

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

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### NATION

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### A.J. Prabal

It's a war in Bengal. Between Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, which has had an unbroken run of three terms or 15 years in the state, and the united might of the BJP, her Goliathesque primary adversary, and all the central agencies it can summon at the flick of a finger.

Even the Election Commission of India (ECI), the administrator and supposedly unquestionable arbiter of 'free and fair' elections in the country has outdone itself in Bengal, its exploits here going far beyond the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls that has sent citizen-voters scrambling all over the country and targeted communities fearing worse.

At the time of going to press, the first phase of polling was over in West Bengal and the second phase was due (on 29 April). Union home minister Amit Shah is camping in Kolkata, reportedly till campaigning for phase 2 comes to an end on 27 April. Playing the role of the BJP's key strategist and on-ground overseer, he is also waving his stick with characteristic panache. At one of the rallies before the phase 1 voting, he declared "the EC has deployed CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces). If Mamata Banerjee's goons try to disturb the poll process, I will ensure they are hanged upside down after 4 May."

The security bandobast is unprecedented. The CAPF deployment includes troops from the CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, SSB, NSG and Assam Rifles, which has put a spring in the stride of BJP workers, and by the same token curbed the exuberance of Trinamool workers. Even so, the TMC cadre have not quite lost their old spunk, as BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, out campaigning with personal security guards and armed paramilitary personnel in tow, found out. In a scene that will be remembered, Adhikari is seen glaring at a man and shouting, "Jai Shri Ram". The man glares back and bellows "Joy Bangla!"

Paramilitary forces started arriving in the state a month before polling. On 20 April, *The Telegraph* reported the deployment of 240,000 CAPF personnel (2,407 companies) for phase 1. To put the number in context, 288 companies were deployed in Manipur at the peak of ethnic violence in 2023.

Trinamool Congress MP and former journalist Sagarika Ghose wrote in *The Print*: "The BJP has descended on Bengal like an occupying force... hundreds of helicopters, thousands of cars with Z-plus security, workers bussed in from Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, hundreds of companies of central forces and

# It's Mamata versus the rest in West Bengal



armoured vehicles of the kind deployed in active conflict zones.'

Bullet-proof armoured vehicles commandeered from different parts of the country (including Kashmir) are rolling down the roads as a 'confidence-building measure'. Troops are marching to establish 'area domination'. The CPI(M)—which ruled West Bengal continuously for 34 years (1977–2011) but isn't in contention anymore, and eager to see the end of Mamata's 'reign of terror'—is not complaining. CPI(M) leader Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, contesting from the Jadavpur seat, welcomed the steps to restrain 'TMC goons'. "Those who couldn't vote earlier due to TMC intimidation will now do so fearlessly," he said. But Congress leader Pradip Bhattacharya questioned the need to instil fear among the people.

The ECI has been in overdrive ever since the election was notified and poll dates announced on 15 March. At 4 a.m. on 16 March, the state's seniormost officers—the chief secretary, home secretary, director

general of police, Kolkata police commissioner and ADG (Law and Order)—were removed in one stroke.

The purge continued, with as many as 483 state government officials removed from their posts and ordered to stay away from any kind of election duty. To contextualise again, the total number of officials transferred before polling in the other three poll-bound states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam) is 23.

Even replacement police inspectors have been handpicked by the ECI. "The ECI may have information that some officials are beholden to the ruling party and could influence the election, but how did it decide which officials would replace them? Who supplied the names?" asks a retired bureaucrat.

Mamata Banerjee herself has complained that the Returning Officer in her constituency was replaced by a state government employee from Nandigram (known to be close to Suwendu Adhikari), who refused her permission to hold a meeting in her own constituency!

The ECI has also directed that all civic

*There has been a flurry of never-before directives including a ban on house guests for two days before the election!*

volunteers and village police personnel—not government employees but poorly paid political appointees—be confined to police lines on polling day and not deployed on election duty. This is akin to RSS volunteers being asked to sit out the elections.

I-PAC, the firm working for the Trinamool Congress in the state, is possibly the first political consultancy to have been targeted during an election. Raids and notices from the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax Department intensified in March. Days before phase 1, three I-PAC directors were summoned by the ED to New Delhi and one of them was arrested, reportedly forcing the consultancy to ask employees to go on leave till 11 May.

The SIR has disenfranchised at least 27 lakh voters in West Bengal, a disproportionate number of them Muslims and women. The ECI has bypassed Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in the state and made use of special observers (4 in Uttar Pradesh but 30 in West Bengal), micro-observers (zero in the rest of the country, 8,000 in West Bengal), 600 retired and serving judicial officers (not deployed in any other state). The ECI also came up with software to detect 'logical discrepancies' (not found anywhere else!), without disclosing the identity of the company contracted and the basis for engaging them.

The 19 appellate tribunals, set up on the instruction of the Supreme Court to hear appeals of voters 'under adjudication', had heard only 138 appeals by 21 April and restored the names of 136.

A 'Straight Talk to TMC' tweet from the ECI singled out the party for allegedly vitiating past elections with violence, booth jamming, intimidation and inducement. A Returning Officer in Kolkata posted an equally offensive tweet asking people to keep Burnol and Boroline (popular ointments for burns and bruises) handy on counting day. No prizes for guessing who was being addressed.

There has been a flurry of never-before directives issued by the chief electoral officer, West Bengal. For instance, a week-long ban on the sale of liquor throughout the state, instead of the usual 48 hours before polling ends. There is even a directive banning house guests for two days before the election!

Most curiously, days before the first phase of polling on 23 April, the ECI announced it had added seven lakh new voters. At a time when 27 lakh voters are running from pillar to post to get their names restored to the voter rolls, where did these new voters come from? ■

With inputs from Kunal Chatterjee, Gautam Bhattacharya and Sourabh Sen

# 'Delimitation must move beyond numbers'

As opposition parties across India raise alarm over the BJP's bid to enforce a population-based delimitation at the national level, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, which can see the writing on the wall, is up in arms. Chief minister M.K. Stalin even burnt a copy of the proposed bill in Namakkal and hoisted a black flag in rejection of a 'black law'. The party argues that a delimitation exercise that is driven solely by population risks altering the democratic balance and weakening India's federal structure. Salem Dharanidharan, national spokesperson of the DMK, tells K.A. Shaji why delimitation must move beyond numbers and reflect both demographic realities and governance outcomes.



#### What is the DMK's proposed solution to the delimitation question?

The DMK's position is anchored in constitutional precedent and political prudence. It argues that the current framework should continue for at least the next 25 years, much like earlier freezes that protected states that implemented national priorities such as population control. This continuity is necessary to prevent sudden distortions in representation and to preserve federal balance.

At the same time, the party calls for evolving a consensus-driven formula rather than imposing unilateral redistribution. Population alone cannot be the determining factor because it ignores decades of policy choices that shaped demographic outcomes differently across states. Tamil Nadu's sustained investments in public health and education brought down fertility rates significantly, while other states followed different paths. A purely population-based model would reward uneven growth and penalise governance success, which the DMK considers fundamentally unjust.

#### Should development indicators be considered alongside population?

The DMK believes this is central to any fair framework. Tamil Nadu ranks among the leading states in literacy, healthcare outcomes and social welfare delivery, with lower infant mortality and higher life expectancy than the national average. It is also one of the largest contributors to the Union's tax revenues, supported by a diversified and industrialised economy. Reducing representation to population alone turns democracy into a mechanical exercise. The DMK argues that human development indicators, fiscal

contribution and governance efficiency must be factored in alongside demographic data. Without such balance, the system risks incentivising poor governance combined with higher population growth. Representation, in its view, must reflect both people and performance.

#### Is increasing the number of parliamentary seats a viable solution?

The DMK does not dismiss this possibility but insists it requires careful deliberation. India's population has more than doubled since 1971 [in fact, 2.7x, from ~55 crore to an estimated 148 crore – Ed] while the number of parliamentary seats has remained unchanged, making expansion a logical consideration. However, such a move cannot be treated as a simple technical adjustment because it has significant implications for federal balance and political representation.

The party argues that any expansion must follow detailed discussions involving experts, political parties and states. It also stresses that representation should be strengthened across all tiers, including state assemblies, panchayats and urban local bodies.

Strengthening these institutions is essential to deepen democracy at the grassroots. Only after reinforcing these layers should Parliament expansion be considered as part of a broader reform.

#### How can India reconcile a constitutional mandate with federal trust?

The Constitution provides both a framework and flexibility, as demonstrated by past decisions to freeze delimitation in the national interest. Reconciling mandate with trust requires a consultative process involving

states, political parties and independent experts. Without such engagement, delimitation will be seen as an imposed exercise that favours certain regions. Trust in federal institutions depends on transparency and inclusiveness. The DMK emphasises that democracy is not only about procedure but also about fairness. Any process that undermines this balance risks weakening the Union itself. Consultation and consensus are, therefore, essential.

#### Why has this issue resonated so strongly in Tamil Nadu?

The issue resonates because people understand the implications in concrete terms. Tamil Nadu invested heavily in public health, education and social welfare, achieving stabilised population growth and improved quality of life. There is now a widespread perception that this success could translate into reduced political representation. This creates a strong sense of injustice that goes beyond policy debate. The issue is seen as one of dignity and fairness. It is also linked to a broader sentiment that southern states are not adequately recognised for their contributions. This explains the depth and intensity of the response.

#### What is fundamentally at stake for southern states?

At stake is the balance of Indian democracy. If representation is determined purely by population, political power could become concentrated in a few regions, weakening the federal structure. This would also reshape national policy priorities in ways that may not reflect the diversity of the country.

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# And quiet flows the river in Ramban

A son murdered by cow vigilantes. A father who waits from dawn to dusk. **Haron Reshi** reports

Search operations by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and local volunteers to recover the body of Tanveer Ahmad Chopan from a fast-flowing tributary of the Chenab in Ramban have, as of 24 April, yielded no results.

Eighteen-year-old Tanveer went missing on 12 April after jumping into the turbulate Bishlari nallah in a desperate attempt to escape an attack by a group of *gau rakshaks* (cow vigilantes). That afternoon, he was driving home from Jammu along the Jammu-Srinagar highway in a mini-truck carrying a cow and two calves. He was not smuggling cattle; he was transporting milk-yielding animals to his home in Mundkhal village in Ramban's Pogal area, where cattle rearing has sustained generations.

Reports indicate that he had legally purchased the animals in Jammu for dairy farming at his native place, where it is a key livelihood for the Muslim Gujjar and Bakarwal communities that that Tanveer belongs to.

Eyewitnesses substantiated that Tanveer's attackers, who were travelling in two vehicles, intercepted him, dragged him out and began assaulting him. Terrified and cornered near Magarkote, he ran towards the river and jumped in. He has not been seen since.

Every day, personnel from multiple agencies are deployed to search for Tanveer's body. Locals gather on the riverbanks, grieve and leave; rescue teams rotate shifts. But one person remains rooted to the spot—Tanveer's father, Abdul Salam Chopan, a special police officer.

"Had this been an accident, perhaps I could have found some fortitude. But my son was



The search continues for 18-year-old Tanveer, who chose to leap into the raging river to escape his attackers

murdered. He was chased, assaulted and beaten so brutally that he chose to leap into the raging river rather than fall into the hands of his attackers," he told *National Herald* over the phone, his voice heavy with anguish.

"Since that day, I feel broken. I arrive here at dawn and leave late at night with nothing but disappointment. At home, my wife and four daughters have not stopped crying for the past two weeks. Every hour, they call me, asking the same question—has he been found?"

Speaking to *National Herald*, Arun Gupta, senior superintendent of police said, "The search is still underway. The strong current, along with deep pits and hidden cavities in the stream, is making

the operation difficult, but efforts to locate the body continue."

The incident has triggered widespread outrage across Jammu and Kashmir. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described it as "nothing short of murder" and warned that "jungle raj will not be tolerated".

Soon after the incident, protests broke out. Demonstrators blocked the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44), bringing traffic to a halt and prompting authorities to respond.

Police have registered an FIR and arrested four accused—Digvijay Singh, Kewal Singh, Surjeet Singh and Sandeep Singh, all residents of Ramban district. They remain in custody. A special investigation team (SIT), led by the sub-divisional police officer of

Banihal, has been constituted to probe the case.

Officials, however, have remained cagey about sharing details. SSP Gupta told *National Herald*, "I do not consider it appropriate to reveal details of the investigation at this stage; however, I would like to make it clear that the investigation is ongoing and that relevant evidence has been duly collected."

Hadn't Tanveer obtained permission to transport the cattle from Jammu to Ramban, as reports suggested? In answer, the SSP said, "The matter is still under investigation. We are currently verifying it with the competent authority, the district magistrate of Jammu, and their response is awaited."

Cow vigilantism is not new to the Jammu region. The area has witnessed a steady escalation of such attacks over the past decade. In April 2017, a group of alleged vigilantes assaulted a Muslim family—including an elderly man and a nine-year-old girl—over suspicions of cattle smuggling in Reasi. Two years later, vigilantes shot dead 50-year-old Nayeem Ahmad Shah and injured another person in Bhabadher while they were transporting bulls bought for farm use. In 2021, a 24-year-old man was reportedly beaten to death in Thanamandi, Rajouri, while returning home with a buffalo.

Advocate Fairoz Khan, former national president of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), is among those seeking justice for Tanveer's family. He alleges that cow vigilantes enjoy political patronage in Ramban and adjoining areas. Speaking to *National Herald*,

he said, "Cow vigilantism has been going on here for several years. There have been continuous complaints against these groups operating along the national highway. All four accused are known repeat offenders. They are not acting alone—they are being supported, shielded, financed and encouraged."

Khan added, "Surjeet Singh, the prime accused arrested by the police is the district president of the Yuva Rajput Sabha. One of the vehicles used by the attackers belonged to a construction company currently building a tunnel in the area. We demand that all those involved be arrested and brought to justice."

He further claimed, "After this incident, we obtained videos showing these individuals unleashing terror at various places—beating nomadic people and even stripping them before assaulting them. We have shown these videos to the deputy commissioner and the SSP."

Khan also alleged attempts to suppress public discussion. "The administration has issued clear instructions not to speak about this issue, particularly on social media. People who protest are being called in and restricted. I myself was detained on the spot premises while on my way to join a peaceful rally to the deputy commissioner's office for the victim's family. There appears to be an effort to suppress the situation and cool things down," he said.

For the family, the continued search for Tanveer's body holds out little hope. For many, this is no longer just about one young man's death, but about confronting a pattern of violence that has gone unchecked for years. ■

*Cow vigilantism is not new to Jammu. The accused are repeat offenders, who are being supported, shielded and financed*

## 'Delimitation must move beyond numbers'

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Southern states contribute significantly to economic output and governance standards, yet their political voice could diminish. This creates a mismatch between contribution and representation. The DMK sees this as a structural issue with long-term consequences for India's unity.

### What is the DMK's biggest concern about the current approach?

The concern goes beyond methodology to questions of intent and outcome. There is a perception that delimitation could be shaped to consolidate political advantage and reduce space for opposition. Such a shift risks deepening regional imbalances and altering electoral dynamics across the country. There is also anxiety that regions with strong alternative political traditions may be weakened. This would influence not just representation but the nature of democratic competition. Without transparency and safeguards, these concerns become serious.

### How does the DMK respond to the argument that representation must reflect population?

The DMK accepts that population is an important factor but rejects it as the sole basis. India is a Union of states, not a unitary system governed only by numbers. A purely population-based model ignores differences in governance, development and policy choices. It risks concentrating power in regions with higher demographic growth while marginalising others. It also overlooks the role of public policy in shaping population trends. Representation must, therefore, balance demographic realities with development and federal equity.

### Why does the DMK say Tamil Nadu is being penalised for success?

Tamil Nadu achieved significant reductions in fertility through sustained investments in healthcare, education and welfare. As a result, its

population stabilised earlier than in many other states. If seats are redistributed purely on current population, states with higher growth have more representation while Tamil Nadu's share declines. This effectively penalises states that implemented national priorities responsibly.

### Could this become a constitutional crisis?

Political issue, it remains a political issue that can still be addressed within the constitutional framework. The Constitution allows flexibility, as seen in earlier freezes on delimitation. This provides space for dialogue, negotiation and consensus-building. If the process is pushed through



without addressing concerns, it could strain Centre-state relations, which could escalate into a constitutional crisis.

### Is delimitation likely to become a long-term political faultline?

There is a strong possibility if handled without care. Questions of representation and federal balance have historically shaped Indian politics, and delimitation brings both into sharp focus. It also intersects with issues of regional equity, governance and democratic fairness. But it also presents an opportunity to strengthen federalism if approached with consensus. ■

## The price of looking inward

As the Iran war disrupts Indian livelihoods, strategic hesitation raises difficult questions

Aakar Patel

What explains our inability—or, if we are to be charitable, our reticence—to influence the world around us? Like the rest of the world, India is negatively affected by the American-Israeli war on Iran. Indeed, Indians have suffered, and are suffering, more than any other nationality except Iranians themselves.

The reason is straightforward. There are roughly one crore Indians living in the Gulf—a population larger than the combined citizenry of five of the six Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC). The lives and livelihoods of these Indians are at risk from the violence. Uncertainty hangs over them and this is especially hard for those who are not well-off, which is by far the majority. Namely, those members of the Indian expatriate working class in the Gulf who are employed in services, construction and industry.

The long-term economic direction of the GCC states has been thrown into question by this war, and the future of these millions of Indians are closely tied to that outcome. This is why India is more deeply affected by the conflict than most other nations, in addition to sharing global concerns relating to fuel and gas supplies.

This brings us to the central question: why this inaction—or unwillingness—to influence, or even attempt to influence, the actions of the principal parties to the conflict, the United States and Israel?

Should stating that shipping should be allowed to resume, our government has not meaningfully engaged with the problem. Why is shipping halted? There has been no explanation. How can it be resumed? There has been little clarity on that either—merely the plea, demand or request (it is unclear which, since the words are empty) that shipping be allowed to resume.

