

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

October 2024



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 15

Issue 7

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 15

Issue 7

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

STATE ELECTIONS IN INDIA: RETAINING AND BROADENING OF HINDU VOTE-BANK

Up until a few years ago, it was difficult to imagine the idea of a consolidated Hindu vote-bank. This idea implies that Hindus would express their electoral preferences in accordance with their religious identity first and foremost. However, since, politically, the Hindu identity has been so deeply riven by caste and Jati sub-identities, the decades-old attempts of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) to forge a consolidated Hindu identity in the political domain (or, Hindutva) has usually yielded mild results. Till as recently as the Lok Sabha elections of 2024, the victory-like-defeat received by the BJP-led ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has borne out this fact, as one of the key reasons behind the BJP's marginal and narrow victory in the Lok Sabha elections was attributable to the insecurity of the Dalits and other marginalized castes against the BJP's hegemonic campaign rhetoric.

In view of the drubbing received by the BJP in the recent Lok Sabha elections, its comprehensive victory in the recent Haryana assembly elections and its positive performance in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) assembly elections soon after the Lok Sabha election, may have taken the country by surprise. Yet, if we look at the broader movement, it is not a surprise. Both, BJP's dilution in Lok Sabha elections as well as its victory in the subsequent Haryana assembly elections signal a broad trend of deepening of political Hindu consolidation independent of local factors. While in Jammu and Kashmir, this trend was explicit with Hindu-majority Jammu rallying

around the BJP and punishing the Congress. In Haryana, where religious polarization has not been a major factor and caste identities play a pivotal role, BJP’s ability to hold onto sections of its Dalit and Jat vote-banks against odds signals a broadening of the BJP’s base along Hindutva lines, independent of local factors. The simple idea that BJP has been successfully able to undertake non-dominant caste mobilization at the state level is no longer sufficient in explaining the recent political changes. What is being witnessed is the construction of new political identities which are likely to survive beyond the BJP’s changing electoral fortunes.

ELECTORAL TRENDS IN HARYANA AND J&K:

In Haryana, the BJP’s comprehensive victory is widely being touted as a hattrick, with the party having won a historical third term in the 90-member state assembly. This is significant as, since 1966, no party has won a third consecutive term in the state assembly. The BJP’s victory in the state also defied all exit poll predictions which had given a thumping majority to the Congress party in the state.

Haryana: Seat share and Vote share

	Seat share in 2024	Seat share in 2019	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2019 (%)
BJP	48	40	39.94	36.5
INC	37	31	39.09	28.08
INLD	2	1	4.14	2.44

From the broad trend, while the BJP has been able to, both retain and slightly expand its vote-base in the state, the Indian National Congress (INC) has also been able to significantly expand its vote share and seat share. The main loser in the process has been Dushyant Chautala’s Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) which has lost nearly all ground, with its Jat vote share shifting to the national parties. While Congress was the main beneficiary of the hit taken by the regional parties, even BJP managed to get some part of their vote share, besides retaining its own vote-base. The trend signals the breaking up of regional forces in Haryana, which, since the formation of the state, have played a pivotal role in Haryana politics.

In the 90-member J&K assembly, the polarization along regional-cum-religious lines between Muslim-majority Kashmir and Hindu-majority Jammu yielded the expected BJP victory in Jammu and defeat in Kashmir. Significantly, while NC may have won more seats, BJP emerged as the single largest party in terms of its vote share. Not only this, but the BJP victory from J&K was historic in the sense that the party posted its highest ever tally in these elections.

J&K: Seat share and Vote share

	Seat share in 2024	Seat share in 2014	Vote share in 2024 (%)	Vote share in 2014 (%)
JKNC	42	15	23.4	20.7
BJP	29	25	25.6	22.9
INC	6	12	11.9	18.01
PDP	3	28	8.87	22.67

Beyond the larger trend of religious polarization along regional lines between Jammu and Kashmir, what is significant in the result is the utter defeat of Congress from both the regions. Mehbooba Mufti’s People’s Democratic Party (PDP) is also moving towards the expected oblivion. The elections, thus breaking the long hold of Congress and PDP in J&K’s electoral matrix, now signal the rise of BJP as the principal challenger to Omar Abdullah’s Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) in the territory. Further, the Congress’s comprehensive loss among Hindus in Jammu – having won only 1 seat from Jammu and 5 from Kashmir – also reinforces its strengthening image as not a secular, but as a Muslim party.

