rashtrabhasha’ (national language) is not likely to stop as long as the BJP rules this country

language of the Union government in 1963, another wave of language agitations flared up. The three-language formula was first adopted in the NEP of 1968 but was never seriously implemented. In most states, language proficiency is low, not only in English and the third language—often Sanskrit in the northern states—but also the mother tongue.

Writing in *The Indian Express* (8 July 2025), political scientist Suhas Palshikar explains the systematic push to make Hindi ‘unofficially the official language’. ‘The pro-Hindi policy of the [current Maharashtra] government [seen in its now-aborted attempt to introduce Hindi from Class 1] is in line with the BJP’s longstanding ambition to have Hindi (*shuddh* Hindi, not Hindustani) as the national language—a policy that dovetails with its penchant for enforcing uniformity in every respect and implementing a one nation, one language policy.’

It’s only when ‘votaries of regional languages appreciate the link between making one language *national* and making one culture *national*’ that we can better ‘understand the politics of nationalism masquerading as the politics of a national

language’. This is possibly why the language issue refuses to go away.

The New Education Policy in 2020 and revised in 2021 provided ‘flexibility’ to the states, the state boards and students. What, then, prompted the Maharashtra government to make the teaching of Hindi mandatory in Class 1, along with Marathi and English? The decision announced on 17 June was hurriedly withdrawn on 30 June in the face of mounting opposition, even from the state government’s own expert committee on languages. Nobody was consulted.

The objection to chief minister Devendra Fadnavis’ decision to adopt a three-language formula for school children in classes 1–5 was along two lines: the dubious merits of burdening children with a third language so early and the opposition of native Marathi speakers.

MNS (Maharashtra Navnirman Sena) workers hit the streets of Mumbai, picking on and assaulting those who failed to communicate in Marathi. Some wrathful victims fought back, asking if Mukesh Ambani or Gautam Adani spoke in Marathi.

One outcome of the furor was to bring estranged cousins Uddhav and Raj Thackeray together after 20 years, as they “united to protect Marathi”. Three days after their public reunion, tensions erupted in Mira Road on 8 July as the MNS and Shiv Sena (UBT) led a large protest, defying prohibitory orders.

With Fadnavis backing down, suspending the decision and setting up a new committee under economist Narendra Jadhav to suggest the way forward, the cousins have the higher ground, as they vow to continue the fight.

Delighted by this unexpected opportunity, Tamil Nadu chief minister was quick to congratulate the Thackeray cousins for their successful campaign, posting on X: ‘The language rights struggle, waged generation after generation by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the people of Tamil Nadu to defeat Hindi imposition, has now transcended state boundaries and is swirling like a storm of protest in Maharashtra.’

Stalin commended Raj Thackeray for asking which third language was being taught in Hindi-speaking states and slammed the BJP’s attempts to throttle the progress of non-Hindi-speaking states. While Stalin evidently hopes to leverage his anti-Hindi stance in next year’s assembly election, no Dravidian party—including those allied with the BJP—can really afford to take a contrary stand on this issue.

Whatever the victories of the moment, the long-term agenda of promoting Hindi as both *rajbhasha* (official language) and *rashtrabhasha* (national language) is not likely to stop as long as the BJP rules this country. Protests are unlikely to deter the BJP and RSS—they will bide their time till the next opportunity presents itself, in line with their other unitary fantasies, they will continue the campaign to foist Hindi on the entire nation. ■



Rev. Sue Parfitt, 83, at a protest in support of Palestine, London, 5 July 2025

Age no bar for this plucky campaigner against the genocide in Gaza

Who says passion and idealism wither away as one grows older. Meet Reverend Sue Parfitt, a priest from Bristol, who at 83 is just as passionate about humanitarian causes as she was when young.

Currently, she is at the forefront of the campaign against Israel’s brutal military action in Gaza which has already claimed thousands of lives while the international community watches from the sidelines.

On 5 July, Parfitt was arrested for taking part in a peaceful protest in London’s Parliament Square. A video of her holding a placard supporting a banned campaign group went viral. It read: ‘I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.’

The retired Anglican priest had travelled to London from the west of

England. She took part in the protest sitting on a fold-away seat before she was led away by officers, walking stick in hand.

Parfitt described herself as a “long-standing supporter of Palestine” who has repeatedly visited the West Bank. “I feel the Israeli government is committing genocide in Gaza and practising apartheid in the occupied West Bank,” she said.

The arrest came just hours after the Labour government designated Palestine Action as a terrorist group for its ‘direct action’ attacking security-sensitive targets.

Asked if she thought it was a terrorist group, Parfitt said: “Of course not. Civil disobedience has a long and honourable history in this country. Our government is cowering to the powerful Israeli lobby.”

Parfitt’s arrest has been widely condemned even by those who don’t agree with Palestine Action’s methods. Urging that she be released, a friend Jerry Hicks said: “She is against genocide and that’s not a crime”.

Many took to social media to voice their support for her, while criticising the UK government and police for silencing any criticism of the war on Gaza.

An estimated 61,700 Palestinians have already been killed in Israel’s military attacks, which has been labelled a genocide by Amnesty International.

Israel has blocked emergency aid from coming into the Strip while civilians have been systematically targeted at aid distribution sites.

‘According to [prime minister Keir] Starmer’s new law, this puts her in the same category as an ISIS or Al-Qaeda terrorist, with a prison sentence of up to 14 years,’ wrote journalist and activist Owen Jones.

A post on X read: ‘We are not living in a rational civilised democratic society. How is this 83-year-old priest considered a “terrorist” for supporting Palestine Action? This is like something out of a Kafkaesque nightmare.’

Fixing Britain’s broken community relations

The alarming rise of a nationalist far right is playing havoc with Britain’s community cohesion, including Hindu-Muslim relations, often culminating in violence.

Memories of the 2022 riots in Leicester,



also known as ‘Little India’, are still fresh. Last summer was marred by violent clashes between white supremacists and largely Muslim immigrants after rumours spread that an asylum-seeker was behind an attack on a dance class—killing three children and injuring eight.

Misinformation and anti-immigrant sentiment spurred nationwide violence with rioters targeting hotels that housed

asylum-seekers, smashing windows and attacking police officers.

Now, an all-party commission has been appointed to examine the ‘deepening polarisation’ in British society. It has recommended measures to ‘fix’ it.

The Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion will develop a policy agenda for the government with the aim of sparking a national conversation about the kind of country the public wants.

Led by former Conservative cabinet minister Sajid Javid and former Labour MP Jon Cruddas, its main focus will be on identifying the ‘forces driving disconnection and divisions’.

“This commission,” Javid said, “has been established to take a long view, propose radical policy changes and, crucially, help forge a cross-society consensus about how we want to live together now and in the future.”

He lamented that social cohesion had been treated as a “second tier” issue by successive governments.

The initiative coincides with a new Refugee Council report expressing concern over a lack of government effort to integrate refugees into British life.

The Commission has been widely welcomed and one is almost inclined to commend it to the Indian political class.



More hurdles for foreign students in Britain

There’s more bad news for international students, with the British government under increasing pressure to scrap the graduate visa route except for those pursuing postgraduate research degrees.

This follows a report from the right-wing think-tank, Policy Exchange, claiming that foreign students are using universities as a ‘back door’ to long-term settlement in the UK.

The government has already taken a series of measures to check the alleged abuse of student visas as part of a broader crackdown on immigration. Earlier this year, it reduced the length of time overseas students can live and work in the UK from two years to 18 months.

Students, with the exception of those pursuing postgraduate research courses, are also banned from bringing dependants with them. Critics are pushing back, pointing to the contribution foreign students make to the British economy.

Jo Grady, general secretary of the University and College Union, said: “International students are essential to the financial stability of our higher education sector; they also contribute tens of billions of pounds to the UK economy each year.”

A case of politics trumping economics.

And, finally, even in this modern age of sneakers, apparel, the true sign of a gentleman in Britain remains whether his shoes are polished enough to see your face in them. ■



Karnataka Government’s Visionary Commitment to Water Conservation and Sustainable Development: A Beacon of Hope for a Water-Secure Future

The Karnataka government, through the Minor Irrigation Department and district administrations, has taken bold and effective steps to restore these water bodies.

Water is life. This timeless truth resonates deeply across Karnataka, where the government, under the dynamic leadership of Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science, and Technology N.S. Boseraju, has embarked on an ambitious journey to conserve, rejuvenate, and sustainably manage the state’s vast network of lakes, tanks, and groundwater resources.

Recognizing water bodies as vital lifelines for communities, agriculture, and ecosystems, Karnataka has positioned itself as a national leader in environmental stewardship, water security, and technological innovation.

This comprehensive advertorial delves into Karnataka’s groundbreaking initiatives aimed at protecting approximately 40,225 lakes and other water bodies, bolstering groundwater recharge, addressing water scarcity in drought-prone regions, and harnessing precise data collection to inform policy and action.

Through a combination of visionary projects, community involvement, scientific research, and strategic governance, Karnataka is crafting a future where water abundance is guaranteed, livelihoods thrive, and nature flourishes.

Reaffirming a Collective Responsibility: Karnataka’s Lake Conservation Mission

At the heart of Karnataka’s water conservation efforts lies a simple yet profound



understanding: lake conservation is not a choice but a necessity—a collective responsibility shared by government, communities, and stakeholders alike. Minister N.S. Boseraju underscored this conviction during the inauguration of the landmark two-day national conference, “Namma Kere–2025: Healthy Lakes, Healthy Lives,” held recently in Bengaluru.

This conference, organized by the Karnataka Science and Technology Academy in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology and the Alumni Association of the College of Fisheries, exemplifies Karnataka’s commitment to raising awareness, fostering scientific dialogue, and promoting sustainable lake management.

The conference’s theme encapsulates a powerful message: healthy lakes lead to healthy lives. Lakes and water bodies are indispensable for groundwater recharge, biodiversity support, climate resilience, and sustaining agriculture—the backbone of Karnataka’s economy and rural livelihood. By focusing on lake conservation, Karnataka aims to safeguard water security for

present and future generations.

Karnataka’s Water Heritage: Protecting Over 40,225 Lakes and Water Bodies

The scale of Karnataka’s water resources is staggering. With more than 40,225 lakes and water bodies identified across the state, each plays a critical role in water storage, irrigation, flood mitigation, and ecosystem balance. However, these water bodies have faced challenges such as encroachments, pollution, and degradation, threatening their sustainability.

The Karnataka government, through the Minor Irrigation Department and district administrations, has taken bold and effective steps to restore these water bodies. In the past two years alone, encroachments have been removed from approximately 12,000 lakes, showcasing decisive action backed by administrative coordination and community participation. This remarkable achievement has not only reclaimed vital water ecosystems but also reaffirmed the government’s resolve to protect

the state’s water heritage.