It should be noted that India appears, by default, to have aligned itself with the position of the former colonial powers of Europe, by seeking no part in the war, making no reference to its perpetrators and simply wanting commercial flows to continue uninterrupted. Let us try to answer the question. It is possible—perhaps



Shopkeepers wait in vain for customers at the Indian souk in Deira, Dubai

even likely—that there is no single explanation, but rather a set of factors that have made silence appear more appealing than action. Let us consider them in turn.

There is a noticeable incoherence in Indian foreign policy, and this extends to questions of national security. A basic example is our uncertainty about China: is it a friend or an adversary? Should engagement be deepened or reduced? The absence of a clear doctrine has contributed to this lack of coherence. Much of our foreign policy appears directed at domestic audiences and, once the claims of being a global leader war—embarrassment makes us look away.

Having effectively abandoned the idea of national interest as a guiding principle, we have become overly reliant on personal diplomacy, often linked to personal equations. We appear to have assumed that personal rapport was a solid foundation for foreign policy.

Unsurprisingly, this approach has resulted in either disappointment or instrumentalisation: we have been let down by Trump and used by Netanyahu, both of whom operate from far more hard-headed perspectives. It is these very 'friends' whose actions have contributed to the hardship faced by Indians, yet we appear unwilling even to ask them to reconsider. Another factor may be

discomfort with diplomatic initiatives undertaken by actors we instinctively distrust. It appears, at times, as though we would rather endure the consequences of the war than see it resolved through the efforts of those we dislike.

This attitude is not only petty and mean-spirited, it is also strategically self-defeating—particularly when it comes from those who regularly invoke platitudes about the world being one big family.

There may also be a deeper reason, captured in the folk saying: *mulla ki daut masjid tak*. The phrase is often interpreted to mean that a person only goes as far as their knowledge, resources or interests allow—that one's actions repeatedly circle back to the same familiar ground.

*There's a marked incoherence in India's foreign policy, extending to questions of national security*

'New India' is defined by a sharp inward-looking nationalism. One only needs to read the newspapers or watch television to recognise this dominant refrain. Minorities are blamed for the past, liberals are portrayed as obstacles to the present path toward a promised future, and the emphasis remains on settling internal scores before engaging meaningfully with the world beyond our borders.

So long as this inward focus remains the primary political project, external developments will continue to be treated as distractions—matters that will somehow resolve themselves if ignored. That appears to be the prevailing mindset today.

At a press conference on 19 April, the spokesperson of the Ministry of external affairs was asked: "Trump is praising Asim Munir and may travel to Pakistan. How does India see Pakistan's ceasefire rule? Will India be okay with it if Trump comes to India and Pakistan on one trip?"

The very focus of the question reveals much about the concerns of our media and political class. The spokesperson replied: "I have a simple answer. India is closely following developments in West Asia."

Rarely has the word 'following' been used so aptly—or so revealingly. ■

Views are personal

DELIMITATION

# It's a reprieve, not a resolution

The bill may have been withdrawn for now but the storm has not blown over. Herjinder lays it out

The immediate crisis triggered by the delimitation proposals tabled in Parliament last week may have been averted, but only just. The defeat of the 131st Constitution Amendment Bill—and the consequent lapse of accompanying legislation—has offered a temporary reprieve. It would be a mistake, however, to read this as closure. The controversy around delimitation has not ended; it has merely been deferred. Beneath the surface, a far more consequential political storm is gathering strength.

To understand the stakes, one must revisit the last major intervention on delimitation. In 2001, through a constitutional amendment to Article 81, the Union extended the freeze on the inter-state distribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the 1971 Census. This freeze—set for 25 years—was not an arbitrary decision. It was a carefully negotiated political compact aimed at preserving federal balance.

The logic was straightforward. States that had successfully implemented population control policies—primarily in southern India—feared that a fresh delimitation based purely on population would penalise them. States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had stabilised their population growth, invested in human development and achieved better socioeconomic outcomes. In contrast, states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continued to witness higher population growth. A population-based redistribution of seats would therefore tilt parliamentary representation in favour of the latter.

The 2001 freeze, in effect, allowed delimitation within states—adjusting constituency boundaries internally—without altering the inter-state allocation of seats. It was a political compromise, underwritten by a broad consensus across parties and regions, acknowledging that democratic fairness must also account for developmental equity.

The now-defeated 131st Amendment Bill sought to move away from this long-standing safeguard. Even as the government publicly reassured southern states that their political weight would not diminish—with phrases like 'guarantee' liberally invoked—the legislative intent appeared to suggest otherwise. The proposed changes signalled a



Photo: Getty Images



Photo: IANS

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks during the debate on the now-defeated 131st Constitution Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha; (left) INDIA bloc all-party meeting a day before the vote

departure from the protective framework embedded in Article 81.

This contradiction between political assurances and legislative design did not go unnoticed. It contributed significantly to the resistance that ultimately stalled the bill. Yet, the larger issue remains unresolved—and is, in fact, approaching a statutory deadline.

The freeze imposed in 2001 is set to expire in 2026. Once it lapses, the constitutional position reverts to a population-based allocation of seats, drawing on the latest Census figures, currently underway. As former Lok Sabha secretary general P.D.T. Achary has pointed out, unless the freeze is explicitly extended through legislation, its expiry is automatic.

The implications are profound. A fresh delimitation based on current population data would almost certainly result in a substantial increase in parliamentary seats for high-growth northern states, while reducing the relative share of southern states. This is not a technical adjustment but a politically charged redrawing of India's democratic map.

Equally significant is the procedural aspect. Extending the freeze would require a constitutional amendment, necessitating a two-thirds majority in Parliament. However, if the government allows the freeze to lapse and proceeds with delimitation thereafter, the process could be initiated through a simple majority by passing a standard delimitation law. The political threshold, in other words, becomes much lower.

This raises a critical question: will the Centre choose the path of consensus or the path of expediency?

There are indications that sustained pressure from southern states—including allies within the ruling coalition such as the Telugu Desam Party—could compel the government to introduce a fresh amendment to extend the freeze. That would be the most straightforward way to preserve the existing balance. But even such a move would only address one layer of the problem.

The deeper concern lies in how delimitation itself is conducted.

Recent exercises in states like Assam

and Jammu & Kashmir have raised troubling questions about the integrity of the process. Delimitation, ideally, is meant to be a neutral, technocratic exercise—guided by principles such as geographical continuity, administrative coherence and equal representation. In practice, however, there is growing evidence that these principles are being subordinated to political considerations.

Take the case of Assam. During the recent redrawing of assembly constituencies, even basic geographical features—rivers, hills and natural boundaries—were reportedly disregarded. Constituencies appeared fragmented and irregular, with little regard for spatial coherence. Areas with significant minority populations were, in some instances, reclassified in ways that altered their electoral character.

One striking example is the Karimganj parliamentary constituency, within which several assembly segments were configured in highly unusual ways. Parts of the Algapur-Katlicherra constituency exist as disconnected 'islands' within another constituency, lacking physical contiguity. Such configurations defy the basic principle that constituencies should be compact and continuous.

As veteran political leader Chatar Singh, who was associated with earlier delimitation exercises, has emphasised: continuity, coherence and compactness are not optional, they are foundational norms. Their violation raises legitimate concerns about intent.

The distortions observed in Assam—

and, to some extent, in Jammu & Kashmir—go beyond the classic definition of gerrymandering. The term itself dates back to 1812, when Elbridge Gerry, then governor of Massachusetts, approved an electoral district so contorted in shape that it was likened to a salamander. The portmanteau 'gerrymandering' has since come to describe the manipulation of electoral boundaries to favour a particular political outcome.

Traditionally, gerrymandering operates through two techniques: 'packing', which concentrates opposition voters into a few districts, and 'cracking', which disperses them across many. What we are witnessing in some recent Indian exercises appears to be a more aggressive variant—one that combines geographic distortion with demographic recalibration.

If such practices are replicated at the national level during the next delimitation, the consequences could be far-reaching.

This is why the current lull should not be mistaken for resolution. The failure of the 131st Amendment Bill has merely postponed a confrontation that is structurally embedded in the constitutional timeline.

India stands at a crossroads. One path leads towards a renewed federal compact—where concerns of equity, representation and regional balance are addressed through consensus. The other leads towards a unilateral reshaping of the political landscape, driven by arithmetic rather than accommodation.

The storm has not passed. It is only gathering force. ■

*If delimitation is based on population data alone, the northern states will gain at the expense of southern states*

# Manu's heirs can't be champions of women

Gurdeep Singh Sappal on women's empowerment as electoral theatre

India has a new champion of women. He is loud about it. He wants you to believe it. And he is counting on you to forget everything that came before.

Don't.

This self-styled champion presides over a party with among the lowest percentage representations of women in Parliament. His time in the prime minister's office will be remembered for its weaponisation of misogyny. Prime Minister Modi talks of 'Nari Shakti' and 'Nari Vandan' and stays mum when convicted rapists are garlanded on their release from prison, when our champion women wrestlers are dragged through the streets for demanding an investigation of their allegations of sexual harassment by a party strongman.

The pattern is not incidental. It flows from an intellectual tradition that has never treated women as political equals.

Savarkar, whose portrait hangs in Parliament's Central Hall, did not merely neglect women's rights. In *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, he criticised Shivaji for treating captured Muslim women with chivalry and pointedly asked if Hindu kings should have done otherwise. This is documented, acknowledged by RSS-affiliated publications, and foundational to understanding the arguments that follow.

The ideology sees women's bodies as the battleground of communal honour. From the targeted abuse of Muslim women on online platforms like 'Sulli Deals' and 'Bulli Bai' to the vicious trolling and targeting of Lenskart's Hindu owner for his company's allegedly anti-Hindu grooming guidelines is a coherent continuum.

A regressive world for women is coded in the DNA of this ideology, which no amount of outward championing of their empowerment can really conceal.

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To understand the depth of this duplicity, one must recall the time India's democratic conscience was forged—during the freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress. At a time when Britain, the United States and France had not yet granted women the right to vote, the Congress was not merely including women in its ranks, it was elevating them to its highest offices.



Where's the 'Nari Vandan' in garlands for rapists and violence for champions?



Photo: Getty Images

The Congress made Annie Besant its president in 1917, Sarojini Naidu in 1925, Nellie Sengupta in 1933—three women

This photo should be changed leading the national movement, before Independence, before the republic and its Constitution had come into existence. This was not tokenism but the natural expression of a movement whose foundational documents treated women's rights as non-negotiable.

The (Motilal) Nehru Report of 1928, which represented the first Indian

constitutional blueprint drafted by Indians, explicitly proposed equal rights for women, including universal adult franchise without distinction on the basis of sex.

The Karachi Resolution of 1931, drafted under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and proposed by Nehru, listed fundamental rights that included equality of gender and freedom of conscience and profession. These were not mere words; they were the architecture of a republic not yet born.

Mahatma Gandhi, whose civilisational philosophy the BJP claims to inherit (while systematically dismantling everything he stood for), wrote and spoke with extraordinary clarity on women's autonomy. He wrote that if non-cooperation was to succeed, women must become equal partners. He famously declared that the awakening of women would be the most significant sign of the awakening of India. In *The Discovery of India*, part history, part memoir, part political manifesto that Jawaharlal Nehru wrote during his incarceration in Ahmednagar Fort between 1942 and 1945, he argues that the status of women is the measure of the civilisation of a people.

When the Objectives Resolution was moved in the Constituent Assembly on 13 December 1946, Nehru's vision of a sovereign, independent republic guaranteed 'justice, social, economic and political' and

'equality of status and opportunity' was understood by every member of the Assembly to encompass women without qualification.

### The silence of the Sangh

The RSS was founded in 1925. For the next 25 years, through the entire drafting of the Constitution, it produced not a single substantive statement on women's rights, women's education or women's political participation. Not one.

Women's emancipation was never on their agenda. In the Sangh worldview, women were keepers of the domestic hearth and bearers of Hindu civilisational continuity, not active partners in lawmaking or administering justice.

When the Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949, a document that guaranteed every Indian woman an equal stake in the republic, the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* responded with contempt. In its editorial of 30 November 1949, it complained that the new Constitution had 'no mention of the unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat' and extolled the *Manusmriti*, whose injunctions on women include the doctrine that a woman must never be allowed to assert herself independently, that she must be guarded by her father in childhood, her husband in youth and her son in old age.

The RSS did not stop at editorials. When the Hindu Code Bill, seeking equal inheritance and divorce rights for Hindu women, came to Parliament, RSS workers burnt effigies of Nehru and Ambedkar, and called the bill an 'atom bomb on Hindu society'. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, founder of the BJP's progenitor, the Jan Sangh, said the bill would 'shatter the magnificent structure of Hindu culture'. For the Sangh, equal rights for women was destruction of culture.

That inglorious tradition is not history. In January 2013, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat declared that marriage is a contract, and if a wife fails to look after the home, her husband may disown her. This was not a slip of the tongue, it was dogma articulated by the ruling party's ideological supremo.

The Women's Reservation Bill, when it finally came under BJP stewardship, was designed to indefinitely defer implementation. In the 2024 Lok Sabha, the BJP had the lowest proportion of women MPs among all major parties. That arithmetic tells its own story.

### Borrowing the shell sans the soul

In any case, women's reservation is not only about seats in Parliament. It is about whether a woman's voice carries weight in the republic. The BJP did not discover women's rights. It borrowed the cause, the language, the symbolism, the legislative frame from a democratic tradition it spent decades opposing.

India's democratic tradition did not discover women's rights in an election year. It was built on the shoulders of women who marched, argued, legislated and led—Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, Ammu Swaminathan, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai Deshmukh, Aruna Asaf Ali, Jhaya Lakshmi Pandit, women who shaped the Indian republic.

The BJP and the RSS carry a different inheritance. They cannot point to a single woman as a leader in the freedom struggle. They can't because they weren't in it.

The record is public, the ideology is documented and the numbers do not lie. Manu's heirs can't be champions of women. ■

GURDEEP SINGH SAPPAL is a Permanent Invitee to the Congress Working Committee

# It's not simply 'ethnic violence'

**Nandita Haksar** explains the persistence of violence in the northeastern state of Manipur

The violence in Manipur is escalating at an alarming rate. People are being killed, including children. Bomb attacks, firing and buffer zones with armed men guarding their communities. The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that violence in Manipur accounted for 97 per cent of displacements in South Asia in 2023.

Three years on, we are witnessing the spectre of more killings, more clashes and more displacements within the state.

On 18 April, a convoy of Nagas was travelling along the Imphal-Ukhrul road under escort. The escort had been provided after earlier attacks on Nagas in Ukhrul district. Shortly after the escort left, the convoy was attacked by Kuki militants; two Nagas died.

In its statement, the Tangkhul Naga Long, the apex body of the Tangkhul Naga tribe, described the incident as a "brutal and inhuman attack", alleging that militants used long-range weapons and opened fire on multiple vehicles carrying women, children and sick persons just after the security personnel withdrew.

Civil society organisations in Tangkhul questioned the effectiveness of current security arrangements along the NH-202, stating that repeated attacks on civilians have eroded public confidence. They also pointed out that the incident occurred shortly after Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh visited Ukhrul and gave assurances that highway security would



Naga society groups hold a candlelight vigil in Kohima after the Ukhrul incident in which two people died

improve. The Voice of Naga Youth has written to the prime minister demanding an enquiry into the alleged lack of neutrality of central security forces in Ukhrul and Kamjong districts.

Is this just another clash between two communities? In a way it is, but to look at these incidents simply as communal clashes between two communities is to miss the larger context in which violence continues unabated in Manipur.

One of the major local factors for the escalation of violence is the number of weapons still in the hands of militants, insurgents and vigilante groups. In 2023, there were reports of arms being looted from state armouries and police stations in the early months of the conflict.

While there were attempts to recover the arms, it was only when the state was under Myanmar's Rule that a large number of these were recovered. These included

looted weapons and weapons smuggled from across borders besides the long-standing stash of illegal arms in the state. This explains why counts of recovered weapons exceed the counts of looted weapons in later reports.

Media reports do not reflect the full extent of weapons available in Manipur with insurgent groups, village defence groups, community militia, armed volunteers, criminal groups and private individuals. Analysts highlight the availability of weapons looted from police armouries and the emergence of armed vigilante outfits (like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun) as security threats in and of themselves.

An inflow of weapons has been reported from Myanmar, where the Myanmar military (now a civilian government) is engaged in a bitter war with various armed ethnic groups in India.

The National Investigative Agency

(NIA) recently arrested seven foreigners allegedly going to Myanmar to train the ethnic armed groups in drone warfare. The foreigners included six Ukrainians and one American. Not much is known about the Ukrainians but the American, VanDyke, has an interesting background.

According to Matthew VanDyke's personal website, he participated in the Iraq War and Libya's civil war. He is the founder of Washington-based consulting firm Sons of Liberty International, whose website says it 'provides free security consulting and training services to vulnerable populations to enable them to defend themselves against terrorist and insurgent groups'. The company also ran operations in Ukraine between 2022 and 2023, when it provided training and advice to Ukraine's military in using non-lethal equipment.

There are credible reports that China has interests in northeast India. For instance, analysis by the Daniel K. Inouye

Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies indicates that India fears China is using instability around Myanmar and Manipur to weaken India's influence in the northeast and deepen its foothold in Myanmar. There are even reports that China is supplying arms to insurgent groups and providing refuge to some of the insurgents.

Manipur has no political leader who is respected by all communities. In the absence of an alternative politics, the communities are captives of their narrow identities and trapped in a deadly cycle of identity politics. This also means that they depend on their own armed groups to defend them in case of attacks and feel increasingly alienated from the state and its security forces.

There is no space for real discussion of the situation in Manipur because anyone seen as critical will be intimidated into

*Media reports do not reflect the full extent of weapons available with insurgent groups, village defence groups, community militia and private individuals*

silence. Armed groups can even turn on their own people if they perceive someone as a traitor who dares criticise his or her own community.

Complicating the already intelligence situation is the presence of intelligence agencies and vested interests, both foreign and Indian. The Indian State has enough and more information from its intelligence agencies on both internal and external security threats. Why, then, is it not addressing the deep-rooted problems that have festered for so long? External actors can take advantage of Manipur's fault lines.

