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THINK TANK

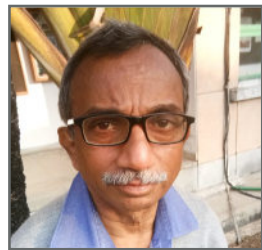


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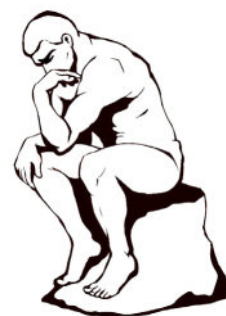
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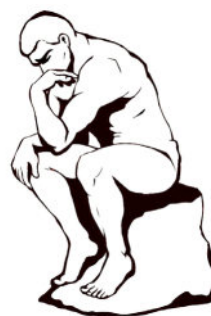


Captain James T. Kirk of the starship enterprise once said, "Without freedom of choice there is no creativity.", for this very yearn for creativity, progress, perception, we, our ancestors, this nation has woven a podium of secularity, justice, fraternity and most important liberty. There have been countless endeavours, some pleasant, some unpleasant but what we must hold true to our heart is this choice to speak up, to respect, to explore beyond tomorrow. Once again it gives me immense pleasure to work on the fourth edition of Think Tank which brings across to you a kaleidoscope of opinions, stories and displays of creativity! With that, i wish you a Happy Independence Day!

Anushcka Joshi
Student Editor

Dedication

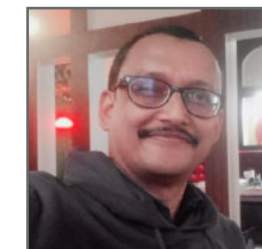
A fledgling seven decades plus democracy recalls with gratitude the countless sacrifices, bravery, conviction and valour of the numerous ushering in a most precious human value called freedom. The strategy of a non-violent struggle to overpower the mighty holds ample relevance today particularly when power is held to be accountable. Each freedom fighter had a dream to see an India, free, progressive and the masses surging forward in peace and prosperity. The journey has just begun and there are stiff challenges to overcome. To restore faith in freedom today would be meaningful if we as citizens of a free State perform our duties diligently and seek to make better in whatever little measure we can The clarion call of this edition of the Think Tank appeals to all is to join in this once in a lifetime noble mission upholding, nurturing and defending freedom.



QUEST FOR A COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

The telos, purpose for any institution is to serve an end. Stretching the Aristotelian narrative, the State came into existence for life and continues to remain for the sake of good life. The legislature as a key organ of the government is entrusted with the task of legislation. Statutes are crucial as policies for progress. The big question is: Are statutes meeting the goal? Have they become statues? some revered, some revolted. Is the legislature able to ventilate grievances? The freedom to speak and the patience to listen are vital. What plays out is an outright assault on the sheer power of rationality and contemplation. Logjam in Parliament with lung power of both the ruling and the opposition yelling their throats out is a very sickening scene at the cost of the taxpayers' money. Democracy or audiocracy is what the layman is left wondering. Snatching papers from the ruling side by the opposition is a serious development challenging the very norms of Parliamentary democracy. The commotion is such and as the decibels rise no sensible reasoning is audible. There is an acute time crunch and what needs to be said and discussed at length do not get the requisite attention. The process of deliberation is important for any law to have meaning. The time factor rush and the lack of detailed consideration does not augur well for the future. The strength of numbers at the cost of making laws for the sake of it has not yielded results. Parliament is an important institution. Voices are echoed here. Representatives are elected to take up the hopes and aspirations of the masses. Partisan and ideological influences are so overwhelming that the conscience of the individual and the collective wisdom of a law are scarcely visible. Illuminating debates indicate the strength of a mature democracy and even as we claim to be one, scenes inside the Parliament leave many of the questions unanswered. Issues of urgent

public importance and the need to address the same is what an ideal situation would have demanded. It appears that the ideal has succumbed to be idle. The noble purpose of such a great institution can never be denied. Parliament is here to stay and along with that the wisdom of collective conscience beyond petty politicking has to surface, revive and endure where law makers agree to disagree for welfare with prudent and cogent reasons along with grace and magnanimity.



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BALANCING GLOBALIZATION WITH LOCAL CONCERNS IN POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

[Dr. Amna Mirza analyzes the impact of the pandemic and its ramifications globally vis- a - vis States and the policies of protectionism]

Abstract/Introduction :-

Globalisation is a relatively old phenomenon that started from the industrial revolutions in the first half of the 19th century. The unexpected environmental impact Covid-19 epidemic has transformed the structural patterns of globalisation. The changes brought by the pandemic are expected to persist and global trade is an important dimension to be factored in. In this discussion paper, the impact of pandemic and globalisation on trade is analysed. The changes and their potential impact on the corporate world that would for different countries shall be evaluated. The necessity of localisation and the need of balance between globalisation and location is also highlighted.

Globalisation, global trade & pandemic :-

Trade barriers have been seen in the form of tariffs, taxes etc. However many countries have restored that with the help of local content requirements. The global supply chains have been impacted drastically due to the pandemic. Governmental restrictions across nation states during the lockdown and changes in the business world with digitalisation have increased the demand of the supply chain immensely.



Technological innovation existed, but at same time, some raw materials were more sought and rare materials were also hard to get for transportation and technological uses after the pandemic. The Global financial crisis expanded by 3.5% in the last decade. Global trade is no longer the primary driving force and the pandemic caused severe shocks to trade and shrink the economy by 3.3%(Annunziata, 2021).

Protectionism got the opportunity to rise and trade war was made fashionable during this time (Annunziata, 2021). Industrial corporations are changing their strategy for coping with the new global situation by making the supply chain flexible and resilient. Government policymakers are taking decisions that would not take the situation back to the previous state, the consequences of pandemic and local action, were not good for many. Supply disruption and inflation pressures would be tackled with new methods and these structural changes would be staying there longer. The goal of several countries now is to make the supply chain more flexible, localised and digital. Countries are planning to invest more in securing their rare treasures as global competition would be fiercer in few years. Facilitation of innovation, infrastructure, and investing skills are seen as beneficial.

Changes in Economic dimensions:

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) firms are transforming their business process by recalibrating the manufacturing blueprint by focusing more on regional hubs. The pricing policy of China is still a matter of concern for different industries. Further, many countries failed to formulate proper action plans while adhering to WTO norms but in today's time many countries are taking steps to instil strong, resilient & independent domestic industries. Examples such as Brexit, Make in India, America first, Buy Uganda Build Uganda, Buy British (Outlookindia, 2021). All these slogans are indicating how the countries are returning to national and local manufacturing in the system. In the last two decades, traditional costs and domestic labour fell badly. The outbreak showed to the country that how fragile and dependent they are in context of global realms leading to so many problems.

To add an alternative dimension here, on the contrary, the paper of Leigland and Eberhard, (2018) showed that localisation policies and regulations hold back and hinder renewable energy uses. The paper mainly illustrated that use of localisation is just to maintain public relations for long term economic development & that it often fails to create jobs and industrialisation opportunities. Domestic manufacturing is mandatory to survive and maintain a healthy economy and population. Today when other countries are thinking about localisation but China is an important factor to be understood here. China is succeeding in the pandemic than other countries because of their independence (Outlookindia, 2021). Amid Covid China is the only country exported most while it was easy for China but for the global market scenario, it is not considered healthy to have such demand dependency on a single country. It could be also seen as one of the main reasons for returning to localisation from globalisation. It is very crucial to restoring the balance and maximising the profit through localisation & globalisation.

Another interesting argument can be traced to Miroudot, (2020) paper , which can be considered as supportive statement as diversifying localisation is a reasonable outcome of globalisation. There is an argument about resilience or robust trade which are very crucial for business. Regional supply chains have limited cost penalty however benefits from a smaller climate footprint. Robustness often not resulted in an effective and suitable outcome. However, it cannot be said robustness is not necessary at all but resilience is mandatory.

