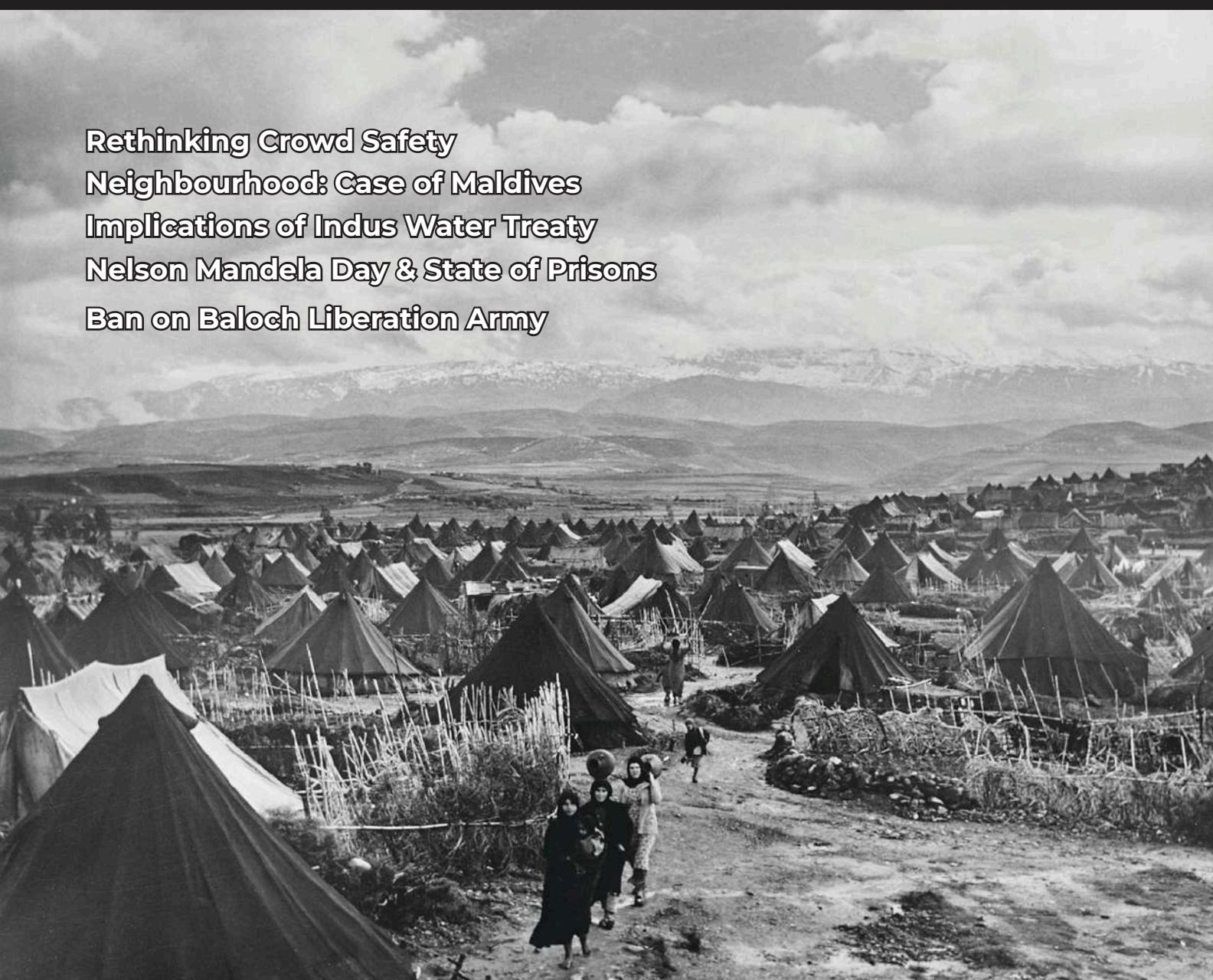


SAVIOURS

Rethinking Crowd Safety
Neighbourhood: Case of Maldives
Implications of Indus Water Treaty
Nelson Mandela Day & State of Prisons
Ban on Baloch Liberation Army



PALESTINIAN REFUGEES



भारत की अग्रणी प्राकृतिक गैस कंपनी

एनर्जाइजिंग पॉसिविलिटीज

- देश में बेची जाने वाली प्राकृतिक गैस में 53% का योगदान
- भारत में प्राकृतिक गैस ट्रांसमिशन में लगभग 68% की बाजार हिस्सेदारी

INSIDE



5-12



13-21



27-31



34-38

LEAD STORY

Palestinian
Refugees: In
Trump world
Order

SPECIAL STORY

Rethinking
Crowd Safety

GUEST STORY

Neighbourhood:
Case of Maldives

EXPERT VIEW

Indus water
Treaty

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LEAD STORY

Palestinian Refugees: In Trump World Order

5-12

SPECIAL STORY

Rethinking Crowd Safety

13-21

CORRECTIONS

Prisoners Matter

22-26

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Neighbourhood First:
Case of Maldives

27-31

FORENSICS

SC Guidelines on DNA Evidence Collection

32-33

IN FOCUS

Security Implications of Indus water Treaty

34-38

View POINT

US Bans Baloch Liberation Army

39-41

SNIPETTES

42-43

BOOK REVIEW

Did I Do All This?

44-45



FROM CEO'S DESK

Trump's second presidency has significantly impacted global peace, shaking the world and the USA in more ways than one. His proactive stance as a peace broker, though with little success to show, has not deterred Israel's relentless pounding of Gaza and shifting of goal posts. Russia-Ukraine war continues to bleed the two neighbours.

Trump's imposition of tariffs on all countries trading with the USA, while potentially boosting revenue, has far-reaching implications. This move is not without its costs, as it is expected to burden American consumers and disrupt global trade.

India's situation, being singled out for the highest tariffs for serving our sovereign interests, raises important questions. Should India be forced to buy oil only from the USA and its allies? Does the world order revolve solely around American interests and whims? These are issues that demand our thoughtful reflection.

India has suspended the Indus Water Treaty in the wake of the gruesome Pahalgam terrorist killings by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. We bring you a story on the issue.

The US has banned the Baloch Liberation Army at the forefront of the Baloch nationalist movement to placate its newfound love, Pakistan! We look at all aspects of security in our neighbourhood due to this development.

Furthermore, this issue is packed with compelling stories and regular columns that delve into a variety of topics. We encourage you to explore these pieces in depth.

As we bring out this journal, more is happening around the globe, in our neighbourhood, and domestically. We will regularly share stories on our portal www.savioursmagazine.in.

I hope you continue to enjoy the magazine.


(Somesh Goyal)



Pic Credit: S Madver, UNRWA Archives

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES: in the TRUMP world order



Vappala Balachandran, is a former Special Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat. He is a prolific contributor to various national and international newspapers and journals on the emerging global security and diplomatic trends. In this piece, he provides a historical perspective of the Palestinian refugee issue. He also discusses the contours of Trump administration's "solution" to this vexatious issue.

As this is written, the contours of Trump administration's "solution" to the Palestinian refugee problem with particular focus on Gaza are not clear except for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's condescending remarks in Washington DC on 7 July that US and Israel are working with other countries "who would give Palestinians a better future" suggesting that the Gaza residents could move to neighbouring countriesⁱ.

On 9 July 2025, UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that the civilian deaths in Gaza due to Israeli operations since 20 October 2023 have reached 57,680, which includes 24,818 men, 17,121 children, 9126 women and 4137 elderly personsⁱⁱ. In addition, 1,37,409 were severely injured and are getting only basic medical treatment, since most of the Gaza hospitals are nonfunctional due to heavy Israeli bombing. In addition, OCHA has been warning of mass famine due to Israel's deliberate action of preventing food and medical aid from reaching Gaza.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed on 11 July that 798 Gaza residents who were struggling to get food aid were killed during the previous 6 weeksⁱⁱⁱ. Meanwhile, the US government “sanctioned” UN Human Rights Council’s special rapporteur Francesca Albanese, who had listed Israel’s excesses in the war, accusing US multinationals of exploiting Gaza for their commercial interests^{iv}.

The sad part of the tragedy is that, except for the United Nations (UN), none, including Arab nations, seem to be concerned about this colossal human tragedy affecting Palestinian refugees, except for issuing bland statements.

WHO ARE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES?

United Nations Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was set up in 1950, defines Palestine refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” In 1950, there were about 750,000 Palestinian refugees. Currently, UNRWA caters to about 5.9 million Palestinian refugees who live in 58 recognised Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

In 1967, Israel waged the “6-Day War”, violating the UN Palestine Partition Plan and map of boundaries, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1947 as Resolution 181 (II), creating the new Jewish State of Israel within the then existing Arab Palestinian State.

Israel also

breached the 1949 Armistice Agreements for ending the 1948 Arab-Israel War with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, by forcibly wresting East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Since then, Israel has been developing illegal Jewish settlements on Arab lands, forcibly evicting Palestinians who are rendered refugees. UNRWA established ten more Palestinian refugee camps to house those evicted^v.

ORIGINS OF THIS PROBLEM

The end of the First World War is a watershed moment for the present Middle East crisis. The main actors involved were the Ottoman Empire, which lost its vast territory, and the British and French colonial powers, who seized lands and influence, sharing it with the Hashemite family, which traces its origins to Hashem Ibn Abd Manaf, the great-grandfather of Prophet Muhammad.

One of the best books describing the problem is “Paris-1919-Six Months that changed the world” by Oxford historian Margaret MacMillan. It explains how the “Big Four powers” (America, Britain, France and Italy) had met in Paris for 6 months after the First World War “that had started in 1914 over a squabble for power and influence in the Balkans and which had drawn all the great powers, from tsarist Russia in the east to Britain in the west, and most of the smaller ones”^{vi}. Among



the world's most intractable problems, which could not be solved in 1919 or even by 2025, was the relationship between the Arab --Palestinian nations and the emerging Jewish homeland in the region.

SEARCH FOR A JEWISH HOMELAND

The Jewish “search” for a homeland started meekly and very submissively in 1897, unlike the present situation, when American support for Israel’s hegemony over the Middle East is strikingly evident.

The story starts in August 1897 when Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist, convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. “Zion” is one of the Biblical names for Jerusalem. On 3 September, he wrote: “At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it”. He was expressing his community’s dreams of establishing a homeland after their “exile” during the pre-Biblical days in the 8th Century BCE. However, the march towards establishing the “homeland” was not easy. On 15 October 1898, Herzl visited Istanbul to plead with the visiting German Kaiser Wilhelm II to recommend to the Turkish Sultan to “seriously consider the proposals of the Zionists”. Jerusalem was then under Ottoman rule. Kaiser mentioned this twice to the Sultan, who would disagree.

Herzl would not give up. On 28 October, he followed the Kaiser to Jerusalem, having heard that he was visiting the Holy Land. He thought he would generate global publicity for the proposal to establish a Jewish homeland. He met Wilhelm twice. On both occasions, the Kaiser was non-committal.

Having failed to persuade the German emperor or Ottoman Sultan, Herzl turned to Britain. He met Lord Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, who suggested that East Africa (specifically Uganda) could be the Jewish homeland. On 13 August 1903, an MOU was issued by the British government to grant land to the “Jewish Colonial Trust Limited” in East Africa. Following this, the Zionist Congress on 26 August 1903, decided to send an investigatory commission to examine this proposal.

However, this led to a vertical split

within the diaspora. The 1905 Zionist Congress rejected the “Ugandan” proposal. The leader of the opposing faction was Chaim Weizmann, a British research scientist of Russian origin who became the first President of Israel. It was he who started canvassing for Palestine, which was then “a small backwards province of the Ottoman Empire”.

Weizmann was considered the “father of industrial fermentation” using maize starch. He had developed the acetone-butanol-ethanol fermentation process to produce acetone, which was of great use for making cordite explosive propellants for the First World War. That was how he had met Lloyd George, who was Munitions Minister and later Prime Minister (1916-1922). He had already met Lord Arthur Balfour in 1906, who would become the Foreign Secretary.

In 1914, Britain was in desperate need of large amounts of acetone to “pre-treat” the gunpowder to prevent abrasions to the barrels, which usually released smoke after firing, thereby allowing enemies to identify the location of the guns. Additionally, during that time, Germany, Russia, and Finland held a near monopoly on acetone production, which Britain was unable to access due to the war.

Weizmann wanted nothing for himself as a reward, but merely British “support” for the Zionist homeland in Palestine. Margaret MacMillan quotes Lloyd George saying in his memoirs that this was “the fount and origin of the famous declaration about the National Home for the Jews in Palestine”. This was the “Balfour Declaration” 2 November 1917, which was a letter from Foreign Secretary Balfour to Lionel Walter, 2nd Lord Rothchild, doyen of the Jews, that Britain viewed “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object”. In fairness to Balfour, the letter also contains the following conditionalities: “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of

existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Strangely, the Rothschild Archives expose the Machiavellian motive behind this letter. According to this, Britain hoped, in exchange for their support of Zionism, that the Jews would help to finance the growing expenses of the First World War, “which was becoming increasingly burdensome”. Further, the British Foreign Office hoped that the Jews could be “prevailed upon to persuade the United States to join the War”. Lastly, the Declaration deliberately used vague language: “The term ‘national home’ was chosen to minimise the Zionist dream, to make Palestine a Jewish state”.

Additionally, Balfour’s letter was addressed to Lord Rothschild, not to Chaim Weizmann, who was the President of the British Zionist Federation in 1917. This was also a British ploy. To understand why, we should study a document in the Rothschild Archives, “Rothschild & Gold”^{vii}, describing how many occasions the Rothschild family had financially rescued the British government from the public debt during the Napoleonic Wars and later. Additionally, in 1825, the Rothschilds advanced a loan of £ 4 million to the Disraeli government for purchasing shares in the Suez Canal.

Harry Collins and Dominique Lapierre wrote in “O Jerusalem”, an international best-seller, that Israeli rulers ignored Chaim Weizmann’s warning in 1925: “Palestine is not Rhodesia, and 600,000 Arabs live there who... have exactly the same rights to their homes as we have to our National Home”. After 1947, Israel ignored this, and the perennial Israel-Palestinian problem started then^{viii}.

Now comes the role played by American politicians: The Harry Truman Library documents reveal how the Jews were aided by President Truman, who modified America’s traditional Israel-Palestinian policy in 1945 to favour his party in American elections by going against Roosevelt’s consensus with Britain^{ix} on the multi-religious character of Palestine and Jewish presence there. In 1917, the Jewish presence there was only 18,000 (3%) out of 6,00,000^x.

This was the beginning of the American

policy of favouring Jews over Arabs due to domestic political considerations, which exists even now under President Donald Trump. Ernest Bevin, then British foreign secretary, had lamented that the “Palestine issue has become the subject of local elections in the United States”^{xi}.

The Arabs protested when Jewish migration increased their numbers to 83,790 by 1922. To this, Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, gave an assurance that there was no intention to turn Palestine into a Jewish state. However, by 1939, the Jewish population had reached 445,457, which was one-third of Palestine’s population.

HOW IRAN TOOK THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE LEADERSHIP?

Iran-Israel relations were friendly in 1948 when Israel was born. A 2019 Brookings paper states that historically, Persian-Judaic interactions were pleasant, as Iran was the only country that did not join the Muslim majority states in opposing its creation. Also, Iran fitted into Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben Gurion’s “Periphery Doctrine”, which aimed at “a political-security goal of countering Arab hostility through relations with alternative regional powers and potential allies.”

However, things changed when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini assumed power in 1979. The first foreign leader to visit Iran was Yasser Arafat, the leader of al-Fatah, on 17 February 1979. Arafat, who had suffered a crushing defeat in 1970 while attempting to take over Jordan (“Black September”), was looking for a country to support him. However, Lebanon had allowed him to operate on its soil.