In parallel, cleanliness drives and groundwater recharge initiatives are actively conducted throughout Karnataka, ensuring that lakes and tanks remain healthy and functional. Such initiatives are instrumental in maintaining water quality, enhancing aquifer levels, and supporting agricultural productivity.

Boosting Groundwater and Irrigation Development: Strategic Budget Allocation

Recognizing the crucial role of groundwater and irrigation in Karnataka’s water security, the government has prioritized long-pending and strategically important projects such as the Vrishabhavati Valley development, H.N. Valley Phase 2, and lake modernization efforts.

These initiatives focus on reviving traditional water bodies and enhancing existing infrastructure—including dams, pickup structures, and lift irrigation schemes—to increase the state’s groundwater table and overall water availability.

To support these critical efforts, a substantial budget allocation of ₹2,000 crore has been earmarked for the Minor Irrigation and Groundwater Development Department. This significant investment will bolster irrigation facilities, especially in drought-prone and semi-arid regions, while improving drinking water availability and agricultural productivity across rural Karnataka.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The ₹2,000 crore grant, announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, underscores the government’s dedication to sustainable groundwater development and irrigation infrastructure enhancement, addressing the adverse effects of climate change, erratic rainfall, and groundwater depletion.
- Minister N.S. Boseraju expressed satisfaction with this focused budget boost, emphasizing that groundwater development is essential for Karnataka’s agricultural and environmental sustainability.
- Groundbreaking Projects with International Acclaim: K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley
- Karnataka’s innovation in water management shines through flagship projects such as K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley. These projects focus on restoring and augmenting groundwater levels using treated wastewater, an environmentally sustainable practice that simultaneously addresses wastewater management and water scarcity.
- Minister Boseraju proudly shared that these projects have gained international recognition, positioning Karnataka as a model state in water recycling and groundwater rejuvenation. By pioneering such initiatives, the state has not only enhanced water availability for farmers and communities but also contributed to global conversations on sustainable water resource management.
- These valley projects represent a holistic approach—combining technology, ecological restoration, and community engagement—to address water security challenges comprehensively. They serve as blueprints for similar initiatives across India and beyond.
- Empowering Farmers and Ensuring Irrigation Security: The ₹285 Crore Tank Replenishment Project
- Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Karnataka’s economy, with millions depending on dependable irrigation and groundwater access. The government’s initiatives under the Minor Irrigation Department are directly aligned with enhancing irrigation infrastructure, protecting water sources, and ensuring that small and marginal farmers receive the water support they need.
- A striking example of this commitment is the recent launch of a ₹285 crore project to refill 62 tanks in Koratagere taluk using water sourced from the Ettinahole project.

Groundbreaking Initiative at Goravanahalli

Announced just a couple of weeks ago at Goravanahalli, this ambitious initiative—championed by Home Minister and Tumakuru District In-charge Minister Dr. G. Parameshwara—aims to substantially boost groundwater levels in the water-stressed Bayaluseeme region of Karnataka.

By storing approximately 826 million cubic feet (MCFT) of water across these tanks, the initiative will significantly reduce drinking water scarcity and increase irrigation reliability for farmers.

Specifically, 43 of these tanks, managed by the Minor Irrigation Department with a combined capacity of 1,848.46 MCFT, will receive an additional 659.47 MCFT of replenished water.

Minister Boseraju lauded Dr. Parameshwara’s dedicated efforts in championing this cause, reflecting the government’s core principle of translating electoral promises into concrete, impactful action. The project launch was complemented by the distribution of irrigation equipment and the drilling of borewells, ensuring that even small and marginal farmers receive adequate water access—empowering them towards sustainable agriculture and economic stability.

Addressing Bayaluseeme’s Water Scarcity: A Permanent and Holistic Approach

The Bayaluseeme districts of Karnataka have long faced severe water scarcity due to erratic rainfall, depleted groundwater, and over-extraction. The Congress government’s strategic response is both comprehensive and forward-looking.

Beyond tank replenishment projects, ongoing initiatives like the K.C. Valley and H.N. Valley projects have already brought tangible improvements to farmers in Kolar, Chikkaballapur, and Bengaluru Rural districts.

Additionally, the Vrishabhavati Valley project in Tumakuru district is steadily progressing, promising a permanent irrigation solution once completed. Together, these initiatives address water scarcity through sustainable water source development, groundwater recharge, and irrigation

infrastructure enhancement—ensuring that the region’s agricultural and drinking water needs are met reliably.

Minister Boseraju’s official statements reaffirm the government’s long-term vision and commitment to these transformative projects, reflecting a governance approach grounded in action, accountability, and community welfare.

Data-Driven Water Governance: Launching the 7th Minor Irrigation and 2nd Water Reservoir Census

A crucial pillar of Karnataka’s water resource management is accurate data collection, which forms the foundation for evidence-based policy-making and effective project implementation.

Minister Boseraju inaugurated the 7th State-Level Training Workshop on the 2nd Minor Irrigation and 7th Water Reservoir Census, emphasizing the indispensable role of comprehensive, precise data.

This workshop prepares officials to undertake a meticulous census of all water bodies, including tube wells, tanks, lakes, and reservoirs. The census, conducted every five years since its inception in 1986, is entering its 7th edition with an enhanced, technology-driven methodology.

Minister Boseraju described it as an “encyclopedia of Karnataka’s water bodies,” a vital resource for departments across Agriculture, Major Irrigation, and Rural Development.

By harnessing advanced technology and standardizing data collection, Karnataka ensures the reliability of its water resource data. This approach facilitates precise planning, resource allocation, and the formulation of targeted conservation and irrigation policies, thereby maximizing the benefits of developmental projects.

The Minister’s call to officials to diligently execute the census underscores the government’s commitment to scientific rigor and transparency in water governance.

Harnessing Technology and Community Engagement for Sustainable Water Management

Beyond projects and data, Karnataka’s success lies in integrating modern technology with active community participation. The

removal of encroachments, cleanliness drives, groundwater recharge programs, and the appointment of new leadership within the Karnataka Science and Technology Academy exemplify a multifaceted strategy that combines administrative efficiency, scientific expertise, and grassroots involvement.

By fostering collaboration between policymakers, scientists, administrators, and local communities, Karnataka creates an ecosystem conducive to innovation, accountability, and sustainable development. This inclusive approach ensures that conservation efforts are not isolated but embedded in the social and economic fabric of the state.

A Model for the Nation: Karnataka’s Water Conservation Leadership

The initiatives under Minister N.S. Boseraju’s stewardship have garnered national and international recognition. Karnataka’s pioneering work in groundwater rejuvenation through treated wastewater projects, large-scale tank replenishment, and data-centric water governance sets a high standard for other states to emulate.

By transforming policy commitments into actionable projects, the government exemplifies a pragmatic, results-oriented leadership style that prioritizes ecological health, farmer welfare, and citizen well-being.



Looking Forward: A Water-Secure Karnataka for Generations to Come

Minister Boseraju’s closing remarks at the “Namma Kere–2025” conference encapsulate the government’s enduring pledge: lake conservation and water security are lifelong commitments, vital to reviving Karnataka’s water heritage and securing a healthier future.

With sustained investments, innovative solutions, and shared responsibility, Karnataka is poised to overcome water challenges, ensuring that every lake, tank, and groundwater source continues to nourish its people, agriculture, and environment.

Karnataka’s comprehensive water conservation and management programs—spanning lake rejuvenation, groundwater recharge, major irrigation projects, and rigorous data collection—represent a holistic, forward-thinking approach to sustainable development.

Minister N.S. Boseraju’s leadership exemplifies dedication, innovation, and inclusivity, driving a transformational agenda that benefits millions of citizens and preserves vital natural resources.

As Karnataka sets benchmarks for environmental stewardship and water security, it offers a compelling blueprint for the nation, demonstrating that with vision, collaboration, and resolve, water scarcity can be effectively tackled, and prosperity assured.

Key Highlights

- Karnataka’s lakes are vital for groundwater recharge, biodiversity, and agriculture.
- Minister Boseraju stresses lake conservation as a non-negotiable, collective duty, not a short-term initiative.
- Over 12,000 lakes freed from encroachments in the last two years.
- Active cleanliness drives and recharge programs underway across Karnataka.

Flagship Groundwater Recharge Projects

- Karnataka’s K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley projects lead the way in sustainable water recycling by utilizing treated wastewater for groundwater rejuvenation.

Why This Matters

- These projects have received international recognition for innovation.
- They simultaneously address wastewater management and water scarcity.
- Serve as models for India and globally on water recycling and groundwater recharge.

Empowering Farmers & Ensuring Irrigation Security

- A landmark ₹285 crore project was launched to refill 62 tanks in Koratagere taluk with water from the Ettinahole project, boosting groundwater in the Bayaluseeme region.

Project Benefits

- Tanks to store approx. 826 million cubic feet (MCFT) of water.
- Replenishment of 659.47 MCFT additional water in 43 tanks managed by Minor Irrigation.
- Improved irrigation reliability and reduced drinking water scarcity.
- Borewell drilling and irrigation equipment distribution to support small farmers.



“Vruksho Rakshati Rakshitah”

VANA MAHOTSAVAM:2025

- Target: **18.02 Crore** saplings plantation.
- Available **20 crore** saplings in **14,355** Nurseries.
- 19.04 Crore** saplings planted in 2024
- Targeted to increase **33% forest** coverage from **24.05%** in Telangana.



Freedom is in Peril. Defend it with all you might Jawaharlal Nehru

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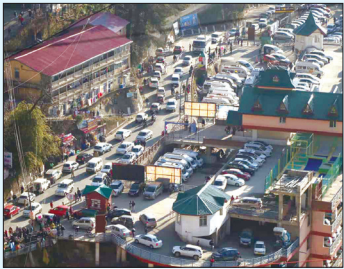
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A CURE FOR TOXIC TOURISM

Avay Shukla has a tourism solution for our hill states

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TRADE POLICY ON A WING AND A PRAYER

The cost of India's timidity in tariff talks with the US

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HOME & ABROAD

THE (THIRD) LANGUAGE QUESTION

Why the BJP is hell-bent on foisting Hindi on all states

► P6



Are we a republic of fools for the ECI?

Is the Election Commission, in effect, admitting that every election held after 2003 used a flawed voter list?

Yogendra Yadav

Exactly what we'd feared has come to pass. A mad, mad decree—surely Tughlaq's envy—is issued in Delhi. It lands in Bihar, and all hell breaks loose. Now that the genie is out of the bottle and the Election Commission of India's 'special intensive' mess impossible to contain, it's busy fabricating a cover-up story.