KEY FAULT LINES IN HARYANA

In Haryana, urban-rural divide and caste were significant factors, while religion played a minuscule role.

Urban-rural divide: Vote share (%):

	BJP		INC+		Others	
	2024 (%)	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)	2024 (%)	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)	2024 (%)	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)
Urban	48.8	0.2	27.7	4.6	23.5	-4.8
Semi-urban	46	5.1	33.6	4.8	20.4	-9.9
Semi-rural	37.8	0.8	46.3	12.6	15.9	-13.4
Rural	36.4	4.7	40.4	14.7	23.2	-19.4

Urban-rural divide: Seat share:

	BJP		INC+		Others	
	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-)	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-)	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-)
Urban	7	0	1	0	1	0
Semi-urban	11	0	4	0	1	0
Semi-rural	13	2	11	-1	1	-1
Rural	17	6	21	7	2	-13

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

The results across the urban-rural landscape show that the urban-rural divide is quite marked. While BJP has outdone the Congress in urban, semi-urban and semi-rural areas, its performance in rural areas has not been too bad either. While the Congress has gained vote-share across rural areas, it lost seats in these areas compared to the last election. This is because Congress could not convert its vote share gains into seat share, as its highest vote share gains in rural areas were concentrated only in a few seats rather than being spread out. ***Significantly, Congress's victories in the rural areas were concentrated in particularly those seats which were Muslim-dominated like Nuh, Ferozepur Jhirka and Punahana, and some which were farmer-dominated.*** In farmer-intensive seats, Congress made the highest vote share gains (greater than 40%) in seats where cultivators and agricultural workers make up more than 65% of the total workforce. In seats where the

share of agricultural workers was less than 50%, Congress did not make significant vote share gains (less than 5%).

In rural seats where Muslim domination and farmer domination was not visible, largely, the BJP was more successful than the Congress.

Vote share (%) in reserved and general seats:

Type of Seat	BJP		INC+		Others	
	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)	2024	Difference from 2019 (+/-) (%)
General	39.1	1.9	38.3	10.6	22.6	-12.5
Reserved for SC	44	10.6	44	13.8	12	-24.4

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

Both BJP and Congress have performed well across general and reserved seats.

Caste and community-wise vote share (%) in Haryana:

	Congress	BJP	INLD+BSP	Others
Brahmin	31	51	2	16
Punjabi Khatri	18	68	4	10
Jat	53	28	6	13
Other upper caste	22	59	4	15
Gujjar	44	37	5	14

Yadav	25	62	2	11
Other OBCs	32	47	8	13
Jatav Dalits	50	35	6	9
Other SCs	33	45	10	12
Muslim	59	7	3	31
Sikh	47	21	17	15

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

From the caste and community vote shares, it is clear that BJP could successfully retain Dalits and dent Congress's Jat voter base. One in three Jats voted for the BJP. It also did well among OBCs, (except Gujjars) and among upper castes.

There were several factors at play in Haryana:

First, the supposed issues which dented the BJP during the Lok Sabha elections – danger to the Constitution, sidelining of the Dalits and OBCs etc. – failed to resonate much with the voters during Haryana state elections. Even Haryana-centric issues which were expected to have wider political impact – such as grievances against the *Agnipath* scheme, farmers' protests, wrestlers' protests and unemployment – did not yield the desired political outcomes for the Congress party. Indeed, wrestlers' and farmers' protests fell completely flat, with wrestler Vinesh Phogat winning her seat by a highly narrow margin of few thousand votes only. Thus, the meticulously crafted rhetoric of '*jawan, kisan, pehelwan*' failed to dent the BJP.

Second, BJP sought to campaign on the basis of its largely decent track record, transparency in governance, and fighting corruption and nepotism. More significantly, smart ticket

distribution and countering anti-incumbency by replacing former Chief Minister, ML Khattar, with Nayab Singh Saini late during the term of the previous assembly, worked well for the BJP. Out of the nearly 25 seats where the BJP replaced party candidates, the party won close to 15 seats.

Third, the traditional BJP formula of non-dominant caste consolidation (in Haryana's case, the Jat community) yielded results in this election too. Part of the reason behind this was the Congress's excessive focus on the Jats. The non-Jats, primarily the backward classes, which form nearly 35% of the state's population supported the BJP. Dalits too did not desert the party, as is evident from the increase in BJP's reserved seats. Significantly, the Jats in several districts of the state supported the BJP.