This arrangement was based on the 2 November 1969 Cairo agreement, supported by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, through which Lebanon permitted the PLO, led by Arafat, to administer 16 official refugee camps under the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA), where approximately 300,000 Palestinian refugees lived.

Gradually, these camps became the training ground for revolutionaries of all hues, including Iranian religious revolutionaries such as the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), also known as Islamic modernists, the Islamic-Marxist Mujahi-

deen-e-Khalq (MEK), and Islamist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iran specialists during that era say that the creation of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was a result of Arafat's suggestions through Lebanese PLO leader Anis Naccache, who had led the 1975 Vienna kidnapping of OPEC oil ministers through Carlos, the Jackal.

IRGC is Iran's leading fighting force now numbering nearly two lakhs with overseas responsibilities through their Quds Force. A Council on Foreign Relations paper updated on 17 April 2024, says that it has regional allies in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon (Hezbollah), Palestinian territories (Hamas & Islamic Jihad), Syria and Yemen. The paper quotes a 2020 assessment by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that "the IRGC has become the most powerful controller of all important economic sectors across Iran" for funding covert activities.

A deeply researched paper dated December 2023 by the "Combating Terrorism Centre" (CTC) at the US Military Academy at West Point states that the IRGC crafts its overseas activities through umbrella groups and joint operations centres.

The first experiment occurred in 1991, when it created the "Ten Resistance Organisation" at the Tehran-sponsored "World Conference in Support of the Islamic Revolution in Palestine". In September 2023, Hamas and Palestinian Jihad started a joint operations room (JOR) in Beirut. Another joint operational centre of Hezbollah and Hamas has been functioning since 2021. CTC reports that this joint operations centre utilises Lebanese Hezbollah as a coordinator between Iran, other Iranian proxies in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and the Palestinian groups.

The CTC also paper quotes Yahya al-Sinwar, Hamas' Gaza lead military commander (who was killed by Israel in October 2024), proclaiming in November 2018 that the JOR would form the "nucleus of the Army of Liberation". Consequently, JOR undertook joint operations by firing rockets at Israel in November 2018 and 2019.

Surprisingly, CTC also reproduced highly impressive propaganda papers circulated through JOR Telegram Channels dated 29 December 2020, on the types of exercises that included launching rockets, simulating taking IDF



hostage from a tank, raiding small structures, deploying an Iranian-made Misagh MANPADS, and using Iranian-made AM 50 rifles. The paper refers to the videos from the drill, on simulated combat divers raiding coastal targets and JOR fighters interdicting mock Israeli seaborne forces. It also quotes Joe Truzman, writing in ‘Long Wars Journal’ on December 27, 2020, on these exercises.

All these were found utilised by Hamas during the murderous 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel, killing 1139 Israelis and hostage taking of more than 200. How this escaped the notice of the legendary Israeli intelligence is still a mystery.

RISE OF HAMAS

On 1 January 2009, Daniel Barenboim, a famous Israeli pianist and conductor, wrote in *The Guardian* that Israel had encouraged Hamas as a tactic to weaken Yasser Arafat. On 26 October 2023, Ami Ayalon, former Shin Bet chief, told “Globes”: “We built Hamas... It didn’t work, because we didn’t understand what Hamas is... That’s why it blew up in our faces”

LINKAGE BETWEEN HAMAS AND IRAN’S HEZBOLLAH

As stated above, the links originally came through Yasser Arafat, the high priest of secular Palestinian nationalism, who provided bodyguards to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini while he lived in exile in Paris. He also facil-

tated the training of future Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the PLO camps in Lebanon.

Israel’s action of pushing Palestinians out of the West Bank and Jerusalem into neighbouring countries in 1948 indirectly facilitated these contacts. Another factor which cemented these links was Israel’s mass expulsion of Islamic Jihad militants from Gaza in 1992 to Marj al-Zuhur (Lebanon) for abducting an Israeli soldier. Meanwhile, Yasser Arafat’s incremental journey towards peace talks with Israel, culminating with the 1993 Oslo Accords, disillusioned Iran.

Militants in Gaza disagreed with this and gravitated towards Iran for financial support. Gradually, Palestinian militants started receiving training in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, in camps run by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

Have such mass Palestinian killings ensured Israel’s Security?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the bloodiest disputes in the history of mankind. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, the official organ of the State of Palestine, recognised by 145 of the 193 UN member states, nearly 1,34,000 Palestinians and Arabs have been killed since 1948 when the partition of Palestine came into force. As against this, Israeli casualties were almost 10,000.

Before the 2023-25 Gaza war, Israel had fought Hamas in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021, which killed nearly 6,400 Palestinians against 300 Israeli deaths.

RISE AND KILL FIRST

In 2018 I reviewed Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman book “Rise and Kill First” for “Outlook” magazine, which claimed that Israel had “assassinated more people than any other country in the Western world — some 2,300 ‘targeted killing operations,’ most of them against Palestinians, but also aimed at Egyptians, Syrians, Iranians and others.

In his book he quotes a



scene on March 14, 1988, when the then Israeli Finance Minister Moshe Nissim, son of the chief Rabbi of Israel persuaded the cabinet to kill PLO leader Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), who was Yasser Arafat's closest ally, quoting a Talmudic precept: "If a man comes to kill you, rise early and kill him first."

Bergman said that Abu Jihad's killing had the opposite effect: It intensified the First Intifada, which lasted till 1993, killing 277 Israelis and 1962 Palestinians. It also proved Foreign Minister Shimon Peres's earlier warning that Abu Jihad was a moderate who could have reined in Arafat.

The second wrong decision, according to Bergman, was the assassination of moderate Lebanese Shia leader Abbas al-Mussavi in Southern Lebanon. On 16 February 1992, Israel proudly described it as the first drone-guided "Hellfire" missile assassination in the world. It was to check the growing Iranian influence on Hezbollah. This also backfired as Mussavi's successor, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, "was blacker than black", more radical than Mussavi.

Now that Nasrallah has been assassinated on 27 September 2024, does Netanyahu feel that Israel would be safer? The Times of Israel (29 September 2024) said, quoting Channel 12, that the US was hoping for a pause in Israeli action through the efforts of Israel's Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer. "Once the hit on Nasrallah took place, the US was left with a feeling of having been misled".

PALESTINIAN GRIEVANCES

In brief, Palestinians' grievances are against forcible Jewish occupation of their lands, denying water rights and the "Permit Regime" for their movements. They also want the return of nearly 7,00,000 of their compatriots who were expelled by the Jewish militia during the 1948 "Nakba," which the UN keeps on demanding.

In addition, they want Israel to remove the West Bank Wall, which Israel calls the "Security Wall". Human rights organisations like B'Tselem (Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) call it as "Apartheid wall"- to put as much Palestinian land and as many

Israeli settlements as possible on the western, or Israeli side, while placing as many Palestinians as possible on the eastern side, effectively annexing large areas of Palestinian land.

Palestinian demands are legal under the UN General Assembly (UNGA)'s resolution No. 181(ii) on 29 November 1947, defining the future government of Palestine, partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under UN rule. True, it was the Arab coalition which used force originally to prevent partition by invading Palestine. However, Jewish militias launched attacks on Palestinian villages, forcing thousands to flee. Although Israel won the 1948 war, the UN has been urging Israel to allow these Palestinian refugees to return.

HOW ISRAEL FLOUTS ALL UN RESOLUTIONS ON PALESTINE?

On the other hand, Israel has been attempting to push the remaining Palestinians into the neighbouring Arab countries. As a result, 5.6 million refugees, registered by the UN refugee organisation (UNRWA), are crammed in about 68 refugee camps. Israel bombed some of these during the present Hamas-Lebanon wars.

Every May 15, Palestinians all over the world observe "Nakba Day" as the sad anniversary of their displacement from their homeland. "Nakba" means catastrophe in Arabic. That was the process of ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs from their homeland, whereby the majority of the present 14.8 million Palestinians live outside of what was once their Palestine.

On 26 September 2024, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged the UNGA to stop the Gaza war as "Israel had almost destroyed Gaza, and it was no longer fit for life". On October 3, the Emir of Qatar, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, called the crisis a "collective genocide".

On 21 May 2025, the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) conducted a seminar on the "Ongoing Palestinian Nakba"^{xii}.

THE ITZHAK RABIN FORMULA, WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN A SOLUTION

Midway in his acclaimed biography of Itzhak Rabin, former Israeli prime minister (“Rabin of Israel”), American journalist Robert Slater gives us details of the assassinated leader’s views on dealing with Palestinians. This has relevance even today when we are discussing Israel’s wars in Gaza and Lebanon.

Rabin, one of the greatest Israeli military heroes of the 1967 Six-Day War, who defeated the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria to wrest areas for “Eretz Yisrael”, has an equal role in Israel’s nation-building as the legendary David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan. As Chief of Staff, he captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Desert from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan.

Yet he was prepared to negotiate with Palestinians even during the First Intifada. As Defence Minister, he told his Labour Party on 21 February 1988 that “you can’t rule by force over one and a half million Palestinians”.

However, extremists in his country did not take that kindly. They wanted the entire land to themselves. As The Guardian (UK) recalled on 31 October 2020: “the road to Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination began in Oslo, sealed in September 1993 by a handshake on the White House lawn between Rabin and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat”.

The Oslo Accords were transitional agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) to establish a partnership for negotiating border disputes, creating Palestinian self-governance through the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, with the hope of resolving the conflict through a two-state solution.

The Guardian also said that the Opposition, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, spoke at two demonstrations where one of the slogans was “Death to Rabin”. “Israel’s head of internal security asked Netanyahu to dial down the rhetoric, warning that the prime minister’s life was in danger. Netanyahu declined”. Rabin was assassinated on 4 November 1995^{xiii}.

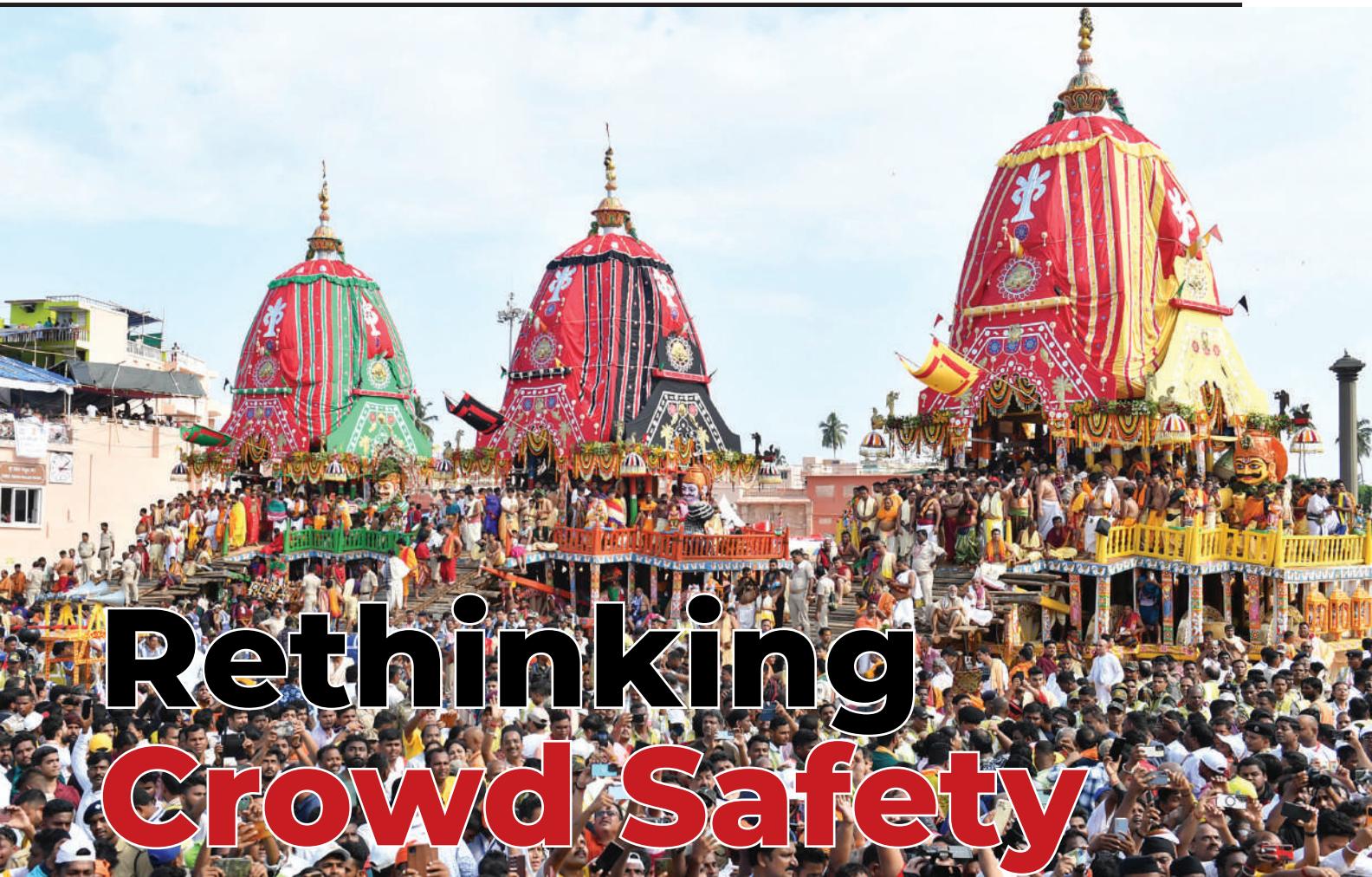
AMERICAN ROLE IN RESTRAINING ISRAEL

The only power that can restrain Israel is the United States. It is, however, true that American Presidents since Harry Truman have started using this issue for domestic political agenda, as the maximum number of Jews in the world reside in that country. The same trend was seen even during President Joe Biden’s era. It remains to be seen how far President Donald Trump would be able to restrain Prime Minister Netanyahu from causing further deaths of civilians in Gaza for rescuing hostages.

Many US presidents had also dealt with Israeli leaders sternly. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan firmly warned the then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin to desist from using cluster bombs on the civilian population in Beirut. He also stopped supplying cluster bombs to Israel^{xiv}. In 1989, Secretary of State James Baker, with full support from President H.W. Bush, gave “an unusually stern warning” to Israel to renounce its claims to territory seized in wars with neighbouring Arab nations^{xv}.

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Rethinking Crowd Safety



Kulwant K Sarangal, is a former Indian Police Service officer from Maharashtra Cadre having extensive experience of managing mass gatherings including the planning of Nashik Kumbh Mela, 2015, Nanded and Pandharpur in Solapur. He has published articles in journals and newspapers on the subject of crowd management.

Crowd disasters in mass gatherings or public utilities in India have been occurring with alarming frequency. Incidents have occurred in Tirupati, Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, New Delhi Railway Station, the IPL victory parade in Bengaluru, and the Jagannath Puri Rath Yatra within just a few months. Tragically, many people have lost their lives. While some of these events were held after years of planning, or are held annually, others are fixed-venue events, and some were held at random locations at short notice, leaving little time for the Police and organisers to plan and prepare adequately. In addition to judicial intervention to determine accountability and instituting judicial

or magisterial inquiries to assign responsibility, following incidents, the Police faced a barrage of criticism. Consequently, some of the senior-most Police officers were either suspended pending inquiries or removed from their positions.

Since the tragic incident at the Haridwar Kumbh Mela on 12 April 1820, where 430 people lost their lives on the steep steps of Hurree Pyree (now known as Har-ki-Pauri), India has witnessed numerous similar crowd disasters. However, this issue is not unique to India, as such tragedies have been reported worldwide, though not as frequently. But what is unique

to India is the conceptual confusion about the control and management of crowds, tactics for managing such events, and above all, describing such gruesome tragedies as stampedes is misleading. Labelling crowd tragedies as mere stampedes reflects intellectual laziness and a refusal to confront the complex social, psychological and structural causes behind these disasters. Crowd management has evolved into a distinct discipline, separate from crowd control. Guided by the science of crowd dynamics, it now plays a vital role in ensuring safety at events where people gather for experience and entertainment. The chronic lack of foresight in planning remains a deeply troubling weakness.