In the morning papers, the ECI puts out an ad. In the evening, it issues a denial. Reports pouring in from various parts of Bihar are deeply troubling. But instead of addressing the problem on the ground, the Commission wants to shoot the messenger—and brazen it out by advertising absurd numbers. An institution once counted among the most trusted in the country has become a joke. Time to ask the eminences currently heading the Election Commission of India some blunt questions:

#1

When the new CEC (chief election commissioner) took charge, the ECI made quite a song and dance about its commitment to 'consultation and dialogue', about holding more than 4,000 meetings with political parties in two months. Question: in any of those meetings, did you even hint that you were planning a 'special intensive revision' of the entire country's voter list? Before taking such a dramatic step, should you not have consulted political parties across the country—especially in Bihar, where elections were to be held soonest?

#2

Since 2003, the Election Commission had put an end to intensive revisions—i.e., creating an entirely fresh electoral roll. What prompted you to reverse that decision? The reasons you've offered—urbanisation, migration, duplicate entries—couldn't those be addressed through a special and thorough revision of the existing rolls? Why throw out the old list and start from scratch? Did the Election Commission assess the pros and cons before taking this decision? Was there even an internal consultation? Can that file be made public?

#3

You've chosen to base this fresh revision

on the 2003 voter list. But that list too was created by revising an older list. Back then, voters weren't asked to produce proof either. So what makes the 2003 list 'authentic' and the ones after that suspect? By that logic, is the Election Commission admitting that every election held after 2003 used a flawed voter list?

#4

For those not on the 2003 list, you're asking for one of 11 specific documents. Is the Election Commission confident that every Indian citizen possesses at least one of these documents? Has the Commission examined what percentage of people in Bihar actually have them? If yes, why not release that data? And if not, why ignore the word of experts who've shown—using government data—that not even half of Bihar's population have these documents?

#5

Why doesn't the Election Commission accept common documents like Aadhaar, ration cards or MGNREGA job cards—the ones most common folk have? What's the difference between these and the 11 'valid' documents? If a residence certificate issued against Aadhaar is valid, why not the Aadhaar card itself? And why won't the Commission accept its own photo ID card?

#6

Why did you choose Bihar to launch this 'special intensive revision' exercise—and that, just four months before elections? Hadn't you already completed a revision of Bihar's voter list in December? Were there any major complaints of fraud about that list from any political party? Did Bihar, like Maharashtra, see a sudden, inexplicable jump in voter numbers? Did any party or group demand that the list be scrapped?

#7

Why was this B.I.G. directive to be implemented at just 12 hours' notice? Did you really believe that you could issue an order from Delhi in the evening and start distributing forms the next morning at 97,000 polling booths in Bihar? Do you not know how long it takes to print forms for 8,00,00,000 (eight crore) names? Or that 20,000 of those 97,000 booths didn't even have Booth Level Officers—and still don't, two weeks on?



Barely half the population of Bihar has received enumerations forms

Photo: Getty Images

NOTE TO READERS

Thanks to the ECI's dodgy 'clarifications' and shifting narrative, confusion reigned among voters in Bihar when the edition went to press. We paused production to take note of the Supreme Court's intervention on Thursday, 10 July. The court allowed the SIR to continue even while questioning the timing of the exercise and the locus of the ECI to verify citizenship. The court also urged the ECI to admit Aadhaar, Voter ID and PDS ration cards as valid documents—or explain why not. The ECI has to respond by 21 July and the next court hearing is on 28 July.

#8

Why only one month to complete such a massive and complex exercise? Has anything of this scale—affecting crores of people—ever been pulled off in a month? The Bihar caste survey, which didn't even require people to fill forms or submit documents, took five months. And now you think you'll pull off a miracle in one month—in the middle of the monsoon and flood season? What world do you live in?

#9

Let's say you made a mistake—whether in haste or under pressure. Why not just admit it? Why these endless excuses? You know very well this revision has nothing to do with weeding out duplicate voters. So why trot out such flimsy arguments? How many complaints has the Commission received about illegal foreign nationals in Bihar's new 2025

voter rolls? If none, why use that as a pretext?

#10

You know full well that of the 4.96 crore voters on the 2003 Bihar list, some 1.5 crore are either dead or have left the state. Why keep repeating that 4.96 crore people won't have to show documents? Do these lies befit an institution like the ECI?

#11

You've lately been releasing outrageous statistics every day—and people are laughing at you. Barely half the population has even received forms, yet you claim that 36 per cent have already filled and submitted their forms! If that is true, why not publish the names? If not—who are you trying to fool? Or as they may say in snippy Bihari style: का बाबू, पब्लिक को बुझक मानते हो? ■

Why there's no stopping the genocide in Gaza

Over 60 MNCs have big stakes in what UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese calls the 'economy of genocide'

Ashok Swain

As Israel's military campaign in Gaza enters its 22nd month, the world faces a defining test of our collective commitment to international law and human rights. A new report by UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese lays bare a chilling reality: over 60 multinational corporations—including big-tech like Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), defence manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Elbit Systems, even online travel agency Bookings.com and homestays and tourism experiences firm Airbnb—are deeply enmeshed in what she terms an 'economy of genocide'.

These corporations, Albanese argues, are not passive bystanders—they are enablers, profiting from Israel's war on Gaza and its decades-long illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

From weapons manufacturing to cloud computing, biometric surveillance to real estate listings in illegal settlements in the West Bank, the involvement of these companies constitutes not just moral indifference but legal complicity.

Albanese's report is not simply a human rights document; it is an indictment of a



Photo: Getty Images

Throughout history, corporations have profited from war and conflict, with the tacit approval or active encouragement of powerful nation-states

global corporate order in which mass violence becomes a market opportunity. This is not a new story. Throughout history, corporations have profited from war and conflict, with the tacit approval or active encouragement of powerful nation-states.

During both World Wars, companies such as Krupp and IG Farben in Germany, General Motors in the US and Vickers in the UK scaled up production to arm militaries and fuel the machinery of violence. In Nazi Germany, industrial firms supplied the regime with everything from tanks to Zyklon-B gas. Some, like IBM, have been accused of facilitating genocide by providing the punch-card systems used to catalogue and target Jews.

In apartheid South Africa, multinationals supported the regime by supplying vehicles and surveillance tools used to repress the Black majority. In Iraq and Afghanistan, firms like Halliburton/ KBR and Blackwater raked in billions in no-bid contracts, turning reconstruction and private security into corporate windfalls.

Russian companies like the Wagner Group have exploited conflict zones in Sudan and across Africa to generate substantial revenue through a mix of military, political and economic activities. In Sudan, Wagner secured lucrative gold mining concessions by providing military support, weapons and training to the RSF forces in exchange for privileged access to natural resources. Likewise, Chinese defence firms, particularly state-owned giants like Norinco and Chengdu Aircraft, profited significantly from the recent India-Pakistan military escalation.

The Gaza case, however, offers a uniquely modern iteration of this historical pattern. Lockheed Martin leads the F-35 fighter jet programme, supplying aircraft used extensively in Israel's bombing campaigns. These jets, capable of carrying over 18,000 pounds of ordnance, have helped turn Gaza's neighbourhoods into rubble. Between 2023 and 2024, Israeli military spending surged 65

per cent, with major arms manufacturers reporting record profits.

Palantir, IBM and Hewlett Packard have supplied software, databases and predictive policing tools that aid in identifying targets and controlling Palestinian movement. The result is a digital architecture of war—automated, scalable and highly profitable.

Big Tech has become a pillar of this economy. Amazon and Google, under the \$1.2 billion Project Nimbus contract, provide cloud and AI services to the Israeli government and military. When Israel's internal military cloud collapsed in October 2023, Microsoft Azure stepped in to provide critical infrastructure. These services, once marketed for logistics or customer support, now enable automated kill lists and battlefield analytics. The deployment of these dual-use technologies, Albanese warns, is more than a violation of human rights—by testing them on real populations, Gaza has been turned into a laboratory for future military applications.

Beyond software and sensors, the physical infrastructure of occupation is also deeply commercialised. Caterpillar and Volvo supply bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian homes. Booking.com and Airbnb list vacation rentals in illegal West Bank settlements, profiting from what is effectively the tourism of colonisation. Meanwhile, companies like Orbia and Glencore provide irrigation and fuel, sustaining illegal agricultural developments on confiscated land. Banks and asset managers like BlackRock and Vanguard hold major stakes in many of these corporations, reaping returns from their war-linked portfolios.

This vast supply chain of complicity is not some accident of globalisation. It reflects structural incentives within corporate architecture itself: war, displacement and repression are profitable. From the colonial

► Continued on page 2

No stopping the genocide in Gaza



Photo: Getty Images

» Continued from page 1

exploitation of rubber and minerals in Africa to the recent mining of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo, often using forced labour and fuelling conflict, corporations have consistently found ways to monetise suffering. Surveillance and cybersecurity firms like Palantir have thrived during the ‘War on Terror’.

Media houses see revenue spikes during conflict. Financial institutions profit from war bonds and defence stocks. Even food and logistics companies like Nestlé and Cargill have operated in zones of mass violence, sometimes accused of tolerating or benefiting from forced labour.

And yet, accountability remains rare. Some firms have faced legal and reputational consequences. Volkswagen and Siemens, for instance, eventually acknowledging their use of forced labour under the Nazis. But far more often, corporations evade justice through complex supply chains, lobbying and legal loopholes. In Gaza, Albanese’s report makes it unequivocally clear, international law places obligations not just on states but on private actors too. Corporate entities and their executives can be held criminally liable for aiding and abetting war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

What must be done is clear. First, the UN Security Council must impose sanctions on the companies named in the report, freezing their assets, and asking member-states to cancel government contracts. There is precedent: sanctions

helped bring down apartheid in South Africa and curtailed corporate involvement in Balkan war economies. Second, financial institutions of member-states must divest from these firms. Pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and asset managers cannot claim neutrality while profiting from genocide. Third, courts in the West must begin proceedings against executives under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Several European countries have already used such laws to try alleged war criminals. They can, and should, apply the same standard to corporate leaders.

The international community must go further. The Rome Statute must evolve to explicitly include corporate liability. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should investigate not only generals and ministers but also CEOs who knowingly supply the machinery of mass violence. Reparations must be considered, not just from states but from companies that have profited from the suffering of Palestinians. An apartheid wealth tax, akin to proposals in post-apartheid South Africa, could fund reconstruction and support displaced communities.

Francesca Albanese’s report is not just an exposé, it is a roadmap. It names the corporations, tracks their investments, and exposes the contracts. It demands that we stop pretending that economic violence is somehow separate from physical violence. If we are serious about ending the horrors in Gaza and preventing future genocides, then the corporate machinery behind them must be dismantled. ■

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With Takhts in turmoil, SGPC faces scrutiny

The churn in Sikh religious bodies points to a deeper power struggle

Herjinder

This isn’t just another chapter in a long-running story. It marks a significant shift in the dynamics of panthic politics. A fresh conflict between the Akal Takht in Amritsar and Takht Sri Patna Sahib in Bihar has revealed a deeper crisis, an institutional erosion, with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)—already mired in controversies over the appointment and removal of Jathedars—at the centre of the latest conflict.