We need to inform ourselves of the complex situation and then act, not in the interest of one community or another but for Manipur and for India. ■

**NANDITA HAKSAR** is a human rights advocate and an author, most recently of *Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent*

*The easy availability of weapons looted from police armouries and the emergence of armed vigilante outfits are security threats in and of themselves*

# The irreversible course of damage

The Ken-Betwa river-linking project is being pushed through with no apparent concern for the environment or the people it will displace

**Rashme Sehgal**

Imagine receiving Rs 16 as compensation for your home. That's the amount offered to a tribal family as part of the rehabilitation package for the Rs 45,000 crore Ken-Betwa project. Another family was given the princely sum of Rs 200.

The foundation stone for the controversial interlinking of the two rivers in drought-prone Bundelkhand was laid on 25 December 2024 amidst a big publicity drive. It involves building the Daudhan dam to store water and a 221 km long canal to transfer water from the Ken to the Betwa.

While the government promised compensation of Rs 12.5 lakh per acre and Rs 6 lakh for a house, a large number of families have been offered tuppence or nothing at all. In despair, people from the 40 villages that will be submerged by the dam's reservoir staged a week-long protest (April 5-16) in Dhodhan village.

Their 'Panch Tatva Satyagraha' began

with a symbolic protest of lying down on funeral pyres ('chita'). Their fast or 'Akash Andolan' was followed by a 'Mitti Andolan' where they smeared soil from their village on their bodies. It culminated with the 'Jal Andolan' when they entered the water, wearing nooses around their necks—demanding justice or death.

On 16 April, a joint team of the Chhatarpur district administration reached the protest site to hold talks with the villagers who agreed to defer the protests until a new compensation package was announced.

Amit Bhatnagar, a former AAP member who is leading them under the banner of the Jai Kisan Sangathan, maintains that "sarkari assurances carry little weight with the villagers. Sixty thousand families, in one of the poorest regions in the country, are being affected by this river-linking project."

No wonder the protest songs that sound in these villages speak of how the Ken-Betwa dam will provide water and

electricity to distant villages while they will be evicted and denied even these basic facilities.

Most of them belong to the indigenous Gond and Kol tribes, who live along the edge of forests and depend on farming for a living. "Our livelihoods are tied to this land—we don't know what the future holds for us anymore," said Phoolwati, a tribal woman who is among the thousands protesting against the project.

According to information supplied by the Ken Betwa Link Project Authority, the 77 metre high Daudhan dam will displace 5,288 families in Chhatarpur district and 1,400 families in Panna district due to land submergence and dam-related land acquisition.

The dam will not only bifurcate the Panna Tiger Reserve, it will also submerge 5,578 hectares of forest land. The project will submerge nearly 98 sq. km (38 sq. miles) of the 543 sq. km sanctuary that successfully brought tigers back from the

brink of local extinction in 2009.

This could undo years of conservation efforts. Wildlife scientist Dr Raghu Chindawat has been living in Panna from 1995. He points out, "With 70 per cent of the tiger reserve habitat submerged, it will mean the end of the Panna Tiger Reserve and also of the 55-plus tigers and other animals living in it. Using the core area of a tiger reserve park for such a large-scale infrastructure project is unprecedented. If we go ahead, it will be a complete mockery of our institutions and our laws, our Forest Conservation Act, our Wildlife Biodiversity Act."

Eminent conservationist M.K. Ranjitsinh, who has been involved in shaping wildlife conservation policies for the last five decades, opposed this project tooth-and-nail. He resigned from the Madhya Pradesh Wildlife Board in 2015, saying, "You can have either the interlinking project or the Panna Tiger Reserve. You cannot have both."

Ranjitsinh, who helped notify nine new national parks and 14 new sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, is a disenfranchised man. "All our protected areas are going to suffer and the most unfortunate aspect is most of these development projects do not even deliver [what they promise]."

From the start, environmentalists have questioned the modus operandi of the ministry of environment and forests. The Mumbai-based company contracted by the ministry to conduct the Environment Impact Assessment for this project was not on its approved list of agencies and had little knowledge of the ecology of the region.

The assessment report incorrectly stated that there were sal forests in the reserve, and declared that it was home to the Manipur brown antler deer (which are found only on the India-Burma border).

Aquatic ecology experts also question the statistics provided by the National Development Water Agency. Dr Brij Gopal of the Centre for Inland Waters in South Asia refutes the National Water Development Agency's claim that the Ken river has an extra 1,074 million cubic of water to share. Gopal says the NWDA relied more on modelling than on-ground observations. If the Panna river did have

struggled water, why were the villagers struggling to find drinking water in summer? Meanwhile, sand mining in the Ken has made a bad water situation worse.

Gopal has suggested reviving the one lakh traditional water bodies in Bundelkhand which would yield more water storage and avoid massive displacement—at a fraction of the present cost.

The most shocking aspect of this project is that water flow calculations are based on data that is 30-40 years old. Chindawat said, "The government has refused to put the data in the public domain, insisting it's a security risk. As both rivers flow into the Ganges which enters Bangladesh, they claim it is 'international flow data' and cannot be revealed."

The government also chose to ignore the adverse report of the central empowered committee of the Supreme Court. Water experts, including Magsaysay awardee Rajendra Singh, have been vehemently critical. "Each river has its own biological character, different flora and fauna. By interlinking river basins, their unique aquatic life will be destroyed," said Singh.

Ranjitsinh believes our present sanctuaries and tiger reserves are the "last havens of hope" for the survival of our natural heritage. "Why should Panna and Kaziranga be less sacrosanct than the Taj Mahal and Ajanta-Ellora?" he asks. "We have tiny havens left—only four per cent of India's landmass. This is a Rubicon that should not have been crossed."

Regardless of criticism, the ministry of water ('jal shakti', if you please) is carrying on, drawing up plans to connect 37 more rivers including the Godavari and Cauvery.

Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala and Sikkim are among the states that have expressed reservations. From the start, Kerala has taken the stand that long-distance inter-basin water transfer will not work. Bihar's rivers originate in Nepal, so diverting them would require the permission of a neighbouring nation.

As the first of a series of projects, the stakes are very high for the government and the powerful construction lobby. Who cares if the damages are irreversible? ■



The proposed Daudhan dam under the Ken-Betwa river linking project

*60,000 families in one of the poorest regions of the country will be affected by the Ken-Betwa river-linking project*

# Shepherd, Lawyer, Chief Minister: The Man Who Served Karnataka Longer Than Anyone Else

## 3 YEARS, 2 TERMS, 1 RECORD: SIDDARAMAIAH AT 2,933 DAYS

Image: IANS



*At the heart of Siddaramaiah's political identity is the AHINDA platform — a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits — which he began articulating through state-wide conventions in 2005. As the first Chief Minister from the Kuruba community, Karnataka's third-largest caste, he translated social coalition into substantive policy rather than mere electoral arithmetic.*

As May 20, 2026, marks the third anniversary of his second term, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will set a new benchmark, surpassing a decades-old record for consecutive days in office by 141 days and taking his total tenure to 2,933 days. Having steered Karnataka for nearly three thousand days, with 1,830 days in his first term and 1,103 in his second, he cements his place as the architect of social justice, the defining political figure of contemporary Karnataka, and the state's preeminent political veteran.

### FROM VILLAGE ROOTS TO A HISTORIC MILESTONE

In the long and storied history of Karnataka's political landscape — defined by coalition governments, mid-term collapses, factional rivalries, and rapid changes of leadership — one achievement stands apart as genuinely unprecedented. On January 7, 2026, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah surpassed the record of 2,792 days in office held by D. Devaraj Urs, becoming the longest-serving Chief Minister in the state's history. That milestone has since continued to grow.

On May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of the commencement of his second term, his cumulative tenure reaches 2,933 days, extending his lead over the previous record to 141 days. The figure speaks not merely to longevity, but to the rare combination of political resilience, successive electoral mandates, and governing purpose that has defined his career across four decades of public life.

That this achievement belongs to a man born in the remote village of Siddaramanahundi, in

Varuna Hobli near T. Narasipura in Mysore district, is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to what sustained public service can accomplish.

Born on August 3, 1947, to Siddarama Gowda and Boramma — a farming family of the Kuruba Gowda community — Siddaramaiah was the fourth among six siblings and the first in his family to graduate. He completed a B.Sc. from Yuvaraja's College, Mysore, pursued law from Sharada Vilas College and Mysore University, and briefly taught at Vidyavardhaka Law College in Mysuru before entering public life.

His entry into electoral politics came not through privilege or patronage, but through the district courts of Mysore, where the lawyer Nanjunda Swamy recognised his potential and persuaded him to contest. Standing on a Bharatiya Lok Dal ticket from the Chamundeshwari constituency, Siddaramaiah entered the 7th Karnataka Legislative Assembly in 1983 — a surprise victory that established his name across the Old Mysuru region.

Over the four decades that followed, he would contest thirteen elections, win nine, and serve Karnataka as Transport Minister, Finance Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and, twice, as Chief Minister.

"I never thought of becoming a minister, let alone Chief Minister. I thought I would become an MLA after becoming a Taluk Board member." — Siddaramaiah

### TWO TERMS, ONE UNBROKEN PURPOSE

The arithmetic of Siddaramaiah's historic tenure is, on its face, straightforward. His first term ran from May 13, 2013, to May 17, 2018 — a total of 1,830 days. This made him only the second Chief Minister in Karnataka's history to complete a full five-year term, the first being Devaraj Urs.

That term was anchored by an absolute majority of 122 out of 224 seats won by the Congress in 2013, enabling a stability of governance that has been the exception, not the rule, in Karnataka's political history.

His second term commenced on May 20, 2023, following another decisive Congress victory built on five welfare guarantees he had championed as the party's central electoral promise.

By May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of that swearing-in, the second term's contribution reaches 1,103 days, bringing the cumulative total to 2,933 days.

### A POLITICAL JOURNEY SHAPED BY CONVICTION

What makes Siddaramaiah's trajectory especially remarkable is that it unfolded almost entirely outside the Congress fold for its first two decades. From his entry through the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1983 to his years within the Janata Party under Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde — where he chaired the Kannada Surveillance Committee and held portfolios across Transport, Animal Husbandry, and Sericulture — and subsequently as a senior figure in the Janata Dal under Deve Gowda, Siddaramaiah was, by his own admission, a committed anti-Congressman. He rose to Deputy Minister in the Deve Gowda cabinet, Deputy Chief Minister under J. H. Patel, and Deputy Chief Minister again in the Congress-JD(S) coalition under Dharam Singh in 2004.

The rupture with Deve Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular) in 2005 — widely attributed to

the former Prime Minister's desire to promote his son H. D. Kumaraswamy — brought Siddaramaiah to a crossroads.

He briefly contemplated returning to legal practice and ruled out floating a regional party, citing an inability to muster financial resources. Instead, he chose the path that would prove transformative: on July 22, 2006, he joined the Congress at a large public rally on Palace Grounds, Bengaluru, in the presence of then AICC President Sonia Gandhi. Contemporaries called it unthinkable. In retrospect, it was the decisive turn on which Karnataka's most consequential political career pivoted.

"On May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of his second term, Siddaramaiah completes 2,933 cumulative days as Chief Minister — 141 days beyond Karnataka's previous record."

Together, the two terms represent more than a numerical record. They embody a continuous thread of governance philosophy — the conviction that public office exists primarily to serve the poor, the marginalised, and those whom Siddaramaiah has long championed through the AHINDA framework: minorities, backward classes, and Dalits.

That continuity of purpose was tested in his second term when supporters of Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar mounted a sustained campaign for their leader's elevation, citing a rumoured 2023 power-sharing formula. Siddaramaiah navigated those pressures with the patience and persistence his supporters regard as hallmarks of his leadership, holding his course and his office.

Underpinning both terms is a fiscal record without parallel in Karnataka's history. On March 6, 2026, Siddaramaiah presented his 17th state budget — a Rs 4.48 lakh crore outlay for 2026–27 — the highest tally ever achieved by any Chief Minister in the state.

This record stretches back to his years as Finance Minister under H. D. Deve Gowda and J. H. Patel in the 1990s, through his dual stints as Deputy Chief Minister, and across his successive budget presentations as Chief Minister. The budget, praised for balancing expansive welfare commitments with long-term infrastructure investment, stands as the capstone of a career-long mastery over the state's economy.

### THE AHINDA LEGACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE GOVERNANCE

At the heart of Siddaramaiah's political identity is the AHINDA platform — a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits — which he began articulating through state-wide conventions in 2005.

As the first Chief Minister from the Kuruba community, Karnataka's third-largest caste, he translated social coalition into substantive policy rather than mere electoral arithmetic. His first term introduced the Karnataka Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan Act of 2013 and conducted the state's first-ever caste survey — a landmark exercise in data-driven governance, subsequently withheld by successive governments for political reasons. His Bhagya welfare schemes — Anna Bhagya for food security, Ksheera Bhagya for school milk supply, Vidyasiri for girls' education — earned him lasting recognition as a champion of the poor.

In his second term, the five guarantees approved at the very first cabinet meeting have become the defining social policy framework of his administration. Independent research has documented their measurable contribution to women's financial autonomy, household well-being, and access to basic services.

The free bus travel scheme for women across Karnataka, and the implementation of internal reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are among the policies that have deepened the administration's social justice commitments.

In drawing explicit inspiration from Devaraj Urs — whose land redistribution reforms of the 1970s remain the benchmark of Karnataka's welfare tradition — Siddaramaiah has positioned his guarantees as the continuation of that same revolutionary instinct, updated for a new generation. That instinct was shaped early.

Influenced by the socialist thought of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, the young Siddaramaiah abandoned a promising legal career to enter politics in pursuit of social justice.

Critics once taunted him with the question: what does a shepherd know about finance? His answer was seventeen budgets, hailed by economists for maintaining fiscal prudence within the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act — even as he funded the most comprehensive welfare architecture Karnataka has ever seen.

### A LEADER FOR THE LONG ARC OF HISTORY

Devaraj Urs — whose record Siddaramaiah surpassed on January 7, 2026 — served two consecutive terms from 1972 to 1977 and 1978 to 1980, totalling 2,792 days. Siddaramaiah's 2,933 days are the product of a more arduous journey: two non-consecutive terms separated by five years as opposition leader, coalition manager, and patient rebuilder of Congress fortunes.

In the interval between his two terms, he chaired the Congress-JD(S) coordination committee under H. D. Kumaraswamy, absorbed the shock of the coalition's collapse in August 2019 following the resignation of 17 MLAs, and led the opposition campaign that delivered the party its landmark 2023 mandate.

He has served as Leader of the Opposition on two separate occasions — from 2009 to 2013 and from 2019 to 2023 — making him one of the most experienced figures ever to occupy both the treasury benches and the opposition aisle in Karnataka's legislative assembly.

Both Siddaramaiah and Urs hail from the Mysuru region, a coincidence the Chief Minister has noted with quiet pride. Yet the comparison, though flattering, understates the singularity of his record.

Urs governed in a more stable era; Siddaramaiah built his legacy across a landscape of defections, coalition collapses, and relentless internal competition — prevailing each time not through patronage networks alone, but through the sustained credibility of his welfare agenda and the loyalty of the social coalitions he built.

Speaking at the January 2026 milestone, he was characteristically understated: "I have come so far in politics with the blessings of the people." He has since expressed confidence in completing his second full five-year term in May 2028, a milestone that would push his cumulative record well beyond what any successor is likely to match for decades.

That May 20, 2026 — a single date that is simultaneously the third anniversary of his current term and the moment his cumulative tally reaches 2,933 days — should carry such layered significance is entirely in keeping with a career defined by the convergence of endurance and purpose. He entered electoral politics in 1983 with no ambition beyond becoming an MLA.

What followed was forty-three years of public life, nine election victories, seventeen budgets, two full Chief Ministerial terms, and a record that will define the measure of leadership in Karnataka for generations.

The name Siddaramaiah now stands at the summit of the state's political history — not as the longest-serving Chief Minister alone, but as the clearest proof that in Karnataka, the longest arcs of power are won not by inheritance or manoeuvre, but by the unrelenting service of the people.

# Can the Gulf states weather this war?

Ashok Swain decodes this moment of reckoning for the Gulf monarchies

The Gulf countries didn't start the war. Yet they're paying a terrible price. In battered infrastructure and the erosion of a carefully manufactured illusion of stability. What has unfolded since end-February is a brutal audit of decades of strategic choices made by the Gulf monarchies.

Within forty-eight hours of the opening strikes on Iran, every member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had taken retaliatory hits. The missiles and drones didn't just target US bases; they tore through airports, hotels, energy installations, ports and all the fragile markers of prosperity cities like Dubai had spent decades burnishing and flaunting.

For decades, these monarchies were secure in the knowledge that the trade they had made with Washington gave them an unassailable security cover. They hosted US bases, bought US weapons, aligned strategically with the US in the firm belief that they had purchased deterrence and security. The war has shattered that illusion.

Iran's justification was brutally simple. If US planes take off from your soil, your soil is part of the war. Iran couldn't afford symmetric warfare, so it would hit where it hurt; civilian infrastructure was not going to be spared.

The strikes have taken a heavy toll: nearly \$200 billion in lost output across the six GCC nations in the Persian Gulf. Their tourism industry is bleeding hundreds of millions every day. Their oil flows are badly hit by Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. The insurance costs of shipping are insupportably high. GDP contraction is an unfolding reality. In other words, this is a systemic collapse of their defence-diplomacy-development 3D model.

The Gulf's economic architecture was built on a simple premise: stability attracts capital. That premise is now in ruins. When drones can slip through air defences, when missile debris falls on luxury districts, when desalination plants that supply 90 per cent of drinking water are vulnerable, the narrative of the Gulf as an oasis collapses.

Yet the deeper failure is political. The GCC monarchies were not just passive victims. Many supported the strategic logic that led to this war. They feared and envied Iran. They lobbied and feted Washington. They entertained the illusion that a US-Israeli campaign could eliminate the Iranian threat without engulfing them. It



A giant billboard at Tehran's Revolution Square defiantly declares: 'The Strait of Hormuz remains closed'

Photo: Getty Images

was a dangerous fantasy.