In this context, before exploring the semantics of crowd control and crowd management, it is essential first to define what constitutes a mass gathering.

WHAT IS MASS GATHERING?

Mass gatherings are a common feature of modern societies, although they were not unknown in pre-modern times. In India, the Kumbh Mela has been held for centuries, a prominent example of such large-scale assemblies. According to the World Health Organisation, “a mass gathering is a planned or spontaneous event where the number of people attending could strain the planning and response resources of the community or country hosting the event. The Olympic Games, The Hajj, and other major sporting, religious, and cultural events are all examples of a mass gathering.”¹

‘Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mass gatherings primarily by two features—size and strain on available resources—Paul Arbon criticises this approach, noting that the term “mass gathering” lacks a consistent, universally accepted definition. While many researchers describe it as an event involving a “large number of people,” thresholds vary, with some suggesting more than 1,000 attendees and others more than 25,000. These definitions are limited, Arbon argues, because they focus solely on crowd size, neglecting broader contextual factors. He proposes a more nuanced definition: any event where large

crowds are present and where emergency responses may be delayed due to limited access or environmental conditions. This potential for delay necessitates careful planning to mitigate health risks and ensure timely medical care.’²

Arbon primarily focuses on the health management aspects of mass gatherings rather than the social dynamics of crowd behaviour. In contrast, Clark McPhail offers a sociological critique of how crowds have traditionally been understood. He challenges outdated views that depict crowds as irrational, emotionally volatile entities driven by contagion or herd mentality. Drawing on empirical research and direct observation, McPhail asserts that individuals in crowds typically act with intention and rationality, guided by communication, coordination, and shared objectives. In this context, he supports replacing the term “the crowd” with “a gathering”—a more neutral descriptor that avoids the negative connotations and analytical distortions of earlier theories. While McPhail does not explicitly define “mass gathering,” his framing encourages a shift from simplistic notions of crowd size toward a more nuanced appreciation of collective human behaviour.³

Although there is no universally agreed-upon threshold for the number of attendees that constitutes a mass gathering, the definition should encompass more than just headcount. It must also reflect the complexity and dynamic nature of managing large, concentrated crowds in diverse contexts. Such critiques and discussions around the term “mass gathering” perceptibly enhance our understanding of crowd dynamics. While the term is more suited to describing planned crowd events, there remains a lack of clarity on how spontaneous assemblies should be defined, explained, and labelled.

CROWD CONTROL VS. CROWD MANAGEMENT

Crowd management and crowd control are two distinct but interrelated concepts. The former includes the facilitation, employment and movement of crowds, while the latter comprises steps taken once a crowd (or section of it) has begun to behave in a disorderly or dangerous manner.

Crowd management procedures involve

planning an event, training employees, forming scenarios, and collecting data.⁴ Distinguishing between two types of crowd events is essential as the strategies and tactics required to manage them vary significantly.

Crowd control tactics still rely largely on Gustave Le Bon's crowd psychology, which he introduced in his widely read 1895 book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. According to Le Bon and the psychologists influenced by his principles, crowds are inherently dangerous. This line of thinking asserts that while a crowd may not initially be a mob, it has the potential to become one, and each crowd constitutes a Police problem. Scholarly expositions suggest that crowd control is a group problem, although a crowd is never a single, homogeneous entity, as crowds are always heterogeneous. At times, the Police may need to step in to regulate or restrict their behaviour. Responses to such behaviour may be unplanned, and in extreme cases, the Police may have to resort to the use of force.

However, the crowds that gather for religious festivals, rock concerts, or sports events do not fit Le Bon's description of crowd behaviour. These crowds require management and are amenable to Police direction, such as forming queues or passing through turnstiles by displaying their tickets. Such crowds necessitate a planned response and are processed for the safety of the crowd members. To ensure safety, crowds are managed by assessing the venue's capacity to handle the expected number of attendees. This involves meticulous planning of entry and exit points, as well as emer-

gency evacuation routes. Additionally, comprehensive emergency management response protocols are established to address any unforeseen situations that may arise. But more critically, effective planning for safety seeks to define and manage the interrelationship between various factors such as the type of crowd, assessment of its overall medical status, type and nature of the event, likely attendance, density, venue characteristics, locale/terrain, and whether the crowd is seated, mobile or standing.

THE FALLACY OF THE STAMPEDE

Crowds are intricate entities, and when fatalities occur in dense crowds, it reflects their complexity. While the Police and media often attribute crowd tragedies to stampedes, they mischaracterise such tragic incidents. Humans do not stampede; animals do. As Dan Hancock noted, "people do not die in dense crowds stampeding, and yet that word is ubiquitous in discussions of crowd deaths. People are rarely even trampled on."⁵ The dynamics of festive crowds often contradict the traditional notion of stampedes. As a result, scholars who study crowd behaviour focus not only on crowd dynamics in a given venue but also on the specific mechanisms behind fatalities in densely packed gatherings. Interestingly, deaths in such scenarios are rarely caused by trampling, as one might expect in a typical stampede; they die from compressive asphyxia due to unsafe crowd density. During the inquiry into the Hillsborough Stadium crowd tragedy in 1989, the issue

Coldplay Mumbai 2016-A woman being pulled out of a dense crowd for breathlessness, and the other one being comforted after rescue.



of asphyxia was extensively discussed. Some of the experts described the deaths by traumatic asphyxia, whereas others distinguished between traumatic and crush asphyxia, a condition caused by a gradual and sustained increase in pressure on the chest.

Roger Byard studied the autopsies of three female victims who died from crush asphyxia. In each case, the pattern of petechiae on the chest was influenced by tight-fitting clothing, which compressed the superficial blood vessels (cutaneous vasculature). This resulted in a distinctive “brassiere sign”—a clearly observable and easily recordable sign of crush asphyxia caused by chest compression. Importantly, this condition is not typically associated with stampede-related deaths.⁶

So, characterising the crowd tragedies as stampedes not only tends to blame the victims for tactical and operational failures of the Police, but also reveals a troubling inability to grapple with the complex dynamics that lead to fatalities in high-density crowd settings. Moreover, epidemiology of dense crowds or mass gatherings is not consistent with stampedes. This mischaracterisation suggests that mass gathering events are not well-understood. If the process is unclear, planning for the safety of attendees is likely to be flawed.

CROWD TYPOLOGIES

Beyond planned and scheduled gatherings, such as religious festivals, sports events, political rallies, and rock concerts, specific urban locations naturally attract or channel high volumes of foot traffic. These include transportation hubs such as railway stations, bus terminals, and airports, as well as facilities like Mumbai’s local trains, shopping malls, and public squares. Major city streets in places like Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai also frequently experience significant overcrowding. This congestion leads to numerous challenges, including accidents, injuries, and in some cases, fatalities. Mumbai local trains, for instance, are third more densely packed than Tokyo’s famously congested equivalent. Officials have coined the term “superdense crushload” to describe how 550 commuters are regularly

crammed into a carriage built for 200—a situation where up to 16 standing passengers share every square meter of floor space,⁷ whereas according to widely accepted crowd density standards, up to 47 individuals can occupy 10 square meters without significant risk of injury or fatality. However, local crowd-attracting focal points have not been sufficiently studied or thoroughly researched. Crowd safety planning in these areas remains limited—possibly because such sites or facilities are not typically approached from the perspective of crowd or mass gathering management.

A tragic incident occurred on January 8, 2025, at the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), where six devotees lost their lives while standing in queue for nearly 12 hours to receive Vaikunthadwara Sarvadarshan tickets. According to reports, a closed gate leading to the distribution counter was briefly opened to assist a devotee who was unwell. However, the waiting crowd misinterpreted this action as the start of ticket distribution. In the ensuing rush, the tragedy took place, resulting in the fatalities. It appears that the gate was opened without prior communication with or warning to the waiting devotees, which contributed to the confusion and subsequent tragedy. Long serpentine queues and extended waiting times are a common sight in India during religious events. Similar scenes can also be observed around cricket stadiums or at venues where people gather to purchase tickets for popular events.

Such waiting crowds present unique challenges, as standing in queues for various purposes or waiting for a delayed train or flight for long hours has its own psychology, dynamics and social norms. David Bissell’s term “the waiting spaces, including the queues, as container spaces, which are designed to hold the body, where the body is prompted to remain inert in a form of temporary statis,”⁸ a state of regulated inaction. However, it is obvious that people are contained for an event to unfold, such as the acquisition of tokens in the Tirupati case or the darshan of Lord Vithal and Rukmini in Pandharpur, Solapur, Maharashtra, where devotees sometimes wait for more than 12 hours for their turn.

As Bissell has put it, waiting for an event is

a form of anticipation. If the crowd managers fail to recognise and address these aspects adequately, it can lead to serious problems. Miscommunication or lack of information—such as was seen during the incident in Tirupati—can turn these situations into tragedies. However, when planning crowd events, waiting and queuing are often taken for granted, with little attention paid to their psychological and procedural aspects, which can usually lead to tragic outcomes. The subject also continues to be inadequately researched.

Crowds are generally classified as ambulatory, standing, seated, acquisitive (as seen in Tirupati), vibrant, or participative. Each type of event—and the distinct crowd it attracts—requires a carefully planned response. ‘However, this typology has been seen as limited, as it focuses primarily on the actions of the crowd, and is not a descriptor of the type of crowd.⁹ A more effective typology would offer a dynamic understanding of crowd behaviour, reflecting not just what crowds do, but how and why they behave in specific ways.

A PLANNING APPROACH TO CROWD SAFETY. FROM CROWDS TO GATHERINGS: A RATIONAL APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN CROWD SAFETY PLANNING

Clark McPhail challenges traditional views that see crowd behaviour as irrational and emotionally driven. Drawing on empirical studies and direct observation, he rejects older theories, such as contagion and convergence, that rely on assumptions of lost individuality and mindless influence. Instead, he argues that individuals in crowds often act purposefully and rationally, with behaviour emerging from communication, coordination, and shared goals. Given the pejorative connotations associated with the term ‘crowd,’ he prefers to use an alternative concept of ‘a gathering’ instead, as discussed above.

McPhail further avers that contemporary sociologists have rejected the term “the crowd” because it acts as a conceptual cataract, obscuring clear analysis of collective phenomena. Instead, the use of the term “a gathering” refers to two or more individuals sharing the same space and time, without implying any specific behaviour. Though the term gathering also omits the behaviour part of

the crowd, this is a valuable insight for developing a planned approach to crowd safety, especially when he explains that “most gatherings are temporary, formed by an assembling process that brings people from different locations at one time to a common location at another time. A dispersal process vacates that location, ending the gathering.”¹⁰

McPhail and Miller speak with more clarity when they articulate that “the literature suggests that many collective behaviour phenomena require large assemblies of people. Such assemblies are neither omnipresent nor continuous. They are produced when people move from disparate points in space at time one to a common location at time two. This assembling process creates those large congregations of people from which collective behaviour may develop.¹¹

McPhail and Miller have thus challenged traditional portrayals of crowds as inherently irrational or violent by using terms such as “gathering” or “assembly” to highlight the structured and often prosocial nature of collective behaviour. Rather than viewing crowds as naturally prone to chaos, they argue that such assumptions tend to arise from misunderstandings or oversimplifications of how crowds actually behave.

CROWD SAFETY PLANNING: INSIGHTS FROM SPATIOTEMPORAL VARIABILITY IN CROWD DYNAMICS

McPhail’s description of gathering



highlights the processual and dynamic nature of crowd assemblies, emphasising that they unfold through a series of stages. A key feature of this process is its spatiotemporal variability, both within the venue and beyond its defined boundaries. Spatiotemporal variability and the gathering formation process are fittingly illustrated by the crowd tragedy that occurred on February 15, 2025, at the New Delhi Railway Station platform involving pilgrims who had gathered there to board trains for the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela. This incident cannot be viewed in isolation; it is intrinsically connected to the broader spatiotemporal variability of crowd assembly process in Prayagraj.

Since every crowd event is unique and takes place in a distinct venue with its own topography, which can influence crowd flow in various ways, the process of crowd formation, circulation within the venue and dispersal—also known as crowd dynamics—differs significantly from one location to another. Therefore, planning for a mass gathering with crowd safety in mind must begin with a thorough understanding of the specific crowd dynamics at that venue. Additionally, crowd dynamics is influenced by

the demographic profile of the attendees. For example, the demographic characteristics of rock concert-goers will differ markedly from those attending religious festivals such as the Kumbh Mela, and these differences can significantly impact crowd dynamics.

DESIGNING FOR DENSITY: HOW VENUE DESIGN SHAPES CROWD SAFETY

Crowds at mass gatherings—whether planned or spontaneous—interact with venues in various ways. Events such as religious festivals, concerts, sports, and conventions, which bring together large numbers of people, often require venues that accommodate sitting, standing, viewing, listening, and ambulatory crowds. However, the available venues—whether permanent or temporary—are rarely tailor-made for processing a large number of people. Kumbh Melas in India are held at fixed venues that have remained the same for years; however, each time the event is held—every twelve years—these venues require extensive temporary design and infrastructure planning for the safety of the pilgrims.

This venue issue brings us to the concept of safety by design. In the 2004 Kumbh Mela in



Nashik, 29 pilgrims tragically lost their lives because the route they were walking on was already overcrowded, with a steep incline that had not been addressed during venue preparation.

A similar failure occurred during the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. Police allowed crowds to fill the two central pens of the stadium, following the flawed assumption that the crowd would naturally distribute itself. Even after the central pens became dangerously overcrowded, additional spectators were directed there, while the two side pens remained relatively empty. Tragically, movement to the side pens was blocked by fences too high to climb, making it impossible for people to redistribute themselves and avoid the crush,^{12 13} essentially a design issue.

DESIGNING VERSUS PROCEDURAL SAFETY: RETHINKING CROWD MANAGEMENT THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The fundamental flaw in ensuring crowd safety at mass gatherings lies in how it is perceived as an operational activity, involving crowd management or control by stewards, Police, and barriers, among others. In fact, delivering crowd safety should start in the design phase or earlier and adopt

an approach that integrates design and management. Safety through design is more effective than procedural safety, which relies on fallible human behaviour. The corollary to this is that the risks arising from poor design cannot necessarily be managed by operational afterthought.¹⁴ What, then, are the characteristics of a venue that should be considered when addressing design issues?

David Canter (1977) in his celebrated book, *The Psychology of Place*, offers a valuable perspective. He identifies three key attributes that define a place:

- Physical attributes – the tangible, architectural elements of an environment.
- Activity – what people do in a place, including their behaviours, routines, and interactions.
- Conceptual meaning – the symbolic or psychological significance that individuals assign to a place.

Canter emphasises that these three dimensions are not independent; instead, they interact and influence each other, collectively shaping an individual's overall experience of a



place. Together, they form what he calls a “place schema”, which guides how a person understands and responds to a particular setting. In addition to the venue’s pre-existing topographical and architectural features, crowd planners often introduce supplementary elements, such as civic amenities, barricades, and other infrastructure, to facilitate crowd movement and ensure safety. The activity element refers to the interactive engagement of attendees with these physical components—such as using civic amenities, accessing medical services, walking through barricaded channels, passing through turnstiles, sitting in stadiums, participating in concerts, or performing rituals during religious festivals. These interactions between people and the venue’s physical structures transform the space into a complex, dynamic environment where human behaviour, infrastructure, and movement systems are tightly interlinked.

In such a complex, interactive venue, especially one that’s tightly coupled with unique crowd dynamics, the margin for error is minimal. That is why planning for crowd safety, complemented by venue design and operational safety, is essential when preparing for a crowd event.

PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY: AVOIDING GENERIC CROWD ASSUMPTIONS

However, planning must take into ac-

count not only the venue and its complexities but also the crowd’s demographic profile and behavioural patterns. A common mistake planners make is to treat the crowd as homogeneous — often reduced to a simple male-female binary — both in demographic terms and behaviour. It’s important to remember that just as every event is unique in terms of venue and crowd dynamics, crowd behaviour is also shaped by the specific nature of the event. The demographic makeup, behavioural tendencies, and dynamics of a rock concert crowd differ significantly from those at a religious gathering or political rally. While historical data can offer valuable insights, it should be recent and relevant, rather than outdated by a generational gap.

While planning an event, organisers often make assumptions based on historical data. However, these assumptions are valid only if the historical data were accurately collected and properly archived during previous events. During a recurring large-scale event, attendance projections were made using speculative data. While the venue was designed based on these optimistic estimates, operational plans cautiously accounted for the possibility of lower turnout. Despite this, a series of operational missteps resulted in a crisis when actual attendance fell short of expectations.

SPATIOTEMPORAL SEGMENTATION AND ITS IMPACT ON CROWD DENSITY

Activity within a venue is inherently spatio-

Venue after the Hathras Crowd Tragedy



temporal, unfolding across both spatial dimensions and temporal phases. While the venue constitutes the physical space, each event is confined to a specific temporal framework. Nevertheless, spatio-temporal heterogeneity ensures that venues are subdivided into multiple dynamic zones. Consider a rock concert: areas designated for entry and egress function as distinct spatiotemporal zones, differing significantly from those near the stage. These sub-zones not only vary spatially but also temporally, each necessitating tailored crowd control methodologies. Consequently, various sections of the venue may experience peak activity either sequentially or concurrently.

Such variability often results in fluctuating crowd densities, which may become critical if operational guidelines are not rigorously implemented. The emergence of unforeseen hotspots may demand immediate reallocation of resources. It is well-documented that exceeding safe crowd density thresholds can result in severe consequences. As a function of both space and time, density must be carefully monitored and managed.

Planning for managing crowd density is central to ensuring attendee safety during event planning. This begins with determining the capacity of the venue or its sub-areas based on safe density thresholds. Once capacity is established, operational measures must be put in place to monitor real-time conditions as crowds begin to form.

Achieving effective crowd management requires robust situational awareness throughout the event. Without it—and without a decision-support system to guide timely responses—there is a heightened risk of tragedy. Ultimately, operational success hinges on the ability to maintain situational awareness and respond appropriately to evolving conditions, but this is possible only if it has been planned.

CONCLUSION

Mass gatherings are inherently complex, with each event displaying unique patterns of crowd behaviour and dynamics. Anticipating these behaviours is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of attendees. Only with such foresight can crowd managers develop effective plans to protect people in densely populated settings.

Some events are periodic and familiar, allowing planners to draw on prior knowledge and experience. Others, however, may be temporary, spontaneous, or novel—demanding greater imagination and anticipatory skills. In such uncertain scenarios, effective management is impossible without planned response across strategic, tactical, and operational dimensions.

In light of multiple crowd-related tragedies in India, it is imperative that both planned and spontaneous gatherings receive a structured and informed response. This response must be grounded in historical data, informed by assumptions, informed by forecasting, and based on a deep understanding of crowd dynamics.

While planning data is often incomplete or fragmented, assumptions—when made—must be rooted in experience, expertise, and a solid grasp of how crowds behave.

Importantly, each gathering possesses its own distinct ecology, psychology and spatio-temporal dimensions, necessitating brainstorming, scenario planning, and adaptive management—right through to post-event evaluation and reporting. ●

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Prisoners humane environment in Indian pris Matter



Somesh Goyal is a former Director General of Police. He also headed the Corrections Department of Himachal Pradesh where he made seminal contribution to the cause of prisons reforms and prisoner rehabilitation. His project *Har Haath Ko Kaam* has been lauded as the game changer for prisoner reintegration with society. In this article, he writes about the issues faced by the prisons in India.

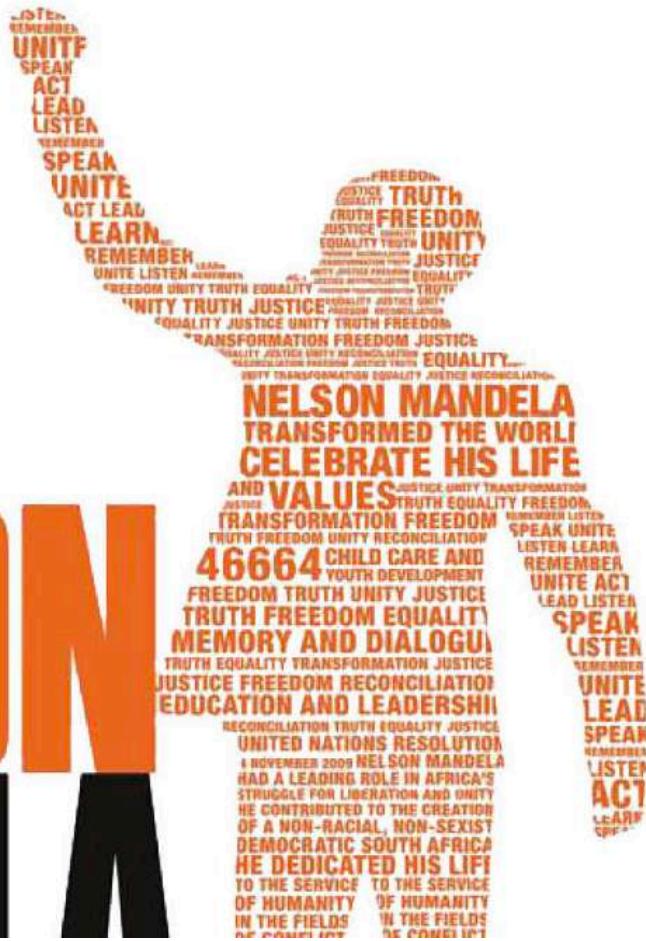
The international Nelson Mandela Day is celebrated on July 18. It is a day to honour the legacy of the former President of South Africa, who endured 27 years of incarceration and inhuman treatment while advocating for peace and freedom. This occasion reminds all policymakers, civil society, and stakeholders in the criminal justice system of the crucial need to promote humane conditions in prisons, recognise the importance of prisoner reintegration in society, and value the significant role of correctional staff in providing a vital social service behind the high stone walls.

2025 holds special significance as it marks the 10th anniversary of the UN Standard

Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, and the 15th anniversary of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders – commonly referred to as the Bangkok Rules. These milestones underscore the significant progress made in prison management and the ongoing need to uphold these rules, which ensure the SAFETY, DIGNITY, and HUMAN RIGHTS of the inmates. This progress should instill a sense of optimism in all of us, as we continue to strive for better prison conditions.

There are more than 11.5 million people behind bars across the world. India alone has more than half a million prisoners in nearly 1330 prisons

Prisoners NELSON MANDELA



as per the NCRB data of 2022. The number of prisoners be they central, district or sub jails, is grossly inadequate to provide dignified living conditions.

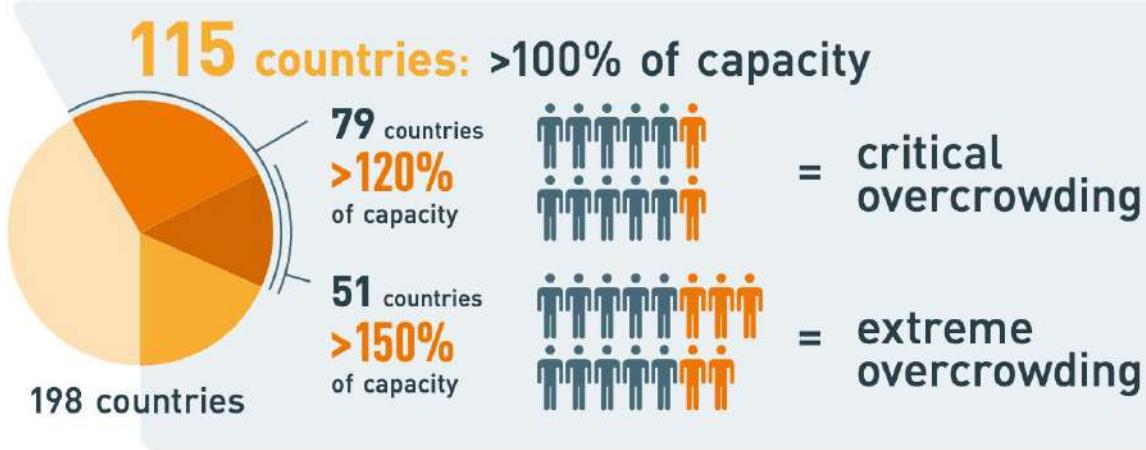
Many of the inmates belong to the most marginalised segments of society. Many prisoners in India live in overcrowded prisons where prison conditions may not provide the best of basic human needs. Most of the inmates are undertrial prisoners awaiting the outcome of their trial.

Unfortunately, these individuals are often forgotten by their family, society and the system. They suffer from loneliness, isolation, social stigma, anger, frustration, insomnia, depression and several other psychosomatic illnesses. But these people do matter.

They come from our society, and their incarceration affects our safety, public health, state resources and the social fabric at large. As the National Human Rights Commission of India has asserted, the prisoners are first and foremost "human beings".

While assessing the condition of Indian prisons in 1835, Lord Macaulay described them as "shocking to humanity". The focus of the British was on retribution, punishment, and torture. The prison conditions have significantly improved after Independence. However, it is ironic that a recent public interest litigation titled 'Inhuman Condi-





tions in Prisons', in the Supreme Court, puts the spotlight back on the not-so-desirable conditions in the Indian prisons.

According to the NCRB data compiled up to 2022, there are approximately 5.73 lakh prisoners in around 1,330 prisons across the country, with an occupancy rate of 131 per cent, which places us in the near extreme overcrowding category. Efforts have been afoot to augment the prison's capacity, which, however, falls short of the pace of increase in the number of inmates. The actual capacity of prisons increased from 4,25,609 in 2021 to 4,36,266 in 2022. This increase was negated by the rise of inmates from 5,54,034 in 2021 to 5,73,220 in 2022, recording a 3.5% jump during the period.

President Draupadi Murmu, a couple of years ago, questioned the need for more prisons in a progressive society. However, the reality on the ground is vastly at variance with such a utopia. There is an urgent need to increase and improve accommodation for the existing prison population and future projections. This need is not just a matter of policy, but a pressing issue that demands immediate attention.

The bane of our criminal justice system is delayed trials, locking up huge numbers of undertrial prisoners (UTP) in prisons. Three in four prisoners are UTPs. Faster trials, as provided in the new criminal laws, and the creation of more lower courts may solve this riddle.

Most of these UTPs are involved in heinous crimes where bail is not available. However, there is a sizable number of other prison-

ers who have been granted bail by the courts but cannot meet the financial obligations of furnishing a bond and/or arranging a local surety. Following the mantra of 'bail, not jail', the Supreme Court, in the Sonadhar case in January 2023, directed local courts to modify or relax these conditions if bail bonds are not furnished within one month from the date of bail grant, which can lead to delays in the release of prisoners on bail.

Wherever a state has shown the will, a large number of such prisoners have been released. Maharashtra has released more than 9,000 inmates by synergising the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), non-profit organisations and the prison staff. Other states are yet to emulate this robust and workable mechanism.

In another inspiring endeavour, the NALSA launched a nationwide campaign 'Release-UTRC@75' to commemorate 75 years of India's Independence in 2022. This campaign, which involved the coordination of various stakeholders including the judiciary, legal services authorities, and prison staff, led to the release of nearly 25,000 prisoners, thereby decreasing the congestion by a substantial five per cent. Such release campaigns, if initiated by each high court at least once a year, could significantly reduce the burden on our prisons and improve the conditions for the remaining inmates.

In 2023, the central government started providing financial support to poor prisoners who were unable to afford the bail amount. The scheme provides financial aid of up to Rs 40,000 for undertrials and Rs 25,000 for convicts, based on the

approval of the empowered committee chaired by district collectors. The Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidelines for the scheme.

The research wing of the Supreme Court identified approximately 25000 such prisoners. However, the scheme remains a non-starter due to the unwillingness or unavailability of the district magistrates to chair the meetings. The MHA, in its communication to the states in October 2024, has acknowledged that “many states/UTs are yet to take full advantage of this scheme despite the MHA’s repeated persuasion in this regard”. The onus is on the MHA to remove this bottleneck and entrust the job to DLSA, on whose recommendation orders from the concerned court should be obtained to release such prisoners.

Of late, emphasis has been laid on rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners rather than incarceration. Open jails have been discussed as a more viable and humane alternative to standard prisons. Himachal Pradesh, although a small state, has made pioneering efforts in establishing open jail facilities within the state. Instead of creating separate open jails, every prisons has created an

open jail component where deserving inmates with a good track record and behaviour are provided livelihood opportunities not only in the prison factories but outside the confines of the prisons in partnership with industries, businesses and by innovative initiatives like the widely acclaimed Shimla Book Café and flagship Himkaara stores completely managed by life convicts. The department has also established a prison in Baddi, a central industrial and pharmaceutical hub, to explore the possibilities of skilling and providing jobs to deserving inmates in collaboration with local industry.

The Har Haath Ko Kaam project of Himachal Prisons aims at engaging maximum prisoners in meaningful livelihood-generating activities, ensuring financial independence and support to the families of the inmates, who are the secondary victims of the crime and get constantly punished and stigmatised for the crime committed by their breadwinner.

It is truly gratifying for Himachal Pradesh that the Apex Court in its interim orders dated 15/09/2017 observed that “the suggestion



given by the learned amicus of encouraging the establishment of 'open jails' or 'open prisons' is certainly worth considering. It was brought to our notice that the experiment in Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) and the semi-open prison in Delhi are extremely successful and need to be carefully studied. Perhaps there might be equally successful experiments carried out in other States as well, and if so, they need to be documented, studied and emulated."

Rajasthan has taken innovative strides by tying up with gaushalas in the state to rehabilitate convicts in maintaining these pounds. They live on campus with their families, leading a near-normal life and integrating with society.

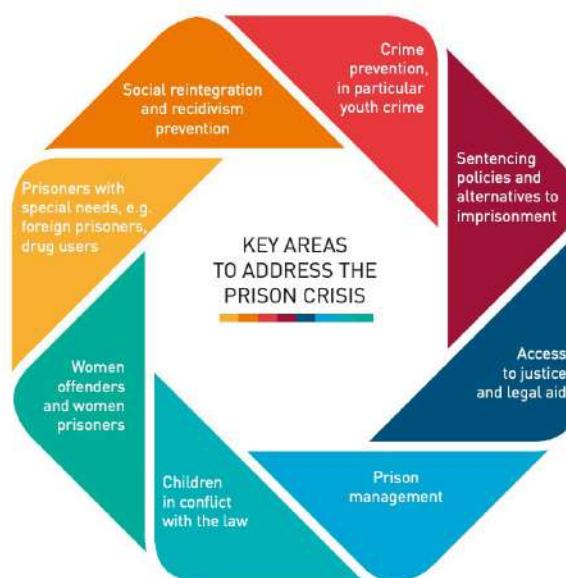
Women, at 24,000, constitute under five per cent of the entire prison population. Most of the women inmates are confined to separate enclosures in general prisons. Even though most of the jails meant for women are not overcrowded, there are serious questions about the suitability of these facilities for the specific needs of women. The World Health Organisation has observed that "the prison system was primarily designed for men and many prisons do not have adequate facilities to protect women's rights or to promote their health". Their personal hygiene and medical needs are distinct from those of their male counterparts and require different approaches in prisons. Globally, there is a conscious effort to treat them as a particular category of inmates by recognising their special needs and creating an infrastructure tailored to them specifically.