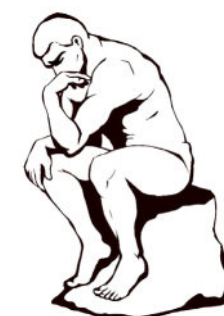
Contemporary reflections regarding pandemic and globalisation:-

The paper of Pegoraro et al. (2020) discussed the industry 4.0 is transforming and capturing in the new manufacturing model. The paper discussed how e-commerce selling technological changes is facilitating B2C business. Understanding this new context, with recent remarks of Gordon Brown where he pointed towards dramatic changes and transformations across the globe, and that how borders have been openly thrown in communication, trade and finance. He held that there are seven ways to change the world. He mentioned that globalisation is at the core of seven methods of change. Throughout his reflection, he mentioned reforming the IMF to create a better early monetary warning system. In coping with pandemic situations, Brown argues that world well-being contribution is 27% based on the US and 13% based on China. These two superpower cooperation would decide so many things. Brown explains the typical cultural flight from history that is bearing responsibility. Globalisation has brought opportunities for some and threats for others. According to him, freezing global finance brought cheaper mortgages and more financial crises (Woods, 2021). Free trade might reduce the cost of food however the local farmers would go bankrupt. After the G7 summit, Brown described promise and commitment to providing vaccines as an unforgivable moral failure. He called for more funding for health, education, and a carbon-free environment.

In a significant move, the PM of India called for new human-centric globalisation. It has been pointed out by India that several nations have faced numerous challenges due to covid-19 and to reform the global multilateral system, its essential to have human-centric globalisation. The Prime Minister of India mentioned that India would support the UN agenda and with deep commitment would try to maintain global harmony for preserving environmental balance and improving socio-economic equity. India has called for a change in the contemporary world. India has sought the reform of global bodies, IMF, and would expand its permanent membership with UNSC (Hindustan Times, 2021).

Conclusion:

It can be concluded from the above discussion that the changes introduced by the pandemic in the global trade and lifestyle would persist longer. Global consumption and supply chain demand would grow as evaluated. Depending





GORDON BROWN

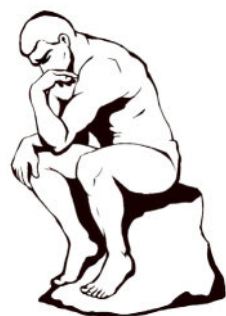
Image source: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/former-u-k-prime-minister-gordon-brown-joins-private-equity-firm-11547060520>

on one country or any other otherwise amid crisis ensuring the wellbeing of a nation at time becomes a difficult proposition. Further, nations cannot close all the borders too. It is necessary to take steps to foster localisation and juxtaposed right ideas & attempts to reform dynamics of globalisation.

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**RASEEN MOHSINA SHAH
CLASS 12 HUMANITIES**



**FUEL ON
FIRE**

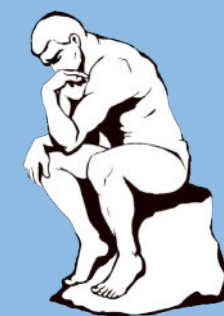
[With fuel prices spiralling sky high, Raseen Shah delves deep into the causes including the legacy of the oil bonds and the dynamics of International Politics.]

India is the world's third-largest oil importer and the fourth-largest buyer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and has been building on its relationship with the West Asian nation. The 23 nations in Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), cartel and allied producers like Russia, had to postpone their negotiations indefinitely, raising fears about its stability of a group that has deftly handled supplies over the past 18 months to cope with the coronavirus- related global economic crisis. Both Saudi Arabia and UAE are member of the OPEC , which accounts for a major part of India's total crude oil imports and 40% of global production. India has been flagging its concerns over the increasing global crude oil prices and requesting phasing out production cuts to OPEC.

In theory, retail prices of petrol and diesel in India are linked to the global crude prices. There is supposed to be complete decontrol of consumer-end prices of auto fuels and others such as the aviation turbine fuel or ATF. It means that if crude prices fall, retails prices should come down too, and vice versa. Oil price decontrol is a one-way street in India. When global prices go up, this is passed on to the consumer, who has to cough up more for every litre of fuel consumed. But when the reverse happens and prices go down, the government, almost by default, slaps fresh

taxes and levies to ensure that it rakes in extra revenues, even as the consumer, who should have ideally benefited by way of lower pump prices, is short changed and forced to either pay what she's already paying, or even more. The key beneficiary in this subversion of price decontrol is the government. The consumer is a clear loser, alongside fuel retailing companies as well. India is particularly vulnerable as any increase in global prices can affect its import bill, stoke inflation and widen trade deficit. Following the COVID outbreak, crude prices for Indian basket of crude had plunged to \$19.90 in April last year during the first wave before recovering to 71.98 a barrel in June, data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell showed.

The growing Gulf rivalry that's pushing up oil prices: A bitter public rift between the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia over oil production quotas this week caused talks between the world's biggest oil-producing nations to be abandoned and left energy markets in limbo, pushing oil prices to a six-year high.



The 23 nations in Opec+, which comprises the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries cartel and allied producers like Russia, had to postpone their negotiations indefinitely, raising fears about its stability of

a group that has deftly handled supplies over the past 18 months to cope with the coronavirus-related global economic crisis. The problem began when the UAE rejected a proposal by Opec+ leaders Saudi Arabia and Russia to extend output curbs for another eight months.

The UAE wanted to renegotiate its current baseline - the level from which production cuts or increases are calculated - to give it freedom to pump out more oil. However, Saudi Arabia and Russia were against doing so.

The negotiations took an unusual turn when the energy ministers of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which are close allies, went public with their differences.

“The rift has come as a surprise, but perhaps the tussle was inevitable,” says Ben Cahill, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

“Abu Dhabi’s production capacity is at odds with its Opec quota. It has invested a lot of money to raise its production. And now demand is picking up. That’s why the UAE has been frustrated over the last year at its inability to increase production,” he adds.

Two princes

For several years, the partnership between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has shaped the geopolitics of the Arab world. The personal bond between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed has been instrumental in cementing this alliance.

Both men are seen as their country’s de facto ruler and have ambitious visions. For several years there was deep co-operation on strategic issues. They formed an Arab military coalition in 2015 to fight a war against the Iran-aligned rebel Houthi movement in Yemen, and imposed a diplomatic, trade and travel embargo on Qatar in 2017.

But cracks in the relationship began to appear two years ago, when the UAE withdrew most of its troops from Yemen, leaving the Saudis displeased.

In January, the Emiratis reluctantly accepted a Saudi-led deal to end the Qatar embargo, even though they remain wary of trusting Doha. Similarly, Saudi Arabia was not enthused by the UAE’s decision to normalise relations with Israel last year.

The cracks started to deepen this February, when Saudi

Arabia issued an ultimatum to multinational companies to relocate their regional headquarters to the kingdom by 2024 or lose out on government contracts. This was perceived as an implicit attack on Dubai (in the UAE), the commercial hub of the region.

After the Emiratis blocked the proposed Opec+ deal, the Saudis appeared to retaliate by suspending flights to the UAE. It cited concerns about coronavirus variants, but the decision came just ahead of an Islamic holiday when many people head to Dubai for a break.

Saudi Arabia also announced that it would exclude imports from free zones or linked to Israel from a preferential tariff agreement with other Gulf states, delivering a blow to the UAE’s economy, which revolves around a free zone model.

Economic competition

The tussle at Opec+ is underlined by a growing economic rivalry, with both countries trying to diversify their economies by reducing their dependence on hydrocarbon exports.

With Saudi Arabia adopting a more aggressive economic strategy under Mohammed bin Salman, they are now competing in sectors like tourism, financial services and technology. “Saudi Arabia is the giant in the region which is now waking up. And at some level that’s a concern for the Emiratis,” says Neil Quilliam, an associate fellow at Chatham House in London. “In 15 to 20 years’ time, if Saudi Arabia transforms into a dynamic economy, then that would be a threat for the Emirati economic model.”

It is still unclear whether Saudi Arabia and the UAE will be able to agree on a new Opec+ deal. But Ali Shihabi, a Saudi analyst close to the royal court, does not believe the rift will hamper their relationship in the long run, even though the Emiratis’ rigid stance came as a “shock” to the Saudis - especially given that they had worked very hard to achieve consensus. “Both the sides have had much bigger disagreements in the past,” he says.

“Every relationship goes through ups and downs, including the US and the UK. But the fundamentals of this relationship are really [too] strong to cause any permanent damage to this alliance.”

The Legacy of the Oil Bonds: Of late, retail fuel prices hit over Rs 100 per litre in many states, including national capital Delhi. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government faces growing clamour to rein in

rising petrol and diesel prices by cutting taxes, the reason for it not yielding to the demand can be traced back to the early 2000’s. The present and the next governments have a bill worth Rs 1.3 lakh crore to pay,

thanks to the then governments’ largesse of keeping petrol and diesel prices in check.