Humiliatingly for the GCC, even though they are under attack, the war is being waged as if their stand is of no consequence. They are being attacked by Iran and ignored by the US, their supposed protector. Decisions about the war were made without them. Negotiations about ceasefires are happening without them. Despite being the most exposed, they are not at the table shaping the outcome of the war.

Even the 'normalisation' with Israel—sold as a pathway to security integration, intelligence sharing and technological superiority—has been of no avail; it has only deepened the perception that certain Gulf states are part of an anti-Iran axis. That perception has consequences: it invites retaliation from Iran and its allies.

If anything, normalising ties with Israel has made some of these monarchies more vulnerable, tying their security calculus to a regional actor whose strategy is driven by perpetual confrontation. The Gulf has effectively imported Israel's enemies without acquiring Israel's deterrence.

*The GCC countries are witnessing a systemic collapse of their defence-diplomacy-development 3D model. Their old economic architecture is in ruins*

Meanwhile, the US security umbrella has revealed its limits in the harshest way possible. Air defences may have intercepted most of the missiles, but deterrence is not about intercepting attacks; it's about preventing them. On that count, the US has failed the GCC spectacularly.

Nor is the economics of defence in their favour. Intercepting a low-cost drone with a multimillion-dollar missile is not sustainable strategy. Iran has weaponised this asymmetry; its strategy pivots on imposing costs that will become unbearable in a war of attrition.

Trump went into the war without bothering to consult allies, working on advice that badly underestimated Iran's appetite and capacity for retaliation. It is now negotiating with Iran from a position that is far worse than where it started. For the Gulf countries, the message is disturbingly clear: US protection is neither guaranteed nor sufficient. In the post-war scenario, they will have to think beyond reconstruction; they'll have to rethink the entire logic of security.

The first uncomfortable truth the GCC must confront is that Iran is not going anywhere. Despite massive strikes, despite leadership losses, the Iranian state endures and dictates the war and ceasefire. It retains its capacity to disrupt the region, to choke global energy flows, to project power asymmetrically. A militarily weakened Iran may even be more dangerous, less predictable and more willing to escalate.

The idea that Iran can be eliminated as a strategic factor is fantasy. The only viable path is coexistence, however uneasy. That requires a shift from confrontation to accommodation, from external balancing to regional engagement, from wishing Iran away to learning to live with it.

The second reality they confront is that relying on the US alone is not sound strategy. A strategically shifty US cannot offer the security guarantees the GCC needs. This is where China enters the picture, not as a replacement in military terms, but as a different kind of patron. China offers something the US no longer can: economic stability without political volatility, engagement without entanglement.

China has already demonstrated its relevance. It brokered the Saudi-Iran rapprochement. It positioned itself as a stabilising actor. For the Gulf countries, turning to China is not about abandoning the US but about reducing dependence on a patron that has proven unreliable; it's about diversification, hedging, creating strategic space.

But the shift towards China cannot be separated from the need to recalibrate relations with Iran. The two are intertwined. Iran's influence in the region is tied to its relationship with Tehran. Any new security architecture that excludes Iran is doomed to fail.

This is the hardest pill for the GCC to swallow. The very state they have spent decades fearing and containing may now have to be engaged as a central pillar of regional order. The alternative is worse. Continued reliance on external powers that use the region as a battleground. Continued exposure to wars they do not control. Continued economic vulnerability to disruptions they cannot prevent. The one certainty of this war is that the Gulf that emerges from it will not be the same. ■

ASHOK SWAIN is a professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University, Sweden

## Why Dinesh Trivedi?

Neither career diplomat nor intelligence expert, his appointment as India's high commissioner to Bangladesh is really mystifying

Ashis Ray

Those following relations between India and Bangladesh are taken aback by the Modi government's decision to send Dinesh Trivedi, a political appointee, to Bangladesh as India's next high commissioner. The appointment awaits a formal agreement from the Bangladesh government.

There hasn't been a political appointee as head of the Indian mission in Dhaka in 50 years. The last such choice was Samar Sen, who was a career diplomat but took up the post after retiring from the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) as India's permanent representative (PR) to the United Nations in New York. Sen was born and brought up in Dhaka and had first-hand experience of the place.

His predecessor Subimal Dutt, the first Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh after its independence from Pakistan in 1971, was also originally from East Bengal (Chittagong). Dutt went on to become India's longest serving foreign secretary before being summoned from retirement to undertake the delicate new assignment in Dhaka.

A promotion to the coveted top job of foreign secretary is often guided not by whether a candidate has served as ambassador, high commissioner or permanent representative in the West, but by whether he or she has fulfilled such a role in a neighbouring country.

In this context, Dhaka has often been a stepping stone to the corner office in the ministry of external affairs (MEA). Think K.P.S Menon (junior), Muchkund Dubey, Krishnan Srinivasan, Krishnan Raghunath and Harsh Shringla.

A change of guard in Dhaka was due. Pranay Verma had served more than three-and-a-half years there as high commissioner. The MEA is said to have proposed Sandeep Chakravarty, India's current ambassador to Indonesia, as Verma's successor. Chakravarty had in his CV a previous stint in Bangladesh as deputy high commissioner. But this failed to impress the PMO. A tussle for control of external affairs between the MEA and the national security establishment in the PMO has been an ongoing and unfortunate saga. The PMO scanned political circles and settled on Trivedi.



*Did Modi reward turncoat Trivedi simply to slight Mamata Banerjee?*

A Gujarati businessman, Trivedi went to school and college in Kolkata, before obtaining an MBA in the United States. He is a much-travelled politician, having moved from the Congress-led UPA government under Manmohan Singh. He quit Mamata Banerjee's outfit in 2021 to join the BJP.

The TMC nominated him first as minister of state for health and family welfare in 2009 and then railway minister with cabinet rank in 2011 in the Congress-led UPA government under Manmohan Singh. He quit Mamata Banerjee's outfit in 2021 to join the BJP. Compelled to resign as a TMC member of parliament in the Rajya Sabha, Trivedi has since been cooling his heels.

While Trivedi is at least not

uneducated—unlike many BJP politicians, including repeat Class 8 failures and *haffidavitwalas*—his qualification for the new post is difficult to fathom. "Modi obviously wanted to reward Trivedi," said a former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh. "Is the pat for turncoat Trivedi a slap for Mamata?"

While another former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh called the logic "unclear", a high-level source familiar with the decision-making process had a different take.

National security advisor Ajit Doval may have prevailed by pointing out the failure of the Indian high commission in Dhaka to understand the seriousness of the discontent with Sheikh Hasina, which culminated in her ouster, the source said.

That failure is not in dispute. But that was surely more a shortcoming on the part of intelligence gathering by the Research & Analysis Wing rather than diplomats stationed in Dhaka. In fact, in his briefing to the Parliament's standing committee on external affairs soon after Hasina's toppling, minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar is said to have accused the United States of being behind it all.

If that was the MEA's post facto conclusion, how were IFS personnel to blame? And, in what way is Trivedi a solution? He possesses neither a background in diplomacy nor in intelligence. The departure from having a foreign affairs specialist as Indian high commissioner in Bangladesh does not, to say the least, make sense.

A mishandling of ties at a time that the BNP (Bangladesh National Party), not the Awami League, is installed in government could potentially be disastrous. Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) made unprecedented inroads into Bangladesh in the 18 months of the interim government in Dhaka since Hasina's exit and the entry of the current prime minister Tarique Rahman. China has gained considerable ground as well.

The re-establishment of previous security cooperation, the reconstruction of mutual confidence and the smooth renewal of the Ganga Waters Treaty are urgent issues. If Ajit Doval thinks these can be tackled by remote control, he is sadly mistaken. ■

## Lessons for India from an 'audit' in Bangladesh

Sourabh Sen

Were the general elections that brought the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to power with a thumping majority after nearly 18 turbulent months free and fair? An audit carried out by a Sweden-based media outlet *Netra News* claims they were. The probe found almost no discrepancy when it compared the Bangladesh Election Commission's (BEC) official data with data collected independently by *Netra News* on polling day (12 February 2026), refuting the claims of rigged elections.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), whose performance did not match up to its own expectations, was one party which had questioned the credibility of the election, describing its defeat as the result of "extraordinary engineering." The party's secretary general Mia Golam Parwar had alleged that manipulations happened somewhere "between the counting of the votes and the declaration of results." Several BNP candidates who lost the elections too made similar claims.

"They sidelined a mainstream political party (JeI) through election engineering. We have raised the issue publicly through official statements and press conferences and have also lodged complaints before the tribunal about this," Parwar told *National Herald*, who lost from his stronghold, Khulna-5 constituency.

The way *Netra News* went about its audit is worth detailing.

The organisation deployed hundreds of 'correspondents' all over Bangladesh in the months before the elections. On the night before polling day and the next morning, different groups of reviewers took photographs of Form 16—the booth-level tally sheet that recorded how many votes had been polled in each booth. The election—in over 43,000 polling stations across 300 constituencies—was held with paper ballots. Each polling booth generated three signed copies of Form 16—one given to the candidate's agent, one pasted outside the booth and a third copy sent to the returning officer of the district, who consolidated the figures and forwarded them to the BEC.

By the morning after the vote, *Netra News* had collected photographs of 8,000 Form 16s. By the time the BEC finished counting the ballots, that number had increased to around 18,000, covering 205 of the 300 constituencies. A random sample of 1,000 forms was drawn from this pool, weighted to reflect the composition of all 18,000 forms. Each of these 1,000 forms was then compared, line by line, against the corresponding tally sheet published by the BEC. Forty-three forms were rejected due to sampling errors. Of the remaining 957, only

four showed minor discrepancies.

The audit matches the party-wise number of ballots present in the boxes before the BEC's final counting. But, as critics point out, election engineering can still occur if ballot boxes were stuffed during polling, or if the numbers are deliberately manipulated by the BEC. Parwar points out that the audit cannot reveal whether voters were intimidated before they cast their votes.

Is there a lesson for India here? The Election Commission of India has the experience, resources and manpower to initiate an even more robust, independent and transparent audit of elections and election results—if it wants to restore the severely eroded credibility of elections conducted under its watch. ■

If election engineering can make or break an outcome, so can women voters. Despite attendant gender parity concerns, politicians in India as well as Bangladesh seem to understand this well. In India, the BJP played to the gallery by rushing a previously-gazetted women's reservation bill through Lok Sabha—knowing full well they did not have the numbers to push it through—just to generate talking points before the elections in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and Puducherry.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, has quietly allocated the 50 seats reserved for women in the Jatiya Sangsad—over and above the 300 contested seats—to winning parties. These seats were allocated in proportion to the number of general seats each party won. Women nominated to these seats are full members of parliament, with the same rights and privileges as those in general seats, though they do not represent any specific geographic constituency.

The BNP recently finalised its list of 36 women nominees. The JeI and National Citizen Party (NCP) have forwarded one name each. The final list of 50 nominated MPs will join the seven elected women members. With 57 out of 350 members, women will comprise nearly 16 per cent of Jatiya Sangsad.

A similar experiment could be carried out in India, by raising the strength of the Lok Sabha to 643 or 743 and allowing each state to nominate women for the additional seats. Similarly, the Rajya Sabha can fix the number and criteria for nominated seats for women. This arrangement for the next 15 years is well worth trying without the complications involved in reserving 33 per cent seats in Parliament at its existing strength. ■

SOURABH SEN is a Kolkata-based independent writer and commentator on politics, human rights and foreign affairs

# A silent crisis: scorching heat, rising UVI

Rising temperatures, pollution and surface ozone levels are producing a deadly 'chemical cocktail' in south India

## Pankaj Chaturvedi

While north and central India saw unseasonal April showers this year, south India is facing a formidable environmental challenge: scorching heat coupled with rising ultraviolet (UV) radiation and surface ozone levels. Unlike the dry heatwave in the north, the combination of rising heat, humidity and dangerous UV rays in south India signals a looming health emergency.

In Kerala, the sharp rise in UV radiation has prompted the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) to issue an orange alert in six districts cautioning the public against prolonged exposure to direct sunlight. Latest data show a UV index level of 8 in Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki, Kollam and Palakkad—high enough to pose serious health risks. Authorities warn that direct sun exposure in these areas could cause sunburn, skin disorders and eye ailments.

In Bengaluru, the city's afternoon UV index has surged to 13, classified as 'extreme' by World Health Organization (WHO) standards. This rapid jump—from 10 to 13 in just two days in the third week of April—is a worrying development. Similarly, Chennai has recorded UV levels as high as 13 around noon. Understanding these extreme indices is vital for residents to protect their skin and overall health in a tropical city with year-round sun exposure.

### Chennai versus other cities

A quick scan (see table below) highlights how UV exposure in Chennai compares with other major cities across India. This comparison helps travellers and residents better understand regional sun intensity and plan outdoor activities with sun safety

in mind.

The southern coastal regions, once known for their pleasant climate, lush greenery and abundant water resources, now confront a frightening phase of climate change. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala have experienced premature and intense heatwaves this year. The region's proximity to the equator and varied altitudes amplify the sun's impact, making south India more vulnerable to UV damage than north India.

This year's figures are alarming. Bengaluru, once called the 'Garden City', has recorded a UV index between 12 and 13. An index above 11 is 'extreme', which means that just ten minutes in the sun without protection can cause permanent damage to skin cells.

The drying of water bodies—like Pallikaranai in Chennai—has intensified UV reflection, further increasing the intensity of local radiation. Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram report UV indices between 10 and 11. A recent KSDMA report reveals that about 80 per cent of Kerala's regions surpass safe radiation limits. Meanwhile, surface ozone—normally protective in the stratosphere—has become toxic at the ground level due to heat and pollution, particularly from vehicle emissions reacting with nitrogen oxides. This 'chemical cocktail' exacerbates respiratory diseases like asthma and lung inflammation, which have surged by over 20 per cent across southern metro areas.

The dual onslaught of ultraviolet rays and ozone has triggered serious health problems. UV radiation directly damages DNA, increasing risks of early onset of skin cancer. Eye exposure threatens cataracts and early blindness. Very high UV levels weaken immunity, further endangering vulnerable populations—daily wage workers, street vendors and

Photo: Getty Images



Constant exposure to ultraviolet rays increases the risk of skin cancer, heat stroke, kidney ailments and severe dehydration

construction labourers exposed to the sun for long hours. The result? Rising cases of heat stroke, kidney ailments and severe dehydration, as reported from the hinterlands of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The ecological fallout is equally grave. Crops in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka show diminished photosynthesis due to UV exposure, impacting yields of sensitive plants like paddy and pulses. Rising sea temperatures and radiation disrupt marine ecosystems, destroying plankton populations which are foundational to the local fisheries.

Wetland degradation—such as the disappearance of 165 water sources in Pallikaranai—not only causes water scarcity but also eliminates natural cooling systems that historically regulated temperature.

The current climate imbalance surpasses a mere temperature increase—it threatens the survival of both humans and biodiversity. Government initiatives in the past, like the Green Credit Programme,

have faltered due to lack of scientific direction. Effective action requires real-time UV monitoring in every city, preservation and expansion of dense urban forests to reduce the effects of ozone naturally, and regulatory measures such as prohibiting manual labour during peak afternoon hours.

Southern India stands at a critical crossroads. From Bengaluru's tech hubs to the serene backwaters of Kerala and the coastal plains of Tamil Nadu, this perilous nexus of heat, UV radiation and pollution reflects a collective failure to safeguard the environment. Without urgent, transformative policy interventions focused on conservation, water resource protection, and pollution control, this vibrant region risks becoming inhospitable for future generations.

The time to act is now—not to spell doom and gloom but to implement bold, swift changes that secure a safe and liveable environment for all. ■

Very high UV levels weaken immunity, and greatly endanger daily wage workers, street vendors and construction labour

### Chennai versus other cities

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Delhi UVI	5	6	9	10	10	10	12	12	9	8	5	5
Mumbai UVI	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	13	11	10	7	7
Ahmedabad UVI	7	8	10	12	11	12	13	13	11	10	7	6
Hyderabad UVI	10	11	12	11	13	13	15	14	13	11	8	8
Chennai	9	12	13	14	12	12	13	13	13	11	10	9
Bengaluru UVI	11	13	13	14	13	14	14	14	14	12	11	10



## उम्मीदों के पंख और हौसलों की उड़ान, हेमन्त सरकार दे रही नया आसमान

आवेदन शुरू  
16 अप्रैल 2026

अंतिम तिथि  
30 अप्रैल 2026

कमर्शियल पायलट लाइसेंस (CPL)  
ट्रेनिंग - सत्र 2026-27 में प्रवेश प्रारंभ



सोना सोबरन उड़ान अकादमी (झारखण्ड फ्लाइटिंग इंस्टीट्यूट)

भविष्य के युवा पायलटों से आवेदन आमंत्रित करता है

युवा अत्याधुनिक सुविधाओं और अनुभवी प्रशिक्षकों के साथ अपने करियर को नई उड़ान दे सकेंगे

### कोर्स की मुख्य बातें

- ▶ **कोर्स:** CPL (मल्टी इंजन रेटिंग एवं इंस्ट्रूमेंट रेटिंग के साथ)
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- ▶ **सुविधाएं:** आधुनिक सिम्युलेटर, ग्राउंड स्कूल और हॉस्टल सुविधा उपलब्ध

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NATIONAL ENGLISH WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

### NATION

#### DELIMITATION IT'S ONLY A REPRIEVE

The bill may have been withdrawn for now but the threat still lurks

► P3



### NATION

#### IT'S NOT SIMPLY 'ETHNIC VIOLENCE'

There is more to the endless cycle of violence in Manipur than meets the ordinary eye

► P4



### WORLD

#### CAN THE GULF STATES WEATHER THIS WAR?

The old order has crashed, the new still lost in the fog of war

► P6



### A.J. Prabal

It's a war in Bengal. Between Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, which has had an unbroken run of three terms or 15 years in the state, and the united might of the BJP, her Goliathesque primary adversary, and all the central agencies it can summon at the flick of a finger.