As of 2022, 1537 women inmates were lodged with 11764 children in the prisons. Separation of children from mothers is traumatic, to say the least. Issues of pregnant inmates, lactating mothers, young children, special diet,

specialised medical care, etc., become important management issues in the prison administration if humane treatment is to be meted out to this category of prisoners.

Prisons have their own problems. Large vacancies, causing a one-third staff shortage, are detrimental to proper watch and ward, safety, and security duties. The vacancy position of the correctional staff that includes probation, welfare, and health officials, counsellors, health and psychologists/psychiatrists is much worse at over forty per cent, which adversely impacts health, including mental, welfare and a facilitating environment inside the correctional facilities.

The role of the Government is paramount in improving the living conditions inside jails for women inmates. The State and central governments must support prison establishments to transform them into reformatories. Several committees have been constituted in the past since Independence, which have made recommendations to improve



the condition of prisoners, particularly women in the Indian prisons. All India Jail Manual Committee, 1957, Working Group of Prisons, 1972, All India Prison Reforms Committee, 1980-83 (Mulla Committee), All India Group of Prison Administration, Security and Discipline, 1986, National Expert Committee on Women Prisoner, 1987 (Justice Krishna Ayer Committee), and Ministry of Women and Child Development Report on women in prisons, 2018 have made several recommendations for improving the living condition for prisoners. The Supreme Court has also directed state High Courts to monitor the condition of prisons in the states.

The judicial activism, the urgency of the prison departments across the country, the advocacy by nonprofits, and the government's support create an environment of hope and optimism for the incarcerated.●



Neighbourhood First: Case of Maldives



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This is a fact that neighbours are a gift of geography and could be the pains of history. India has a challenging neighbourhood, which is further complicated by the fact that post-independence India shares borders and river water disputes with many of its neighbours, often resulting in contested areas. Some borders, such as those with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, were settled amicably. They also have a civilisational connection, which enhances expectations vertically. This gets further accentuated by the political dynamics of several Indian states that border these countries, especially Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Bhutan has generally remained close and calm despite Chinese attempts to cut its own deals. Since India is not only the largest and most powerful South Asian country but also the fastest-growing major economy in the world, it makes it equally attractive to the populace of many of our neighbours, who find sound sustenance and opportunities. Immigration and refugees have also been a challenge, as in several cases, especially in West Bengal and the Northeastern region of India, they could destabilise the population dynamic. Hence, there is a call for addressing this issue more vigor-

ously, especially when the domestic elections are impending. Resolving boundary issues and river water disputes also requires the cooperation of the adjoining Indian state. It becomes difficult for the Centre when the ruling political party in the state is not politically aligned with the central government. These complexities play out on the canvas of neighbourhood policies and often crystallise the divergences more acutely.

They have congenital problems and suffer from sibling rivalries, similar to humans, and are complicated in their bilateral or multilateral discourse by the historic baggage or external inducements and machinations. Often, land and territorial issues are intertwined with sovereignty and identity dimensions, which become complex due to the engineered domestic politics of the country and the region. India, of a continental proportion and size, is no exception. Several of its neighbours have had a historical nexus and coexisted as part of the whole, even owing their existence to the colonialism of barely 200 years. Both history and geography, as well as extended neighbourhoods, are further accentuated by

modern-day competition for their development, security, and influence, especially in smaller countries.

Since SAARC itself has become hostage to Indo-Pak rivalry, given Pakistan's continued recourse to terrorism as a tool of state policy against India, newer definitions of neighbourhood had to be devised. Hence, the "Act East Policy" with an emphasis on sub-regional cooperation, i.e., BCIM, BBIN, and BIMSTEC, IOR, etc., was blended with the Neighbourhood First Policy in a sub-regional connectivity format, including India's North East. Moreover, the "Look and Act West Policy" to strategically engage and expand the collaborative matrix with the Middle East, especially the GCC countries and Israel, has achieved unprecedented depth and possibly represents the most significant success of the Modi government's foreign policy. Prime Minister Modi's travels to all our neighbours several times and invitations to the leaders at his swearing-in ceremonies since 2014 have displayed India's genuine desire to take them along. A unique trait of PM Modi and his "inter-personal touch" with his counterparts has provided an unusual comfort level and understanding, which will reinforce ties in the bilateral and multilateral context and is clearly evident in the enhanced strategic investments, especially from the Gulf, and expanding collaboration in security, defence, and counter terrorism initiatives. Israel has also emerged as a major technological and security partner for India, while India continues to support Palestine in the international fora and through varied bilateral assistance. One should then look at the potential under the Indo-Pacific framework. It is essential to understand that the Neighbourhood First policy has extended its outreach beyond the immediate vicinity.

In any case, since the neighbours are a reality and you have to live with them in tandem and harmony, it is imperative that, being a regional superpower, one has to be magnanimous. This is precisely what India has done by adopting the Neighbourhood First policy in South Asia at least since 2008. Prior to that, the neighbours also claimed priority in developmental

assistance through the Gujral Doctrine, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, or infrastructural and budgetary assistance. This primacy is driven by the foreign policy dictum that for India, the economic development of neighbours and political and security stability are equally important for India's own growth journey as a global power. Peace is a prerequisite.

Even with Pakistan, which has been driven by highly unproductive anti-India, unifocal cross-border terrorism and zero-sum policies and wars against India, it has been New Delhi's approach that an economically strong Pakistan was in India's interest. But Pakistan is an incorrigible Militarocracy whose deep state's existence depends on an anti-India posture and policies for which J&K is only a ruse. Since they got defeated in all four wars with India during the past seven and a half decades, some four decades ago, they chose cross-border terrorism, extremism and radicalisation as a low-cost modus operandi. It has tried its nuclear blackmail to ignite international interest, but India has called that bluff. Heinous Pahalgam terror attacks where Pakistan-based "The Resistance Front" (TRF) killed twenty-six innocent tourists based on their religion, met with a decisive kinetic response from India, which launched Op-Sindoor to avenge the nine terror hideouts and camps across Pakistan. Since the Uri attacks in 2016, India decided to hit the terrorists and their sponsors with decisive might. This is also the reason that SAARC became a laggard since India refused to let the terror-sponsoring Pakistan go scot-free. Today, the relationship with Pakistan is at its lowest, and with Op-Sindoor in continuum against Pakistani cross-border terrorism, it is unlikely to be improved until Pakistan conclusively abjures its nurturing and sponsoring of it.

One of the biggest challenges in South Asia is China's hegemonic, chequebook-driven diplomacy, which aims to essentially encircle India in the region and hinder its global ambitions. It continues to oppose India's rightful inclusion in the permanent category of the UNSC in the reformed council. Parity is what bothers China and remains unacceptable. Ironically, the GDPs of India and China were broadly identical in the 1980s. Today, China is the second-largest and India the fourth-largest



economy, and they are heading to reduce the gap caused by several of our policies and the delayed start of economic reforms, by at least a decade, which has become critical in generating the economic differential. Hence, China and its Sino-Pak axis (iron-clad friendship), as well as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and strategic investments, such as its String of Pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean, have become a cause of concern for India's security and regional influence. In almost all countries, Beijing tries to create hurdles for India through its debt traps and White Elephant projects. By the time our neighbours, such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives, as well as Nepal, realised that the stress factor had increased in their bilateral relationships with India. The Sino-Pak axis has become a two-front threat for India and is a real one. All neighbours, with the sole exception of Bhutan, have bought into the Chinese bait and pie, especially for the BRI, where India has sovereignty concerns.

Most of our neighbours suffer from the 'Big Brother Syndrome' as far as India is concerned, and under the garb of the strategic autonomy and identity crisis, they fall prey to the Chinese designs conducted with speed and precision. They have become smarter and try to leverage themselves between India and China. Although India has invested billions of dollars in projects and capacity building for its neighbours, the political certainty regarding the outcomes of the non-reciprocal policy remains uncertain. But a realisation has set in that India's benign foreign policy generosity is something they can bank on in times to come. Bailing out Sri Lanka by providing over \$4 billion to support the failing state, which has a huge and prominently Chinese debt burden, has woken them up and is being watched by others.

India also emerged as a first responder and often a net security provider be it water shortages and coup attempts in Maldives, devastating earthquakes in Nepal or terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka or the recurring floods in Bangladesh, or for that matter medicinal and vaccine provision during the pandemic the speed with which India reaches and provides rescue efforts to them is sometimes projected by political opponents as a territorial ingress rather than humanitarian concern and spirit of

Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam (world is one family) and approach of Prime Minister Modi's government of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' especially with regard to the neighbors.

Now Bangladesh, which has turned into a master piece relationship in the neighbourhood, has become another challenge as the US-China-Pakistan play their dirty games in connivance with the interim Bangladesh government of so-called Chief Adviser Mohammed Yunus after the departure of ousted long-term leader Sheikh Hasina, who had also stopped listening to the people and the street. Her asylum or interim stay in India has become a new bone of contention between India and Bangladesh, and perhaps the relationship has taken a nose-dive. Given Bangladeshi insensitivities, India had to take specific trade and transportation restriction measures. However, on the existential issues affecting the people of Bangladesh, New Delhi continued to meet their requirements to avoid punishing them for the misguided policies of their rulers.

What does India want in return for its non-reciprocal broadband assistance and market access from its neighbours? Simply put, the only thing India expects from all its neighbours is the assurance that their land will not be used against India's security and core concerns. Not too much to ask for what India does for them. However, in the shifting sands of instability and political volatility in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, such assurances will be difficult to come by. India cannot dictate or deny any country the right to choose its relationships and partners.

Still, if they are driven by evil intent to impinge on Indian security interests, there ought to be certain costs. Despite India having remained clear and committed to assisting its neighbours and not adopting a petty, even if realistic, policy option. Given the political upheavals and changes, as well as occasional anti-India rhetoric emanating from the neighbourhood, some perceive this as a failure of diplomacy and policy. This is far from the reality. It is essential to recognise that the state of relations with our neighbours is also contingent upon the leaders and ruling dispensation in a given time frame

and is subject to policy fluctuations, as India remains a significant factor in their domestic politics. They will continue to redefine their own strategic calculus and importance in the regional game of thrones, even as there are no permanent friends or enemies, and only interests are essential. Each country and its political leadership, at a particular period, exercises its strategic choices as it deems proper. Sooner or later, they realise what is good for them. It has been witnessed in several cases among our neighbours, but one of the most classic examples is that of the Maldives, which is a strategic maritime neighbour.

MALDIVES REVISITED

On July 26, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 60th Anniversary celebrations of the Maldives' Independence and the strengthening of our diplomatic ties as the Chief Guest. He also became the first foreign leader to be hosted by President Muizzu since taking over. This is highly significant and indicative of a substantive turnaround in the relationship, as President Muizzu and his political party were known to oppose a closer partnership with India. 'The India Out' campaign by his party, and overarching negative remarks, and their desire to get even closer to China were seen by many as if we had lost the Maldives for good to our competitors. In fact, India-Maldives relations, from the presidency of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (1978–2008) to that of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (2018–23), have grown from strength to strength, except the tenure of President Abdulla Yameen (2013–18).

President Mohamed Muizzu followed Yameen's ideological aversion to India in the early days. His first visits to Turkey and China, rather than to his closest neighbour—India—were indicative of his efforts to rebuff India. Likewise, the conclusion of 20 agreements in Beijing; and the raging controversy over his public demand to India to withdraw a small team of defence personnel stationed there to man an Indian aircraft and two helicopters for the benefit of the Maldivian people created a challenging situation and public furor in India that turned into mass boycott of tourism – a vital artery of

Maldives. Indians, who had previously constituted the most significant number of tourists, dropped to sixth place, causing substantial tremors for the tourism and allied industries in the Maldives. This alone had a significant impact and forced the new dispensation to look inward and pragmatically consider their own interests.

This visit by the Prime Minister was symbolic and significant, as the Muizzu government, early on, began to realise that India was not only their nearest neighbour but also a friend in need at all times throughout their history. Despite widespread discontent over the 'India Out' political campaign and patriotic reaction by an average Indian, even dumping their travel and tourism to Male, the Indian government did not indulge in direct retaliatory or punishing measures. Instead, it continued to provide financial, food and project assistance whenever required and requested by them. PM Modi invited President Muizzu during his swearing-in ceremony in 2024. In his October visit to India, a shared vision for a comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership was announced. That vision is now becoming a reality. As a result, bilateral ties are reaching new heights, and several important projects have been inaugurated, ranging from social housing to connectivity, cybersecurity, defence, and capacity building, as well as the provision of Lines of Credit and grants. Climate Change and counter-terrorism remain the key concerns and areas of cooperation for the two sides.

In a Joint Statement with President Muizzu in Male, PM Modi said 'This year also marks 60 years of diplomatic relations between India and the Maldives. However, the roots of our relationship are older than history itself and are as deep as the ocean. The commemorative stamp released today, featuring the traditional boats of both our countries, is a reflection of the fact that we are not just neighbours, but also fellow voyagers on a shared journey.' He further added, "India is the closest neighbour of the Maldives. The Maldives holds a key place in both India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and our MAHASAGAR vision. India also takes pride in being the Maldives's most trusted friend. Be it natural disasters or pandemics, India has always stood by the Maldives as the 'First

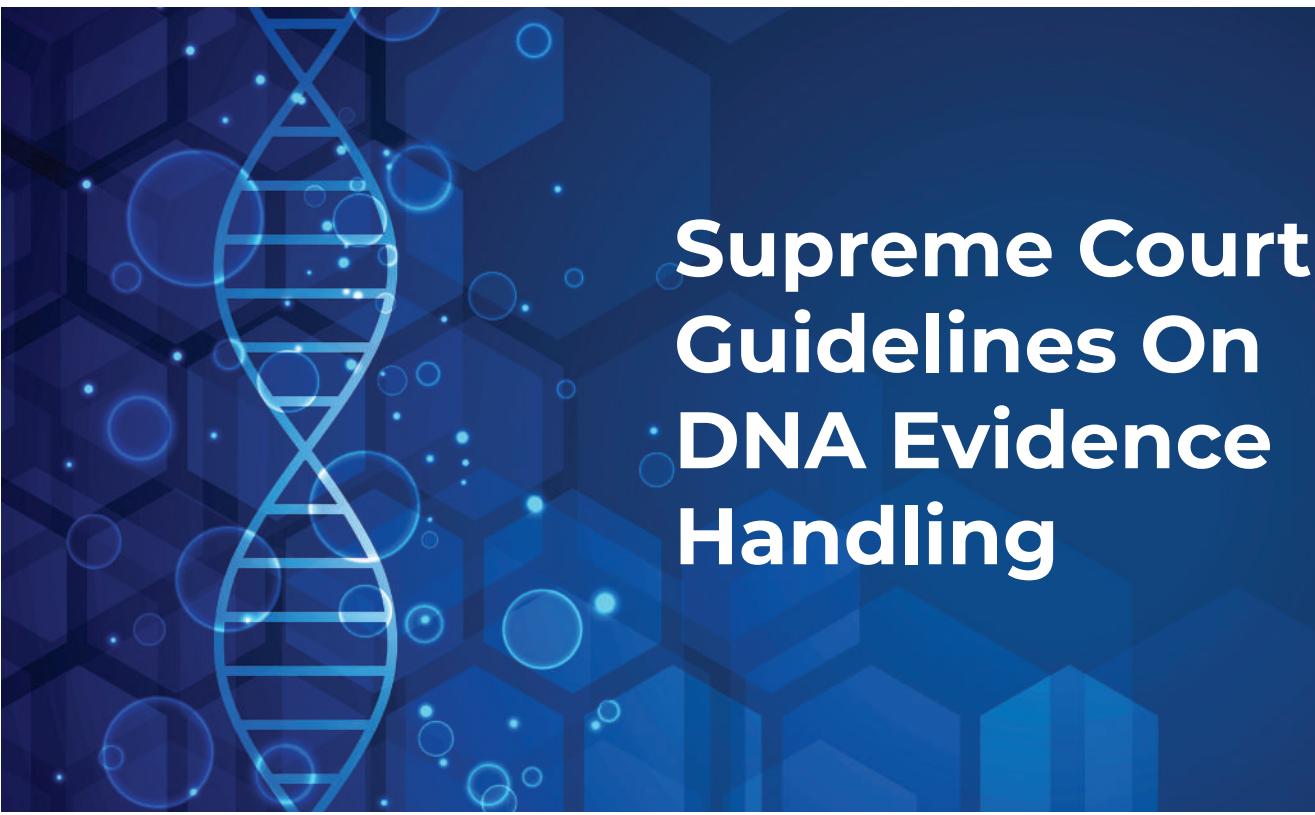
Responder'. Whether it was ensuring the supply of essential commodities or supporting economic recovery following COVID-19, India has always worked hand in hand with the Maldives. For us, it is always friendship first."