The current controversy erupted with the removal of Jathedar Giani Ranjit Singh Gauhar of Takht Sri Patna Sahib over allegations of financial misconduct. Gauhar, known for his proximity to the Badal family, was reinstated shortly thereafter by the Jathedars of the three Punjab-based Takhts—Akal Takht, Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib and Damdama Sahib—an action widely seen as influenced by the Badal family.

This reinstatement, however, violates a 2008 agreement between the five Takhts, reached after an earlier dispute between Patna Sahib and the Akal Takht. That pact allowed autonomy to each Takht over local affairs but mandated joint decision-making—or deference to the Akal Takht—on major panthic matters. The current breach of that understanding hints at deeper fissures and a power struggle within the



Jathedar Giani Ranjit Singh Gauhar

Sikh religious leadership.

The reversal of their decision did not sit well with Takht Sri Patna Sahib. In what appeared to be a retaliatory move, the *Panj Pyare* (council of five Sikh devouts who strictly observe the Sikh code of conduct) responsible for making decisions, convened and declared the acting Jathedar of Akal Takht, Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj and Tek Singh Dhulana of Takht Damdama Sahib *tankhaiya* (guilty of religious misconduct), along with the Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal.

In quick response, the religious heads of the three Punjab Takhts declared that those who had issued the Patna Sahib order were *tankhaiya*. Patna Sahib dismissed this move, arguing that those already branded *tankhaiya* had no authority to pass judgement on others. One has to wait and watch whether this conflict will escalate or whether, as in the past, it will be resolved through mediation. What it has exposed is deepening cracks within Sikh religious politics—rifts that have been widening since the beginning of this year.

In March, the SGPC abruptly removed Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh and appointed Gargaj as acting Jathedar. This decision was met with sharp criticism from various quarters, including the Nihang factions, who openly vowed to oppose the appointment. In a move seemingly aimed at avoiding confrontation, Gargaj was quietly installed at 2.50 a.m. The entire sequence

of events poses a threat of credibility for the SGPC, which is responsible for appointing Jathedars and managing all gurdwaras in Punjab, along with several historic shrines in the country. Till recently, it also oversaw gurdwaras in Haryana, but that responsibility now rests with a separate state-level committee.

Traditionally, the SGPC has been heavily influenced and aligned with the Akali Dal. However, as the Badal family gradually took full control of the party, the SGPC too came under their influence. This became starkly evident in 1999 when, after a rift, Parkash Singh Badal replaced Gurcharan Singh Tohra with Bibi Jagir Kaur as SGPC president. Tohra was only able to return after reconciling with Badal.

With the Akali Dal’s political fortunes on the decline, tensions have intensified within the SGPC as well. But it’s not just the Akali Dal that is struggling. The SGPC itself is in the midst of a severe credibility crisis. Once hailed as one of the most democratic religious institutions, it has been nearly one-and-a-half decades since it last conducted elections. Among the reasons for this prolonged delay is the removal of voting rights from *Sahajdhari* Sikhs, a matter currently under judicial review. Additionally, voter rolls are yet to be updated. After Haryana formed its own gurdwara committee, constituencies needed be redrawn, but this process too remains incomplete. Above all, there seems to be a complete lack of urgency or political will to resolve these issues and hold fresh elections.

The escalating conflict among the Takhts, coupled with the SGPC’s deepening crisis of legitimacy, underscores a larger malaise within the Sikh leadership. What was once a unified, robust and democratic religious structure now appears mired in factionalism, political interference and inertia. Sukhdev Singh Bahur, former general secretary of the SGPC, captures the mood when he says, “When the Shiromani committee itself has deviated from its duty, then who all should be blamed?”

Whether this crisis will culminate in further division or lead to meaningful reform remains to be seen. ■

With the Akali Dal’s political fortunes on the decline, tensions have intensified within the SGPC as well

Is Kejriwal the ‘super CM’ in Punjab now?

As the former Delhi chief minister tightens his hold on Punjab, critics wonder whether it’s a move for survival or revival

Herjinder

Like every other state, Punjab is also seeing its share of back-to-back government events and party shows. On 7 July, for instance, a thanksgiving rally was organised to celebrate Aam Aadmi Party’s victory in the Ludhiana West by-election. That same day, a sewage treatment plant was inaugurated in Mohali. Punjab’s top rank in the National Achievement Survey 2024 was marked by a gathering of teachers. On 8 July, health cards were distributed under the government’s health insurance scheme. Later, the Punjabi edition of Jasmine Shah’s book *Kejriwal Model* was launched.

As per protocol, chief minister Bhagwant Mann was present at all these events. But it was clear that he was not the central figure. That role belonged to Arvind Kejriwal, former Delhi chief minister and AAP’s national convenor. Over the past several months, Kejriwal has taken centre stage in nearly every major event in Punjab. Be it the inauguration of a development project or the launch of a government initiative like the campaign against addiction or the unveiling of new rules for land registry or the rollout of an industrial portal—he is the one grabbing the headlines.

Kejriwal’s political focus appears to have shifted almost entirely to Punjab. His visibility in Delhi has sharply declined, a fact reflected on the party’s official X and YouTube accounts, where Punjab-related content dominates. At several of these events, former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia is also seen on stage.

When the AAP government assumed office in Punjab in 2022 and Mann took oath as CM, the buzz across the state was all about the ‘Delhi model’. Everywhere, officials were talking about free electricity, world-class schools and mohalla clinics. It was said that the Mann government was fixated on replicating this model. Mann himself began frequenting Delhi, prompting opposition leaders to allege that Punjab was being governed by

“remote control” from the national capital.

That “remote control” seems to have shifted physically to Punjab after AAP’s defeat in the Delhi assembly elections in February this year. It began with Arvind Kejriwal’s 10-day Vipassana retreat in Hoshiarpur, during which much of the state government machinery was reportedly deployed to accommodate him. Since then, Kejriwal has been practically invisible in Delhi, attending more and more programmes in Punjab. AAP’s Delhi unit is effectively being run by Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj. When Atishi was arrested during a protest against a slum demolition drive in Kalkaji, Kejriwal limited his response to a social media post. There was no protest, no press conference. A marked shift indeed for someone who was once proactive on Delhi issues. Kejriwal now appears reactive, if not indifferent.

The turning point can be traced to 8 February, the day AAP suffered a defeat in Delhi. Three days later, all AAP MLAs in Punjab were summoned to a meeting at Arvind Kejriwal’s residence. The meeting was attended by all 91 MLAs, including CM Mann, signalling a marked shift of power centre.

Two significant announcements were made that day. Manish Sisodia was appointed in charge of Punjab with Satyendar Jain as co-in charge. Both, like Kejriwal, had lost the Delhi elections.

They now reside in Chandigarh’s Sector 39A in government bungalows meant for Punjab cabinet ministers. Sometime back, the Punjab government set up the Punjab Development Commission (PDC) modelled after the Niti Aayog. Mann chairs the commission, while Seema Bansal, originally from Haryana, is the vice-chairperson. This move has sparked a controversy with senior Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa alleging that most of the top appointees to the PDC are outsiders, closely aligned with AAP’s Delhi leadership.

He further accused the government of



Photo: Getty Images

Wherever Arvind Kejriwal is present, even state chief minister Bhagwant Mann is relegated to the sidelines

A BJP leader claimed that cabinet meetings are held at Mann’s residence, giving Kejriwal and Sisodia an opportunity to be present and, in effect, preside over them

bypassing the legislative process and operating in a non-transparent manner.

BJP leader Sunil Jakhar went a step further and claimed that cabinet meetings were now being held at Mann’s residence—giving Kejriwal and Sisodia an opportunity to be present and, in effect, preside over the proceedings. Not surprising then that several opposition leaders refer to Kejriwal as the “de facto CM” or the “super CM”.

Delhi’s hand was also quite apparent during last month’s by-poll to the Ludhiana West Assembly seat. The entire campaign was reportedly taken over by AAP’s Delhi media team, headed by Vijay Nair—an accused in the Delhi liquor policy scam. According to media reports, several members of AAP’s Punjab media team were sidelined through the

campaign. Following his victory in the bypoll, AAP’s Sanjeev Arora resigned from the Rajya Sabha, fuelling speculation of Kejriwal’s entry to the upper house of Parliament, though both he and the party have publicly denied this.

Irrespective of whether or not Kejriwal enters the Rajya Sabha, the moot question is: does he now see his political future rooted in Punjab? His activities and sustained presence in the state certainly suggest so.

With Delhi slipping from its grip, AAP’s political fate now hinges on the 2027 Assembly elections in Punjab. Ironically, the very team that suffered a resounding defeat in Delhi is now steering the campaign in Punjab—where AAP hopes to script its next chapter of survival, or perhaps revival. ■

When tourism becomes toxic

Sustainable solutions must replace the car-centric chaos in Himachal and Uttarakhand

Avay Shukla

The deputy commissioner of Shimla announced in mid-June that 300,000 vehicles had already entered Shimla in the first two weeks of the month. That’s 15,000 vehicles per day. Shimla has parking for just about 5,000 vehicles, and if we assume that a tourist family/ group stays for just two days, the daily parking requirement is for 30,000 vehicles—six times what is available. (This does not include locally registered vehicles which total around 70,000!)

The situation is no different in Dehradun, Nainital, Mussoorie, Manali, Dharamshala and other hill stations. And it’s getting worse every year.

The tourists, of course, suffer—stuck in traffic jams for hours, sometimes overnight, without food, water or toilet facilities. Half their vacation time is spent on the roads.

The real and continuing price, however, is paid by the permanent residents of these once quiet, idyllic, British-era towns, who are practically imprisoned in their houses for half the year, with no space left on the roads for pedestrians.

I live near Mashobra, about 12 km from Shimla, for six months every year and have decided to never, but NEVER, drive into Shimla during my stay here—there’s no telling if I’ll ever be able to make it back to my house!

States like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand bear the brunt of this vehicle-driven overtourism. Their proximity to the northern states is their undoing, while Kashmir is spared the deluge because of its distance and the on-again, off-again security situation.

The state governments should have foreseen this, with tourist numbers growing by 43 per cent (2023 figure, over the previous year), rising incomes and the desperation of families to escape the heat and pollution of our deteriorating cities. But the governments never planned for this nightmare, content with collecting their GST and luxury taxes.

And when they did start making some plans, they were all the wrong ones.