Even the Election Commission of India (ECI), the administrator and supposedly unquestionable arbiter of 'free and fair' elections in the country has outdone itself in Bengal, its exploits here going far beyond the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls that has sent citizen-voters scrambling all over the country and targeted communities fearing worse.

At the time of going to press, the first phase of polling was over in West Bengal and the second phase was due (on 29 April). Union home minister Amit Shah is camping in Kolkata, reportedly till campaigning for phase 2 comes to an end on 27 April. Playing the role of the BJP's key strategist and on-ground overseer, he is also waving his stick with characteristic panache. At one of the rallies before the phase 1 voting, he declared "the EC has deployed CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces). If Mamata Banerjee's goons try to disturb the poll process, I will ensure they are hanged upside down after 4 May."

The security bandobast is unprecedented. The CAPF deployment includes troops from the CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, SSB, NSG and Assam Rifles, which has put a spring in the stride of BJP workers, and by the same token curbed the exuberance of Trinamool workers. Even so, the TMC cadre have not quite lost their old spunk, as BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, out campaigning with personal security guards and armed paramilitary personnel in tow, found out. In a scene that will be remembered, Adhikari is seen glaring at a man and shouting, "Jai Shri Ram". The man glares back and bellows "Joy Bangla!"

Paramilitary forces started arriving in the state a month before polling. On 20 April, *The Telegraph* reported the deployment of 240,000 CAPF personnel (2,407 companies) for phase 1. To put the number in context, 288 companies were deployed in Manipur at the peak of ethnic violence in 2023.

Trinamool Congress MP and former journalist Sagarika Ghose wrote in *The Print*: "The BJP has descended on Bengal like an occupying force... hundreds of helicopters, thousands of cars with Z-plus security, workers bussed in from Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, hundreds of companies of central forces and

## It's Mamata versus the rest in West Bengal



armoured vehicles of the kind deployed in active conflict zones.'

Bullet-proof armoured vehicles commandeered from different parts of the country (including Kashmir) are rolling down the roads as a 'confidence-building measure'. Troops are marching to establish 'area domination'. The CPI(M)—which ruled West Bengal continuously for 34 years (1977–2011) but isn't in contention anymore, and eager to see the end of Mamata's 'reign of terror'—is not complaining. CPI(M) leader Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, contesting from the Jadavpur seat, welcomed the steps to restrain 'TMC goons'. "Those who couldn't vote earlier due to TMC intimidation will now do so fearlessly," he said. But Congress leader Pradip Bhattacharya questioned the need to instil fear among the people.

The ECI has been in overdrive ever since the election was notified and poll dates announced on 15 March. At 4 a.m. on 16 March, the state's seniormost officers—the chief secretary, home secretary, director

general of police, Kolkata police commissioner and ADG (Law and Order)—were removed in one stroke.

The purge continued, with as many as 483 state government officials removed from their posts and ordered to stay away from any kind of election duty. To contextualise again, the total number of officials transferred before polling in the other three poll-bound states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam) is 23.

Even replacement police inspectors have been handpicked by the ECI. "The ECI may have information that some officials are beholden to the ruling party and could influence the election, but how did it decide which officials would replace them? Who supplied the names?" asks a retired bureaucrat.

Mamata Banerjee herself has complained that the Returning Officer in her constituency was replaced by a state government employee from Nandigram (known to be close to Suwendu Adhikari), who refused her permission to hold a meeting in her own constituency!

The ECI has also directed that all civic

*There has been a flurry of never-before directives including a ban on house guests for two days before the election!*

volunteers and village police personnel—not government employees but poorly paid political appointees—be confined to police lines on polling day and not deployed on election duty. This is akin to RSS volunteers being asked to sit out the elections.

I-PAC, the firm working for the Trinamool Congress in the state, is possibly the first political consultancy to have been targeted during an election. Raids and notices from the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax Department intensified in March. Days before phase 1, three I-PAC directors were summoned by the ED to New Delhi and one of them was arrested, reportedly forcing the consultancy to ask employees to go on leave till 11 May.

The SIR has disenfranchised at least 27 lakh voters in West Bengal, a disproportionate number of them Muslims and women. The ECI has bypassed Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in the state and made use of special observers (4 in Uttar Pradesh but 30 in West Bengal), micro-observers (zero in the rest of the country, 8,000 in West Bengal), 600 retired and serving judicial officers (not deployed in any other state). The ECI also came up with software to detect 'logical discrepancies' (not found anywhere else!), without disclosing the identity of the company contracted and the basis for engaging them.

The 19 appellate tribunals, set up on the instruction of the Supreme Court to hear appeals of voters 'under adjudication', had heard only 138 appeals by 21 April and restored the names of 136.

A 'Straight Talk to TMC' tweet from the ECI singled out the party for allegedly vitiating past elections with violence, booth jamming, intimidation and inducement. A Returning Officer in Kolkata posted an equally offensive tweet asking people to keep Burnol and Boroline (popular ointments for burns and bruises) handy on counting day. No prizes for guessing who was being addressed.

There has been a flurry of never-before directives issued by the chief electoral officer, West Bengal. For instance, a week-long ban on the sale of liquor throughout the state, instead of the usual 48 hours before polling ends. There is even a directive banning house guests for two days before the election!

Most curiously, days before the first phase of polling on 23 April, the ECI announced it had added seven lakh new voters. At a time when 27 lakh voters are running from pillar to post to get their names restored to the voter rolls, where did these new voters come from? ■

*With inputs from Kunal Chatterjee, Gautam Bhattacharya and Sourabh Sen*

## 'Delimitation must move beyond numbers'

As opposition parties across India raise alarm over the BJP's bid to enforce a population-based delimitation at the national level, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, which can see the writing on the wall, is up in arms. Chief minister M.K. Stalin even burnt a copy of the proposed bill in Namakkal and hoisted a black flag in rejection of a 'black law'. The party argues that a delimitation exercise that is driven solely by population risks altering the democratic balance and weakening India's federal structure. Salem Dharanidharan, national spokesperson of the DMK, tells K.A. Shaji why delimitation must move beyond numbers and reflect both demographic realities and governance outcomes.



#### What is the DMK's proposed solution to the delimitation question?

The DMK's position is anchored in constitutional precedent and political prudence. It argues that the current framework should continue for at least the next 25 years, much like earlier freezes that protected states that implemented national priorities such as population control. This continuity is necessary to prevent sudden distortions in representation and to preserve federal balance.

At the same time, the party calls for evolving a consensus-driven formula rather than imposing unilateral redistribution. Population alone cannot be the determining factor because it ignores decades of policy choices that shaped demographic outcomes differently across states. Tamil Nadu's sustained investments in public health and education brought down fertility rates significantly, while other states followed different paths. A purely population-based model would reward uneven growth and penalise governance success, which the DMK considers fundamentally unjust.

#### Should development indicators be considered alongside population?

The DMK believes this is central to any fair framework. Tamil Nadu ranks among the leading states in literacy, healthcare outcomes and social welfare delivery, with lower infant mortality and higher life expectancy than the national average. It is also one of the largest contributors to the Union's tax revenues, supported by a diversified and industrialised economy. Reducing representation to population alone turns democracy into a mechanical exercise. The DMK argues that human development indicators, fiscal

contribution and governance efficiency must be factored in alongside demographic data. Without such balance, the system risks incentivising poor governance combined with higher population growth. Representation, in its view, must reflect both people and performance.

#### Is increasing the number of parliamentary seats a viable solution?

The DMK does not dismiss this possibility but insists it requires careful deliberation. India's population has more than doubled since 1971 [in fact, 2.7x, from ~55 crore to an estimated 148 crore – Ed] while the number of parliamentary seats has remained unchanged, making expansion a logical consideration. However, such a move cannot be treated as a simple technical adjustment because it has significant implications for federal balance and political representation.

The party argues that any expansion must follow detailed discussions involving experts, political parties and states. It also stresses that representation should be strengthened across all tiers, including state assemblies, panchayats and urban local bodies.

Strengthening these institutions is essential to deepen democracy at the grassroots. Only after reinforcing these layers should Parliament expansion be considered as part of a broader reform.

#### How can India reconcile a constitutional mandate with federal trust?

The Constitution provides both a framework and flexibility, as demonstrated by past decisions to freeze delimitation in the national interest. Reconciling mandate with trust requires a consultative process involving

states, political parties and independent experts. Without such engagement, delimitation will be seen as an imposed exercise that favours certain regions. Trust in federal institutions depends on transparency and inclusiveness. The DMK emphasises that democracy is not only about procedure but also about fairness. Any process that undermines this balance risks weakening the Union itself. Consultation and consensus are, therefore, essential.

#### Why has this issue resonated so strongly in Tamil Nadu?

The issue resonates because people understand the implications in concrete terms. Tamil Nadu invested heavily in public health, education and social welfare, achieving stabilised population growth and improved quality of life. There is now a widespread perception that this success could translate into reduced political representation. This creates a strong sense of injustice that goes beyond policy debate. The issue is seen as one of dignity and fairness. It is also linked to a broader sentiment that southern states are not adequately recognised for their contributions. This explains the depth and intensity of the response.

#### What is fundamentally at stake for southern states?

At stake is the balance of Indian democracy. If representation is determined purely by population, political power could become concentrated in a few regions, weakening the federal structure. This would also reshape national policy priorities in ways that may not reflect the diversity of the country.

► Continued on page 2

# And quiet flows the river in Ramban

A son murdered by cow vigilantes. A father who waits from dawn to dusk. **Haron Reshi** reports

Search operations by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and local volunteers to recover the body of Tanveer Ahmad Chopan from a fast-flowing tributary of the Chenab in Ramban have, as of 24 April, yielded no results.

Eighteen-year-old Tanveer went missing on 12 April after jumping into the turbulent Bishlari nallah in a desperate attempt to escape an attack by a group of *gau rakshaks* (cow vigilantes). That afternoon, he was driving home from Jammu along the Jammu-Srinagar highway in a mini-truck carrying a cow and two calves. He was not smuggling cattle; he was transporting milk-yielding animals to his home in Mundkhal village in Ramban's Pogal area, where cattle rearing has sustained generations.

Reports indicate that he had legally purchased the animals in Jammu for dairy farming at his native place, where it is a key livelihood for the Muslim Gujjar and Bakarwal communities that that Tanveer belongs to.

Eyewitnesses substantiated that Tanveer's attackers, who were travelling in two vehicles, intercepted him, dragged him out and began assaulting him. Terrified and cornered near Magarkote, he ran towards the river and jumped in. He has not been seen since.

Every day, personnel from multiple agencies are deployed to search for Tanveer's body. Locals gather on the riverbanks, grieve and leave; rescue teams rotate shifts. But one person remains rooted to the spot—Tanveer's father, Abdul Salam Chopan, a special police officer.

"Had this been an accident, perhaps I could have found some fortitude. But my son was



The search continues for 18-year-old Tanveer, who chose to leap into the raging river to escape his attackers

murdered. He was chased, assaulted and beaten so brutally that he chose to leap into the raging river rather than fall into the hands of his attackers," he told *National Herald* over the phone, his voice heavy with anguish.

"Since that day, I feel broken. I arrive here at dawn and leave late at night with nothing but disappointment. At home, my wife and four daughters have not stopped crying for the past two weeks. Every hour, they call me, asking the same question—has he been found?"

Speaking to *National Herald*, Arun Gupta, senior superintendent of police said, "The search is still underway. The strong current, along with deep pits and hidden cavities in the stream, is making

the operation difficult, but efforts to locate the body continue."

The incident has triggered widespread outrage across Jammu and Kashmir. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described it as "nothing short of murder" and warned that "jungle raj will not be tolerated".

Soon after the incident, protests broke out. Demonstrators blocked the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44), bringing traffic to a halt and prompting authorities to respond.

Police have registered an FIR and arrested four accused—Digvijay Singh, Kewal Singh, Surjeet Singh and Sandeep Singh, all residents of Ramban district. They remain in custody. A special investigation team (SIT), led by the sub-divisional police officer of

Banihal, has been constituted to probe the case.

Officials, however, have remained cagey about sharing details. SSP Gupta told *National Herald*, "I do not consider it appropriate to reveal details of the investigation at this stage; however, I would like to make it clear that the investigation is ongoing and that relevant evidence has been duly collected."

Hadn't Tanveer obtained permission to transport the cattle from Jammu to Ramban, as reports suggested? In answer, the SSP said, "The matter is still under investigation. We are currently verifying it with the competent authority, the district magistrate of Jammu, and their response is awaited."

Cow vigilantism is not new to the Jammu region. The area has witnessed a steady escalation of such attacks over the past decade. In April 2017, a group of alleged vigilantes assaulted a Muslim family—including an elderly man and a nine-year-old girl—over suspicions of cattle smuggling in Reasi. Two years later, vigilantes shot dead 50-year-old Nayeem Ahmad Shah and injured another person in Baderwah while they were transporting bulls bought for farm use. In 2021, a 24-year-old man was reportedly beaten to death in Thanamandi, Rajouri, while returning home with a buffalo.

Advocate Fairuz Khan, former national president of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), is among those seeking justice for Tanveer's family. He alleges that cow vigilantes enjoy political patronage in Ramban and adjoining areas. Speaking to *National Herald*,

he said, "Cow vigilantism has been going on here for several years. There have been continuous complaints against these groups operating along the national highway. All four accused are known repeat offenders. They are not acting alone—they are being supported, shielded, financed and encouraged."

Khan added, "Surjeet Singh, the prime accused arrested by the police is the district president of the Yuva Rajput Sabha. One of the vehicles used by the attackers belonged to a construction company currently building a tunnel in the area. We demand that all those involved be arrested and brought to justice."

He further claimed, "After this incident, we obtained videos showing these individuals unleashing terror at various places—beating nomadic people and even stripping them before assaulting them. We have shown these videos to the deputy commissioner and the SSP."

Khan also alleged attempts to suppress public discussion. "The administration has issued clear instructions not to speak about this issue, particularly on social media. People who protest are being called in and restricted. I myself was detained on the spot premises while on my way to join a peaceful rally to the deputy commissioner's office for the victim's family. There appears to be an effort to suppress the situation and cool things down," he said.

For the family, the continued search for Tanveer's body holds out little hope. For many, this is no longer just about one young man's death, but about confronting a pattern of violence that has gone unchecked for years. ■

*Cow vigilantism is not new to Jammu. The accused are repeat offenders, who are being supported, shielded and financed*

## 'Delimitation must move beyond numbers'

► Continued from page 1

Southern states contribute significantly to economic output and governance standards, yet their political voice could diminish. This creates a mismatch between contribution and representation. The DMK sees this as a structural issue with long-term consequences for India's unity.

### What is the DMK's biggest concern about the current approach?

The concern goes beyond methodology to questions of intent and outcome. There is a perception that delimitation could be shaped to consolidate political advantage and reduce space for opposition. Such a shift risks deepening regional imbalances and altering electoral dynamics across the country. There is also anxiety that regions with strong alternative political traditions may be weakened. This would influence not just representation but the nature of democratic competition. Without transparency and safeguards, these concerns become serious.

### How does the DMK respond to the argument that representation must reflect population?

The DMK accepts that population is an important factor but rejects it as the sole basis. India is a Union of states, not a unitary system governed only by numbers. A purely population-based model ignores differences in governance, development and policy choices. It risks concentrating power in regions with higher demographic growth while marginalising others. It also overlooks the role of public policy in shaping population trends. Representation must, therefore, balance demographic realities with development and federal equity.

### Why does the DMK say Tamil Nadu is being penalised for success?

Tamil Nadu achieved significant reductions in fertility through sustained investments in healthcare, education and welfare. As a result, its

population stabilised earlier than in many other states. If seats are redistributed purely on current population, states with higher growth rate more representation while Tamil Nadu's share declines. This effectively penalises states that implemented national priorities responsibly.

### Could this become a constitutional crisis?

Political issue, it remains a political issue that can still be addressed within the constitutional framework. The Constitution allows flexibility, as seen in earlier freezes on delimitation. This provides space for dialogue, negotiation and consensus-building. If the process is pushed through



without addressing concerns, it could strain Centre-state relations, which could escalate into a constitutional crisis.

### Is delimitation likely to become a long-term political faultline?

There is a strong possibility if handled without care. Questions of representation and federal balance have historically shaped Indian politics, and delimitation brings both into sharp focus. It also intersects with issues of regional equity, governance and democratic fairness. But it also presents an opportunity to strengthen federalism if approached with consensus. ■

## The price of looking inward

As the Iran war disrupts Indian livelihoods, strategic hesitation raises difficult questions

Aakar Patel

What explains our inability—or, if we are to be charitable, our reticence—to influence the world around us? Like the rest of the world, India is negatively affected by the American-Israeli war on Iran. Indeed, Indians have suffered, and are suffering, more than any other nationality except Iranians themselves.

The reason is straightforward. There are roughly one crore Indians living in the Gulf—a population larger than the combined citizenry of five of the six Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC). The lives and livelihoods of these Indians are at risk from the violence. Uncertainty hangs over them and this is especially hard for those who are not well-off, which is by far the majority. Namely, those members of the Indian expatriate working class in the Gulf who are employed in services, construction and industry.

The long-term economic direction of the GCC states has been thrown into question by this war, and the future of these millions of Indians are closely tied to that outcome. This is why India is more deeply affected by the conflict than most other nations, in addition to sharing global concerns relating to fuel and gas supplies.

This brings us to the central question: why this inaction—or unwillingness—to influence, or even attempt to influence, the actions of the principal parties to the conflict, the United States and Israel?

Beyond stating that shipping should be allowed to resume, our government has not meaningfully engaged with the problem. Why is shipping halted? There has been no explanation. How can it be resumed? There has been little clarity on that either—merely the plea, demand or request (it is unclear which, since the words are empty) that shipping be allowed to resume.

It should be noted that India appears, by default, to have aligned itself with the position of the former colonial powers of Europe, by seeking no part in the war, making no reference to its perpetrators and simply wanting commercial flows to continue uninterrupted.

Let us try to answer the question. It is possible—perhaps



Shopkeepers wait in vain for customers at the Indian souk in Deira, Dubai

even likely—that there is no single explanation, but rather a set of factors that have made silence appear more appealing than action. Let us consider them in turn.