Defence and security cooperation has often been seen as cantankerous by some in the Maldives. However, the fact that India built the Defence Ministry building there, which PM Modi inaugurated, tells a new story of a concrete symbol of trust. India will continue to support the development of the Maldives' defence capabilities. Peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region are our shared objectives. Together, through the Colombo Security Conclave, we will strengthen regional maritime security, the PM commented. India extended a new line of credit of \$ 565 Mn for infrastructure and connectivity projects in this land of a thousand islands, as the PM handed over 3300 social housing units constructed under India's buyer credit facility to the Maldivians. To address the health care issue, India presented two BHISHM health cube sets. A large number of Maldivians come to India for treatment. Both countries have decided to finalise the Bilateral Investment Treaty as well as the Avoidance of Double Taxation Treaty, creating an institutional framework. With the local currency settlement system, trade can now take place directly in Rupees and Rufiyaa. The rapid adoption of UPI in the Maldives will further strengthen both the tourism and retail sectors. Projects such as the Greater Male Connectivity Project, the Addu Road Development Project, and the redevelopment of Hanimaadhoo International Airport will transform this entire region into a vital hub for transportation and economic activity. Four MoUs and Agreements were signed, which included negotiations on a Free Trade agreement (IMFTA); reduction of annual debt repayment

obligations of Maldives; A line of Credit of Rs 4850 Crores (\$565 Mn), etc., a network-to-network agreement between India's NPCI International and the Maldives Monetary Authority to launch India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system in the Maldives. As India has become the hub for Digital Public Infrastructure, an MoU for Digital cooperation was signed. All these are highly significant pedestals for deeper collaboration with a strategic neighbour.

In his departure statement, PM Modi reiterated that "The productive talks with President [Mohamed] Muizzu will add significant energy to our bilateral relations." The India-Maldives relationship today is a testament to good neighbourly and mutually beneficial partnership. A quiet diplomacy delivers, as the former President Mohamed Nasheed said, "Muizzu's government initially came to power with strained relations with India. However, soon after assuming office, he swiftly recalibrated his approach, and we are pleased that relations with India are now back on a positive and amicable footing. India is broad-shouldered and resilient: people may say different things in various quarters, but India has always maintained its strategic focus". In the final analysis, we must be agile in our diplomatic efforts, as all relationships require mutual respect, mutual interest, and mutual sensitivity.●





Supreme Court Guidelines On DNA Evidence Handling

The Supreme Court on 15 July acquitted a man sentenced to death for the murders of a couple and rape of the woman victim, citing grave procedural lapses in the handling of DNA evidence. The Court has issued binding nationwide guidelines to ensure proper collection, preservation, and processing of DNA and other biological materials in criminal investigations.

The appellant Kattavellai @ Deevakar was sentenced to death by the trial court after being found guilty of the offences under Section 302, 376 and 397 of the Indian Penal Code. The conviction, which the High Court affirmed, rested almost entirely on circumstantial evidence, primarily the DNA match between biological samples collected from the crime scene and the accused.

Challenging the High Court's decision, the appellant appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing systematic flaws in the Police's investigation, particularly the handling, storage and forwarding of the DNA evidence. Taking note of the material placed on record, the Court found multiple procedural deficiencies that rendered

the DNA evidence unreliable. Notably, the Court highlighted the absence of a chain of custody register, unexplained delays in submitting samples to the forensic laboratory, and the lack of information on how the samples were stored, which raised significant concerns about possible contamination or tampering.

Considering the sensitive nature of the DNA Evidence, which is prone to dilution, the judgment authored by Justice Karol issued the following directives:

- The collection of DNA samples will be made after due care and compliance with all necessary procedures, including swift and appropriate packaging. Fir Number and date, Section and the statute involved therein, details of I.O., Police Station, requisite serial number shall be duly documented.
- The document recording the collection shall have the signatures and designations of the medical professional present, the investigating officer and independent witnesses. The Supreme Court clarified that the absence of independent witnesses shall not be taken to compromise the collection of such evidence;



however, the efforts made to join such witnesses and the eventual inability to do so shall be duly recorded.

- The Investigating Officer shall be responsible for transporting the DNA evidence to the relevant Police Station or hospital, as applicable. He shall also be responsible for ensuring that the samples taken reach the concerned forensic science laboratory with dispatch and, in any case, not later than 48 hours from the time of collection. Should any extraneous circumstance present itself and the 48-hour timeline cannot be complied with, the reason for the delay shall be duly recorded in the case diary. Throughout, the requisite efforts should be made to preserve the samples as per the requirements corresponding to the nature of the sample taken.
- In the time that the DNA samples are stored pending trial, appeal etc., no package shall be opened, altered or resealed without express authorisation of the Trial Court acting upon a statement of a duly qualified and experienced medical professional to the effect that the same shall not hurt the sanctity of the evidence and with the Court being assured that such a step is necessary for proper and just outcome of the Investigation/Trial.
- Right from the point of collection to the logical end, i.e., conviction or acquittal of the accused, a Chain of Custody Register shall be maintained wherein every movement of the evidence shall be recorded with a counter-sign at each end thereof stating also the reason therefor. This Chain of Custody Register shall necessarily be appended as part of the Trial Court record. Failure to maintain the same shall render the I.O. responsible for explaining such lapse.

A copy of this judgment has been sent to all High Courts and Directors General of Police of all states for compliance. The Court has also urged the Police Academies of the states to examine the necessity of conducting training of the Investigating Officers to ensure full compliance with the requisite precautions and procedures in accordance with the directions issued herein above.●

US BAN ON BLA

Continued from pg 41

Second, Pakistan is going to escalate terror attacks in the union territory of J&K, as is evidenced by the continued engagements of security forces with the Pakistan-trained and sponsored terrorists. Infiltration is generally high after the opening of the snow-clad passes and before the onset of winter. India should meticulously pick all irrefutable scientific evidence of Pakistani involvement in the terror attacks, fast-track the investigation, and prosecute perpetrators and share it with the counterpart, world media and international bodies to highlight the role of Pakistan as the epicentre of global terror.

Thirdly, India should also be prepared for the increased shipments of the US military hardware and spare parts reaching the Pakistan Army, further bolstering its war capability and prepare accordingly.

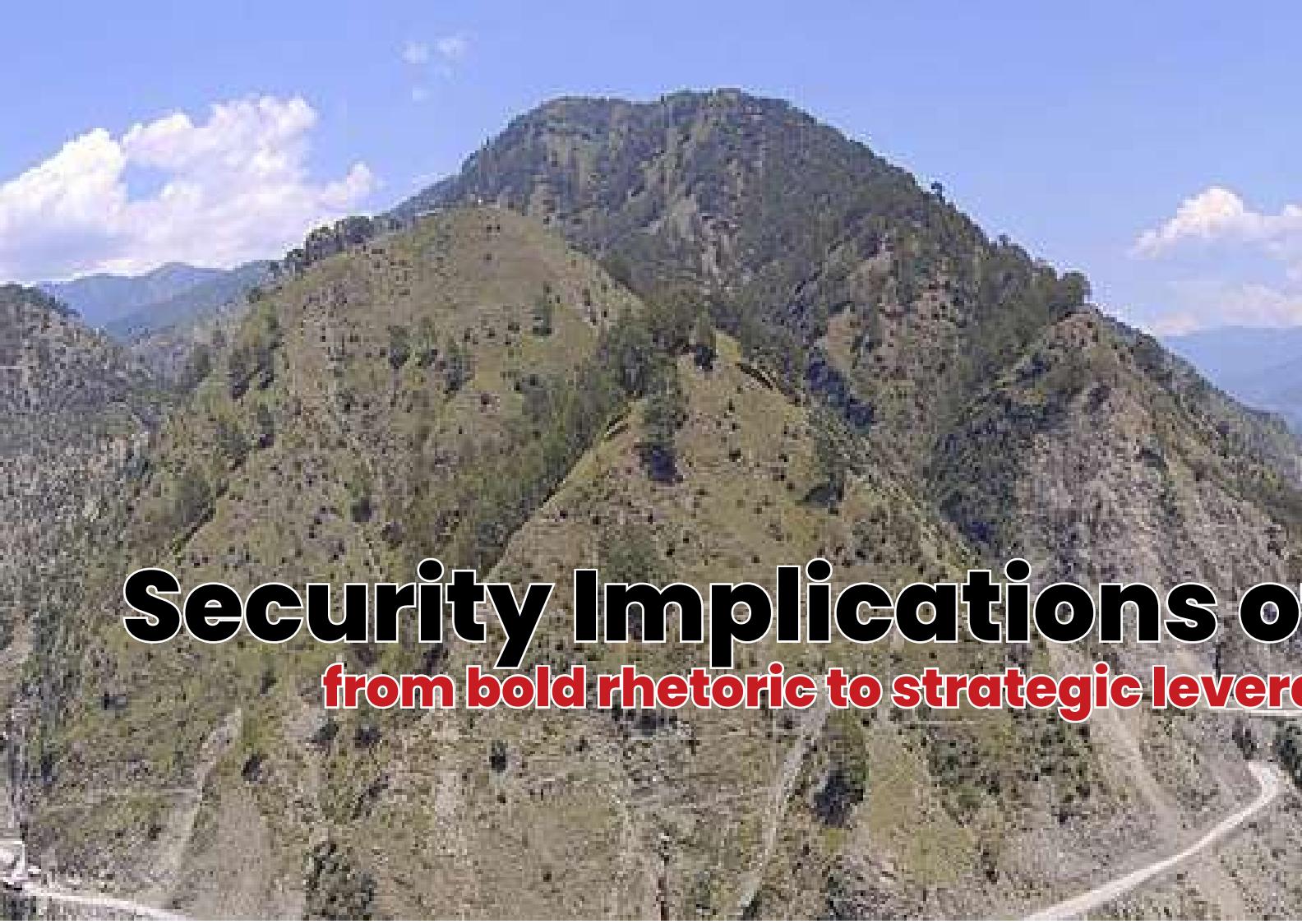
Fourthly, references to Op Sindoar in election campaigns should be restricted to India's resounding victory, without crediting who and how the hostilities were stopped.

Fifthly, India should intensify its diplomatic engagement with the USA; after all, the US is India's most valuable trading partner, shares a similar democratic ethos, and is committed to free trade. In a message on the occasion of India's Independence Day, the US statement highlighted the strategic importance of India in the Indo-Pacific region and its long-term engagement in trade, technology, innovation, and space.

Sixthly, the present unease in relations should not jeopardise the next round of trade talks and long-term objectives. India should also reach out to friendly countries and multilateral blocs, in particular, to share its concerns about terrorism and recent developments in the neighbourhood.

Seventhly, India has thus far avoided any retaliatory tariffs against the US. We should tread this path carefully in the larger national interest and to sustain economic growth.

It may be a tactical compulsion of the USA to humour Pakistan at the moment. We need to examine India-US relations beyond the India-Pakistan prism for sustained and deeper strategic, technology and economic engagement. In short, we need to agree to disagree on Pakistan.●



Security Implications of from bold rhetoric to strategic leverage



KBS Sidhu, is a former Special Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab. He is well versed with the Punjab's and India's water issues being the former Principal Secretary Irrigation and Water Resources in Punjab.

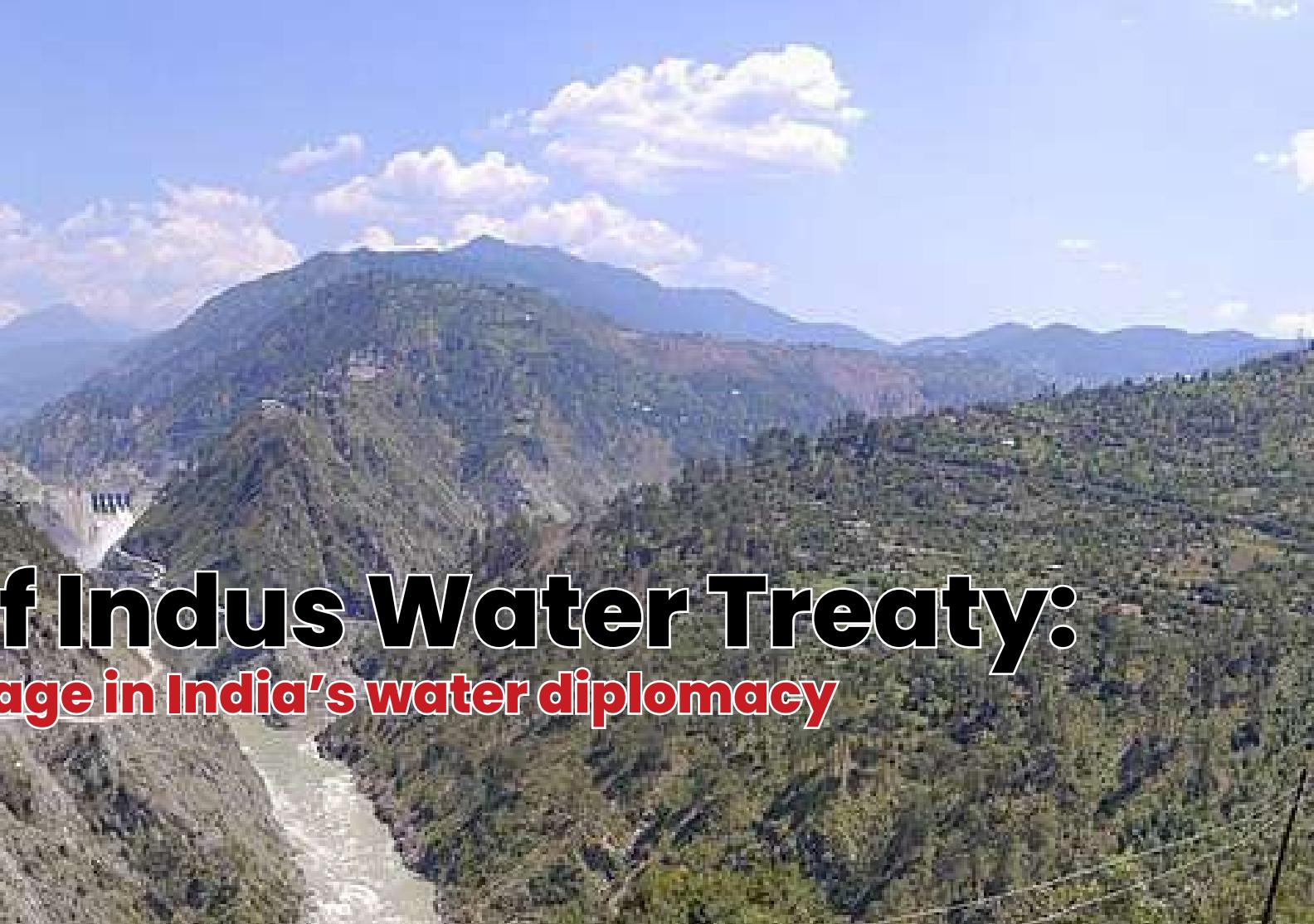
In this piece, he draws on his vast experience to dwell on the strategic importance of India's stand on the Indus water Treaty.