Of late, retail fuel prices hit over Rs 100 per litre in many states, including national capital Delhi. Notably, various central and state taxes make up for up to 60 per cent of fuel prices. The central government mopped up Rs 3.72 lakh crore in excise duty on crude oil and petroleum products in the last financial year 2020-21; while the state governments collected Rs 2.03 lakh crore in sales tax and VAT on petrol and diesel. On the other hand, the government has to pay towards the redemption of outstanding oil bonds worth over a lakh crore rupees.

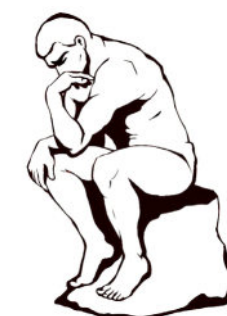
What are oil bonds? Why did governments issue?

Oil bonds were issued in lieu of cash subsidy to oil marketing companies (OMCs) in former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s UPA era, and also Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s NDA rule. These sovereign oil bonds, issued

Name of Loan	Earliest date of maturity	As at the end of					Revised 2020-2021	Budget 2021-2022
		1950-1951	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020		
2 E - SPECIAL SECURITIES ISSUED TO OIL MARKETING COMPANIES IN LIEU OF CASH SUBSIDY								
8.13% GOI spl. Bonds,2021	16.10.2021	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	...
7.75% GOI spl. Bonds,2021	28.11.2021	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	...
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2023	10.11.2023	...	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00
8.01% GOI spl. Bonds,2023	15.12.2023	...	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	12.02.2024	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	15.09.2024	...	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33
6.35% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	23.12.2024	...	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00
7.95% GOI spl. Bonds,2025	18.01.2025	...	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92
8.40% GOI spl. Bonds,2025	28.03.2025	...	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92
8.40% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	29.03.2026	...	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00
6.90% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	04.02.2026	...	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00
8.00% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	23.03.2026	...	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00
Total			130923.17	130923.17	130923.17	130923.17	130923.17	120923.17

in favour of oil companies Indian Oil Corp, HPCL and BPCL, were transferable, allowing these companies to raise immediate cash at the time. The government, being the issuer, would bear the interest payments and redemption at maturity. During that time, OMCs were selling fuel at lower than international market prices to keep it affordable. The government compensated those companies for it.

The government has a liability to pay Rs 20,000 crore in the current fiscal year 2021-22 in the form of bond repayment and interest on the outstanding oil bonds. While for the next six years, the government has a total debt obligation worth Rs 1.30 lakh crore. Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan (before the recent Cabinet reshuffle)



blamed the UPA regime for issuing oil bonds, saying that this is the main reason behind the hike in fuel prices. He said that the Congress-led UPA, left lakhs of crores dues which the Modi government has to pay in the coming years. He also stated that there has been a rise in the prices of crude oil in the international market. To fulfill the domestic needs, India has to import 80 per cent oil, which is the main reason for the rise in petrol, diesel prices.

Last month, Amit Malviya, national president of the IT cell of the BJP, in a tweet said that the increase in petrol and diesel prices has been a legacy of UPA’s mismanagement. “We are paying for the oil bonds that will come up for redemption starting FY2021 till (2026), which were issued by UPA to oil companies for not increasing retail prices then! Bad economics, bad politics,” a part of the tweet read.

Total oil bonds payout stands at Rs 1.30 lakh crore

In the 2021-22 receipt budget, as per annexure 6E titled ‘Special Securities Issued to Oil Marketing Companies

In Lieu Of Cash Subsidy’, pending liabilities related to oil bonds were Rs 1,30,923.17 crore. This means an amount of Rs 1,30,923.17 crore was the total value of pending oil bonds by the end of 2020-21. Special Securities Issued to Oil Marketing Companies In Lieu Of Cash Subsidy

Narendra Modi’s NDA government first came into power in 2014. During its regime, two tranches of bonds, worth Rs 1,750, each (Rs 3,500 crore), matured in 2015. Two tranches of bonds, worth Rs 1,750, each (Rs 3,500 crore), matured in 2015

Two oil bonds maturing this fiscal; Modi govt to pay Rs 20,000 cr

Name of Loan	Earliest date of maturity	At the end of						(In crores of Rupees)	
		1950-1951	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Revised	Budget
7.47% GOI spl. Bonds,2012	07.03.2012	...	2000.00	2000.00	...	...	...	...	...
7.44% GOI spl. Bonds,2012	23.03.2012	...	2000.00	2000.00	...	...	...	...	...
7.00% GOI spl. Bonds,2012	09.09.2012	...	5762.85	5762.85	5762.85	...	...	...	...
7.61% GOI spl. Bonds,2015	07.03.2015	...	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	...
7.59% GOI spl. Bonds,2015	23.03.2015	...	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	1750.00	...
8.13% GOI spl. Bonds,2021	16.10.2021	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00
7.75% GOI spl. Bonds,2021	28.11.2021	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2023	10.11.2023	...	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00
8.01% GOI spl. Bonds,2023	15.12.2023	...	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00	4150.00
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	12.02.2024	...	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00	5000.00
8.20% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	15.09.2024	...	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33	10306.33
8.35% GOI spl. Bonds,2024	23.12.2024	...	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00	22000.00
7.99% GOI spl. Bonds,2025	18.01.2025	...	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92	11256.92
8.40% GOI spl. Bonds,2025	28.03.2025	...	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92	9296.92
8.40% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	28.03.2026	...	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00	4971.00
6.90% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	04.02.2026	...	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00	21942.00
8.00% GOI spl. Bonds,2026	23.03.2026	...	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00	10000.00
Total			144186.02	144186.02	144186.02	134423.17	134423.17	139923.17	

In 2019, Narendra Modi's NDA government came into power for the second consecutive time. According to the budget documents, oil bonds worth Rs 41,150 crore are due for maturity between 2019-2024. In 2018, Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said that the government has paid around Rs 10,000 crore annually as interest over the last decade. It is likely that the government will pay a similar amount of interest for outstanding bonds for the current fiscal as well. So, the total bond repayment and interest on the outstanding oil bonds stands around Rs 20,000 crore for the current fiscal. Not just UPA, but Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led govt also issued. However, oil bonds were issued not only by the UPA government but also by Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government. According to the budget speech of 2002-03, the then Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said that the government would issue oil bonds. "The Oil Pool Account will be dismantled on April 1, 2002, and the outstanding balances will be liquidated by issue of oil bonds to the concerned oil companies."

In order to meet the demands of the market, Oil refinery companies in India face problem as the cost of input price of crude oil is high thus resulting in less supply and more demand for petrol in the country. An increase in supply results in a decrease in the price of the petrol and vice versa. Oil refining and marketing companies maintain crude oil inventory up to six weeks, which also influences the price of the petrol and petroleum products. The prices of petroleum products varies according to the local government policies which impose taxes on fuels. As and when the government of India raises tax rates on fuels, the oil companies in India also increases the price of the petrol to recover losses and maintain marginal profits in the oil business in India. The rupee-dollar exchange rate is also one of the major factors which influence the price of petrol in India. Indian oil companies pay to the oil imported from other countries in terms of dollars, but their expenses are in rupees. So, when rupee rate plunges, you have to pay more for the USD. The factors also responsible for drop in production of crude oil have caused a spike in fuel prices in India.

Fuel prices in India are continuing to rise, so much so, that they have reached levels that have never been witnessed before. Petrol rates have crossed Rs 100 per litre in seven states and Union Territories. When compared, the petrol prices of the neighbouring countries are comparatively low. With Pakistan retails petrol costs at Rs. 51.14, Sri Lanka at Rs. 60.56, Bangladesh at Rs. 76.41, Nepal at Rs. 68.98 and Bhutan at Rs. 49.56, India has the highest petrol and diesel retail prices. Excise duty is levied by the Centre. This comprises of a major part of price of petrol. It has doubled since the year 2014. Value added tax is collected by the state. It is charged on price of petrol and the dealer's commission. Therefore, both the taxes together amount up to 63% of the cost. The retailers' commission and freight charge count up to a third of the petrol price. According to Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell, IOC, the fuel taxation across the world is; India at 69% (the highest), Italy at 64%, France and Germany at 63%, Britain at 62%, Spain at 53%, Japan at 47%, Canada at 33% and USA at 19%.