There is a noticeable incoherence in Indian foreign policy, and this extends to questions of national security. A basic example is our uncertainty about China: is it a friend or an adversary? Should engagement be deepened or reduced? The absence of a clear doctrine has contributed to this lack of coherence. Much of our foreign policy appears directed at domestic audiences and, once the claims of being a global leader war—embarrassment makes us look away.

Having effectively abandoned the idea of national interest as a guiding principle, we have become overly reliant on personal diplomacy, often linked to personal equations. We appear to have assumed that personal rapport was a solid foundation for foreign policy.

Unsurprisingly, this approach has resulted in either disappointment or instrumentalisation: we have been let down by Trump and used by Netanyahu, both of whom operate from far more hard-headed perspectives. It is these very 'friends' whose actions have contributed to the hardship faced by Indians, yet we appear unwilling even to ask them to reconsider.

Another factor may be

discomfort with diplomatic initiatives undertaken by actors we instinctively distrust. It appears, at times, as though we would rather endure the consequences of the war than see it resolved through the efforts of those we dislike.

This attitude is not only petty and mean-spirited, it is also strategically self-defeating—particularly when it comes from those who regularly invoke platitudes about the world being one big family.

There may also be a deeper reason, captured in the folk saying: *mulla ki daut masjid tak*. The phrase is often interpreted to mean that a person only goes as far as their knowledge, resources or interests allow—that one's actions repeatedly circle back to the same familiar ground.

*There's a marked incoherence in India's foreign policy, extending to questions of national security*

'New India' is defined by a sharp inward-looking nationalism. One only needs to read the newspapers or watch television to recognise this dominant refrain. Minorities are blamed for the past, liberals are portrayed as obstacles to the present path toward a promised future, and the emphasis remains on settling internal scores before engaging meaningfully with the world beyond our borders.

So long as this inward focus remains the primary political project, external developments will continue to be treated as distractions—matters that will somehow resolve themselves if ignored. That appears to be the prevailing mindset today.

At a press conference on 19 April, the spokesperson of the Ministry of external affairs was asked: "Trump is praising Asim Munir and may travel to Pakistan. How does India see Pakistan's ceasefire rule? Will India be okay with it if Trump comes to India and Pakistan on one trip?"

The very focus of the question reveals much about the concerns of our media and political class. The spokesperson replied: "I have a simple answer. India is closely following developments in West Asia."

Rarely has the word 'following' been used so aptly—or so revealingly. ■

Views are personal

DELIMITATION

# It's a reprieve, not a resolution

The bill may have been withdrawn for now but the storm has not blown over. Herjinder lays it out

The immediate crisis triggered by the delimitation proposals tabled in Parliament last week may have been averted, but only just. The defeat of the 131st Constitution Amendment Bill—and the consequent lapse of accompanying legislation—has offered a temporary reprieve. It would be a mistake, however, to read this as closure. The controversy around delimitation has not ended; it has merely been deferred. Beneath the surface, a far more consequential political storm is gathering strength.

To understand the stakes, one must revisit the last major intervention on delimitation. In 2001, through a constitutional amendment to Article 81, the Union extended the freeze on the inter-state distribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the 1971 Census. This freeze—set for 25 years—was not an arbitrary decision. It was a carefully negotiated political compact aimed at preserving federal balance.

The logic was straightforward. States that had successfully implemented population control policies—primarily in southern India—feared that a fresh delimitation based purely on population would penalise them. States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had stabilised their population growth, invested in human development and achieved better socioeconomic outcomes. In contrast, states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continued to witness higher population growth. A population-based redistribution of seats would therefore tilt parliamentary representation in favour of the latter.

The 2001 freeze, in effect, allowed delimitation within states—adjusting constituency boundaries internally—without altering the inter-state allocation of seats. It was a political compromise, underwritten by a broad consensus across parties and regions, acknowledging that democratic fairness must also account for developmental equity.

The now-defeated 131st Amendment Bill sought to move away from this long-standing safeguard. Even as the government publicly reassured southern states that their political weight would not diminish—with phrases like 'guarantee' liberally invoked—the legislative intent appeared to suggest otherwise. The proposed changes signalled a



Photo: Getty Images



Photo: IANS

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks during the debate on the now-defeated 131st Constitution Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha; (left) INDIA bloc all-party meeting a day before the vote

departure from the protective framework embedded in Article 81.

This contradiction between political assurances and legislative design did not go unnoticed. It contributed significantly to the resistance that ultimately stalled the bill. Yet, the larger issue remains unresolved—and is, in fact, approaching a statutory deadline.

The freeze imposed in 2001 is set to expire in 2026. Once it lapses, the constitutional position reverts to a population-based allocation of seats, drawing on the latest Census figures, currently underway. As former Lok Sabha secretary general P.D.T. Achary has pointed out, unless the freeze is explicitly extended through legislation, its expiry is automatic.

The implications are profound. A fresh delimitation based on current population data would almost certainly result in a substantial increase in parliamentary seats for high-growth northern states, while reducing the relative share of southern states. This is not a technical adjustment but a politically charged redrawing of India's democratic map.

Equally significant is the procedural aspect. Extending the freeze would require a constitutional amendment, necessitating a two-thirds majority in Parliament. However, if the government allows the freeze to lapse and proceeds with delimitation thereafter, the process could be initiated through a simple majority by passing a standard delimitation law. The political threshold, in other words, becomes much lower.

This raises a critical question: will the Centre choose the path of consensus or the path of expediency?

There are indications that sustained pressure from southern states—including allies within the ruling coalition such as the Telugu Desam Party—could compel the government to introduce a fresh amendment to extend the freeze. That would be the most straightforward way to preserve the existing balance. But even such a move would only address one layer of the problem.

The deeper concern lies in how delimitation itself is conducted.

Recent exercises in states like Assam

and Jammu & Kashmir have raised troubling questions about the integrity of the process. Delimitation, ideally, is meant to be a neutral, technocratic exercise—guided by principles such as geographical continuity, administrative coherence and equal representation. In practice, however, there is growing evidence that these principles are being subordinated to political considerations.

Take the case of Assam. During the recent redrawing of assembly constituencies, even basic geographical features—rivers, hills and natural boundaries—were reportedly disregarded. Constituencies appeared fragmented and irregular, with little regard for spatial coherence. Areas with significant minority populations were, in some instances, reclassified in ways that altered their electoral character.

One striking example is the Karimganj parliamentary constituency, within which several assembly segments were configured in highly unusual ways. Parts of the Algapur-Katlicherra constituency exist as disconnected 'islands' within another constituency, lacking physical contiguity. Such configurations defy the basic principle that constituencies should be compact and continuous.

As veteran political leader Chatar Singh, who was associated with earlier delimitation exercises, has emphasised: continuity, coherence and compactness are not optional, they are foundational norms. Their violation raises legitimate concerns about intent.

The distortions observed in Assam—

and, to some extent, in Jammu & Kashmir—go beyond the classic definition of gerrymandering. The term itself dates back to 1812, when Elbridge Gerry, then governor of Massachusetts, approved an electoral district so contorted in shape that it was likened to a salamander. The portmanteau 'gerrymandering' has since come to describe the manipulation of electoral boundaries to favour a particular political outcome.

Traditionally, gerrymandering operates through two techniques: 'packing', which concentrates opposition voters into a few districts, and 'cracking', which disperses them across many. What we are witnessing in some recent Indian exercises appears to be a more aggressive variant—one that combines geographic distortion with demographic recalibration.

If such practices are replicated at the national level during the next delimitation, the consequences could be far-reaching.

This is why the current lull should not be mistaken for resolution. The failure of the 131st Amendment Bill has merely postponed a confrontation that is structurally embedded in the constitutional timeline.

India stands at a crossroads. One path leads towards a renewed federal compact—where concerns of equity, representation and regional balance are addressed through consensus. The other leads towards a unilateral reshaping of the political landscape, driven by arithmetic rather than accommodation.

The storm has not passed. It is only gathering force. ■

*If delimitation is based on population data alone, the northern states will gain at the expense of southern states*

# Manu's heirs can't be champions of women

Gurdeep Singh Sappal on women's empowerment as electoral theatre

India has a new champion of women. He is loud about it. He wants you to believe it. And he is counting on you to forget everything that came before.

Don't.

This self-styled champion presides over a party with among the lowest percentage representations of women in Parliament. His time in the prime minister's office will be remembered for its weaponisation of misogyny. Prime Minister Modi talks of 'Nari Shakti' and 'Nari Vandan' and stays mum when convicted rapists are garlanded on their release from prison, when our champion women wrestlers are dragged through the streets for demanding an investigation of their allegations of sexual harassment by a party strongman.

The pattern is not incidental. It flows from an intellectual tradition that has never treated women as political equals. Savarkar, whose portrait hangs in Parliament's Central Hall, did not merely neglect women's rights. In *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, he criticised Shivaji for treating captured Muslim women with chivalry and pointedly asked if Hindu kings should have done otherwise. This is documented, acknowledged by RSS-affiliated publications, and foundational to understanding the arguments that follow.

The ideology sees women's bodies as the battleground of communal honour. From the targeted abuse of Muslim women on online platforms like 'Sulli Deals' and 'Bulli Bai' to the vicious trolling and targeting of Lenskart's Hindu owner for his company's allegedly anti-Hindu grooming guidelines is a coherent continuum.

A regressive world for women is coded in the DNA of this ideology, which no amount of outward championing of their empowerment can really conceal.

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To understand the depth of this duplicity, one must recall the time India's democratic conscience was forged—during the freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress. At a time when Britain, the United States and France had not yet granted women the right to vote, the Congress was not merely including women in its ranks, it was elevating them to its highest offices.



Where's the 'Nari Vandan' in garlands for rapists and violence for champions?



Photo: Getty Images

The Congress made Annie Besant its president in 1917, Sarojini Naidu in 1925, Nellie Sengupta in 1933—three women

This photo should be changed leading the national movement, before Independence, before the republic and its Constitution had come into existence. This was not tokenism but the natural expression of a movement whose foundational documents treated women's rights as non-negotiable.

The (Motilal) Nehru Report of 1928, which represented the first Indian

constitutional blueprint drafted by Indians, explicitly proposed equal rights for women, including universal adult franchise without distinction on the basis of sex.

The Karachi Resolution of 1931, drafted under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and proposed by Nehru, listed fundamental rights that included equality of gender and freedom of conscience and profession. These were not mere words; they were the architecture of a republic not yet born.

Mahatma Gandhi, whose civilisational philosophy the BJP claims to inherit (while systematically dismantling everything he stood for), wrote and spoke with extraordinary clarity on women's autonomy. He wrote that if non-cooperation was to succeed, women must become equal partners. He famously declared that the awakening of women would be the most significant sign of the awakening of India. In *The Discovery of India*, part history, part memoir, part political manifesto that Jawaharlal Nehru wrote during his incarceration in Ahmednagar Fort between 1942 and 1945, he argues that the status of women is the measure of the civilisation of a people.

When the Objectives Resolution was moved in the Constituent Assembly on 13 December 1946, Nehru's vision of a sovereign, independent republic guaranteed 'justice, social, economic and political' and

'equality of status and opportunity' was understood by every member of the Assembly to encompass women without qualification.

### The silence of the Sangh

The RSS was founded in 1925. For the next 25 years, through the entire drafting of the Constitution, it produced not a single substantive statement on women's rights, women's education or women's political participation. Not one.

Women's emancipation was never on their agenda. In the Sangh worldview, women were keepers of the domestic hearth and bearers of Hindu civilisational continuity, not active partners in lawmaking or administering justice.

When the Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949, a document that guaranteed every Indian woman an equal stake in the republic, the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* responded with contempt. In its editorial of 30 November 1949, it complained that the new Constitution had 'no mention of the unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat' and extolled the *Manusmriti*, whose injunctions on women include the doctrine that a woman must never be allowed to assert herself independently, that she must be guarded by her father in childhood, her husband in youth and her son in old age.

The RSS did not stop at editorials. When the Hindu Code Bill, seeking equal inheritance and divorce rights for Hindu women, came to Parliament, RSS workers burnt effigies of Nehru and Ambedkar, and called the bill an 'atom bomb on Hindu society'. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, founder of the BJP's progenitor, the Jan Sangh, said the bill would 'shatter the magnificent structure of Hindu culture'. For the Sangh, equal rights for women was destruction of culture.

That inglorious tradition is not history. In January 2013, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat declared that marriage is a contract, and if a wife fails to look after the home, her husband may disown her. This was not a slip of the tongue, it was dogma articulated by the ruling party's ideological supremo.

The Women's Reservation Bill, when it finally came under BJP stewardship, was designed to indefinitely defer implementation. In the 2024 Lok Sabha, the BJP had the lowest proportion of women MPs among all major parties. That arithmetic tells its own story.

### Borrowing the shell sans the soul

In any case, women's reservation is not only about seats in Parliament. It is about whether a woman's voice carries weight in the republic. The BJP did not discover women's rights. It borrowed the cause, the language, the symbolism, the legislative frame from a democratic tradition it spent decades opposing.

India's democratic tradition did not discover women's rights in an election year. It was built on the shoulders of women who marched, argued, legislated and led—Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, Ammu Swaminathan, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai Deshmukh, Aruna Asaf Ali, Jhaya Lakshmi Pandit, women who shaped the Indian republic.

The BJP and the RSS carry a different inheritance. They cannot point to a single woman as a leader in the freedom struggle. They can't because they weren't in it.

The record is public, the ideology is documented and the numbers do not lie. Manu's heirs can't be champions of women. ■

GURDEEP SINGH SAPPAL is a Permanent Invitee to the Congress Working Committee

# It's not simply 'ethnic violence'

**Nandita Haksar** explains the persistence of violence in the northeastern state of Manipur

The violence in Manipur is escalating at an alarming rate. People are being killed, including children. Bomb attacks, firing and buffer zones with armed men guarding their communities. The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that violence in Manipur accounted for 97 per cent of displacements in South Asia in 2023.

Three years on, we are witnessing the spectre of more killings, more clashes and more displacements within the state.

On 18 April, a convoy of Nagas was travelling along the Imphal-Ukhrul road under escort. The escort had been provided after earlier attacks on Nagas in Ukhrul district. Shortly after the escort left, the convoy was attacked by Kuki militants; two Nagas died.

In its statement, the Tangkhul Naga Long, the apex body of the Tangkhul Naga tribe, described the incident as a "brutal and inhuman attack", alleging that militants used long-range weapons and opened fire on multiple vehicles carrying women, children and sick persons just after the security personnel withdrew.

Civil society organisations in Tangkhul questioned the effectiveness of current security arrangements along the NH-202, stating that repeated attacks on civilians have eroded public confidence. They also pointed out that the incident occurred shortly after Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh visited Ukhrul and gave assurances that highway security would



Naga society groups hold a candlelight vigil in Kohima after the Ukhrul incident in which two people died

improve. The Voice of Naga Youth has written to the prime minister demanding an enquiry into the alleged lack of neutrality of central security forces in Ukhrul and Kamjong districts.

Is this just another clash between two communities? In a way it is, but to look at these incidents simply as communal clashes between two communities is to miss the larger context in which violence continues unabated in Manipur.

One of the major local factors for the escalation of violence is the number of weapons still in the hands of militants, insurgents and vigilante groups. In 2023, there were reports of arms being looted from state armouries and police stations in the early months of the conflict.

While there were attempts to recover the arms, it was only when the state was under Myanmar's Rule that a large number of these were recovered. These included

looted weapons and weapons smuggled from across borders besides the long-standing stash of illegal arms in the state. This explains why counts of recovered weapons exceed the counts of looted weapons in later reports.

Media reports do not reflect the full extent of weapons available in Manipur with insurgent groups, village defence groups, community militia, armed volunteers, criminal groups and private individuals. Analysts highlight the availability of weapons looted from police armouries and the emergence of armed vigilante outfits (like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun) as security threats in and of themselves.

An inflow of weapons has been reported from Myanmar, where the Myanmar military (now a civilian government) is engaged in a bitter war with various armed ethnic groups in India.

The National Investigative Agency

(NIA) recently arrested seven foreigners allegedly going to Myanmar to train the ethnic armed groups in drone warfare. The foreigners included six Ukrainians and one American. Not much is known about the Ukrainians but the American, VanDyke, has an interesting background.

According to Matthew VanDyke's personal website, he participated in the Iraq War and Libya's civil war. He is the founder of Washington-based consulting firm Sons of Liberty International, whose website says it 'provides free security consulting and training services to vulnerable populations to enable them to defend themselves against terrorist and insurgent groups'. The company also ran operations in Ukraine between 2022 and 2023, when it provided training and advice to Ukraine's military in using non-lethal equipment.

There are credible reports that China has interests in northeast India. For instance, analysis by the Daniel K. Inouye

Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies indicates that India fears China is using instability around Myanmar and Manipur to weaken India's influence in the northeast and deepen its foothold in Myanmar. There are even reports that China is supplying arms to insurgent groups and providing refuge to some of the insurgents.

Manipur has no political leader who is respected by all communities. In the absence of an alternative politics, the communities are captives of their narrow identities and trapped in a deadly cycle of identity politics. This also means that they depend on their own armed groups to defend them in case of attacks and feel increasingly alienated from the state and its security forces.

There is no space for real discussion of the situation in Manipur because anyone seen as critical will be intimidated into

*Media reports do not reflect the full extent of weapons available with insurgent groups, village defence groups, community militia and private individuals*

silence. Armed groups can even turn on their own people if they perceive someone as a traitor who dares criticise his or her own community.

Complicating the already intelligence situation is the presence of intelligence agencies and vested interests, both foreign and Indian. The Indian State has enough and more information from its intelligence agencies on both internal and external security threats. Why, then, is it not addressing the deep-rooted problems that have festered for so long? External actors can take advantage of Manipur's fault lines.