Water transcends economics and environment to become a pillar of national security. In April 2025, following the Pahalgam massacre, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India would place the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance. This bold move signals a shift from passive treaty compliance to proactive resource control. Yet, strategic leverage demands more than rhetoric; it requires meticulous engineering plans, robust funding, institutional reform and the political will to overcome both external vetoes and domestic turf wars. India must convert treaty suspension into a tool that secures

irrigation and hydropower in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, while reinforcing its broader defence posture.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM UNIFIED BASIN TO PARTITIONED WATERS

Until 15 August 1947, the Indus basin—comprising the Indus and its five tributaries (Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej)—was administered as one under British India. A network of barrages diverted flows into canals, irrigating lakhs of acres across the Punjab plains. Barrages direct flow but do not store water—that function belongs to dams. Partition severed this integrated system:



of Indus Water Treaty: age in India's water diplomacy

India retained the headwaters; Pakistan inherited the downstream infrastructure.

Canal stoppages in 1948, notably at Madhopur, caused Pakistani crop failures and diplomatic crises. By 1951, both governments agreed to World Bank mediation, linking loans for Bhakra–Nangal (India) and for Pakistan's Warsak and Chashma works to a comprehensive settlement. After nine years of marathon talks, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Field-Marshall Ayub Khan signed the IWT in Karachi on 19 September 1960, backed by a US\$1.2 billion fund (\approx US\$12 billion today). The Treaty allocated 20 per cent (33 MAF) of basin flows to India and 80 per cent (135 MAF) to Pakistan.

India acquired near-exclusive rights over the eastern rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi) and 3.6 MAF per annum consumptive use on the western trio (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) for irrigation, hydropower, pondage and flood moderation, plus run-of-river

hydro schemes. A Permanent Indus Commission was created for twice-yearly data exchange and dispute resolution.

FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY: THE SUSPENSION

On 26 April 2025, India placed the IWT in abeyance. This measure does not immediately halt cross-border flows but removes the procedural veto that required New Delhi to obtain Pakistani or World Bank approval for each project. Henceforth, India may unilaterally approve storage schemes and diversions exceeding the 3.6 MAF ceiling—its lawful entitlement under the original Treaty.

However, without a coherent implementation plan, the suspension risks remaining empty rhetoric. Security analysts warn that adversaries exploit delays; Pakistan will deploy treaty mechanisms to stall progress, while domestic

inter-state disputes threaten to derail even well-conceived projects. Bridging the gap between political intent and engineering execution is therefore crucial to preventing water policy from becoming another unfulfilled promise.

THE RHETORIC–REALITY GAP IN SECURITY PLANNING

History shows that water projects delayed for even a year attract fresh objections, litigation and funding shortfalls. Mere political declarations are insufficient. India must publish detailed timelines, secure funds in advance and monitor progress transparently to preserve credibility and deter obstruction.

SHORT-TERM “LOW-HANGING FRUIT” PROJECTS

India can secure early wins by completing works already permissible under the IWT’s existing provisions:

Shahpur Kandi Dam (Ravi)

– Balancing reservoir to capture ~1 MAF that formerly flowed into Pakistan.

1.– Civil works are nearly complete; commissioning in June 2025 will irrigate 37,000 ha and generate 206 MW.

Salal Desilting (Chenab)

1.– Sediment has reduced pondage by 15 per cent. An NHPC-led desilting campaign can restore 0.15 MAF in two years.

Ujh Multipurpose Project (Ujh tributary)

1.– Provides 0.65 MAF storage, 212 MW power and irrigation for 16,743 ha. Land acquisition and financial closure must be expedited for a 2029 target.



Baramulla Lift Scheme (Jhelum–Beas link)

1.– Solar-powered pumps transferring 0.5 MAF annually into the Beas, reducing pressure on Punjab’s ageing canal network during the April–October lean season.

Delivering these within three to five years will demonstrate India’s capacity to convert policy into practice and undercut Pakistan’s ability to litigate delays.

LONG-TERM FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

Securing strategic control of western-river flows and maximising hydropower requires four flagship schemes:

Bursar Dam (Marusudar tributary)

1.2 MAF storage, 800 MW generation; all technical clearances obtained, pending administrative sanction.

Sawalkot Dam (Chenab main stem)

1.8 MAF storage, 1,856 MW generation; geological surveys complete, awaiting governmental approval.

Marhu Tunnel (Chenab→Ravi link)

A 40 km trans-basin tunnel, diverting up to 2.5 MAF into the Ravi–Beas system, enhancing water security for Punjab and Rajasthan.

Kishanganga Pondage Increase (Jhelum tributary)

Raising the reservoir by 15 m to add 0.1 MAF and increase capacity from 330 to 400 MW.

Ground-breaking by 2027 and completion by 2032 would secure an additional 3–4 MAF and 3 GW of evening-peak power, reshaping the region’s hydrology and energy mix.

AVOIDING INTER-STATE DISPUTES: THE

PUNJAB-HARYANA LESSON

Domestic friction can stall even flagship projects. In early May 2025, the Bhakra Beas Management Board reignited the Punjab–Haryana dispute by awarding Haryana an extra 850.026 cusecs of Ravi water, despite its drawing 104 per cent of its quota. When a young Haryana leader proposed puncturing the Ranjit Sagar dam to revive the Saraswati and divert Sutlej water to Yamunanagar, Punjab's legislature convened an all-party meeting. Leaders emphasised that only 27 per cent of Punjab's farmland is canal-fed; 73 per cent relies on depleting tubewells. A special Vidhan Sabha session on 5 May will formulate Punjab's response, even as Haryana prepares its own political counter-moves. Such internecine battles waste time, money, and distract from the national mission. Additional waters from IWT suspension must be treated as national assets, allocated on riparian principles, but managed free of inter-state veto.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM: A NATIONAL RIVER INFRASTRUCTURE AUTHORITY

To bypass centre-state and inter-state gridlock, India needs a statutory National River Infrastructure Authority, modelled on the National Highways Authority of India. This body would:

- Hold a statutory charge over the Himalayan

river works.

- Employ its own cadre of engineers and hydropower specialists.
- Maintain a dedicated River Infrastructure Fund with 100 per cent central financing.
- Oversee project appraisals, clearances and contracting.
- Adjudicate interstate water disputes rapidly.

Centralised authority ensures projects proceed unhindered by political squabbles, delivering water security as an instrument of sovereignty.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS AND REGIONAL STRATEGY

Suspension of the IWT yields a strategic advantage as well as development:

- Pakistan, strained by unrest in Balochistan and waning foreign aid, lacks the capacity to sabotage Indian infrastructure at scale.
- Its provinces—Sindh versus Punjab, upper versus lower Punjab—will clash over diminished flows, fracturing internal cohesion.
- India must deploy specialised security units and drone surveillance at key sites, publish real-time flow data to pre-empt spurious claims and conduct diplomatic outreach to clarify its lawful intent.

True leverage lies not in “weaponising”



water but ending decades of one-sided charity. When Pakistan's canal managers confront empty canals, they will choose between protracted, unavailing litigation and negotiation on India's terms.

For Jammu & Kashmir, harnessing river flows secures both prosperity and stability. Reliable irrigation will revive saffron fields in Pampore and apple orchards in Shopian, reducing agrarian grievances. Hydropower pondage will strengthen local grids, enabling continuous security lighting and disrupting insurgent safe havens. Aligning development with defence ensures that IWT suspension reinforces national integration, not isolation.

CONCLUSION: FROM WORDS TO WORKS, FROM RHETORIC TO LEVERAGE

The suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty offers India a rare opportunity to translate untapped entitlements into concrete security and development gains. By swiftly completing short-term projects, fast-tracking flagship dams, avoiding domestic distractions and empowering a National River Infrastructure Authority, India can claim the hydrological high ground. The era of empty slogans is over—an era of decisive action has dawned. Let the excavators move in, the tunnels be bored, and every drop of India's rightful waters fuel the nation's sovereignty, stability and prosperity.●

THE POLITICS OF IWT TRIBUNAL AWARD

BY KBS SIDHU

On 8 August 2025, the Court of Arbitration under the Indus Waters Treaty—administered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague—issued its Award on Issues of General Interpretation declaring that India must generally “let flow” the waters of the Western Rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—for Pakistan’s unrestricted use, and that any Indian projects on these rivers must strictly conform to the treaty’s technical design limits. These limits include restrictions on pondage, the configuration of gated spillways, low-level outlets, and turbine intakes. The award was delivered *ex parte*—without India’s participation—because New Delhi has consistently refused to appear before the tribunal, which has the limited remit of interpreting treaty clauses rather than enforcing compliance.

Pakistan has applauded the award, portraying it as a reaffirmation of its full rights over the Western Rivers and as a rebuke to India’s hydropower ambitions in the region.
India’s Stand—Reaffirmed Before the Award

In June 2025, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had already made clear its position that the forum was “illegally constituted” and asserted that it lacked any jurisdiction to entertain Pakistan’s case. India declared that it will not participate in its proceedings, and is pursuing the dispute resolution track it considers legitimate: the Neutral Expert process under the IWT. By affirming this position weeks before the August award, the MEA pre-emptively rejected any interpretive rulings or procedural steps the tribunal might issue.

The jurisdictional wrangle began in 2016, when Pakistan sought arbitration over India’s Kishanganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects, alleging that they violated the design parameters for run-of-river plants on the Western Rivers. India requested the appointment of a Neutral Expert instead, as provided under Annex F of the IWT. The World Bank, which acts as a treaty facilitator, “paused” both tracks in late 2016 to encourage bilateral discussions.

In 2022, however, the Bank controversially allowed both tracks to proceed—appointing a Neutral Expert for India’s route and constituting a Court of Arbitration for Pakistan’s. India objected, refused to participate in the court proceedings, and continued to engage only with the Neutral Expert. The PCA tribunal, nonetheless, issued an Award on Competence in July 2023, claiming it had the authority to proceed. In June 2025, after India suspended the treaty, it issued a Supplemental Award on Competence stating that India’s “abeyance” decision did not affect its jurisdiction. The August 2025 interpretive award flowed directly from that claim of competence, one India had already dismissed.●



US BANS BALOCH LIBERATION ARMY & ITS IMPACT

Those who saw the Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir's visit as only a courtesy visit on occasion of retirement of the outgoing United States Central Command (CENT-COM) Commander General Michael E Kurilla, and assumption of the command by Admiral Brad Cooper, must be in for a rude shock by the US state department's proscription of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) engaged in a freedom movement as a Foreign Terror Organisation (FTO). The real motive of Munir's visit went beyond merely attending the ceremony, extracting what he could while the "honeymoon" is at its peak.

THE BALOCH ISSUE

Balochistan has been a thorn in Pakistan's flesh ever since the Kalat state was militarily annexed by Pakistan in 1948, after Jinnah, who had initially endorsed Kalat's independence after the Partition, reversed his stance, demanding Kalat's accession. The nationalist movement, which dates back to the pre-1947 era, continues to torment the Pakistani state.

Baloch people have long suffered political victimisation, and their resistance to state oppression, extrajudicial killings, disappearances of their political leaders, and human rights violations has resulted in continuous conflict. Their demands for justice and accountability have gone unaddressed. BLA is the primary group that is engaged in armed resistance against the Pakistani state.

Balochistan is endowed with rich reserves of minerals, rare earths, gas, and oil. Ninety percent of Pakistan's copper is produced from the Baloch quarries. Gwadar Port, a strategic national asset for Pakistan, is situated in Balochistan, and the \$60 billion CPEC corridor, China's ambitious project to access the Arabian Sea, traverses Balochistan. However, the benefits of this resource extraction and development do not necessarily get distributed among the poor Baloch population or are not ploughed back into the region's growth, leaving the largest province the least developed. There have been several attacks in the past on the infrastructure, foreign workers and projects along the CPEC corridor in Balochistan.

Marginalised culturally, politically and economically, the nationalist movement seeks political autonomy and greater control over the region's affairs and resources.

The US State Department has formally designated the BLA and its hit unit, the Ma-jeed Brigade, as an FTO. The statement (dated 11 August 2025) signed by Secretary of State, also lists the past proscription of BLA in 2019 and refers to some recent BLA actions like the March 2025 hijacking of the Jaffar Express that killed 31 people and held hundreds hostage, the suicide attacks near Karachi airport, and at the Gwadar Port Authority Complex to declare

BLA as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity.

It may be recalled that Pakistan has repeatedly blamed India for providing support to BLA and the Baloch cause. Pakistan accused India of involvement in the Jaffar Express hijack even though the BLA fighters had demanded “unconditional release of Baloch political prisoners, forcibly disappeared persons and national resistance activists” and the state media had claimed that the BLA insurgents were “in contact with their facilitators in Afghanistan”.

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE BAN

The declaration of BLA as a designated terror outfit has serious ramifications for the supporters and sympathisers of the Baloch cause. The FTO label criminalises all material support to the Baloch resistance movement under the guise of the BLA or its aliases, such as the Majeed Brigade. In addition, the ban chokes off finance and logistics, impacts mobility and immigration, and subjects them to US surveillance and investigative scrutiny.

However, there is a possibility that the BLA may take a leaf out of the proscribed terror outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiyba that have repeatedly changed nomenclature to escape sanctions and to continue their terror agenda at

the behest of Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Nationalist movements across the globe, with ideological clarity and mass support, have hardly been quelled by strong-arm tactics. India, however, is a shining example of dealing with militancy and insurgency by mainstreaming them through political integration.

Another downside of this ban is that the humanitarian concerns of the Baloch people, extra-judicial exterminations, disappearances and state repression may largely go unreported, and the vast mineral resources may be up for grabs by foreign mining giants, mainly American and Chinese.

This ban also hands a lever to Pakistan to malign India at international fora for support to BLA, albeit without evidence, and push for an anti-India rhetoric.

NUCLEAR SABRE-RATTLING

Pakistan is known to brandish the nuclear sabre at the slightest provocation. However, the recent nuclear diatribe against India from Tampa, though in a private function hosted by the diaspora, on the soil of a friendly and strategic partner like the USA, does not augur well. Munir has also challenged that any hydrological projects implemented by India on the Indus basin after the suspension of the treaty will be destroyed by the missiles launched by Pakistan. Pakistan feels emboldened to



make such cheap remarks after an ex parte award from the Hague based Permanent Court of Arbitration on Indus Water Treaty which declared that India must generally “let flow” the waters of the Western Rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—for Pakistan’s unrestricted use, and that any Indian projects on these rivers must strictly conform to the treaty’s technical design limits with reference to pondage, configuration of gated spillways, low-level outlets, and turbines. Munir went on to outline his future strategy for disabling India’s energy infrastructure, hinting at the Jamnagar refinery as a potential target.

The aftermath of the OP Sindoor has seen uneasy India-US ties and growing US-Pakistan military bonhomie. During the second visit, Munir also had discussions with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dan Caine, on “matters of mutual professional interest” and invited Gen. Caine to visit Pakistan. Earlier, on August 2, the US Central Command hosted a conference in Islamabad for the chiefs of defence and leaders from Pakistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

MUNIR'S RESURRECTION

Before the India-Pakistan hostilities, Munir was staring at the worst approval graph for any army chief of Pakistan. In a favourable turnaround, his and his Army’s approval ratings have soared exponentially with Asim Munir assuming the mantle of the Field Marshal of Pakistan’s Army. There is no doubt any longer as to who calls the shots in Pakistan.

Munir has also successfully contained the threat from Imran Khan’s party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The visits of the party supremo’s sons to the USA yielded no traction. The recent protests by the party were more like a whimper compared to the mass uprising seen a year or so ago.