Any change in international crude oil price has a direct influence on the price of crude oil in the domestic market. This is the most important factor responsible for any rise in petrol prices in India as India imports 84% of the petrol products used in the country. Increase in international demand, low production rate and any political unrest in the crude oil producing countries of the world severely affects petrol price. Economic growth in India and other developing countries has also led to the increase in demand for oil and other essential petroleum fuels in India. The number of people who own private vehicles has gone up in the recent past which has contributed to the increase in demand for petrol in India; this has resulted in the hike in petrol prices in India.

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**PERFORMANCE
POLITICS IN
KERALA
State Election
Analysis**

[The Kerala state elections saw the Left Front ward off anti-incumbency and win by a thumping majority. Hiyaniejemmy Das examines the winning strategies.]

Introduction and Background

The 2nd of May, 2021. India holds its breath as the results of the Assembly Elections in Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and the Union Territory of Puducherry are declared. In Kerala, precedent favours the United Democratic Front (UDF), since the incumbent government was formed by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), and the state has always switched between the two coalition governments since 1977. However, trends from local elections and polls clearly favour the incumbent LDF. For the first time in



Kerala's political scene, contrasting predictions and uncertainty emerge, further amplified by the lack of favour for the BJP-led NDA, a party and an alliance steadily dominating the rest of the country but not even confident of retaining the single seat they controlled in Kerala. Thus, all eyes were on 'God's Own Country'. Kerala is arguably one of the most politically volatile states in India, exemplified by multiple periods under President's Rule, multiple term extensions of the Legislature, and of course, the alliance system: no party has ever enjoyed majority in Kerala. From Kerala's formation in 1956 till 1980, the political climate of the state was



Image Source: https://www.business-standard.com/article/elections/kerala-assembly-polls-state-record-s-74-06-turnout-in-april-6-election-121041000681_1.html

“It is a state which still hasn’t given in to the ‘Saffron Wave’ taking hold of the rest of the country, a state which bears witness to the slow apparent-demise of Congress which continues to lose its strongholds, and of course, a state where a communist party still dominates, an exceptional case in a multi-party system of democracy.”

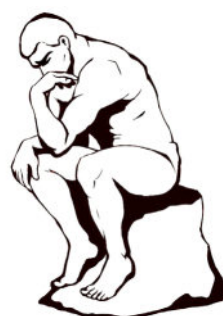
unpredictable and wildly unstable. Finally, from the 80s two powerful coalitions emerged: the UDF, an alliance of centre and centre-left parties, led by the Indian National Congress (INC); and then the LDF, an alliance of left-wing parties, led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). The parties have been alternating power for the last four decades, until the LDF made history in the 2021 Assembly Elections by being the first incumbent government to be re-elected in 40 years.

Analysing the Result

Throughout its tenure, the LDF Government armed itself with a slew of welfarism:

- Making affordable healthcare a norm
- Building over 200,000 houses for the homeless and landless
- Upgrading government schools
- Efficiently handling the various crises emerging in its tenure, most recently and significantly the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Such policies and campaigns invariably drew the support of the people, especially the poor and marginalised communities, something the Opposition failed to do. Despite being the most literate state in the country, votes are still influenced by identity politics.[6] The BJP put a massive campaign around the topics of Sabarimala and



Love Jihad to appeal to Hindu voters. Meanwhile, Congress was unable to cement a position of approval from voters: unable to counter Hindutva, and accused of becoming a tail of the Muslim League (unable to counter the League’s influence in the UDF, an alliance considered to be led by the Congress). Moreover, both Congress and BJP lost no opportunity in slamming the LDF with corruption charges, bringing up allegations of jeopardising the fishing community, and the handling of the Sabarimala case, among others. These make it clear that communal divisions very much played a role in the elections. Conversely, the LDF heavily relied on its welfarism and secured the support of poorer voters, a win its competitors could not secure. This was the primary factor for its re-election. The tangible and beneficial outcomes of the LDF’s policies simply outweigh any play on striking the religious/communal sentiments of voters. Along with welfare politics, the LDF has also benefited from the significant shift in Kerala’s political landscape with the rise of Hindu nationalism. The Christian and Muslim communities see the LDF as a solid counterforce to the BJP at the state level as opposed to the Congress.

What makes this result historic?

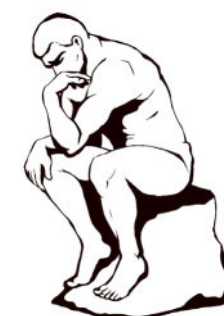
The LDF won a decisive mandate, claiming 99 seats and surpassing its tally in the previous House, and also seeing an increase in vote share from 2016. The UDF won only 41 seats (a decline of six seats) but managed to retain more or less the same vote share that it had secured last time. The BJP-led alliance lost the single seat it controlled.

Kerala’s long history with alternating governments reflects the electorate’s desire for change, a desire which far outpaces belief in or loyalty to incumbent governments. The LDF win proves confidence and approval of the government’s handling of the many crises that rocked its tenure. In fact, even corruption charges against the government towards the end of its term were outweighed by the approval of its welfarism. An overwhelming 70% of polled voters said they were satisfied with the LDF Government.[10] The result has also proven the mettle of Pinarayi Vijayan, re-elected CM of Kerala, who throughout his tenure had to work to emerge from the shadow of his party colleague and opponent, VS Achuthanandan, CM from 2006-2011. On the other hand, the declining influence of Congress posed an opportunity for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to affirm itself as the major opposition against the LDF, just as it has in West Bengal and Odisha-strongholds of regional parties like Kerala. Instead, the BJP lost its sole seat and saw only a marginal increase in vote share, dealing a blow to its efforts in the state, one which has persisted against the rising tide of Hindu nationalism and growing influence of the party.

Conclusion

It is imperative to question: to what extent were the LDF’s policies also influenced by performative politics and communalism? The policies invariably led to development, but it can be assumed that the LDF is as guilty of preying on identity politics as the UDF and the BJP, reflected by its larger share of votes among the non-literate, and primary-level educated voters, as well as the poor and lower income level voters, compared to its opponents. However, this can be viewed from another lens as well: that the support from such voters was merely the product of the LDF’s welfare-centred policies.

Either way, it opens the conversation for the unique political climate that is Kerala. It is a state which still hasn’t given in to the ‘Saffron Wave’ taking hold of the rest of the country, a state which bears witness to the slow apparent-demise of Congress which continues to lose its strongholds, and of course, a state where a communist party still dominates, an exceptional case in a multi-party system of democracy. The unprecedented, continued support of the LDF, culminating in a historic win, will ensure that eyes will continue to be fixed on Kerala with great interest, especially as both the key national players, the BJP and Congress continue to try to sway the state their way. Until then, we get to watch the



LDF at work in its second term at the helm of Kerala, a scenario which has never played out in the state-until 2021.



PINARAYI VIJAYAN

Image Source: <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/kerala-cm-pinarayi-vijayan-seeks-additional-covid-vaccine-doses-allocation-719819>

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ELECTORAL BONDS IN INDIA

[Elections and funding of political parties in India in the context of electoral bonds is evaluated by Aarav Jain.]



The role of electoral bonds in India has always remained under a scanner. In January, 2018, the Central Government notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018 with an aim to ensure transparency in political funding. An electoral bond is like a promissory note which would be payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest. These bonds can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India. Apart from that only those political parties are eligible for electoral bonds that are registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951 and have secured no less than one per cent votes in the last Lok Sabha elections. Apart from that every political party would be allotted a verified account by the Election Commission and all the electoral bond transactions can be done through this account only. As per the provisions of this scheme electoral bonds can be purchased from the branches of the

State Bank of India (SBI) only, in the denominations ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1 crore. The bonds will remain valid for 15 days and can later be encashed by the political party only through a bank account with the authorized bank within that period only. In order to purchase these electoral bonds every donor has to provide his/her KYC detail to the banks. However, the names of the donors will be kept confidential.

The influx of the government's electoral bond scheme is a retrograde step which majorly amends the transparency in our democratic system. The scheme of electoral bonds has been a subject to a lot of criticism because it threatens our future of electoral democracy. Government's move to remove cap on donations of money to political parties by corporations and the rule of maintaining anonymity of the donor will only increase the corporate and political nexus to work towards the fulfilment of their own selfish aims.