Finally, the most important reason for BJP's victory in the state was the hard work and effort put in by the RSS *karyakartas* in the run-up to the election. The RSS workers held extensive meetings, campaigns and mobilization outreach activities across the state in an attempt to foil the Congress's caste arithmetic (of uniting Jats and Dalits), and the results show that it was successful to a significant extent.

KEY FAULT LINES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR (J&K)

In J&K, the election was being painted as being a referendum on the constitutional changes brought about in the aftermath of August 5th, 2019, with the revocation of Article 370 by the central government. In large measure it was, but to a limited extent. Yet, traditional parties like NC and Congress refrained from making any concrete promises to bring back Article 370

which had guaranteed a separate constitutional status to the former state. Instead, the focus was on bringing back statehood to the present Union Territory. Even among Independents (largely, former separatists and militants), the key discourse centered more around local issues such as corruption and public services vis-à-vis regional parties, and so-called suppression of freedom vis-à-vis central government.

Regional vote share across J&K (%):

	INDIA (NC+INC+CPIM)	BJP	PDP	Independents
Kashmir	42.4	2.2	16.3	21.2
Jammu	32.8	45.2	2.7	12.8

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

Majority religion-wise vote share (%):

	INDIA	BJP	PDP	Independents
High Hindu majority	28.4	54.3	0.4	10.1
High Muslim majority	41.9	4.1	15.4	21.9

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

Parties’ performance across regions:

Regions	Total seats	NC- Congress		BJP		PDP		AIP		Independents		Others	
		Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)
Kashmir	47	40	41.08	0	2.17	3	16.32	0	1.97	2	16.82	2	21.64
Jammu	43	8	30.67	29	45.23	0	2.66	0	0.00	5	12.84	1	8.6
Overall	90	48	35.4	29	25.64	3	8.87	0	0.9	7	14.65	3	14.54

Source: Lokniti-CSDS Post Poll Survey

There were several factors at play in J&K:

First, the breath of NC’s victory is comprehensive, having cornered the traditional voters of both PDP and Congress. It was NC’s first such performance after winning 57 seats in the 1996 elections, sweeping all seats in Srinagar, Budgam and Ganderbal in Kashmir Valley. It also replaced PDP in the Mufti’s traditional stronghold of south Kashmir, winning 10 out 16 seats there. It improved its performance in the Pir Panjal valley and Chenab valley in Jammu by winning 6 out of 16 seats.

Second, while the BJP failed to win a single seat in Kashmir, it swept the predominantly Hindu

areas in Jammu, winning Jammu, Samba, Udhampur and Kathua. Unlike in Pir Panjal, the party did well in Chenab valley winning four seats. It is important to note that almost 70 percent of the seats across J&K were demographically challenging for the BJP, as not entire Jammu is Hindi-dominated. At least 16 seats across 5 Jammu districts have Muslim domination, including Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Poonch, and Rajouri. Thus, across J&K, there are 63 seats with a Muslim-majority population and 27 with a Hindu majority (Tiwari, 2024).

Third, in terms of reserved seats, the BJP, as expected performed well in Hindu-dominated SC reserved seats having won all of them, while the INDI Alliance took away the Muslim-dominated ST reserved seats. All seven SC-reserved seats and six out of nine ST-reserved seats fall in Jammu. The BJP could not win a single ST-reserved seat in Jammu, including the in districts of Rajouri, Poonch and Reasi. The performance in these reserved seats was significant because they were created in the aftermath of the revocation of Article 370. The Centre had further increased the scope of ST-reserved seats by including Paharis – which make up majority of voters in Rajouri and Poonch – within them. The extension of reservation to Paharis angered the Gujjars, while even a section of Paharis voted for NC-Congress. As a result, BJP performed below the mark in ST-reserved seats.

BROAD PATTERNS OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

First, the most visible pattern – which will have resonance across North India – is the movement from regionalization towards nationalization. With BJP and Congress cornering about 80% of the vote share between themselves in Harayana, the

space for regional parties has shrunk completely. Significant here is the nationalization of the Jat vote-bank in Haryana. Its movement towards the two national parties, particularly the BJP which has strongly been perceived as an anti-farmer and anti-Jat party is significant. The election appears to have broken the entrenched hold of Jat family dynasties like Chautalas over the system, while also denying space to potential new regional parties like Aam Admi Party (AAP) despite Kejriwal's Haryana connection and past breakthroughs. JJP which had commanded a vote share of nearly 15% in the last election not only plummeted its vote share to less than 1%, but also Dushyant Chautala lost his security deposit from Uchana Kalan – the Chautala family bastion – to BJP.