The biggest planning blunder has been the construction of expensive, environmentally disastrous four-lane highways and expressways in the mountainous terrain of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to reduce driving time and make access easier for tourists.



An overview of traffic in Shimla

This has led to an explosion in the number of vehicles coming to these destinations. Before the Kalka–Shimla four-lane highway was built (it is still not complete), the average number of cars entering Shimla every day was about 4,000–5000; that number is now 15,000–20,000. And when these vehicles enter Shimla, there is just no space for them to park.

It’s even worse in Manali, with 25,000 vehicles crossing the Atal tunnel (below Rohtang pass) every day during the peak season. The state government is a silent spectator. The National Green Tribunal had to step in and impose a daily cap of 1,500 vehicles to limit traffic to Rohtang Pass and prevent it from becoming another Karol Bagh, in more ways than one.

The mistakes of Shimla and Manali are being repeated, this time with Mussoorie as the victim.

A 26-km elevated expressway has been approved to connect Dehradun and Mussoorie. We are told this will reduce driving time to just 26 minutes. This is a

disaster in the making, quite apart from the 17,000 trees that will be felled and the 250 families who shall be displaced by the project.

The Shimla/ Manali experience shows that the number of vehicles headed for Mussoorie will likely triple or quadruple; what happens to them once they reach Mussoorie? The town has even less parking space than Shimla and can barely accommodate those who come just to meet Ruskin Bond!

It is better to provide tourists attractive alternatives to using their cars rather than simply taxing or embroiling them in red tape. Lazy solutions are usually the worst

Bureaucracies are loath to think out of the box and politicians are happy to sanction capital intensive projects such as roads and multi-storeyed parking to their favoured contractors.

But this comfortable, parabolic arrangement has to change. Given the geology and terrain, one cannot keep ‘widening’ roads and excavating more parking spaces indefinitely—the limits have already been reached.

What our mountain destinations actually

need are fewer highways and more cable cars/ ropeways—that way, they can keep attracting more tourists but fewer vehicles.

A Dehradun–Mussoorie cable system would have served the purpose, at one-tenth the cost of an elevated highway. It is to Himachal’s credit that it has seen the light and has approved four major ropeway projects: Parwanoo–Shimla, Dharamshala–McLeodganj, Manali–Rohtang and Kullu–Bijli Mahadev. Many more are needed, including one from Parwanoo/ Kalka to Kasauli.

The Union government too needs to play a role in curbing this vehicular overtourism:

- It should never again approve a monstrosity like the Char Dham Highway, which is effectively a death warrant for Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.
- It should put a hold on all four-laning projects in these states (even at the risk of annoying Mr Gadkari) and fast-track central approvals and funding for ropeways.
- More flights should be started to these states—in Himachal, currently all four airports are being utilised at below 50 per cent of their capacity. More helicopter services should be introduced, and not just to religious places.
- Most important, the government should expand the skeletal rail network in all mountain states that have tourism potential—and not just for strategic reasons. In 75 years, not an inch of railway line has been added to what the British left behind. Doing this will not only reduce the vehicular tsunamis that lash the mountains, but also add an entirely novel experience for visitors.

Harsh physical or fiscal barriers such as e-passes, capping the numbers of vehicles entering a state or even excessive tolls or entry fees should be avoided, as they cause inconvenience and will not serve the purpose in the long run.

It is better to provide tourists attractive alternatives to using their cars rather than simply taxing or embroiling them in red tape. Lazy solutions are usually the worst. (Though these tough measures will become inevitable if the numbers continue to expand at the present rate.)

The vision should be: we welcome tourists, but not their cars. ■

AVAY SHUKLA is a retired IAS officer and author of Holy Cows and Loose Cannons—the Duffer Zone Chronicles

Kashmiris feel the heat, quite literally

Haroon Reshi

*Har sokhta-jāni ke bā Kashmir dar āyad
Gar murgh-e-kabāb ast ke bā bāl-o-par āyad*
(Every scorched soul that enters Kashmir, If it’s a roasted bird, it grows wings, flies again)

That couplet by the 16th-century Persian poet Urfi Shirazi is a lovely paean to Kashmir’s fabled climate. Not any more, though.

This July, temperatures across the Kashmir Valley shattered all records. On 5 July, Srinagar recorded 37.4 degrees Celsius, the hottest day in over 70 years.

Dr Mukhtar Ahmad, director of the Meteorological Centre in Srinagar, told *National Herald*, “The 37.4 degrees recorded on 5 July was the third-highest July reading since 1892, after 38.3 on 10 July 1946 and 37.7 on 5 July 1953.” The tourist resort of Pahalgam, thronged by people who come here to escape the summer heat in the plains, also saw its hottest July day ever (on 5 July), with the temperature hitting 31.6 degrees.

These record-breaking temperatures are not isolated events but part of a changing pattern. According to a 2019 study published in *Environmental Research Letters*, a peer-reviewed journal of environmental science, Kashmir’s annual average temperature rose by 0.8 degrees between 1980 and 2016. This is why the region is experiencing more frequent and intense heatwaves, affecting the environment and the lives of its residents.

The rise in temperature can be attributed to the usual suspects—global warming, deforestation and urbanisation. Experts fear that future heatwaves could lead to frequent extreme weather events such as flash floods and cloudbursts.

It’s not even just the heat. In recent years, the Valley has also experienced a deficit of rainfall and a lack of snowfall. A 60–99 per cent rainfall deficit has been recorded between December 2024 and June 2025, resulting in a 30 per cent drop in the water levels of the river Jhelum, severely impacting irrigation, agriculture and hydropower generation, a key source of energy in the Valley.

As for winters, last year’s Chillai Kalan—the harshest 40 days of cold—saw alarmingly low snowfall. On 9 January,

Chief minister Omar Abdullah wrote on X: “I’ve never seen Gulmarg so dry in winter... If we don’t get snow soon, summer is going to be miserable.”

Impact on daily life and agriculture

The recent surge in temperatures has taken a harsh toll on the daily life of residents. The administration has changed school timings in the Valley, with classes now commencing at 7.30 a.m. in Srinagar (compared to 9 a.m. earlier) and 8 a.m. in the rural areas instead of 9.30 a.m.

Local newspapers in Srinagar have reported a surge in the sales of air-conditioners (ACs), coolers, fans and refrigerators, and Kashmir Power Distribution Corp. has witnessed a 25 per cent rise in demand during peak hours.

Farmers and orchardists are also anxious. Experts warn that the unseasonal heat could severely impact the region’s staple crops like apples, paddy and saffron. “Temperatures above 25 degrees can trigger hormonal changes in apple trees, reducing both yield and quality,” says Prof. Raihana Habib, an agrometeorologist at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. “The hailstorms during April–May have already inflicted substantial damage on apple and cherry orchards in Shopian and Kulgam. The heatwave poses an additional threat.”

“Two other thermosensitive crops,” she added, “are paddy and saffron, both of which rely on precise hydro-thermal regimes during their growth phases.”

Lack of adequate snowfall resulted in the postponement of the Khelo India Winter Games, scheduled to be held in Gulmarg’s ski resort in February



People jump into a canal to beat the heat in Pulwama; (inset) tourists in Gulmarg in June 2025

In fact, erratic and changing weather patterns put the entire agricultural sector at risk, making it extremely vulnerable. Insurance companies show limited interest in Jammu and Kashmir’s crop insurance scheme. In

June, J&K minister for agricultural production Javed Ahmad Dar told reporters that the eagerly awaited crop insurance scheme for farmers in J&K had stalled for lack of interest from insurance firms. “The volatility of the climate makes crops uninsurable for these companies,” an official told *National Herald* on condition of anonymity.

Tourism too takes a hit

It’s not just farmers. The tourism industry is equally vulnerable. “In the past two years, the extreme heat in June and July has kept many tourists indoors during the day,” said Farooq Ahmad, a Srinagar hotel manager.

Lack of adequate snowfall resulted in the postponement of the Khelo India Winter Games, which was scheduled to be held in

Gulmarg’s ski resort from 22–25 February this year. This is worrying, Kashmir risks losing the natural charm that once drew visitors,” said Ahmad.

Experts believe that human negligence is worsening the crisis. Raja Muzaffar Bhat, a prominent social activist, told *NH*, “We must accept that we too have played a role in aggravating the problem—with rampant deforestation, haphazard urbanisation and ill-conceived infrastructure projects.

“In the name of development, thousands of trees have been cut over the years. The government is preparing to build a 77 km railway line to Pahalgam, neither required nor demanded by residents. This line will pass through fertile farmland and forested areas, and without a doubt, thousands of trees will be felled. This is how we are ruining our environment.”

In reply to an RTI application, the government has admitted that Kashmir has lost nearly 5.84 lakh trees along the Jhelum and its tributaries over the past five years. “The felled trees were identified as ‘encroachments’ by the irrigation and flood control department. How can we expect that these actions will not disturb our weather patterns?” Bhat asks.

Kashmir’s changing climate mocks Shirazi’s proud verse. ■

Trade policy on a wing and a prayer

How long will India persist in its strategic timidity to save its neck from Trump’s tariff guillotine?

Ashis Ray

United States President Donald Trump’s 9 July deadline passed without any fireworks—maybe he was busy threatening “anti-America” BRICS, of which India is a member. At the time of writing, neither side had commented on the current status of the India-US trade talks.

Past the 9 July deadline, India was to enter steeper tariff territory (26 per cent on exports to the US), but there was no confirmation of this from the US administration. Emails to the White House, Department of Commerce and Department of Trade went unanswered. Chances are the door for negotiations is still ajar.

On 7 July, while hosting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for dinner at the White House, Trump told reporters the US and India were close to an agreement. In a 6 July post on his social media platform Truth Social, he warned: ‘Any country aligning themselves with the anti-American policies of BRICS will be charged an *additional* 10 per cent tariff. There will be no exceptions to this policy.’ Brazil’s Lula shot back: ‘The world does not want an emperor who lashes out over the internet.’ South Africa’s Ramaphosa was more restrained: ‘The powerful should not seek vengeance against those working for good in the world.’ India remained timidly silent.

Trump thinks BRICS is planning to ditch the US dollar in bilateral trade. When Trump first raised the matter, India hastened to plead that it does not support de-dollarisation, even though it has local currency arrangements in some cases. *Bloomberg* reported on 9 July that Trump’s démarche added a new twist to the

If the Modi government has been spared Trump’s browbeating of trade partners, it is only because it hasn’t had the courage to call Trump’s bluff



domestic product (GDP) second only to the US, even after Britain’s exit from the EU. Trump says the EU is, “in many ways, nastier than China”.

The acrimony between the EU and Britain after the Brexit referendum of 2016 spelled disunity in Europe. The return of a Labour government in the UK has generated better vibes and a reset in ties, promising smoother trade. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forged a bond, and the UK has taken the lead in creating a military ‘coalition of the willing’.