The basket of anonymity encourages corruption and defies safeguard which was meant to ensure transparency. The salient feature of this scheme is that that a bondholder is not only supposed to keep back the details of its purchase but also that the parties on the other end, receiving the donations are supposed to suppress the donor's identity. This feature disregards Art. 19(1)(a) of our Constitution which deals with right to freedom of speech and expression. The public is supposed to know about every single ounce of information that explicitly gives them the right to express themselves during the process of election. It was in same vein that the Apex Court in the case of PUCL v. Union of India [AIR 2003 SC 2363] held that while the right to vote may not be a fundamental right, the right to make a choice by means of the ballot is an imminent part of the right to freedom of expression. In my opinion The Electoral Bond Scheme also violates Article 14 of the Constitution. As per this scheme the bonds are mandated to be received only by those political parties which are registered under the Representation of the People's Act. This provision stems out of Clause 3(30) of the Scheme. A further condition is that the party must have received not less than 1% of the votes polled in the previous election whether to Parliament or to the Legislative Assembly. This falls flat on the face of Article 14 as the new/independent candidates will not be suitable to receive bonds and would be deprived of funding

On April 12, 2019, the Supreme Court passed an interim order on the constitutional challenge to the government's Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018. The Apex Court in its interim order refused to withdraw the scheme of electoral bonds. However in its interim order the Court directed all the political parties to submit receipts of amounts received and details of identity of donors in a sealed cover to the Election Commission by 30th of May 2019. The Supreme Court while passing the interim order contended that if the identity of the buyers of electoral bonds is not known then the efforts of the government to curtail black money in elections would be rendered futile. However the CJI Ranjan Gogoi was of the opinion that such an issue requires detailed consideration. As a result the Court did not pronounce the final verdict on 12th of April.

The Bonds Challenged in the Supreme Court on March 2021:

The Supreme Court dismissed petitions seeking to stay the sale of fresh electoral bonds ahead of Assembly elections in West Bengal,

Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry. Although the court said there is no justification to stay the current sale, the larger constitutional challenge to the electoral bonds scheme filed in 2017 is still pending.

What is the pending challenge?

It was filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms, which works for electoral transparency and accountability, along with Common Cause, another non-profit. The court had admitted the plea and sought responses from the government and the Election Commission of India (EC). However, the case has not been heard in detail since then. Apart from challenging the constitutionality of the electoral bonds scheme, the petitioners had asked the court to declare all political parties as public offices to bring them under the ambit of the Right to Information Act and compel political parties to disclose their income and expenditure. Friday's ruling came on another plea by the petitioners seeking a stay on the current sale, until the court decides on the pending petition.

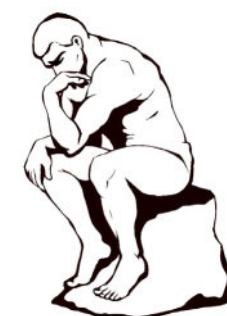
Why have they been challenged?

The point of contention is the anonymity provided to donors of electoral bonds. Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the Centre has exempted parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds. In other words, they need not disclose these details in their mandatory contribution reports to the Election Commission every year.

This means voters will not know which individual, company, or organisation has funded which party, and to what extent. Before the introduction of electoral bonds, parties had to disclose details of all donors who have contributed more than Rs 20,000. According to transparency activists, the change infringes the citizen's 'Right to Know' and makes the political class even more unaccountable. "Moreover, while electoral bonds provide no details to the citizens, the said anonymity does not apply to the government of the day, which can always access the donor details by demanding the data from the State Bank of India (SBI). This implies that the only people in dark about the source of these donations are the taxpayers. It may also be noted that the printing of these bonds & SBI commission for facilitating the sale and purchase of the bonds is paid from the taxpayers' money by the central government," the ADR said in a recent statement.

How popular are these bonds?

By virtue of the anonymity they offer to donors, electoral bonds have become the



most popular route of donation. More than half the total income of national parties and the regional parties analysed by ADR for the financial year 2018-19 came from electoral bonds donations.

The BJP is the biggest beneficiary, having received Rs 1,660.89 crore, or 60.17% of the total Rs 2,760.20 crore received by parties via electoral bonds in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

What is the EC's stand?

In its submission to the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in May 2017, the EC had objected to amendments in the Representation of the People Act that exempt political parties from disclosing donations through this route. In a letter to the Law Ministry the same month, the EC had asked the government to "reconsider" and "modify" the above amendment.

Asking the government to withdraw the new proviso, the EC had written, "In a situation where the contribution received through electoral bonds are not reported, on perusal of the contribution report of political parties, it cannot be ascertained whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provision under Section 29(b) of the RP Act which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources."

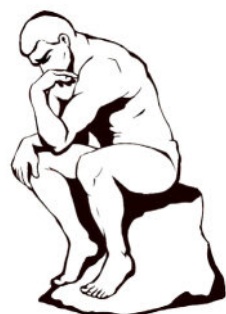
The basic intention of government behind bringing such a system of electoral bonds was to make political funding transparent and free of corruption. However at the root level this scheme is hardly empowering anyone. The government's theory of maintaining the invisible coat is well comprehended but the amount of money that each political party is receiving should be kept account of. Further this data needs to be in public domain as it will help the voter in making decision thereby striking a right balance between transparency and free and fair democracy. Even the global evidence suggests much of the transparency and accountability in well-functioning democracies have come through strong records of disclosures and strict scrutiny of accounts of parties and candidates receiving funds.

However the discrepancies of electoral bond scheme can be removed by bringing a system of national election fund which would help to cater to a particular cause and can be requested by the political parties for their rational cause. Another way of improving the current situation is by bringing a system of state funding of elections. State funding of elections was originally recommended by Indrajit Gupta Committee in 1998 to create

the same ground to sow or reap for all parties. The present statistics reveal that most of the national parties have undisclosed funding of almost 70 per cent. This can only be curbed by state funding, wherein funds received by every political party would be recorded easily and thus every candidate will get a fair representation.

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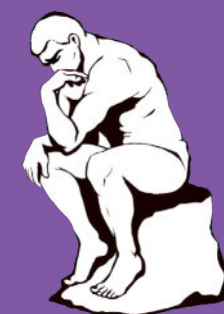


PLATOON

[Tiara Warji reviews *Platoon* portraying the US misadventure in Vietnam.]

The Vietnam war started in good faith by good people with good intentions but some two decades later it was all over. The war was little about communism but more about independence, but the combination of American overconfidence, cold war tensions and imperialist tendencies the Americans had fought so hard against made the Vietnam war one of the darkest pages in American history. The Vietnamese had not been one to give in to foreign invasion; be it the French colonizers in 1858 or the Chinese.

Platoon, an anti war movie released in 1986 was written and directed by Oliver Stone, who fought in Vietnam and who has tried to make a movie about the war that is not fantasy, not legend, not metaphor, not message, but simply a memory of what it seemed like at the time to him. The movie is narrated by a young soldier (Charlie Sheen) based on Stone himself. He is a middle-class college student who volunteers for the war because he considers it his patriotic duty, and who is told, soon after he arrives in the combat zone, "You don't belong here" and he very much believes it. There are no false heroics in this movie, and no standard heroes; the narrator is quickly at the point of physical collapse, bedeviled by long marches, no sleep, ants, snakes, cuts, bruises and constant, gnawing fear. He never felt like a hero and atypically even though he had joined out of patriotic obligation he seemed to have regretted it greatly. His first week in, he had already written his grandma describing it as hell.



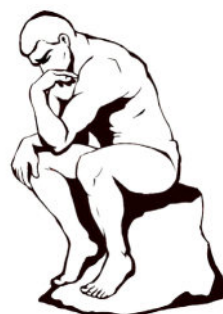
In his first letter to his grandma, he'd written on the monotony of the work. How the draining incessant shifts wrecked his ability to feel. He also explained how being the new guy, no one cared about them. In fact, being new meant being less valuable so the more new guys died the more worthy lives were saved. He said that the logic was, the sooner you get killed the better. That way you suffer less. There had been this distinctively interesting conversation amongst Taylor (Charlie Sheen) and two other men. He was asked how he landed up there for he seemed educated and wealthy, to which Taylor responded saying he had volunteered for it because he dropped out of college. Figuring it didn't teach much and he wasn't learning anything so why should only the poor kids go off to war while the rich kids always get away with it. The man then answered called him a crusader and told him how he had to be rich in the first place to think like that. This right here in my opinion was the opening line to the whole point the movie was trying to make.