It shows not only the limitations of identity politics and regional forces, but also reinforces the idea that, at some level, national loyalties and religious identity are beginning to trump narrow regional loyalties and caste identities.

Second, from the J&K results, a significant pattern of mobilization has been the decline of extremist forces in the territory. This is visible through four main patterns:

1. The voter turnout in the territory has been impressively high this time. It is significant that even in areas of Kashmir where voters used to boycott elections in the past (under the call of Islamic clerics and terrorists), the turnout has been significant. This humble indicator shows the rising legitimacy of Indian national institutions in Kashmir.

2. The fact that BJP could expand its organization in certain parts in Kashmir (such as Guarez in southern Kashmir which used to be a militancy-prone area) emerging as a principal challenger to the winner shows that despite its overall loss in

Kashmir, BJP's acceptability in Kashmir cannot be dismissed, and has indeed risen despite all odds.

3. Extremist forces – such as the independents fielded by the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), and other extremists – did not make any headway in terms of popularity, with people in Kashmir preferring to vote along established party lines. These extremist forces have espoused a radical Islamic agenda and have had a historical record of fueling Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the Valley. At the same time, the fact that JeI sought to participate in these elections at all was itself a significant occurrence, regardless of the results.

The last time the Islamic radicals, under JeI, had participated in the elections in the region was during the infamous 1987 elections under the banner of the Muslim United Front. The elections are remembered for having been rigged by the Congress-NC combine. This was followed by a brutal phase of terrorism and Pandit genocide in Kashmir from 1989 onwards. It was, thus, after many decades that such outlawed radicals attempted to participate in the electoral process. The trend indicates that people in the Valley have realized that there exists no alternative to India and that resistance is futile.

4. Finally, geopolitics has had no mean influence on the decline of extremism in Kashmir. Some key patterns include the marginalization of Pakistan and its forceful subordination to India through events such as Uri and Balakot strikes, the hatred between Afghan Taliban and Pakistan, and the changing dynamics in the Middle east where Israel's comprehensive operations have nearly destroyed Iran's capabilities and where Sunni Arab countries have merely responded in a lukewarm manner. All these factors have impacted Kashmir significantly.

Pakistan's weakening and its feud with Taliban in Afghanistan has shifted the locus of terrorism towards Pakistan. Unlike in the 1990s, when Pakistan and Afghan Taliban had joined hands to fuel militancy in Kashmir and when Pakistan had a favourable geopolitical position with both United States and China, and was flush with money, this is no longer the case at present. Today Pakistan is barely able to control its own internal insurgencies and political upheavals, and its economic impoverishment appears to have become too deeply ingrained. Another source of militant funding in Kashmir came from the powerful clerics and madrassas in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Here also, the dynamics have completely changed now. Saudi Arabia is characterized by a trend towards modernization and commercialism, a sidelining of Muslim clerics, and a massive improvement of bilateral relations between Modi regime and Saudi Arabia's Mohammad bin Salman, while Iran has become too occupied with its own geopolitical troubles to focus on Kashmir any longer. It is now an indirect but significant part of an active war with Israel, and ever since the Russia-Ukraine war, its closer relations with Russia has shifted Iran's geopolitical export of Islam more towards Russia.

The decline in extremist forces visible through these trends is likely to reflect in the future governance of the union territory. This was evident in the statements made by the new Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, after winning the elections. Unlike the acrimonious position taken by the NC during the campaign, Mr. Abdullah refrained from mentioning Article 370 and struck a conciliatory tone by declaring his intention to work with the central government. The usual sermons by Abdullahs about seeking reconciliation with Pakistan were also missing. In view of recent geopolitical changes and with J&K

downgraded to a union territory status, thereby restricting the Chief Minister's powers, the new leadership probably realizes that its avenues of seeking anti-national sources of financial and political autonomy are limited and that its best bet to remain in power would be to remain on good terms with the central government. It also realizes that it could benefit from the massive public and private investments that continue to be infused into the union territory after 2019 if it seeks a productive rather than an antagonistic relationship with the centre.