We need to inform ourselves of the complex situation and then act, not in the interest of one community or another but for Manipur and for India. ■

**NANDITA HAKSAR** is a human rights advocate and an author, most recently of *Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent*

*The easy availability of weapons looted from police armouries and the emergence of armed vigilante outfits are security threats in and of themselves*

# The irreversible course of damage

The Ken-Betwa river-linking project is being pushed through with no apparent concern for the environment or the people it will displace

**Rashme Sehgal**

Imagine receiving Rs 16 as compensation for your home. That's the amount offered to a tribal family as part of the rehabilitation package for the Rs 45,000 crore Ken-Betwa project. Another family was given the princely sum of Rs 200.

The foundation stone for the controversial interlinking of the two rivers in drought-prone Bundelkhand was laid on 25 December 2024 amidst a big publicity drive. It involves building the Daudhan dam to store water and a 221 km long canal to transfer water from the Ken to the Betwa.

While the government promised compensation of Rs 12.5 lakh per acre and Rs 6 lakh for a house, a large number of families have been offered tuppence or nothing at all. In despair, people from the 40 villages that will be submerged by the dam's reservoir staged a week-long protest (April 5-16) in Dhodhan village.

Their 'Panch Tatva Satyagraha' began

with a symbolic protest of lying down on funeral pyres ('chita'). Their fast or 'Akash Andolan' was followed by a 'Mitti Andolan' where they smeared soil from their village on their bodies. It culminated with the 'Jal Andolan' when they entered the water, wearing nooses around their necks—demanding justice or death.

On 16 April, a joint team of the Chhatrapur district administration reached the protest site to hold talks with the villagers who agreed to defer the protests until a new compensation package was announced.

Amit Bhatnagar, a former AAP member who is leading them under the banner of the Jai Kisan Sangathan, maintains that "sarkari assurances carry little weight with the villagers. Sixty thousand families, in one of the poorest regions in the country, are being affected by this river-linking project."

No wonder the protest songs that sound in these villages speak of how the Ken-Betwa dam will provide water and

electricity to distant villages while they will be evicted and denied even these basic facilities.

Most of them belong to the indigenous Gond and Kol tribes, who live along the edge of forests and depend on farming for a living. "Our livelihoods are tied to this land—we don't know what the future holds for us anymore," said Phoolwati, a tribal woman who is among the thousands protesting against the project.

According to information supplied by the Ken Betwa Link Project Authority, the 77 metre high Daudhan dam will displace 5,288 families in Chhatrapur district and 1,400 families in Panna district due to land submergence and dam-related land acquisition.

The dam will not only bifurcate the Panna Tiger Reserve, it will also submerge 5,578 hectares of forest land. The project will submerge nearly 98 sq. km (38 sq. miles) of the 543 sq. km sanctuary that successfully brought tigers back from the

brink of local extinction in 2009.

This could undo years of conservation efforts. Wildlife scientist Dr Raghu Chindawat has been living in Panna from 1995. He points out, "With 70 per cent of the tiger reserve habitat submerged, it will mean the end of the Panna Tiger Reserve and also of the 55-plus tigers and other animals living in it. Using the core area of a tiger reserve park for such a large-scale infrastructure project is unprecedented. If we go ahead, it will be a complete mockery of our institutions and our laws, our Forest Conservation Act, our Wildlife Biodiversity Act."

Eminent conservationist M.K. Ranjitsinh, who has been involved in shaping wildlife conservation policies for the last five decades, opposed this project tooth-and-nail. He resigned from the Madhya Pradesh Wildlife Board in 2015, saying, "You can have either the interlinking project or the Panna Tiger Reserve. You cannot have both."

Ranjitsinh, who helped notify nine new national parks and 14 new sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, is a disenfranchised man. "All our protected areas are going to suffer and the most unfortunate aspect is most of these development projects do not even deliver [what they promise]."

From the start, environmentalists have questioned the modus operandi of the ministry of environment and forests. The Mumbai-based company contracted by the ministry to conduct the Environment Impact Assessment for this project was not on its approved list of agencies and had little knowledge of the ecology of the region.

The assessment report incorrectly stated that there were sal forests in the reserve, and declared that it was home to the Manipur brown antler deer (which are found only on the India-Burma border).

Aquatic ecology experts also question the statistics provided by the National Development Water Agency. Dr Brij Gopal of the Centre for Inland Waters in South Asia refutes the National Water Development Agency's claim that the Ken river has an extra 1,074 million cubic of water to share. Gopal says the NWDA relied more on modelling than on-ground observations. If the Panna river did have

struggles water, why were the villagers struggling to find drinking water in summer? Meanwhile, sand mining in the Ken has made a bad water situation worse.

Gopal has suggested reviving the one lakh traditional water bodies in Bundelkhand which would yield more water storage and avoid massive displacement—at a fraction of the present cost.

The most shocking aspect of this project is that water flow calculations are based on data that is 30-40 years old. Chindawat said, "The government has refused to put the data in the public domain, insisting it's a security risk. As both rivers flow into the Ganges which enters Bangladesh, they claim it is 'international flow data' and cannot be revealed."

The government also chose to ignore the adverse report of the central empowered committee of the Supreme Court. Water experts, including Magsaysay awardee Rajendra Singh, have been vehemently critical. "Each river has its own biological character, different flora and fauna. By interlinking river basins, their unique aquatic life will be destroyed," said Singh.

Ranjitsinh believes our present sanctuaries and tiger reserves are the "last havens of hope" for the survival of our natural heritage. "Why should Panna and Kaziranga be less sacrosanct than the Taj Mahal and Ajanta-Ellora?" he asks. "We have tiny havens left—only four per cent of India's landmass. This is a Rubicon that should not have been crossed."

Regardless of criticism, the ministry of water ('jal shakti', if you please) is carrying on, drawing up plans to connect 37 more rivers including the Godavari and Cauvery.

Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala and Sikkim are among the states that have expressed reservations. From the start, Kerala has taken the stand that long-distance inter-basin water transfer will not work. Bihar's rivers originate in Nepal, so diverting them would require the permission of a neighbouring nation.

As the first of a series of projects, the stakes are very high for the government and the powerful construction lobby. Who cares if the damages are irreversible? ■



The proposed Daudhan dam under the Ken-Betwa river linking project

*60,000 families in one of the poorest regions of the country will be affected by the Ken-Betwa river-linking project*

# Shepherd, Lawyer, Chief Minister: The Man Who Served Karnataka Longer Than Anyone Else

## 3 YEARS, 2 TERMS, 1 RECORD: SIDDARAMAIAH AT 2,933 DAYS

Image: IANS

*At the heart of Siddaramaiah's political identity is the AHINDA platform — a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits — which he began articulating through state-wide conventions in 2005. As the first Chief Minister from the Kuruba community, Karnataka's third-largest caste, he translated social coalition into substantive policy rather than mere electoral arithmetic.*



As May 20, 2026, marks the third anniversary of his second term, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will set a new benchmark, surpassing a decades-old record for consecutive days in office by 141 days and taking his total tenure to 2,933 days. Having steered Karnataka for nearly three thousand days, with 1,830 days in his first term and 1,103 in his second, he cements his place as the architect of social justice, the defining political figure of contemporary Karnataka, and the state's preeminent political veteran.

### FROM VILLAGE ROOTS TO A HISTORIC MILESTONE

In the long and storied history of Karnataka's political landscape — defined by coalition governments, mid-term collapses, factional rivalries, and rapid changes of leadership — one achievement stands apart as genuinely unprecedented. On January 7, 2026, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah surpassed the record of 2,792 days in office held by D. Devaraj Urs, becoming the longest-serving Chief Minister in the state's history. That milestone has since continued to grow.

On May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of the commencement of his second term, his cumulative tenure reaches 2,933 days, extending his lead over the previous record to 141 days. The figure speaks not merely to longevity, but to the rare combination of political resilience, successive electoral mandates, and governing purpose that has defined his career across four decades of public life.

That this achievement belongs to a man born in the remote village of Siddaramanahundi, in

Varuna Hobli near T. Narasipura in Mysore district, is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to what sustained public service can accomplish.

Born on August 3, 1947, to Siddarama Gowda and Boramma — a farming family of the Kuruba Gowda community — Siddaramaiah was the fourth among six siblings and the first in his family to graduate. He completed a B.Sc. from Yuvaraja's College, Mysore, pursued law from Sharada Vilas College and Mysore University, and briefly taught at Vidyavardhaka Law College in Mysuru before entering public life.

His entry into electoral politics came not through privilege or patronage, but through the district courts of Mysore, where the lawyer Nanjunda Swamy recognised his potential and persuaded him to contest. Standing on a Bharatiya Lok Dal ticket from the Chamundeshwari constituency, Siddaramaiah entered the 7th Karnataka Legislative Assembly in 1983 — a surprise victory that established his name across the Old Mysuru region.

Over the four decades that followed, he would contest thirteen elections, win nine, and serve Karnataka as Transport Minister, Finance Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and, twice, as Chief Minister.

"I never thought of becoming a minister, let alone Chief Minister. I thought I would become an MLA after becoming a Taluk Board member." — Siddaramaiah

### TWO TERMS, ONE UNBROKEN PURPOSE

The arithmetic of Siddaramaiah's historic tenure is, on its face, straightforward. His first term ran from May 13, 2013, to May 17, 2018 — a total of 1,830 days. This made him only the second Chief Minister in Karnataka's history to complete a full five-year term, the first being Devaraj Urs.

That term was anchored by an absolute majority of 122 out of 224 seats won by the Congress in 2013, enabling a stability of governance that has been the exception, not the rule, in Karnataka's political history.

His second term commenced on May 20, 2023, following another decisive Congress victory built on five welfare guarantees he had championed as the party's central electoral promise.

By May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of that swearing-in, the second term's contribution reaches 1,103 days, bringing the cumulative total to 2,933 days.

### A POLITICAL JOURNEY SHAPED BY CONVICTION

What makes Siddaramaiah's trajectory especially remarkable is that it unfolded almost entirely outside the Congress fold for its first two decades. From his entry through the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1983 to his years within the Janata Party under Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde — where he chaired the Kannada Surveillance Committee and held portfolios across Transport, Animal Husbandry, and Sericulture — and subsequently as a senior figure in the Janata Dal under Deve Gowda, Siddaramaiah was, by his own admission, a committed anti-Congressman. He rose to Deputy Minister in the Deve Gowda cabinet, Deputy Chief Minister under J. H. Patel, and Deputy Chief Minister again in the Congress-JD(S) coalition under Dharam Singh in 2004.

The rupture with Deve Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular) in 2005 — widely attributed to

the former Prime Minister's desire to promote his son H. D. Kumaraswamy — brought Siddaramaiah to a crossroads.

He briefly contemplated returning to legal practice and ruled out floating a regional party, citing an inability to muster financial resources. Instead, he chose the path that would prove transformative: on July 22, 2006, he joined the Congress at a large public rally on Palace Grounds, Bengaluru, in the presence of then AICC President Sonia Gandhi. Contemporaries called it unthinkable. In retrospect, it was the decisive turn on which Karnataka's most consequential political career pivoted.

"On May 20, 2026, the third anniversary of his second term, Siddaramaiah completes 2,933 cumulative days as Chief Minister — 141 days beyond Karnataka's previous record."

Together, the two terms represent more than a numerical record. They embody a continuous thread of governance philosophy — the conviction that public office exists primarily to serve the poor, the marginalised, and those whom Siddaramaiah has long championed through the AHINDA framework: minorities, backward classes, and Dalits.

That continuity of purpose was tested in his second term when supporters of Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar mounted a sustained campaign for their leader's elevation, citing a rumoured 2023 power-sharing formula. Siddaramaiah navigated those pressures with the patience and persistence his supporters regard as hallmarks of his leadership, holding his course and his office.

Underpinning both terms is a fiscal record without parallel in Karnataka's history. On March 6, 2026, Siddaramaiah presented his 17th state budget — a Rs 4.48 lakh crore outlay for 2026–27 — the highest tally ever achieved by any Chief Minister in the state.

This record stretches back to his years as Finance Minister under H. D. Deve Gowda and J. H. Patel in the 1990s, through his dual stints as Deputy Chief Minister, and across his successive budget presentations as Chief Minister. The budget, praised for balancing expansive welfare commitments with long-term infrastructure investment, stands as the capstone of a career-long mastery over the state's economy.

### THE AHINDA LEGACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE GOVERNANCE

At the heart of Siddaramaiah's political identity is the AHINDA platform — a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits — which he began articulating through state-wide conventions in 2005.

As the first Chief Minister from the Kuruba community, Karnataka's third-largest caste, he translated social coalition into substantive policy rather than mere electoral arithmetic. His first term introduced the Karnataka Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan Act of 2013 and conducted the state's first-ever caste survey — a landmark exercise in data-driven governance, subsequently withheld by successive governments for political reasons. His Bhagya welfare schemes — Anna Bhagya for food security, Ksheera Bhagya for school milk supply, Vidyasiri for girls' education — earned him lasting recognition as a champion of the poor.

In his second term, the five guarantees approved at the very first cabinet meeting have become the defining social policy framework of his administration. Independent research has documented their measurable contribution to women's financial autonomy, household well-being, and access to basic services.

The free bus travel scheme for women across Karnataka, and the implementation of internal reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are among the policies that have deepened the administration's social justice commitments.

In drawing explicit inspiration from Devaraj Urs — whose land redistribution reforms of the 1970s remain the benchmark of Karnataka's welfare tradition — Siddaramaiah has positioned his guarantees as the continuation of that same revolutionary instinct, updated for a new generation. That instinct was shaped early.

Influenced by the socialist thought of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, the young Siddaramaiah abandoned a promising legal career to enter politics in pursuit of social justice.

Critics once taunted him with the question: what does a shepherd know about finance? His answer was seventeen budgets, hailed by economists for maintaining fiscal prudence within the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act — even as he funded the most comprehensive welfare architecture Karnataka has ever seen.

### A LEADER FOR THE LONG ARC OF HISTORY

Devaraj Urs — whose record Siddaramaiah surpassed on January 7, 2026 — served two consecutive terms from 1972 to 1977 and 1978 to 1980, totalling 2,792 days. Siddaramaiah's 2,933 days are the product of a more arduous journey: two non-consecutive terms separated by five years as opposition leader, coalition manager, and patient rebuilder of Congress fortunes.

In the interval between his two terms, he chaired the Congress-JD(S) coordination committee under H. D. Kumaraswamy, absorbed the shock of the coalition's collapse in August 2019 following the resignation of 17 MLAs, and led the opposition campaign that delivered the party its landmark 2023 mandate.

He has served as Leader of the Opposition on two separate occasions — from 2009 to 2013 and from 2019 to 2023 — making him one of the most experienced figures ever to occupy both the treasury benches and the opposition aisle in Karnataka's legislative assembly.

Both Siddaramaiah and Urs hail from the Mysuru region, a coincidence the Chief Minister has noted with quiet pride. Yet the comparison, though flattering, understates the singularity of his record.

Urs governed in a more stable era; Siddaramaiah built his legacy across a landscape of defections, coalition collapses, and relentless internal competition — prevailing each time not through patronage networks alone, but through the sustained credibility of his welfare agenda and the loyalty of the social coalitions he built.

Speaking at the January 2026 milestone, he was characteristically understated: "I have come so far in politics with the blessings of the people." He has since expressed confidence in completing his second full five-year term in May 2028, a milestone that would push his cumulative record well beyond what any successor is likely to match for decades.

That May 20, 2026 — a single date that is simultaneously the third anniversary of his current term and the moment his cumulative tally reaches 2,933 days — should carry such layered significance is entirely in keeping with a career defined by the convergence of endurance and purpose. He entered electoral politics in 1983 with no ambition beyond becoming an MLA.

What followed was forty-three years of public life, nine election victories, seventeen budgets, two full Chief Ministerial terms, and a record that will define the measure of leadership in Karnataka for generations.

The name Siddaramaiah now stands at the summit of the state's political history — not as the longest-serving Chief Minister alone, but as the clearest proof that in Karnataka, the longest arcs of power are won not by inheritance or manoeuvre, but by the unrelenting service of the people.

# Can the Gulf states weather this war?

Ashok Swain decodes this moment of reckoning for the Gulf monarchies

The Gulf countries didn't start the war. Yet they're paying a terrible price. In battered infrastructure and the erosion of a carefully manufactured illusion of stability. What has unfolded since end-February is a brutal audit of decades of strategic choices made by the Gulf monarchies.

Within forty-eight hours of the opening strikes on Iran, every member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had taken retaliatory hits. The missiles and drones didn't just target US bases; they tore through airports, hotels, energy installations, ports and all the fragile markers of prosperity cities like Dubai had spent decades burnishing and flaunting.

For decades, these monarchies were secure in the knowledge that the trade they had made with Washington gave them an unassailable security cover. They hosted US bases, bought US weapons, aligned strategically with the US in the firm belief that they had purchased deterrence and security. The war has shattered that illusion.

Iran's justification was brutally simple. If US planes take off from your soil, your soil is part of the war. Iran couldn't afford symmetric warfare, so it would hit where it hurt; civilian infrastructure was not going to be spared.

The strikes have taken a heavy toll: nearly \$200 billion in lost output across the six GCC nations in the Persian Gulf. Their tourism industry is bleeding hundreds of millions every day. Their oil flows are badly hit by Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. The insurance costs of shipping are insupportably high. GDP contraction is an unfolding reality. In other words, this is a systemic collapse of their defence-diplomacy-development 3D model.

The Gulf's economic architecture was built on a simple premise: stability attracts capital. That premise is now in ruins. When drones can slip through air defences, when missile debris falls on luxury districts, when desalination plants that supply 90 per cent of drinking water are vulnerable, the narrative of the Gulf as an oasis collapses.

Yet the deeper failure is political. The GCC monarchies were not just passive victims. Many supported the strategic logic that led to this war. They feared and envied Iran. They lobbied and feted Washington. They entertained the illusion that a US-Israeli campaign could eliminate the Iranian threat without engulfing them. It



A giant billboard at Tehran's Revolution Square defiantly declares: 'The Strait of Hormuz remains closed'

Photo: Getty Images

was a dangerous fantasy.

Humiliatingly for the GCC, even though they are under attack, the war is being waged as if their stand is of no consequence. They are being attacked by Iran and ignored by the US, their supposed protector. Decisions about the war were made without them. Negotiations about ceasefires are happening without them. Despite being the most exposed, they are not at the table shaping the outcome of the war.