Oliver Stone faced several obstacles while trying to get this movie produced. It had been rejected two times for being too bare because the people weren't ready for that kind of exposure that soon after the crucial war. In an interesting podcast with Joe Rogan, Oliver had stated how Willem Dafoe, also known as sergeant Elias in the movie was based on a man he really admired. He then proceeds to tell us the man who sergeant Elias's character is based on dies after one week of him leaving the



Image Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/bluewaterdown/platoon/>

unit in a friendly fire. Friendly fires had been a subject he deliberately emphasized on in his book because this was something that was very highlighted to the audience after the Pat Tillman incident, an NFL player that gave up his career to go serve in the war and was killed in a friendly fire as well however nothing more was said after that. Oliver Stone explained how these were the kind of things the army would draw a veil over. The reason for this he said, was very simple, and I quote 'Imagine if, 15 to 20% are dying from that friendly fire and if the parents were to know this, we can only imagine what would follow'. Another very interesting fact about how this war got away with many of its defaults was the people's ignorance of its impact. Back then, there was not term for the post war conditions the survivors suffered from. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was not a term many were familiar with unlike today's day and age where illnesses such as those seem to have become self-diagnosable amongst teenagers now. Oliver Stone says the post war affects was not an ailment you could catalog because if you did, the army would be admitting to a huge amount of insurance problems and medical problems that they would have to cover. Oliver goes on to tell us how this movie faced massive



resistance and the board of directors were hell bent on not getting it produced.

Platoon was unlike any other anti-war film of that time, it was realistic and dirty. It showed us the use of drug use in the army and greatly emphasized on the division it constantly faced. There was a split and this split is shown in several scenes. From the division of the army troupes resembling that of high school cliques, the group that would laze around smoking their weed to the group that would sit in their dorms following the rules and trash talking about the ones that didn't while buttering up the lieutenant in the way teens may do to teachers. There was a vexatious scene where a particular sergeant had threatened to kill a farmer's child in order to access to information he wanted. A bunch of men applauded this and wanted in on it while a few others were perturbed. When an opposing sergeant, Sergeant Elias fought this former sergeant for practicing in a way not advised by authorities, a loud and appalling fight took place. Most of the members however in favour of this hostility cheered for it. Eventually a sort of silent aggression had been formed between Sergeant Barnes and Sergeant Elias and as expected sides were taken, rumours were formed and a form of antagonism was born. This led to great measures in the movie, Charlie Sheen had questioned when did it go from fighting the war to fighting each other. We could say it was a form of coping, avoiding the inevitable loss they were about to face with the Vietnamese; they felt

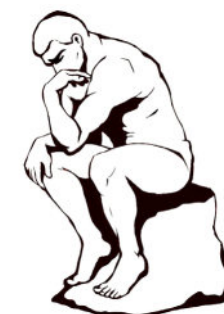


Image Source: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.britannica.com%2Ftopic%2FPlatoon=-film-by-Stone&psig-AOvVaw1IbSLdh7r2V2gLJE2NFQIW&ust=1628931495979000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAwQjhxqFwoTCMiyvDQrfiCFQAAAAA-dAAAAABAP>

the need to look for victory elsewhere.

Oliver wanted to make it clear to us the army was not a warm and welcoming home away for home. It was rough and most important a selected survival. It wasn't a place to form families and attachments, it was callous and everyone was to live that way or find their own. Oliver had also explained how there was a lot of dissension in the black troupes too because when Martin Luther King was killed in April '68, it most definitely had a negative impact on the army. Things were happening back at home and people in the army could see that and feel that. When drawing up the actors to play the roles, it was absolute fresh faces, the one you didn't see in other movies, brought from all over, says Oliver. A lot of faces from the south, the Midwest, and inner city people such as St Louis, Chicago, California. He had casted young people only in order to mirror just the kind of guys the army would draw in too. It's funny to see how Oliver had applied all these minute details into the movie in the simplest ways. Charlie also known as Taylor in the movie was known to write letters to his grandma and in one of such letters he had said and I quote "Most come from the end of the line, small towns you never heard of. Pulaski, Tennessee. Brandon, Mississippi, Pork Bend, Utah, Wampum, Pennsylvania". He proceeded saying how most of them have got nothing. They're poor. They're the unwanted and it's weird, isn't it? At the bottom of the barrel, lie their country's Heroes.

Oliver did his very best to make the movie a realistic one, he made sure he got the message to the audience, that the glorification of the war was a distorted one. Men that returned home from the war were far less than heroes and more like survivors. The movie was a



definite 9 on 10, It's quite a sad thing, to rate something such as war, so highly. In itself, therefore, the movie Platoon is somewhat of a paradox. It is Oliver Stone's masterpiece of course; it is fair to say; a highlight showcasing the director's unquestionable talents. It is not autobiographical, but certainly communicates the actual experience of a soldier in Vietnam. One is constantly aware of Stone's actual experience in that war. It is not, in the strictest sense, an anti-war film. It portrays the troops with tremendous sympathy, and exposes many of the self-inflicted weaknesses of the US army, and the very real feelings of soldiers thousands of miles from home, fighting in a war that they believed had nothing to do with them or their country

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Himanta Biswa Sarma:

From a Dynamic Young Student to the Hon'ble Chief Minister

STUDENT LIFE:

Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma was born in Jorhat on February 1, 1969. He was educated at Natun Saraniya Prathamik Bidyalai in Gandhibasti, Guwahati, and then attended Kamrup College in the city. He graduated from Cotton College and Gauhati University with a masters in Political Science. Himanta Biswa Sarma started his political career very early in the Assam State Student Union (AASU). He made his debut in AASU Rally in Patarkuchi in 1979, and in March 1982 he served as the Deputy Secretary of Kamrup Academy. This was the first time he won. In 1984-85, Sarma became the elected general secretary of the student assembly. Himanta Biswa Sarma became the elected general secretary of the Cotton College Union Society.

HIMANTA JOINS CONGRESS:

Sarma then joined The Congress, and soon became one of Tarun Gogo's most trusted deputy, in fact his blue eyed boy. He also established his ability to multitask: hence getting a lot of support from voters and surpassing his colleagues. He also led the political movement in Congress in 2011, which was one of the major reasons for the victory of Congress winning 78 extraordinary seats. Sarma served as a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly for 3 sessions as a politician of the Congress. First elected in 2001, representing Jalukbari constituency. Sarma was re-elected once more in the years 2006 and 2011. He became Minister of Agriculture, Health, Planning and Development, Transformation



and Finance for three terms in Tarun Gogoi's Congress in Assam.

RIFT WITH TARUN GOGOI

Sarma drifted far away from Congress due to Mr Gogoi's bid to task his son Gaurav. A bold and ambitious Sarma first announced made his dream of becoming the chief minister publicly in 2011 and later started out brazenly revolting while the chief minister Gogoi who launched his son Gaurav Gogoi.

A PATRON OF SPORTS:

Along with politics, Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma also has some unique pursuits in sports. Sarma was unanimously elected as the President of Indian Badminton Association in 2017, the 50-year-old politician received 35 votes from 40 respondents. "The BAI president is making his foray in the continental committee and we are positive it will help Badminton Association of India to get assistance from the Asian body and work to expand badminton in the region," said the BAI secretary-general-Ajay Singhania. BAC Chairman Anton Subovo also appointed Omar Rashid, Secretary-General of BAI (Championship) and Secretary-General of the Assam State Badminton Association, as the Vice-Chairman of the Asian Badminton Development Committee. Sarma is also the vice-chairman of Badminton Asia, who received 236 votes



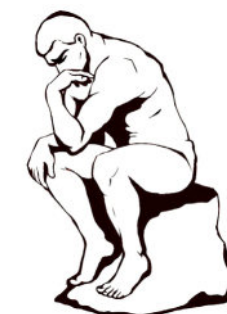
**HIMANTA BISWA
SARMA**

Image Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/himanta-biswa-sarma-crowned-next-assam-chief-minister-1800469-2021-05-09>

as 31 contributors contested for 20 locations in the Council at the virtual AGM and election of the sport's international governing frame. In June 2016, he was also appointed as the chairman of the Assam State Cricket Association.

THE WRITER:

In the year 2016, Himanta's book "Oinyo Ek Dristikun" was published. It acquired massive appreciation from the readers and became a bestseller in book gala's held throughout the state. "Eta Sopunor Pom Khedi" is the fourth book by Sarma. It is a compilation of speeches on Assam. The book was unveiled at Hotel Taj Vivanta. The book launch was graced by the presence of Conrad Sangma (Chief Minister of Meghalaya), Hitendranath Goswami (Assam Assembly Speaker), and Ranjeet Kumar Das (Assam BJP President). "Eta Xopunor Pom Khedi" is a compilation of records of various elements like social, political, cultural, etc. The publisher of this book is Saraswati Prakashan. Recently, he additionally did an Assamese translation of Amit Shah's biography which was released by ex-CM Sonowal. Samagata Samay is a well-known bestseller of the Chief Minister.