Further, the election of the J&K legislative assembly and its new Chief Minister is unlikely to impact governance in a major way. Being a union territory, there are only a limited set of areas that the assembly can legislate upon. As per the J&K Reorganization Act, 2019, the assembly can legislate on matters within the State List and Concurrent List, excluding police and public order. Further as per the Act, the assembly will also have no say on subjects under education, marriage, taxation, property transfers, forests, trade unions, labour welfare, charitable organizations and trade and commerce. Few days before the elections were announced, the Union Home Ministry made some amendments to the rules under the 2019 Act, giving more powers to the L-G in matters related to police, public order and All India Services, including transfers and postings. These changes have completely restricted the powers of the assembly to exercise any major autonomy in lawmaking. It is no wonder that Mr. Abdullah has been consistently reminding the centre of the promise to restore statehood the J&K.

CONCLUSION

The recently concluded state elections have come as a much-needed psychological boost for the ruling BJP at the

national level, and may provide the needed ammunition to the party in subsequent state elections to be held in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. In the aftermath of the drubbing received by the party in the Lok Sabha elections, these state elections were widely perceived to be a test of BJP's actual position in Indian politics. These doubts have now been dispelled to a significant extent. The role of the RSS in undertaking active political mobilization for the BJP has been one of the primary catalysts of BJP's performance in both Haryana and J&K – something that was conspicuously missing during the Lok Sabha elections. The energetic mobilization by the RSS shows that the appeal of Hindutva not only extends to the domain of religious unity but can also dent caste rigidities when undertaken properly.

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HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Russian Mobilization of Muslims Amid Declining Conscription:

Even as the war sees little major breakthroughs except varying intensity of drone attacks from either side, Russia has been jolted by declining recruitment of combatants in the Russian army to fight in the war. The last few months have especially seen such a decline, with Russian military facing the highest manpower losses during May-September 2024. In the wake of this, Russia began a new conscription campaign in October 2024 with the aim of recruiting 130,000 soldiers – a much lower number than the 150,000 soldiers recruited during April – July 2024.

Further, in the backdrop of this declining conscription and Russian manpower losses, the revival of religious organizations to internally mobilize for the war is now being witnessed in Russia. While other non-Catholic minorities have desisted from participating in the war, with Buddhists even condemning it, Russia has sought to mobilize the Muslims in recent times. In this regard, the Russian government has enlisted the support of Muslim Spiritual Directorates (MSDs), which are religious organizations established during the Second World War.

The deployment of MSDs in the present war, however, is much more extensive than it ever was during the Second World War. In the present war, the attempt is to mobilize the Muslim population against a foreign enemy, and, also to fill up the vacuum of intermittent shortage of manpower in the Russian

military to avoid recruiting ethnic Russians from metropolitan cities. This, Russia calculates, can help achieve various objectives, such as containing tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim combatants within Russian military through the MSDs, and project the illusion that Russia is internally at peace. To what extent Russia is successful depends on the changed context of the present times when, both, Muslim population as well as the radicalization among Russia's Muslim minority has increased, making the country a frequent target of Islamic terrorist attacks. Historically, many MSDs – presently there are hundreds of them – have harboured motivations that have sought to challenge the Russian state. With the revival of MSDs, the latter is a challenge that Russia may further have to contend with in the future.

Dangers of a New Proxy War

With the deployment of North Korean troops by the Russian military, a new facet of the present war has developed. The North Korean troops have been deployed as a part of the mutual security agreement between the two countries, dating back to the Cold War period. According to South Korea's National Intelligence Service, 1,500 North Korean "special forces" arrived first with a total complement of 10,000 troops, who would be allocated into two brigades of 5,000 troops each. In the past, during the course of the war, like Iran, North Korea has also allegedly transferred weapons and ammunition to Russia. Like in the past, in the present instance of troop deployment too, the United States has refused to give much traction to it, as has South Korea. For, giving traction to this development risks the escalation of the war to much more expansive dimensions, making it a war between US and Russian

proxies and something akin to the Cold War dynamics. Further, the presence of North Korean troops has also reduced Russia's stress of forcible recruitment of locals.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Israel-Iran Face-off

The war along Israel's twin fronts in Lebanon and Gaza continues unabated, with the looming specter of an all-out escalation with Iran becoming more concrete with time. In recent times, the Iranian drone attack on Israel – the second one this year – did not cause any damage to the latter and did not result in any casualties. This was followed by Israeli air strikes on Iranian military bases. In the past also Israel has targeted Iranian facilities – like earlier this year – and carried out targeted assassinations within Iranian territory. However, unlike in the past when Israel never claimed any of its actions, this time Israel explicitly announced the airstrikes while its jets were inside Iran.