On 8-10 July, Britain hosted French President Emmanuel Macron, the first visit by a European Union head of state since the UK officially exited the confederation on 31 January 2020. Addressing a joint session of the UK parliament, Macron said, “We will never accept the theory that might is right. And I want to be clear, this is why, together with you, Mr Prime Minister (Sir Keir Starmer), we decided to launch this coalition last February.”

Musk clearly has the means to bankroll his party. Trump, on his part, has hinted at destroying Musk’s businesses and deporting him to South Africa

negotiations, which have been ongoing for months. But it is just as likely that Trump is bargaining hard with a wider pool of players, not specifically India.

CNN reported on 9 July, ‘India has long been viewed as the most likely major partner to sign onto a framework with the US. But Indian trade negotiators have hardened their positions in recent days, according to US officials.’

In late April, after his first 100 days in office, Trump falsely claimed he had completed trade deals with 200 countries. Nearly two and a half months later, he has announced only three—with Britain, China and Vietnam. Realising perhaps that not all trading partners are cowed by his aggressive posture, he has effectively extended the negotiations, by sending out letters—apparently coercive but actually face-saving—to a number of countries, including Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, setting higher tariffs. Most of them have assessed Trump as more bark than bite—and are waiting for him to climb down.

The Narendra Modi government is among the few who haven’t had the courage to call Trump’s bluff. So, it has escaped his browbeating. But if India capitulates in the negotiations and grants American agricultural and dairy products unfettered access to the Indian market, it will be the

death-knell for India’s still heavily agriculture-dependent population.

If Trump doesn’t relent on this, it will show what kind of priority he is willing to accord India—despite years of appeasement by Modi. In turn, it will affect Quad, the US-India-Turn-Australia partnership essentially created to contain China.

The Trump-Musk soap opera

Trump recently disclosed he didn’t like electric cars (which billionaire Elon Musk’s Tesla manufactures) and prefers the traditional oil-guzzlers. Buddies till the day before, their relationship has spiralled southward with astonishing speed.

Reading between the lines of a Trump statement, it seems Musk, while a ‘special employee’ of the US government and a close advisor to the President, was pushing for an ‘electric vehicle mandate’. Much to Musk’s chagrin, Trump’s ‘big, beautiful bill’ (now law) ended tax breaks for electric vehicles. “People are now allowed to buy whatever they want—gasoline-powered hybrids or new technologies as they come about—no more EV mandate,” Trump said.

Musk quite vocally opposed the legislation. He argued it would increase US national debt by trillions over Trump’s four-year term in the White House. He has now founded a new political party to

oppose Trump.

Reacting to Musk’s proclamation of the America Party, Trump said, ‘I think it’s ridiculous to start a third party... I am saddened to watch Elon Musk go completely off the rails.’ He has even hinted at destroying Musk’s businesses and deporting him to South Africa.

Musk, the world’s richest man, clearly has the means to bankroll his party. Posting on his social media platform X, on 7 July, he said: ‘Backing a candidate for president is not out [of] the question, but the focus for the next 12 months is on the House [of Representatives] and the Senate.’ Musk owns X, which has 600 million active users, including over 50 million in the US.

He also cautioned ruling Republican lawmakers, who voted in favour of the bill, that they ‘will lose their (pre-nomination) primary (contest) next year if it is the last thing I do on this earth’.

The America Party may select a presidential candidate for 2028, but Musk cannot run, for he was born in Pretoria and, therefore, does not qualify.

UK-France entente cordiale

Europe does not keep you on tenterhooks the way Trump does. But the 27-nation European Union (EU) is a de facto United States of Europe, its gross

He highlighted that Britain and France were Europe’s only two nuclear powers; “the leading armed forces of the continent” shouldering 40 per cent of Europe’s outlay on defence. Macron went on to affirm that European countries must end their “excessive dependency on both the US and China”, slamming China’s use of subsidies and Trump’s abuse of tariffs.

The Macron-Starmer chemistry has raised hopes of greater cooperation between the two countries to tackle asylum seekers who cross the English Channel from France to Britain. This has been a major political issue in the United Kingdom for years, which the previous Conservative government failed to remedy because of its fractious relationship with the EU, including France. ■

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The ‘integral humanism’ spin on the meaning of dharma

The BJP’s problems with ‘secularism’ could additionally be semantic, if you go by their constitution

Aakar Patel

The BJP’s constitution (Article 3) says, ‘Integral Humanism shall be the philosophy of the party’. The party’s membership form bears a pledge which members are required to take. The first line of this pledge is: ‘I believe in Integral Humanism which is the basic philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party.’

‘Integral humanism’ is a term many Indians are familiar with but few know much about. It comprises the text of four lectures by Deendayal Upadhyaya between 22 and 25 April 1965 in Mumbai. Upadhyaya held a bachelor’s degree in arts and was a journalist with the RSS’s in-house publication, *Panchjanya*. He was around 50 years old when he delivered these lectures, and became president of the Jana Sangh a couple of years later.

Let us go through the message of the BJP’s philosophy, which we can then analyse at a future date. What follows is a summary of the argument that Upadhyaya presents in his speeches, and it is presented as neutrally as possible.

The cause of the problems facing Bharat is a neglect of national identity. The nation is like an individual and becomes ill if its natural instincts are disregarded or suppressed. Despite Independence, India was still undecided about the direction it would take to realise development. Independence is meaningful only if it is the instrument to express culture.

The focus in India was on episodic problems: economic, social and political. This was because India adopted a Western

way of looking at economic, social and political doctrines along with Western science. Westernisation was synonymous with progress for Indians.

However, the West was unable to reconcile nationalism, democracy and socialism. These were essentially Western ideals and they were all in conflict with one another. These ideologies were not universal and not free from the limitations of the particular people and cultures which gave birth to these ‘isms’. Ayurveda said

we need to find local cures to local diseases. Could Bharatiya culture provide a solution for the world?

It is generally thought that Bharatiya culture thinks of salvation of the soul and does not bother about body, mind and intellect, but that is untrue. Dharma is given foremost place in Bharatiya culture. Dharma is the natural law that is eternal and universally applicable.

Dharma is higher than the executive, legislative and the judiciary, and it is also

higher than the people. If out of 450 million Indians, all except one voted for something, it would still be wrong if it was against dharma. The people have no right to act against dharma. The words ‘secularism’ and ‘*dharmanirapeksha*’ used in the Constitution are wrong and bad because dharma is a necessary condition for the State.

That which is not based on dharma is unacceptable and therefore secularism was fatally flawed. National unity is India’s dharma and so diversity was problematic. For this reason, India’s Constitution needs to change from federal to unitary with no legislative powers for the states, only for the Centre. Conflict between individuals and institutions of society is a sign of decadence and perversion.

The West was wrong to see the adversarial relationship between the individual and the State as the reason for progress. The individual was made up of body, mind, intelligence and soul. A human being is born with a soul. Personality, soul and character are different from one another. The person’s soul is unaffected by

personal history. Similarly, national culture is continuously modified by history.

Culture includes all the things held as good and commendable, but they do not affect ‘*chiti*’, the national soul. India’s national soul is fundamental and central. Chiti determines the direction of cultural advance. It filters out what is to be excluded from culture. Societies are animate and a society has a body, mind, intellect and soul. Some Westerners were beginning to accept this truth. One of them, William McDougall, said a group had a mind and a psychology, its own methods of thinking and action just as an individual did.

Societies have an inborn nature that is not based on its history. Events do not affect it. This group nature is like the soul in individuals, which was also unaffected by history. This group mentality is like mob mentality but developed over a longer period. The nation needs both an ideal and a motherland and only then is it a nation. And the State exists to protect this nation, which has an ideal and a motherland.

The difference between India and the West was that we regard the body only as an instrument to achieve dharma. Our efforts were for dharma, *artha* (money), *kama* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). The mistake of the West was to treat the four separately.

You could get voting rights but then you didn’t get food. The United States had both political freedom and wealth but it also topped the list in the number of suicides and mental patients. This was puzzling—there were bread and voting rights but no peace or happiness. Sound sleep was scarce in America because they had not thought of the integrated human being. The Americans said ‘honesty is the best business policy’ and the Europeans said ‘honesty is the best policy’, but the Indians said ‘honesty is not a policy but a principle’.

This, broadly speaking, is what the BJP says is its basic philosophy. It would be interesting to see how many BJP ministers or members can explain what their philosophy of integral humanism is all about. If they believe in it, as they are required to pledge, one would be interested to know what that belief is. ■



Deendayal Upadhyaya Photo: Getty Images

It would be interesting to see how many BJP ministers or members can explain what their philosophy of integral humanism is all about

Views are personal



राजकीय शिववर्णी मेला

11 जुलाई से
09 अगस्त 2025

के शुभ अवसर पर

**बाबा बैद्यनाथ धाम एवं
बाबा बासुकीनाथ धाम**

की पावन धरा में सभी श्रद्धालुओं का
हार्दिक स्वागत एवं जोहार

महादेव सभी भक्तों की मनोकामना पूर्ण करें

सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, झारखण्ड सरकार



हेमन्त सोरेन
मुख्यमंत्री, झारखण्ड

A two-faced approach to the three-language formula

Shivkumar S.

In this country, those who speak English will soon feel ashamed!” declared home minister Shah at a book launch on 19 June 2025. “The idea of a ‘complete India’ (whatever that means) cannot be imagined through half-baked foreign languages.”

As expected, there was public outrage, giving Shah reason to track back the next time. At the golden jubilee celebrations of the Union government’s official language department, in Delhi on 26 June, he said: “I sincerely believe that Hindi can’t be a *virোধi* (adversary) to any Indian language. Hindi is a *sakshi* (friend) of all Indian languages.”

Readers will recall Prime Minister Narendra Modi mocking politicians from Tamil Nadu for signing their letters to him in English. “They are so proud of Tamil that they even sign their letters in English,” he jeered at a public meeting in April.

Earlier this year, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan accused DMK leaders of misleading the public on the New Education Policy (NEP) and neglecting the interests of the students of Tamil Nadu. He threatened to withhold central funds under the ‘Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan’ unless the southern states adopted the NEP’s three-language formula.

While the TDP in Andhra Pradesh—a BJP ally in New Delhi—responded with a diplomatic statement on accepting Hindi ‘willingly’, the other states were not so pliant. Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin refused to budge from the state’s two-language formula in primary education, and accused the Centre of imposing Hindi.

The southern states criticised the Centre for its top-down approach, pointing out that they fund 85 per cent of primary education and deserve a say in policy decisions. They also questioned the effectiveness of Hindi-speaking BJP-ruled states in implementing the three-language system, urging the Centre to first address poor learning outcomes there.