CLEANING THE AUGEAN STABLES OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT:

As Assam State Minister of Education, Himanta said the government of Assam has appointed as many as 71,000 teachers in academic institutions in the past five years. Sarma once said in Guwahati that the number of teachers employed was close to 30,000, and pointed out that after hiring 71,000 teachers in the past five years, they have almost filled the vacancies in the education sector. Sarma also shared a tweet: "Today I was able to deliver 29,701 appointments to teachers and non-teaching staff which is the first-ever such drive in Assam. Congratulations to all deserving instructors and team of workers. We expect your contribution.". He is one of the most encouraging and effective Educational minister that Assam has seen in recent years. The system of middle men, kickbacks and mediocracy has been given a final burial and merit duly recognized. Accountability factor in education department became visible with schools having a nil pass rate in the Boards being pulled up.

REFORMS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

As the Minister of Health, Sarma formulated many modern health plans for the people of Assam during his tenure as Minister of Planning and Development of Assam. When Sarma became the Cabinet Minister for Health in 2006 and Education Minister in 2011, his management ability, imagination

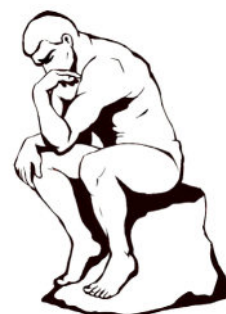
and vision was highly praised. Under his guidance, the health protection of Assam was controlled to attain remarkable heights. The sector of Health in Assam had visible a remarkable trade under Sarma's guidance and management. He also opened 3 other clinical colleges in: Jorhat, Barpeta and Tezpur. In addition, Sarma also started working in some of the major clinical colleges in Diphu, Nagaon, North Lakhimpur and Kokrajhar, each of which is in a different stage of implementation. The Union Government also discussed multiple acquisitions of the health and education sector in Assam in its annual report. The Government of India in its annual report had additionally talked about the numerous procurements of the departments of Health and Education in Assam. All of his remarkable work in education, welfare, health had been huge positive contributions in his road to becoming the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam.

CAA AND Dr. HIMANTA BISWA SARMA

When The Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) was formulated on December 11th 2019 by the Parliament of India. It was the first time that religion had become the main criterion for obtaining citizenship under Indian law. Illegal immigrants belonging to 6 specific groups from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh are allowed to apply for Indian citizenship by category. It turns out that because of Sarma's recent actions during the CAA protests, many people in the state regarded him as an "enemy". Sarma also attacked protesters in Shahinbagh, claiming that there was nothing in the CAA that would offend the Indian Muslim community. He said in an interview that the people at Dharna in Shahin Bagh have an emotional impact on the Hindu community, and they can grow up in front of Indian Hindus who may be at the front which he did not support. With the support of CAA, it allegedly violated Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees the same legal protection for non-residents. He had to face criticism on this issue.

REMARKABLE WORK IN MANAGING THE COVID PANDEMIC: IMPACT ON STATE BJP LEADERSHIP:

. Himanta Sarma with his numerous crucial decisions taken amid the crises emerged as a "hero" for the masses. Sarma was given the love, support, and praises of people for his powerful handling of the Covid-19 scenario in Assam. Sarma has single-handedly controlled the Covid-19 pandemic within the state, rising as the face of the crisis. This further exposed the imbalance in the leadership



of Assam. Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal was playing second fiddle to Sarma, who had now emerged as the Bharatiya Janata Party's most prominent face in the Northeast. This begged the controversial question "Who will be the next CM of Assam?"

PUBLIC CONTACT AND MASS SUPPORT:

Himanta Biswa Sharma is one of the most charming and dynamic leaders in Assam; he is an extraordinary visionary, sometimes called the Chanakya of Assam and Northeast politics. His dance moves are very popular and he was a massive crowd puller. He was visible as the mascot of the BJP party in Assam. In the 2016 Assam Assembly elections, the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and once again in the 2021 Assam Assembly elections, he once again managed to create an electrifying and exciting atmosphere in the election campaign. Finally ending speculations on who would occupy the pinnacle post as each Sarma and outgoing leader minister Sarbananda Sonowal had been contenders, the powerful NEDA convenor became elected as the legislature party chief, a week after the ruling alliance it won the meeting elections with a clear majority for the second successive term. Himanta Biswa Sarma succeeded Sarbananda Sonowal as the next Chief Minister of Assam. On May 10, 2021, Sarma was elected as the chief of the BJP's legislative party in Assam state and sworn in as a CM.

THE BJP ANNOUNCES Dr. HIMANTA BISWA SARMA AS THE CM OF ASSAM:

The decision was announced by Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on the 10th of May 2021 after newly elected Assembly MPs ratified it and unanimously elected Himanta Biswa Sarma as the leader. Amid hypothesis over the following chief minister, both Sonowal and Sarma had been summoned to the national capital late on Friday. Himanta Biswa Sharma defeated Sarbananda Sonowal and prepared to become the new CM of Assam. This was the day when Himanta's dream finally emerged as a reality.

THE NEW CHIEF MINISTER'S GRACE AND GRATITUDE:

Regarding the changing of the guard, Sarma said: "Even on the moon, there are spots. But the Sarbananda Government of the Sonowal led government laboured and worked very well for the past 5 years. He added praising the ex-CM "As a Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal is our leader. He will guide us in the future and show us the way. Sarma is currently

arguably the most influential politician in northeastern India and the BJP's key person and troubleshooter in the region. He is also the coordinator of NEDA (Northeast Democratic Alliance), a local anti- Congress political alliance in the Northeast led by BJP.

ZERO TOLERANCE ON DRUGS- CRUCIAL DECISION:

Since taking office more than a month ago, his new efforts as Chief Minister of Assam have led the state to resolutely combat drug On Wednesday, when he participated in a drug discussion initiated by AGP MLA Pradeep Hazarika, he said: "We will end the drug risk in Assam. If we can stop transiting through the state, Assam will be able to help Punjab and other states. Drug control has made a significant contribution. He said that 1,021 cases have been reported in the past few months. Sources in Assam authorities stated the current border clashes with Mizoram had been the result of the crackdown by the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led BJP government against the drug cartel. The crackdown on drug trafficking via means of the Assam authorities adversely affected traffickers and their consumers neighbouring Mizoram. They stated the drug mafia and functionaries had close links with businesses working from Myanmar across the international border with patronage in Mizoram. These links are leveraged to facilitate the flow of drugs, such as artificial pills from Myanmar to Mizoram and then to Assam and the rest of the country. Mizoram remains in denial mode pointing at places on the fringe areas on the Assam side as the hot bed for drugs.

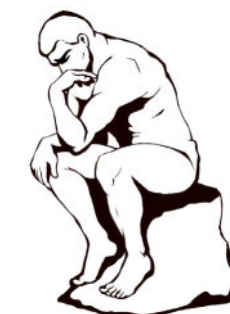
MANAGING BORDER FLARE UPS AND DISPUTES:

Another remarkable instance of his diligence and work ethic lies in his undertaking in an attempt to remedy the North-Eastern states border crisis. At one point of time Assam Chief Minister

Himanta Biswa Sarma on stated he might be very satisfied if his arrest resolves the ongoing Assam-Mizoram border dispute. "This is not always about Assam and Mizoram, but about the six lives. 1/3 of several neutrals investigating this case is always higher," Himanta Biswa Sarma said, even adding that Himanta Biswa Sarma also stated on July 26 that Assam authorities are ready to cooperate with the Mizoram authorities. Talking to find a solution to the border issue. This is simply one of the remarkable examples of work being performed by our Chief Minister of Assam. The Chief Minister is level headed, has a knack for ensuring solutions yet tough on safeguarding the vital interests of Assam including her territory and land. The young CM has taken keen interest and initiative to solve the festering border disputes of the state with her neighbours as well including Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. This is a welcome step. From being an ordinary boy ,child artiste in an acclaimed Assamese movie Koka, Deuta Nati Aru Hati, who found his voice in the fraternity of a student union, through perseverance and hard work, Himanta Biswa Sharma realized his dream of becoming the Chief Minister of Assam. His existence and history is not just a fairy tale that can be heard and remembered. We must be inspired by his revolutionary work and values, who has time and time again risen from criticism, setbacks and failure in pursuit of becoming who he is now.