In the latest strikes, Israel targeted Iran's air defence, missile, drone manufacturing and storage facilities in three provinces, including Tehran. The strikes – which lasted a few hours – laid bare the weak state of Iranian air defence systems. Iranian response was also one of its kind this time. Unlike in the past, when Iran would deny the strikes or claim limited or no damage, this time, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamanei, himself announced that Iran should neither exaggerate nor downplay the damages resulting from Israeli strikes and that Iran would use all its resources to deliver a response to Israel. How this plays out is yet to be seen. However, the strikes do mark a new phase of closer and more frequent escalations between

Israel and Iran, thereby igniting the possibilities of the expansion of the war to a regional level.

Israel's Vindication

In yet another instance of how Hamas terrorists are using civilians as human shields, Israeli troops captured around 100 Hamas terrorists after raids on a hospital in northern Gaza. Further, as part of the raids, Israeli troops also uncovered weapons, funds and intelligence documents which were being used by the Hamas terrorists. Some terrorists had even disguised themselves as medical staff. The incident shows how, in terrorist hubs like Gaza, civilian and terrorist interlinkages often go deep. That is probably why because of such incidents – after providing extensive evidence – the Israeli Parliament finally passed a law banning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) from operating throughout occupied Palestine, branding it a “terror” group. For a long time, instead of operating like a UN agency, the UNRWA has operated more like a government, providing services such as health care, education and even psychological support. Its deep roots in Palestine ingrained it as part of regional politics, with Israel stating that many members of UNRWA were involved in massacre of Israelis on October 7th, 2023.

HINDU GENOCIDE IN BANGLADESH

The continuing genocide of Hindus in Bangladesh has finally triggered an aggravated reaction from the minority community in the country, with tens of thousands of Hindus rallying to demand that the Yunus government give them protection from attacks and drop sedition charges against leaders from the Hindu

community. With around 30,000 Hindus gathering at Chittagong's Laldighi Maidan – under the banner of *Sanatan Jagran Manch* – demanding their rights, the Bangladesh government has been rattled. Many Hindus have also boldly stood guard outside their temples. Besides Chattogram, protests by Hindus were reported from other parts of Bangladesh as well.

The community is calling for an 8-point agenda, including:

1. Compensation for the families of missing, deceased, injured, or affected religious minorities.
2. Establishment of a Ministry for Minority Development.
3. Formulation of a Minority Protection Law and the establishment of a special tribunal for justice.
4. Declaration of three days of public holidays for Durga Puja.
5. Recovery of confiscated religious properties, enacting a preservation law, and restoration of temples in respective areas.
6. Establishment of model temples in all 64 districts and a Vedic university, transforming the Hindu Religious Welfare Trust into a foundation.
7. Modernisation of the Sanskrit and Pali Education Board.
8. Declaration of a public holiday for the Rath Yatra.

Besides the genocidal acts of physical violence against Hindus, the latter are also the target of a variety of other forms of harassment, such as social exclusion, smear campaigns, discrimination in employment including forceful resignations or dismissals and subjection to constant climate of fear and threat. India has repeatedly, through foreign affairs ministry, called on the government in Bangladesh to prioritize the safety

of Hindus and ensure that those responsible for attacks on the community are brought to justice. In a positive signal to the Hindus, US President-elect, Donald Trump, during his past month's campaign extensively and bluntly condemned the barbaric violence against Hindus, Christians and other minorities in Bangladesh.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER RAPPROCHEMENT

The long overdue and secretly negotiated India-China border settlement has finally led to a disengagement of troops from the Line of Actual Control (LAC), thereby fulfilling India's negotiating condition of a return to the pre-2020 arrangement. This disengagement will be followed by the two other steps of normalization viz. de-escalation and de-induction of troops. In the process, the countries have also arrived at a solution to the 'legacy' issues of patrolling in Depsang and Demchok regions in eastern Ladakh. In addition, there was also an understanding on Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh viz. that Chinese patrols in the area will be allowed as in the past without being blocked. With the agreement reached on patrolling points, the post-Galwan face-off is finally being settled. While the disengagement process at five other friction points was already conducted in 2022, Depsang and Demchok had proved to be difficult. In the present deal, India has not only gained patrolling access, but also grazing rights for its herders.