Even as the first six months of 2025 saw the language wars hotting up, initially in Tamil Nadu and then in Maharashtra, hostility against Hindi speakers who had settled in these states led to clashes on the streets and in the marketplace. Resistance or refusal was met with violence and intimidation.

Frustrated Hindi speakers (who also knew English), particularly those in transferable jobs, voiced their resentment



Children being taught Hindi in a Mumbai municipal school; (right) police detain MNS workers protesting Hindi imposition, Mira Road, 8 July

over being asked to learn a third language. “How many languages must we learn?” they asked—ironically vindicating the two-language formula favoured by the southern states.

A brief history lesson may be in order here. While many members of the Constituent Assembly (1946–49) were strongly in favour of a single ‘unifying’ language, the resolution in favour of Hindi as the official language was passed by just a single vote. It was resolved that English would remain the official language for 15 years, and continue as one of the official languages thereafter, as long as the states desired.

In 1937, C. Rajagopalachari had made learning Hindustani compulsory in the Madras Presidency. (In 1940, the British government revoked this.) In 1968, he wrote in *Swarajya*, ‘Hindi is, at best, the language of a large minority, even as Tamil is the language of a medium-sized minority... Even in its most advanced form, Hindi as a language is inadequately equipped with the technical terms required for conveying modern knowledge.’

Once Hindi was adopted as the official

The RSS-BJP’s long-term agenda of promoting Hindi as both ‘rajbhasha’ (official language) and ‘rashtrabhasha’ (national language) is not likely to stop as long as the BJP rules this country

language of the Union government in 1963, another wave of language agitations flared up. The three-language formula was first adopted in the NEP of 1968 but was never seriously implemented. In most states, language proficiency is low, not only in English and the third language—often Sanskrit in the northern states—but also the mother tongue.

Writing in *The Indian Express* (8 July 2025), political scientist Suhas Palshikar explains the systematic push to make Hindi ‘unofficially the official language’. ‘The pro-Hindi policy of the [current Maharashtra] government [seen in its now-aborted attempt to introduce Hindi from Class 1] is in line with the BJP’s longstanding ambition to have Hindi (*shuddh* Hindi, not Hindustani) as the national language—a policy that dovetails with its penchant for enforcing uniformity in every respect and implementing a one nation, one language policy.’

It’s only when ‘votaries of regional languages appreciate the link between making one language *national* and making one culture *national*’ that we can better ‘understand the politics of nationalism masquerading as the politics of a national

language’. This is possibly why the language issue refuses to go away.

The New Education Policy in 2020 and revised in 2021 provided ‘flexibility’ to the states, the state boards and students. What, then, prompted the Maharashtra government to make the teaching of Hindi mandatory in Class 1, along with Marathi and English? The decision announced on 17 June was hurriedly withdrawn on 30 June in the face of mounting opposition, even from the state government’s own expert committee on languages. Nobody was consulted.

The objection to chief minister Devendra Fadnavis’ decision to adopt a three-language formula for school children in classes 1–5 was along two lines: the dubious merits of burdening children with a third language so early and the opposition of native Marathi speakers.

MNS (Maharashtra Navnirman Sena) workers hit the streets of Mumbai, picking on and assaulting those who failed to communicate in Marathi. Some wrathful victims fought back, asking if Mukesh Ambani or Gautam Adani spoke in Marathi.

One outcome of the furor was to bring estranged cousins Uddhav and Raj Thackeray together after 20 years, as they “united to protect Marathi”. Three days after their public reunion, tensions erupted in Mira Road on 8 July as the MNS and Shiv Sena (UBT) led a large protest, defying prohibitory orders.

With Fadnavis backing down, suspending the decision and setting up a new committee under economist Narendra Jadhav to suggest the way forward, the cousins have the higher ground, as they vow to continue the fight.

Delighted by this unexpected opportunity, Tamil Nadu chief minister was quick to congratulate the Thackeray cousins for their successful campaign, posting on X: ‘The language rights struggle, waged generation after generation by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the people of Tamil Nadu to defeat Hindi imposition, has now transcended state boundaries and is swirling like a storm of protest in Maharashtra.’

Stalin commended Raj Thackeray for asking which third language was being taught in Hindi-speaking states and slammed the BJP’s attempts to throttle the progress of non-Hindi-speaking states. While Stalin evidently hopes to leverage his anti-Hindi stance in next year’s assembly election, no Dravidian party—including those allied with the BJP—can really afford to take a contrary stand on this issue.

Whatever the victories of the moment, the long-term agenda of promoting Hindi as both *rajbhasha* (official language) and *rashtrabhasha* (national language) is not likely to stop as long as the BJP rules this country. Protests are unlikely to deter the BJP and RSS—they will bide their time till the next opportunity presents itself, in line with their other unitary fantasies, they will continue the campaign to foist Hindi on the entire nation. ■



Rev. Sue Parfitt, 83, at a protest in support of Palestine, London, 5 July 2025

Age no bar for this plucky campaigner against the genocide in Gaza

Who says passion and idealism wither away as one grows older. Meet Reverend Sue Parfitt, a priest from Bristol, who at 83 is just as passionate about humanitarian causes as she was when young.

Currently, she is at the forefront of the campaign against Israel’s brutal military action in Gaza which has already claimed thousands of lives while the international community watches from the sidelines.

On 5 July, Parfitt was arrested for taking part in a peaceful protest in London’s Parliament Square. A video of her holding a placard supporting a banned campaign group went viral. It read: ‘I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.’

The retired Anglican priest had travelled to London from the west of

England. She took part in the protest sitting on a fold-away seat before she was led away by officers, walking stick in hand.

Parfitt described herself as a “long-standing supporter of Palestine” who has repeatedly visited the West Bank. “I feel the Israeli government is committing genocide in Gaza and practising apartheid in the occupied West Bank,” she said.

The arrest came just hours after the Labour government designated Palestine Action as a terrorist group for its ‘direct action’ attacking security-sensitive targets.

Asked if she thought it was a terrorist group, Parfitt said: “Of course not. Civil disobedience has a long and honourable history in this country. Our government is cowering to the powerful Israeli lobby.”

Parfitt’s arrest has been widely condemned even by those who don’t agree with Palestine Action’s methods. Urging that she be released, a friend Jerry Hicks said: “She is against genocide and that’s not a crime”.

Many took to social media to voice their support for her, while criticising the UK government and police for silencing any criticism of the war on Gaza.

An estimated 61,700 Palestinians have already been killed in Israel’s military attacks, which has been labelled a genocide by Amnesty International.

Israel has blocked emergency aid from coming into the Strip while civilians have been systematically targeted at aid distribution sites.

‘According to [prime minister Keir] Starmer’s new law, this puts her in the same category as an ISIS or Al-Qaeda terrorist, with a prison sentence of up to 14 years,’ wrote journalist and activist Owen Jones.

A post on X read: ‘We are not living in a rational civilised democratic society. How is this 83-year-old priest considered a “terrorist” for supporting Palestine Action? This is like something out of a Kafkaesque nightmare.’

Fixing Britain’s broken community relations

The alarming rise of a nationalist far right is playing havoc with Britain’s community cohesion, including Hindu-Muslim relations, often culminating in violence.

Memories of the 2022 riots in Leicester,



also known as ‘Little India’, are still fresh. Last summer was marred by violent clashes between white supremacists and largely Muslim immigrants after rumours spread that an asylum-seeker was behind an attack on a dance class—killing three children and injuring eight.

Misinformation and anti-immigrant sentiment spurred nationwide violence with rioters targeting hotels that housed

asylum-seekers, smashing windows and attacking police officers.

Now, an all-party commission has been appointed to examine the ‘deepening polarisation’ in British society. It has recommended measures to ‘fix’ it.

The Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion will develop a policy agenda for the government with the aim of sparking a national conversation about the kind of country the public wants.

Led by former Conservative cabinet minister Sajid Javid and former Labour MP Jon Cruddas, its main focus will be on identifying the ‘forces driving disconnection and divisions’.

“This commission,” Javid said, “has been established to take a long view, propose radical policy changes and, crucially, help forge a cross-society consensus about how we want to live together now and in the future.”

He lamented that social cohesion had been treated as a “second tier” issue by successive governments.

The initiative coincides with a new Refugee Council report expressing concern over a lack of government effort to integrate refugees into British life.

The Commission has been widely welcomed and one is almost inclined to commend it to the Indian political class.



More hurdles for foreign students in Britain

There’s more bad news for international students, with the British government under increasing pressure to scrap the graduate visa route except for those pursuing postgraduate research degrees.

This follows a report from the right-wing think-tank, Policy Exchange, claiming that foreign students are using universities as a ‘back door’ to long-term settlement in the UK.

The government has already taken a series of measures to check the alleged abuse of student visas as part of a broader crackdown on immigration. Earlier this year, it reduced the length of time overseas students can live and work in the UK from two years to 18 months.

Students, with the exception of those pursuing postgraduate research courses, are also banned from bringing dependants with them. Critics are pushing back, pointing to the contribution foreign students make to the British economy.

Jo Grady, general secretary of the University and College Union, said: “International students are essential to the financial stability of our higher education sector; they also contribute tens of billions of pounds to the UK economy each year.”

A case of politics trumping economics.

And, finally, even in this modern age of sneakers, apparel, the true sign of a gentleman in Britain remains whether his shoes are polished enough to see your face in them. ■



Karnataka Government’s Visionary Commitment to Water Conservation and Sustainable Development: A Beacon of Hope for a Water-Secure Future

Water is life. This timeless truth resonates deeply across Karnataka, where the government, under the dynamic leadership of Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science, and Technology N.S. Boseraju, has embarked on an ambitious journey to conserve, rejuvenate, and sustainably manage the state’s vast network of lakes, tanks, and groundwater resources.

Recognizing water bodies as vital lifelines for communities, agriculture, and ecosystems, Karnataka has positioned itself as a national leader in environmental stewardship, water security, and technological innovation.

This comprehensive advertorial delves into Karnataka’s groundbreaking initiatives aimed at protecting approximately 40,225 lakes and other water bodies, bolstering groundwater recharge, addressing water scarcity in drought-prone regions, and harnessing precise data collection to inform policy and action.

Through a combination of visionary projects, community involvement, scientific research, and strategic governance, Karnataka is crafting a future where water abundance is guaranteed, livelihoods thrive, and nature flourishes.

Reaffirming a Collective Responsibility: Karnataka’s Lake Conservation Mission

At the heart of Karnataka’s water conservation efforts lies a simple yet profound



understanding: lake conservation is not a choice but a necessity—a collective responsibility shared by government, communities, and stakeholders alike. Minister N.S. Boseraju underscored this conviction during the inauguration of the landmark two-day national conference, “Namma Kere–2025: Healthy Lakes, Healthy Lives,” held recently in Bengaluru.