Even the 'normalisation' with Israel—sold as a pathway to security integration, intelligence sharing and technological superiority—has been of no avail; it has only deepened the perception that certain Gulf states are part of an anti-Iran axis. That perception has consequences: it invites retaliation from Iran and its allies.

If anything, normalising ties with Israel has made some of these monarchies more vulnerable, tying their security calculus to a regional actor whose strategy is driven by perpetual confrontation. The Gulf has effectively imported Israel's enemies without acquiring Israel's deterrence.

*The GCC countries are witnessing a systemic collapse of their defence-diplomacy-development 3D model. Their old economic architecture is in ruins*

Meanwhile, the US security umbrella has revealed its limits in the harshest way possible. Air defences may have intercepted most of the missiles, but deterrence is not about intercepting attacks; it's about preventing them. On that count, the US has failed the GCC spectacularly.

Nor is the economics of defence in their favour. Intercepting a low-cost drone with a multimillion-dollar missile is not sustainable strategy. Iran has weaponised this asymmetry; its strategy pivots on imposing costs that will become unbearable in a war of attrition.

Trump went into the war without bothering to consult allies, working on advice that badly underestimated Iran's appetite and capacity for retaliation. It is now negotiating with Iran from a position that is far worse than where it started. For the Gulf countries, the message is disturbingly clear: US protection is neither guaranteed nor sufficient. In the post-war scenario, they will have to think beyond reconstruction; they'll have to rethink the entire logic of security.

The first uncomfortable truth the GCC must confront is that Iran is not going anywhere. Despite massive strikes, despite leadership losses, the Iranian state endures and dictates the war and ceasefire. It retains its capacity to disrupt the region, to choke global energy flows, to project power asymmetrically. A militarily weakened Iran may even be more dangerous, less predictable and more willing to escalate.

The idea that Iran can be eliminated as a strategic factor is fantasy. The only viable path is coexistence, however uneasy. That requires a shift from confrontation to accommodation, from external balancing to regional engagement, from wishing Iran away to learning to live with it.

The second reality they confront is that relying on the US alone is not sound strategy. A strategically shifty US cannot offer the security guarantees the GCC needs. This is where China enters the picture, not as a replacement in military terms, but as a different kind of patron. China offers something the US no longer can: economic stability without political volatility, engagement without entanglement.

China has already demonstrated its relevance. It brokered the Saudi-Iran rapprochement. It positioned itself as a stabilising actor. For the Gulf countries, turning to China is not about abandoning the US but about reducing dependence on a patron that has proven unreliable; it's about diversification, hedging, creating strategic space.

But the shift towards China cannot be separated from the need to recalibrate relations with Iran. The two are intertwined. Iran's influence in the region is tied to its relationship with Tehran. Any new security architecture that excludes Iran is doomed to fail.

This is the hardest pill for the GCC to swallow. The very state they have spent decades fearing and containing may now have to be engaged as a central pillar of regional order. The alternative is worse. Continued reliance on external powers that use the region as a battleground. Continued exposure to wars they do not control. Continued economic vulnerability to disruptions they cannot prevent. The one certainty of this war is that the Gulf that emerges from it will not be the same. ■

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## Why Dinesh Trivedi?

Neither career diplomat nor intelligence expert, his appointment as India's high commissioner to Bangladesh is really mystifying

Ashis Ray

Those following relations between India and Bangladesh are taken aback by the Modi government's decision to send Dinesh Trivedi, a political appointee, to Bangladesh as India's next high commissioner. The appointment awaits a formal agreement from the Bangladesh government.

There hasn't been a political appointee as head of the Indian mission in Dhaka in 50 years. The last such choice was Samar Sen, who was a career diplomat but took up the post after retiring from the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) as India's permanent representative (PR) to the United Nations in New York. Sen was born and brought up in Dhaka and had first-hand experience of the place.

His predecessor Subimal Dutt, the first Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh after its independence from Pakistan in 1971, was also originally from East Bengal (Chittagong). Dutt went on to become India's longest serving foreign secretary before being summoned from retirement to undertake the delicate new assignment in Dhaka.

A promotion to the coveted top job of foreign secretary is often guided not by whether a candidate has served as ambassador, high commissioner or permanent representative in the West, but by whether he or she has fulfilled such a role in a neighbouring country.

In this context, Dhaka has often been a stepping stone to the corner office in the ministry of external affairs (MEA). Think K.P.S Menon (junior), Muchkund Dubey, Krishnan Srinivasan, Krishnan Raghunath and Harsh Shringla.

A change of guard in Dhaka was due. Pranay Verma had served more than three-and-a-half years there as high commissioner. The MEA is said to have proposed Sandeep Chakravarty, India's current ambassador to Indonesia, as Verma's successor. Chakravarty had in his CV a previous stint in Bangladesh as deputy high commissioner. But this failed to impress the PMO. A tussle for control of external affairs between the MEA and the national security establishment in the PMO has been an ongoing and unfortunate saga. The PMO scanned political circles and settled on Trivedi.



*Did Modi reward turncoat Trivedi simply to slight Mamata Banerjee?*

A Gujarati businessman, Trivedi went to school and college in Kolkata, before obtaining an MBA in the United States. He is a much-travelled politician, having moved from the Congress-led UPA government under Manmohan Singh. He quit Mamata Banerjee's outfit in 2021 to join the BJP.

The TMC nominated him first as minister of state for health and family welfare in 2009 and then railway minister with cabinet rank in 2011 in the Congress-led UPA government under Manmohan Singh. He quit Mamata Banerjee's outfit in 2021 to join the BJP. Compelled to resign as a TMC member of parliament in the Rajya Sabha, Trivedi has since been cooling his heels.

While Trivedi is at least not

uneducated—unlike many BJP politicians, including repeat Class 8 failures and *haffidavitwalas*—his qualification for the new post is difficult to fathom. "Modi obviously wanted to reward Trivedi," said a former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh. "Is the pat for turncoat Trivedi a slap for Mamata?"

While another former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh called the logic "unclear", a high-level source familiar with the decision-making process had a different take.

National security advisor Ajit Doval may have prevailed by pointing out the failure of the Indian high commission in Dhaka to understand the seriousness of the discontent with Sheikh Hasina, which culminated in her ouster, the source said.

That failure is not in dispute. But that was surely more a shortcoming on the part of intelligence gathering by the Research & Analysis Wing rather than diplomats stationed in Dhaka. In fact, in his briefing to the Parliament's standing committee on external affairs soon after Hasina's toppling, minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar is said to have accused the United States of being behind it all.

If that was the MEA's post facto conclusion, how were IFS personnel to blame? And, in what way is Trivedi a solution? He possesses neither a background in diplomacy nor in intelligence. The departure from having a foreign affairs specialist as Indian high commissioner in Bangladesh does not, to say the least, make sense.

A mishandling of ties at a time that the BNP (Bangladesh National Party), not the Awami League, is installed in government could potentially be disastrous. Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) made unprecedented inroads into Bangladesh in the 18 months of the interim government in Dhaka since Hasina's exit and the entry of the current prime minister Tarique Rahman. China has gained considerable ground as well.

The re-establishment of previous security cooperation, the reconstruction of mutual confidence and the smooth renewal of the Ganga Waters Treaty are urgent issues. If Ajit Doval thinks these can be tackled by remote control, he is sadly mistaken. ■

## Lessons for India from an 'audit' in Bangladesh

Sourabh Sen

Were the general elections that brought the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to power with a thumping majority after nearly 18 turbulent months free and fair? An audit carried out by a Sweden-based media outlet *Netra News* claims they were. The probe found almost no discrepancy when it compared the Bangladesh Election Commission's (BEC) official data with data collected independently by *Netra News* on polling day (12 February 2026), refuting the claims of rigged elections.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), whose performance did not match up to its own expectations, was one party which had questioned the credibility of the election, describing its defeat as the result of "extraordinary engineering." The party's secretary general Mia Golam Parwar had alleged that manipulations happened somewhere "between the counting of the votes and the declaration of results." Several BNP candidates who lost the elections too made similar claims.

"They sidelined a mainstream political party (JeI) through election engineering. We have raised the issue publicly through official statements and press conferences and have also lodged complaints before the tribunal about this," Parwar told *National Herald*, who lost from his stronghold, Khulna-5 constituency.

The way *Netra News* went about its audit is worth detailing.

The organisation deployed hundreds of 'correspondents' all over Bangladesh in the months before the elections. On the night before polling day and the next morning, different groups of reviewers took photographs of Form 16—the booth-level tally sheet that recorded how many votes had been polled in each booth. The election—in over 43,000 polling stations across 300 constituencies—was held with paper ballots. Each polling booth generated three signed copies of Form 16—one given to the candidate's agent, one pasted outside the booth and a third copy sent to the returning officer of the district, who consolidated the figures and forwarded them to the BEC.

By the morning after the vote, *Netra News* had collected photographs of 8,000 Form 16s. By the time the BEC finished counting the ballots, that number had increased to around 18,000, covering 205 of the 300 constituencies. A random sample of 1,000 forms was drawn from this pool, weighted to reflect the composition of all 18,000 forms. Each of these 1,000 forms was then compared, line by line, against the corresponding tally sheet published by the BEC. Forty-three forms were rejected due to sampling errors. Of the remaining 957, only

four showed minor discrepancies.

The audit matches the party-wise number of ballots present in the boxes before the BEC's final counting. But, as critics point out, election engineering can still occur if ballot boxes were stuffed during polling, or if the numbers are deliberately manipulated by the BEC. Parwar points out that the audit cannot reveal whether voters were intimidated before they cast their votes.

Is there a lesson for India here? The Election Commission of India has the experience, resources and manpower to initiate an even more robust, independent and transparent audit of elections and election results—if it wants to restore the severely eroded credibility of elections conducted under its watch. ■

If election engineering can make or break an outcome, so can women voters. Despite attendant gender parity concerns, politicians in India as well as Bangladesh seem to understand this well. In India, the BJP played to the gallery by rushing a previously-gazetted women's reservation bill through Lok Sabha—knowing full well they did not have the numbers to push it through—just to generate talking points before the elections in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and Puducherry.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, has quietly allocated the 50 seats reserved for women in the Jatiya Sangsad—over and above the 300 contested seats—to winning parties. These seats were allocated in proportion to the number of general seats each party won. Women nominated to these seats are full members of parliament, with the same rights and privileges as those in general seats, though they do not represent any specific geographic constituency.

The BNP recently finalised its list of 36 women nominees. The JeI and National Citizen Party (NCP) have forwarded one name each. The final list of 50 nominated MPs will join the seven elected women members. With 57 out of 350 members, women will comprise nearly 16 per cent of Jatiya Sangsad.

A similar experiment could be carried out in India, by raising the strength of the Lok Sabha to 643 or 743 and allowing each state to nominate women for the additional seats. Similarly, the Rajya Sabha can fix the number and criteria for nominated seats for women. This arrangement for the next 15 years is well worth trying without the complications involved in reserving 33 per cent seats in Parliament at its existing strength. ■

SOURABH SEN is a Kolkata-based independent writer and commentator on politics, human rights and foreign affairs

# A silent crisis: scorching heat, rising UVI

Rising temperatures, pollution and surface ozone levels are producing a deadly 'chemical cocktail' in south India

## Pankaj Chaturvedi

While north and central India saw unseasonal April showers this year, south India is facing a formidable environmental challenge: scorching heat coupled with rising ultraviolet (UV) radiation and surface ozone levels. Unlike the dry heatwave in the north, the combination of rising heat, humidity and dangerous UV rays in south India signals a looming health emergency.

In Kerala, the sharp rise in UV radiation has prompted the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) to issue an orange alert in six districts cautioning the public against prolonged exposure to direct sunlight. Latest data show a UV index level of 8 in Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki, Kollam and Palakkad—high enough to pose serious health risks. Authorities warn that direct sun exposure in these areas could cause sunburn, skin disorders and eye ailments.

In Bengaluru, the city's afternoon UV index has surged to 13, classified as 'extreme' by World Health Organization (WHO) standards. This rapid jump—from 10 to 13 in just two days in the third week of April—is a worrying development. Similarly, Chennai has recorded UV levels as high as 13 around noon. Understanding these extreme indices is vital for residents to protect their skin and overall health in a tropical city with year-round sun exposure.

### Chennai versus other cities

A quick scan (see table below) highlights how UV exposure in Chennai compares with other major cities across India. This comparison helps travellers and residents better understand regional sun intensity and plan outdoor activities with sun safety

in mind.

The southern coastal regions, once known for their pleasant climate, lush greenery and abundant water resources, now confront a frightening phase of climate change. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala have experienced premature and intense heatwaves this year. The region's proximity to the equator and varied altitudes amplify the sun's impact, making south India more vulnerable to UV damage than north India.

This year's figures are alarming. Bengaluru, once called the 'Garden City', has recorded a UV index between 12 and 13. An index above 11 is 'extreme', which means that just ten minutes in the sun without protection can cause permanent damage to skin cells.

The drying of water bodies—like Pallikaranai in Chennai—has intensified UV reflection, further increasing the intensity of local radiation. Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram report UV indices between 10 and 11. A recent KSDMA report reveals that about 80 per cent of Kerala's regions surpass safe radiation limits. Meanwhile, surface ozone—normally protective in the stratosphere—has become toxic at the ground level due to heat and pollution, particularly from vehicle emissions reacting with nitrogen oxides. This 'chemical cocktail' exacerbates respiratory diseases like asthma and lung inflammation, which have surged by over 20 per cent across southern metro areas.

The dual onslaught of ultraviolet rays and ozone has triggered serious health problems. UV radiation directly damages DNA, increasing risks of early onset of skin cancer. Eye exposure threatens cataracts and early blindness. Very high UV levels weaken immunity, further endangering vulnerable populations—daily wage workers, street vendors and

Photo: Getty Images



Constant exposure to ultraviolet rays increases the risk of skin cancer, heat stroke, kidney ailments and severe dehydration

construction labourers exposed to the sun for long hours. The result? Rising cases of heat stroke, kidney ailments and severe dehydration, as reported from the hinterlands of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The ecological fallout is equally grave. Crops in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka show diminished photosynthesis due to UV exposure, impacting yields of sensitive plants like paddy and pulses. Rising sea temperatures and radiation disrupt marine ecosystems, destroying plankton populations which are foundational to the local fisheries.

Wetland degradation—such as the disappearance of 165 water sources in Pallikaranai—not only causes water scarcity but also eliminates natural cooling systems that historically regulated temperature.

The current climate imbalance surpasses a mere temperature increase—it threatens the survival of both humans and biodiversity. Government initiatives in the past, like the Green Credit Programme,

have faltered due to lack of scientific direction. Effective action requires real-time UV monitoring in every city, preservation and expansion of dense urban forests to reduce the effects of ozone naturally, and regulatory measures such as prohibiting manual labour during peak afternoon hours.

Southern India stands at a critical crossroads. From Bengaluru's tech hubs to the serene backwaters of Kerala and the coastal plains of Tamil Nadu, this perilous nexus of heat, UV radiation and pollution reflects a collective failure to safeguard the environment. Without urgent, transformative policy interventions focused on conservation, water resource protection, and pollution control, this vibrant region risks becoming inhospitable for future generations.

The time to act is now—not to spell doom and gloom but to implement bold, swift changes that secure a safe and liveable environment for all. ■

*Very high UV levels weaken immunity, and greatly endanger daily wage workers, street vendors and construction labour*

### Chennai versus other cities

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Delhi UVI	5	6	9	10	10	10	12	12	9	8	5	5
Mumbai UVI	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	13	11	10	7	7
Ahmedabad UVI	7	8	10	12	11	12	13	13	11	10	7	6
Hyderabad UVI	10	11	12	11	13	13	15	14	13	11	8	8
Chennai	9	12	13	14	12	12	13	13	13	11	10	9
Bengaluru UVI	11	13	13	14	13	14	14	14	14	12	11	10



## उम्मीदों के पंख और हौसलों की उड़ान, हेमन्त सरकार दे रही नया आसमान

आवेदन शुरू  
16 अप्रैल 2026

अंतिम तिथि  
30 अप्रैल 2026

कमर्शियल पायलट लाइसेंस (CPL)  
ट्रेनिंग - सत्र 2026-27 में प्रवेश प्रारंभ



सोना सोबरन उड़ान अकादमी (झारखण्ड फ्लाइटिंग इंस्टीट्यूट)

भविष्य के युवा पायलटों से आवेदन आमंत्रित करता है

युवा अत्याधुनिक सुविधाओं और अनुभवी प्रशिक्षकों के साथ अपने करियर को नई उड़ान दे सकेंगे

### कोर्स की मुख्य बातें

- ▶ **कोर्स:** CPL (मल्टी इंजन रेटिंग एवं इंस्ट्रूमेंट रेटिंग के साथ)
- ▶ **प्रशिक्षण स्थल:** दुमका, झारखण्ड
- ▶ **सुविधाएं:** आधुनिक सिम्युलेटर, ग्राउंड स्कूल और हॉस्टल सुविधा उपलब्ध

### प्रवेश हेतु पात्रता

- ▶ **ऊंचाई:** 158 - 185 सेमी
- ▶ **शिक्षा:** 10+2 (PCME) न्यूनतम 50% अंकों के साथ (आरक्षित वर्ग हेतु 45%)
- ▶ **अनिवार्यता:** DGCA के कम से कम 04 थ्योरी पेपर उत्तीर्ण होना आवश्यक

**आवेदन प्रक्रिया:** इच्छुक उम्मीदवार आवेदन फॉर्म वेबसाइट [www.jharkhandaviation.in](http://www.jharkhandaviation.in) से डाउनलोड कर सकते हैं। भरा हुआ फॉर्म ₹1200 के डिमांड ड्राफ्ट के साथ स्पीड पोस्ट या व्यक्तिगत रूप से कार्यालय में जमा कर सकते हैं

**संपर्क करें:** स्टेट हैंगर, बिरसा मुंडा एयरपोर्ट, रांची  
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