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was another major concern for Pakistan. With the USA by its side, Munir finds himself better equipped to deal with its north and north-western neighbour, allegedly harbouring anti-Pakistan separatist groups, depredations of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the bordering areas of Pakistan, refugee influx and Baloch nationalists.

Munir may have killed two birds with

one stone. Pakistan has offered its massive oil reserves and rare earths in the Balochistan area to the US for exploration. American companies will demand increased security for their workers, which will indirectly benefit Chinese interests in a safe CPEC corridor, opening the Arabian Sea to China.

INDIA, USA & PAKISTAN

The US administration, headed by Donald Trump, is palpably incensed by India’s not acknowledging its role in ending the four-day hostilities. In contrast, Pakistan has gone on to recommend the Nobel Peace Prize for Donald Trump for bringing peace to the world. A direct fallout of India’s dismissal of the US role was the release of a large bailout tranche of cash by the IMF to Pakistan. Many believe these funds will be utilised in targeting India.

The trade agreement between Pakistan and the USA, cryptocurrency deal and Trump’s euphoric announcement of vast oil reserves of Pakistan, indulging Munir to lunch in the White House and public acknowledgement of Pakistan’s role in fighting terrorism are some of the unmissable pointers to the rising importance of Pakistan in the current Afghanistan and Iran situation in the US tactical calculus.

Designating the Resistance Force (TRF), which had claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam terrorist attack, as an FTO can be seen as an act of balancing the diplomatic scales. The US statement had named the TRF as a “front and proxy” for the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), which Pakistan claims to have rendered “defunct”.

The USA has called India the “tariff king” and slapped a 50% tariff on the bogey of buying Russian oil, completely ignoring the import of Russian energy by the US, China and the European Union without similar sanctions. This discriminatory imposition of tariffs defies a rule-based world order.

WHAT INDIA SHOULD DO

First, on the Baloch front, India needs to maintain its principled stance of opposition to all instances of terror anywhere on the planet earth. India should, however, delicately differentiate between advocacy of freedom of expression and human rights and abetment to terror.

Continued at pg 33



CONSIDER ANNUAL INCREASE IN COMPENSATION IN HIT & RUN CASES: **APEX COURT**

The Supreme Court has instructed the Centre to assess the possibility of annually increasing compensation amounts for death and severe injury resulting from hit-and run accidents. The court also expressed concern about the under-utilisation of the compensation scheme, attributing it to a lack of awareness among victims. The court has given the government an eight-week deadline to make a decision in this regard. According to the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act, 1988, in the event of death from a hit-and-run accident, a compensation of Rs 2 lakh or a higher amount prescribed by the central government must be paid. For grievous injuries, the compensation is set at Rs 50,000.

The court has also mandated the police to inform the family members of victims about the compensation scheme under the MV Act. Notably, the Compensation of Victims of Hit and Run Motor Accidents Scheme, 2022, came into force from April 1, 2022, replacing the Solatium Scheme of 1989. The Central Standing Committee was directed to issue detailed instructions for public awareness and sensitisation about the scheme. Additionally, if vehicle details are unavailable within a month of the accident report's registration, the police should inform the injured or the legal representatives of the deceased in writing, indicating their eligibility to claim compensation under the scheme. Contact details of the jurisdictional claims enquiry officer should be provided in such cases.

YOU CANNOT STOP YOUR CAR SUDDENLY ON HIGHWAYS WITHOUT WARNING

The Supreme Court has held that a driver's abrupt halt in the middle of a highway, even if triggered by a personal emergency, cannot be justified if it endangers other road users. "On a highway, high speed of vehicles is expected and if a driver intends to stop his vehicle, he has a responsibility to give a warning or signal to other vehicles moving behind on the road," said the Court. The verdict came on a plea of S Mohammed Hakim, an engineering student whose left leg had to be amputated after a road accident in Coimbatore on January 7, 2017. Holding a car driver as 50 per cent liable in a road accident case, the bench did not agree to his contention that he had suddenly applied the brakes as his wife was pregnant and she had a vomiting sensation.

The court held the appellant also liable for contributory negligence but only to the extent of 20 per cent, while making the car driver and bus driver as liable for negligence to the extent of 50 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. The court computed the total amount of compensation as Rs 1.14 crore but reduced it by 20 per cent due to contributory negligence by the appellant, to be paid to him by the insurance companies of both the vehicles, within four weeks.



ELECTRONIC SERVICE OF PROCESSES IN DELHI

Delhi has taken a significant step toward modernising its justice delivery system with the notification of the Delhi BNSS (Service of Summons and Warrants) Rules, 2025, which enables electronic dispatch of court summons and warrants through WhatsApp and email. "This reform will allow officers to focus more on core policing and investigation instead of clerical tasks," a senior official explained. The summons generated by the courts will carry the digital seal and signature of the presiding judge. Police stations will share these authenticated processes with the intended recipients through their registered email IDs or WhatsApp numbers. However, physical delivery may happen where the recipient's digital contact details are unavailable. In sensitive matters, including cases registered under the POCSO Act and those involving women, girls, or juveniles, the rules also introduce safeguards for privacy. Contact details, such as email addresses and phone numbers, of victims will remain confidential, ensuring their identity is not compromised.

All police stations across the capital will now be required to create electronic summons delivery centres for sending notices digitally, confirming receipt, and maintaining records of all communications. These databases will be integrated with the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) and shared with local courts on a monthly basis for cross-verification. "Quicker service of notices means cases can move faster, trials won't be held up, and citizens won't have to wait endlessly for basic processes," the official said, calling the reform a landmark step in the city's judicial administration.



BODYGUARDS' FITNESS REVEALS PRIVATE LOCATION OF ROYALS

Sweden's national security service said it was investigating reports that data shared by bodyguards on a fitness app had exposed the private locations of some of the country's most powerful figures.

It comes after the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported earlier this week that seven members of the security service were sharing details of their running and cycling routes on the fitness app *Strava*, inadvertently revealing the locations of the king and queen's personal vacations.

That included trips to a private island in the Seychelles, the mountain village of Storlien in northern Sweden and, most recently, to a luxury villa on the French Riviera in June.

Earlier reports from the newspaper also found that the guards' workout data on the fitness app had revealed the private details of Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson on at least 35 occasions, including his running routes, trips abroad and private address.

"Dignitaries that our Service is responsible for protecting are subject to several layers of protection, where their close protection by bodyguards is one layer," the SÄPO spokesperson said in their statement, adding that the security agency was aware of the risks presented by the leaked information.

"Our Service is now taking the necessary steps to ensure that our procedures are followed closely, so that this does not happen again," the statement said.

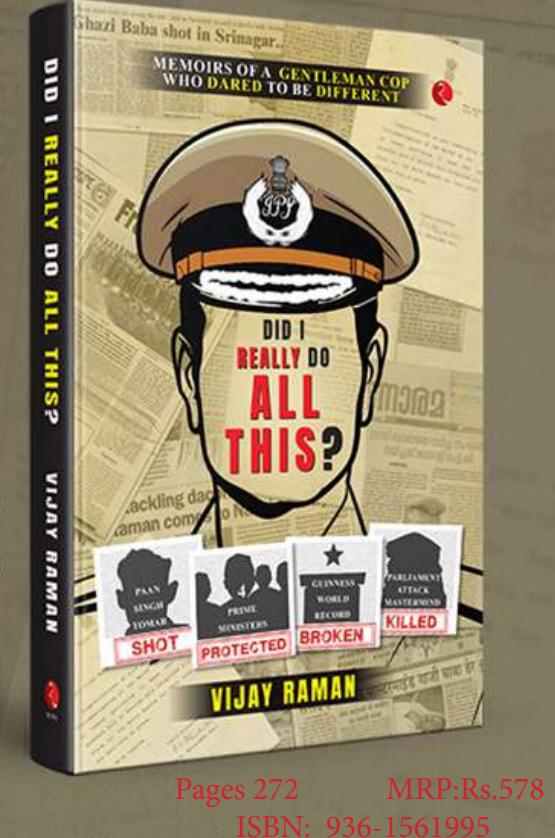
DID I REALLY DO ALL THIS?

One of India's highly decorated police officer's riveting memoir about tackling crime and criminals.

Vijay Raman, an IPS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, 1975 batch, built an enviable stature around him for his professionalism, no-nonsense approach and people-friendly attitude. He was at the forefront of eliminating dacoity in the Chambal ravines, neutralising dreaded Jaish militant Ghazi Baba, notorious for masterminding the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, anti-Naxal operations, serious investigations like the VYAAPAM and astute security leadership in SPG.

Vijay Raman's adventurous spirit led him to set a new Guinness World Record by circumnavigating the globe in an Indian car, a feat that not only showcased his daring nature but also his love for his country and its capabilities.

I had close interaction with Vijay Raman during my deputation with the Special Protection Group (SPG), which was responsible for the security of the Prime Minister, their family, and former Prime Ministers. Being one of the earliest or founding officers of the elite organisation, Vijay Raman was obviously anointed in an aura that newcomers like me much admired. We all respected his professionalism, thorough approach, and willingness to share his experiences



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and knowledge, as well as his wit and humour.

Both the state and central governments acknowledged Vijay Raman's service and gallantry, and he received all the medals that an IPS officer can aspire to, including the coveted President's Police Medal for Gallantry.

Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the Chambal ravines, presented a grave challenge to the civil Police after independence. Vijay Raman, with his baptism in service, spearheaded successful campaigns against dreaded dacoits like Paan Singh Tomar and his gang. The book provides intricate details about the planning, team building and execution of sensitive operations. Never trigger-happy, Vijay Raman ensured the surrender of several dacoits, including Malkan Singh and Phoolan Devi, inspiring all with his courage and determination.

The book delves into Vijay Raman's internal struggles with matters of morality, ethics, and staying on the right side of the law. His story serves as a valuable lesson for young police officers, reminding them that true greatness lies not in grand gestures but in the consistent, quiet courage to do what is right.

The book's straightforward narration, de-



void of high-sounding diction and self-glorification, engages the reader from start to finish. It packs a lot of action and thrill with detailed accounts of investigations, encounters, and adventurous episodes. It is a masterclass in storytelling, leaving the reader captivated and eager for more!

As one navigates the well-defined chapters, one notices the evolution of Vijay Raman's character, his secular outlook, fierce courage, people-first approach, and adventurous streak. Decades of experience and memoirs are condensed into a couple of hundred pages, revealing the complexities of policing in India.

Throughout the book, Vijay Raman remains equanimous and dispassionate, sometimes irritably so in describing the Bhopal Gas Tragedy.

The book also provides valuable insights into the functioning of at least two Central Armed Reserve Forces (CAPFs), namely the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), where Vijay Raman had memorable tenures. This information will leave the reader feeling more informed and knowledgeable about the intricacies of Indian policing.

None other than the Indian National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, echoes, "This book is a vivid recollection of his professional journey and makes interesting reading."

Any review of the book would be incomplete without acknowledging the role of Veena Raman, who, from the preface to the last page of the book, remains an omniscient presence in support of Vijay Raman.

It appears the author's failing health prevented him from editing the last couple of chapters. His untimely passing in 2023 was a loss to the Police fraternity. I would respond to his question and the title of the book - Did I Really Do All This? by saying, 'Yes, Sir, you did it all and did it very well.' ●

WON'T KILL AN ELEPHANT!

PV Rajgopal, author and a retired IPS officer shares a vignette from one of more than 10,000 pages of KF Rustomji's diaries recounting how an English police officer defied the Government orders to kill a pachyderm that escaped into the nearby jungle after mauling the mahout. In an era where encounters earn bad name for the Indian Police, this story stands out for the courage of conviction and dedication to duty.

"The Chief Secretary told me that an elephant had run amuck in Bhopal, killed its mahout and had hurt and frightened people in a number of villages. The Cabinet, after hours of futile discussion, decided that police should be entrusted with the job of killing the elephant. He asked me to hand over the job to Russell, who was a crack shot.

"I sent for AA R Russell, Commandant of the local Battalion, from his office next door. When he came, I told him the story and said he could take a squad from his battalion and destroy the animal.

"I am sorry, Sir. I can't do it," he said."

"Why? If I may ask," I said, wondering whether it was his wife's sickness, his lumbago or shortage of ammunition.

"On principle, Sir. I am sorry. I refuse to kill an elephant. On principle"

"What do you mean by principle? It is a government order - a Cabinet decision". I added. "Maybe, Sir. But I am sorry, Sir. I refuse to kill an elephant on principle."

"You bloody well can kill a man, and you say you won't kill an elephant" "No Sir, I have never killed a man. I may still kill a man. But I cannot and will not kill an elephant." Russell replied defiantly.

"The very cheek of the man made me absolutely speechless with anger. So angry was I that my hands started trembling, and words were not coming out of my mouth. I indicated to

him with my hands that he should get out of my room.

"He went out and, after 15 or 20 minutes, came back and said he would go.

"Good man, Russell, I felt. The fellow has a sense of duty. I would try and get him a medal if he does a neat job.

"Doubts began to appear. Day after day, I waited for the report. There was no news of Russell or the elephant. Search parties were sent out. They came back with the news that the elephant had left the area, and the armed men with Russell were sent back by him. Nobody could say what happened to him. No news at all. I began to get worried. Perhaps he has been killed, perhaps trampled to death and thrown into a jheel of water or kicked into a tree stump or left dead somewhere in the jungle. There were other doubts too. Perhaps in a mystic frame of mind, he had gone away to some monastery to atone for the sin of killing an elephant.

"Seven days later, a mud-splattered Commandant Russell walked into my office. He had a growth of a week's beard. His trousers and shirt were torn at several places, and his eyes seemed half closed and he looked very, very tired and hungry. He saluted sadly and said, "I got him, Sir," he said slowly.

"Good, congratulations," I said, "How

many shots did you have to put into him?"

"Shots? What shots? I told you I don't shoot elephants," he said testily.

"Then what the Dickens did you do? I asked.

"I brought him with me,"

"Where is it?"

"It's outside."

"Looking at the elephant cozily munching sugarcane, surrounded by an adoring crowd, I asked Russell how he had done it.

"It was not easy, Sir," he said, "We kept on following him day after day, trying to be friends. First, he was angry we were too many of us. So, I sent back the section of armed police. Then he became less difficult. Finally, he took sugarcane and fruits I kept for him, and lastly, he kept eating out of my hands. Then I led him back to Bhopal. I am sorry, Sir, for the delay."

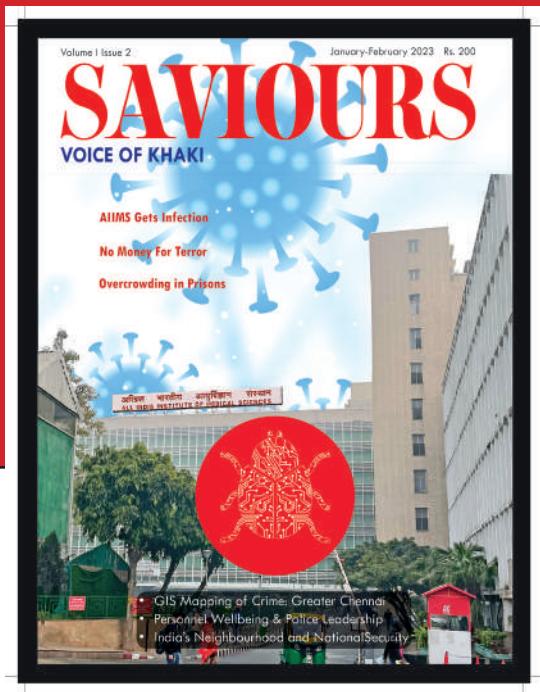
"I kept staring at Russell and the elephant, quite impressed by his ingenuity.

"But you know, Sir," Russell said sadly, "he seems to be very cut up because he killed the mahout - he was crying. In fact, he had tears in his eyes."

"Men like Russell have made the Madhya Pradesh Police a force to be proud of." ●



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