This conference, organized by the Karnataka Science and Technology Academy in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology and the Alumni Association of the College of Fisheries, exemplifies Karnataka’s commitment to raising awareness, fostering scientific dialogue, and promoting sustainable lake management.

The conference’s theme encapsulates a powerful message: healthy lakes lead to healthy lives. Lakes and water bodies are indispensable for groundwater recharge, biodiversity support, climate resilience, and sustaining agriculture—the backbone of Karnataka’s economy and rural livelihood. By focusing on lake conservation, Karnataka aims to safeguard water security for

present and future generations.

Karnataka’s Water Heritage: Protecting Over 40,225 Lakes and Water Bodies

The scale of Karnataka’s water resources is staggering. With more than 40,225 lakes and water bodies identified across the state, each plays a critical role in water storage, irrigation, flood mitigation, and ecosystem balance. However, these water bodies have faced challenges such as encroachments, pollution, and degradation, threatening their sustainability.

The Karnataka government, through the Minor Irrigation Department and district administrations, has taken bold and effective steps to restore these water bodies. In the past two years alone, encroachments have been removed from approximately 12,000 lakes, showcasing decisive action backed by administrative coordination and community participation. This remarkable achievement has not only reclaimed vital water ecosystems but also reaffirmed the government’s resolve to protect

the state’s water heritage.

In parallel, cleanliness drives and groundwater recharge initiatives are actively conducted throughout Karnataka, ensuring that lakes and tanks remain healthy and functional. Such initiatives are instrumental in maintaining water quality, enhancing aquifer levels, and supporting agricultural productivity.

Boosting Groundwater and Irrigation Development: Strategic Budget Allocation

Recognizing the crucial role of groundwater and irrigation in Karnataka’s water security, the government has prioritized long-pending and strategically important projects such as the Vrishabhavati Valley development, H.N. Valley Phase 2, and lake modernization efforts.

These initiatives focus on reviving traditional water bodies and enhancing existing infrastructure—including dams, pickup structures, and lift irrigation schemes—to increase the state’s groundwater table and overall water availability.

To support these critical efforts, a substantial budget allocation of ₹2,000 crore has been earmarked for the Minor Irrigation and Groundwater Development Department. This significant investment will bolster irrigation facilities, especially in drought-prone and semi-arid regions, while improving drinking water availability and agricultural productivity across rural Karnataka.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The ₹2,000 crore grant, announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, underscores the government’s dedication to sustainable groundwater development and irrigation infrastructure enhancement, addressing the adverse effects of climate change, erratic rainfall, and groundwater depletion.
- Minister N.S. Boseraju expressed satisfaction with this focused budget boost, emphasizing that groundwater development is essential for Karnataka’s agricultural and environmental sustainability.
- Groundbreaking Projects with International Acclaim: K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley
- Karnataka’s innovation in water management shines through flagship projects such as K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley. These projects focus on restoring and augmenting groundwater levels using treated wastewater, an environmentally sustainable practice that simultaneously addresses wastewater management and water scarcity.
- Minister Boseraju proudly shared that these projects have gained international recognition, positioning Karnataka as a model state in water recycling and groundwater rejuvenation. By pioneering such initiatives, the state has not only enhanced water availability for farmers and communities but also contributed to global conversations on sustainable water resource management.
- These valley projects represent a holistic approach—combining technology, ecological restoration, and community engagement—to address water security challenges comprehensively. They serve as blueprints for similar initiatives across India and beyond.
- Empowering Farmers and Ensuring Irrigation Security: The ₹285 Crore Tank Replenishment Project
- Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Karnataka’s economy, with millions depending on dependable irrigation and groundwater access. The government’s initiatives under the Minor Irrigation Department are directly aligned with enhancing irrigation infrastructure, protecting water sources, and ensuring that small and marginal farmers receive the water support they need.
- A striking example of this commitment is the recent launch of a ₹285 crore project to refill 62 tanks in Koratagere taluk using water sourced from the Ettinahole project.

Groundbreaking Initiative at Goravanahalli

Announced just a couple of weeks ago at Goravanahalli, this ambitious initiative—championed by Home Minister and Tumakuru District In-charge Minister Dr. G. Parameshwara—aims to substantially boost groundwater levels in the water-stressed Bayaluseeme region of Karnataka.

By storing approximately 826 million cubic feet (MCFT) of water across these tanks, the initiative will significantly reduce drinking water scarcity and increase irrigation reliability for farmers.

Specifically, 43 of these tanks, managed by the Minor Irrigation Department with a combined capacity of 1,848.46 MCFT, will receive an additional 659.47 MCFT of replenished water.

Minister Boseraju lauded Dr. Parameshwara’s dedicated efforts in championing this cause, reflecting the government’s core principle of translating electoral promises into concrete, impactful action. The project launch was complemented by the distribution of irrigation equipment and the drilling of borewells, ensuring that even small and marginal farmers receive adequate water access—empowering them towards sustainable agriculture and economic stability.

Addressing Bayaluseeme’s Water Scarcity: A Permanent and Holistic Approach

The Bayaluseeme districts of Karnataka have long faced severe water scarcity due to erratic rainfall, depleted groundwater, and over-extraction. The Congress government’s strategic response is both comprehensive and forward-looking.

Beyond tank replenishment projects, ongoing initiatives like the K.C. Valley and H.N. Valley projects have already brought tangible improvements to farmers in Kolar, Chikkaballapur, and Bengaluru Rural districts.

Additionally, the Vrishabhavati Valley project in Tumakuru district is steadily progressing, promising a permanent irrigation solution once completed. Together, these initiatives address water scarcity through sustainable water source development, groundwater recharge, and irrigation

infrastructure enhancement—ensuring that the region’s agricultural and drinking water needs are met reliably.

Minister Boseraju’s official statements reaffirm the government’s long-term vision and commitment to these transformative projects, reflecting a governance approach grounded in action, accountability, and community welfare.

Data-Driven Water Governance: Launching the 7th Minor Irrigation and 2nd Water Reservoir Census

A crucial pillar of Karnataka’s water resource management is accurate data collection, which forms the foundation for evidence-based policy-making and effective project implementation.

Minister Boseraju inaugurated the 7th State-Level Training Workshop on the 2nd Minor Irrigation and 7th Water Reservoir Census, emphasizing the indispensable role of comprehensive, precise data.

This workshop prepares officials to undertake a meticulous census of all water bodies, including tube wells, tanks, lakes, and reservoirs. The census, conducted every five years since its inception in 1986, is entering its 7th edition with an enhanced, technology-driven methodology.

Minister Boseraju described it as an “encyclopedia of Karnataka’s water bodies,” a vital resource for departments across Agriculture, Major Irrigation, and Rural Development.

By harnessing advanced technology and standardizing data collection, Karnataka ensures the reliability of its water resource data. This approach facilitates precise planning, resource allocation, and the formulation of targeted conservation and irrigation policies, thereby maximizing the benefits of developmental projects.

The Minister’s call to officials to diligently execute the census underscores the government’s commitment to scientific rigor and transparency in water governance.

Harnessing Technology and Community Engagement for Sustainable Water Management

Beyond projects and data, Karnataka’s success lies in integrating modern technology with active community participation. The

removal of encroachments, cleanliness drives, groundwater recharge programs, and the appointment of new leadership within the Karnataka Science and Technology Academy exemplify a multifaceted strategy that combines administrative efficiency, scientific expertise, and grassroots involvement.

By fostering collaboration between policymakers, scientists, administrators, and local communities, Karnataka creates an ecosystem conducive to innovation, accountability, and sustainable development. This inclusive approach ensures that conservation efforts are not isolated but embedded in the social and economic fabric of the state.

A Model for the Nation: Karnataka’s Water Conservation Leadership

The initiatives under Minister N.S. Boseraju’s stewardship have garnered national and international recognition. Karnataka’s pioneering work in groundwater rejuvenation through treated wastewater projects, large-scale tank replenishment, and data-centric water governance sets a high standard for other states to emulate.

By transforming policy commitments into actionable projects, the government exemplifies a pragmatic, results-oriented leadership style that prioritizes ecological health, farmer welfare, and citizen well-being.



Looking Forward: A Water-Secure Karnataka for Generations to Come

Minister Boseraju’s closing remarks at the “Namma Kere–2025” conference encapsulate the government’s enduring pledge: lake conservation and water security are lifelong commitments, vital to reviving Karnataka’s water heritage and securing a healthier future.

With sustained investments, innovative solutions, and shared responsibility, Karnataka is poised to overcome water challenges, ensuring that every lake, tank, and groundwater source continues to nourish its people, agriculture, and environment.

Karnataka’s comprehensive water conservation and management programs—spanning lake rejuvenation, groundwater recharge, major irrigation projects, and rigorous data collection—represent a holistic, forward-thinking approach to sustainable development.

Minister N.S. Boseraju’s leadership exemplifies dedication, innovation, and inclusivity, driving a transformational agenda that benefits millions of citizens and preserves vital natural resources.

As Karnataka sets benchmarks for environmental stewardship and water security, it offers a compelling blueprint for the nation, demonstrating that with vision, collaboration, and resolve, water scarcity can be effectively tackled, and prosperity assured.

Key Highlights

- Karnataka’s lakes are vital for groundwater recharge, biodiversity, and agriculture.
- Minister Boseraju stresses lake conservation as a non-negotiable, collective duty, not a short-term initiative.
- Over 12,000 lakes freed from encroachments in the last two years.
- Active cleanliness drives and recharge programs underway across Karnataka.

Flagship Groundwater Recharge Projects

- Karnataka’s K.C. Valley, H.N. Valley, and Vrishabhavati Valley projects lead the way in sustainable water recycling by utilizing treated wastewater for groundwater rejuvenation.

Why This Matters

- These projects have received international recognition for innovation.
- They simultaneously address wastewater management and water scarcity.
- Serve as models for India and globally on water recycling and groundwater recharge.

Empowering Farmers & Ensuring Irrigation Security

- A landmark ₹285 crore project was launched to refill 62 tanks in Koratagere taluk with water from the Ettinahole project, boosting groundwater in the Bayaluseeme region.

Project Benefits

- Tanks to store approx. 826 million cubic feet (MCFT) of water.
- Replenishment of 659.47 MCFT additional water in 43 tanks managed by Minor Irrigation.
- Improved irrigation reliability and reduced drinking water scarcity.
- Borewell drilling and irrigation equipment distribution to support small farmers.



“Vruksho Rakshati Rakshitah”

VANA MAHOTSAVAM:2025

- Target: **18.02 Crore** saplings plantation.
- Available **20 crore** saplings in **14,355** Nurseries.
- 19.04 Crore** saplings planted in 2024
- Targeted to increase **33% forest** coverage from **24.05%** in Telangana.