With the disengagement now complete, the political realignment also took place rapidly, as visible in the Modi-Xi meeting for the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia. This meeting at the highest level is expected to be followed by the resumption of foreign ministers and national security adviser-level dialogues.

INDIA-CANADA ROW

India-Canada diplomatic relations were already at an all-time low since last year when Canada alleged that Indian officials and agents were involved in the killing of Khalistani “activist” Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023. Concurrently, an Indian-origin person was also facing indictment in a US court in a case involving a “conspiracy” to assassinate Gurbatwant Singh Pannun – another Khalistani terrorist who has issued multiple open threats against India. Canada claims to have received ‘credible intelligence’ from the Five Eyes partner countries. The coordinated timing of US and Canada escalations have posed a challenge for India. Unlike Canada, however, the US has been defter and more circumspect. It has avoided making any public allegations against India, and let its judicial system take its own course.

While the issue created diplomatic tensions few months back, Canada again chose to reignite it with a repetition of the same allegations. Further, it accused six Indian diplomats in Canada – including the High Commissioner – of acts of extortion, homicide and other violent acts against ‘Canadian citizens.’ This time it even went a step further and made it personal by naming Indian Home Minister Amit Shah (in a manipulated leakage to the Washington Post), as being involved in the attack on Nijjar. Canada also accused India of escalating violence further since last year when Canada had first made the allegations.

India, in turn, has rejected Canada’s allegations against its diplomats and has pulled out its six diplomats from the country in return it has also expelled six Canadian diplomats from India. Canada has also tightened the visa process, as Trudeau has

been under domestic fire over illegal immigration. India has further maintained that despite consistently seeking hard evidence from Canada, instead of merely intelligence inputs, Canada has failed to provide that. In the absence of evidence, Canada's intelligence inputs do not hold any value. In turn, Canada has bizarrely asked India to cooperate in its investigation into Indian officials themselves! In the wake of Canada's renewed aggression, India has also hit back with unusually blunt language – usually reserved for Pakistan – stating that domestic political compulsions and 'vote bank' politics in Canada have led to a highly 'permissive' environment for anti-India secessionist activities in the country.

The diplomatic crisis has laid bare the ill-willed motivations behind the synchronization between the Biden administration and the Trudeau administration. The renewed face off came at a time when the US administration was, more or less, in a state of autopilot with Biden no longer active, and Harris taking the key decisions besides campaigning for the elections. The attitude displayed by the West in this saga has ended up alerting India further to the pitfalls of falling in too closely in line with the West. The double standards of US are particularly jarring, since it has had a long history of covert and explicit instances of domestic interference, assassinations and regime changes not only in enemy countries, but also in treaty allies like in Europe. Indeed, countries like US and Israel have been very open about carrying out targeted individual killings in foreign lands.

For the West to, thus, talk about the rule of law becomes ironical. In the name of rule of law and free speech, countries like US and Canada have tolerated open calls for violence against India, open threats by so-called "activists" like Pannun

to blow up Indian airlines, public celebrations of past violence against India, and attacks on Indian diplomatic missions based in “Five Eyes” countries. One of the most jarring of such attacks was the attack on Indian consular event at a temple in Brampton, Canada to facilitate travel processes for Indian diaspora, including many Sikhs. The gathering came under one of the worst instances of violent attacks, with the Canadian police finding itself unable to control the situation. This, in turn, led to extensive disturbances between Hindus and Khalistani Sikhs – an insignificant portion even of the overseas Sikh community. This has led to the mobilisation of many Hindus and Sikhs seeking to organise against such senseless acts and the attitude of the administration in the face of such acts.

THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY IN THE EARLY INDIAN POLITY

“The principle of popular rule is the possession of the reins of government by the mass of the people, but by the possession is not intended necessarily the actual exercise of administration. When the people are able to approve or to disapprove of any action of the Government with the certainty that such approval or disapproval will be absolutely effective, the spirit of democracy is present even if the body is not evolved. India in her ancient polity possessed this spirit of democracy.”

– Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA 7: 943)