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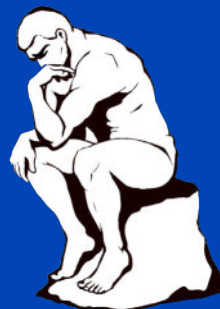


Analyzing West Bengal Elections

The Eight Phases

It was a much anticipated political battle as the ruling Trinamool Congress was facing its stiffest challenge from the BJP. Two slogans ‘Poribaton’ by the TMC versus ‘Asol Poribarton’ of the BJP tried to sway the people for their votes. It was also a fight between localism and symbolism. CM Mamta Banerjee’s punch line Khela Hobey set the tone that the TMC was keen for a political battle with the BJP. The BJP saw an opportunity to storm the bastion of the TMC based on its 2019 Lok Sabha elections where the saffron party could grab 18 out of the 42 seats, the TMC won 22 and the Congress, the remaining 2 seats. The BJP also projected veteran actor Mithun Chakravarty as a star campaigner. The TMC saw many of its veteran politicians switching over to the BJP on the eve of elections including Suwendu Adhikary, Mamta Banerjee’s trusted lieutenant.

For the first time ever, The Election Commission of India (ECI) in Bengal declared a complete eight-phased-election. The eight days across the state were March 27, April 1, April 6, April 10, April 17, April 22, April 26 and April 29. The leading party Trinamool Congress frowned upon this decision and advocated that it was done to favour BJP. “If elections can be conducted in one phase in Tamil Nadu and three phases in Assam, why does Bengal have it spread over eight long phases?”, questioned West Bengal Chief Minister



and leader of Trinamool Congress of India (TMC) Mamata Banerjee.

As for the opposition, the leftists didn’t make a fuss and accepted what came. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in Bengal claimed it was a wise decision and that it would make the crucial task of monitoring the elections easy in the state has a history of violent elections. A strong reason for conducting the election in these many phases (besides the growth in number of voters) was the pandemic wherein social gatherings should ideally be as small as possible, if at all.

The number of polling booths across the state shot up by a whopping 31%, according to The Indian Express. In fact, the number of voters casting votes in one polling booth was cut down from 1500 in the year 2016 to 1000 in the year 2021. But on the other side of the scale, increased number of phases imply higher expense to the borne by the centrally funded Election Commission of India.

Seats won and lost through the years
In 2011, AITC (All India Trinamool Congress, popularly called TMC) allied with Congress and won Bengal Elections with an absolute majority, breaking the 34-year-streak of Leftist Rule. The AITC-Congress Alliance won a total of 228 seats in 2011, which is a whopping high number when compared to the 30 seats it won in

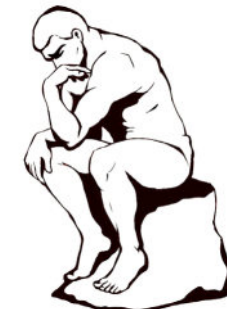
2006. The Left front lost a commendable number of seats as the numbers went down from 233 in 2006 to 62 in 2011. The reason behind this, as many would suggest, is diminishing popularity among the farmers as an aftermath of the Singur Car Plant Controversy. Their political popularity also diluted as BJP won the Hindu votes and TMC won the Muslims’.

Having analyzing west Bengal Elections lost 7/8 th of the seats it had in the last elections, BJP and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha under the umbrella of NDA (National Democratic Alliance) stood with just 3 seats in 2011. The 2016 State Legislative Assembly Elections in Bengal saw the re-election of TMC led by Mamata Banerjee. They won a total of 211 seats out of 294, losing 17 seats from 2011. The seats were spread across Bengal, leaving the central portion where the Left front still dominated. Left Front allied with Congress won 77 seats, a few seats more than the last round of votes. BJP’s vote count stayed as unchanged as the condition of unemployed youth in the state, sticking to 3 seats. The round of elections in 2021 saw the third consecutive tenure of the Twin Grassroots (another name for TMC’s flag) with 213 seats, two seats more than the last elections. BJP’s popularity, however, shot up by a good number as the claimed 77 constituencies this time. Thus, 74 new constituencies were marked saffron.

Campaign and Strategies

One of TMC’s most commendable strategies were to keep their women in the front as a public message that the party was progressive. Over the last decade, Mamata Banerjee has always targeted women and girls with the party policies (like The Kanyashree Scheme and The Rupashree Scheme).

Banerjee’s Muslim vote bank game plan has always been strong but with BJP’s attempt at polarisation this year, it had to be even stronger. BJP’s strategy to win over Bengal was marked by leaders like Party President J P Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah, besides the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray nicknamed Mamata Banerjee “The Tigress of Bengal” as he went on to make a statement about how she led her party to victory despite PM himself coming to Bengal for the sake of campaigning. BJP made it clear that its only competition was TMC and that they didn’t bother much about Congress. It was pretty evident that the anti BJP votes would go to none but TMC. The party that is usually known for “Hindutwa”



left no stones unturned as they put their formidable outreach network to connect with the Muslims of the state too. One of PM Modi’s social media handle featured a picture of him giving a shoulder to a young boy in a white skull cap.

As the pandemic deteriorated public health in the state’s capital TMC, Congress and BJP eventually decided to stop campaigning public and changed strategies. Banerjee’s opposition to car plant in Singur A large portion of West Bengal’s population was being dependant on the agricultural sector that demands immense physical labour but doesn’t yield a satisfactory income. To “balance” the share of primary and secondary sectors in the state, the Left Front gave consent to Tata Motors, one of India’s largest car manufacturing units, to set up a plant. This was done citing an 1894 land acquisition act for public good, using which the state government took over the land in an attempt to start industrialisation in Bengal A total of six sites were offered by the state government, out of which Tata Motors chose Singur to set up a Tata Nano car manufacturing plant. This angered a lot of farmers who claimed they would “lose” 997 acres of their agricultural land to a factory. It was entirely overlooked that the same factory could provide stable jobs with fixed and higher pay to the same farmers who were raging with superficial dissent. TMC, then the opposition party, with other environmental “activists” started raising objections on the same. Mamata Banerjee’s “Save Farmland Movement” began and hence TMC started mustering farmers’ support all over the state. The movement augmented to a scale so large that Tata Motors was compelled to leave and move to other

Analyzing West Bengal Elections states that offered to cooperate in industrialisation. Because of this controversy created by the Left Front and the farmers, TMC’s popularity skyrocketed.

Banerjee wins in the state but not in the constituency With an impressive victory in the intensely contested West Bengal Assembly elections that defied most poll predictions, the All-India Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee has assumed power in the state for the third time. Winning 213 of the 292 West Bengal Vidhan Sabha for which elections were held, the party garnered 47.94 per cent of the state’s vote share. While support for the Trinamool Congress was spread across geographical regions, including those that had voted for the BJP in 2019, and identities, the massive support of women voters proved

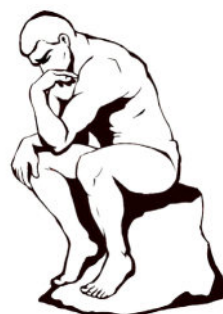


Image Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/west-bengal-assembly-polls-2021/story/mamata-banerjee-wheelchair-rally-tmc-rally-nandigram-diwasi-tiger-leg-injury-1779231-2021-03-14>

critical in securing the party's victory.

It came of as a surprise when Mamata Banerjee declared to contest from Nandigram against lieutenant-turned-turncoat Suwendu Adhikari, increasing the party workers' morale. Suwendu Adhikari, an ex-TMC member switched his side last year as he promised his loyalty to saffron.

While Banerjee gave up her Bhowanipore constituency to show Nandigram that she would never abandon her roots, Adhikari vowed to quit politics if he didn't defeat Banerjee by a substantial gap. Having lost in the constituency, Banerjee decided to move to High Court to review the polling system claiming that there were "some malpractices". Her sudden concern about "malpractices" makes it seem like malpractices during Bengal elections only count when the CM contests and loses. Banerjee's loss in Nandigram came off a shock because Nandigram was the constituency that catapulted her into power in 2011 State Assembly Elections.



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THE TENACITY OF A REMARKABLE POLITICIAN

[The tenacity of Maldivian leader Muhammed Nasheed is sketched by Marwati Imsong]



Intro

Mohamed Nasheed, journalist, activist and politician served as the president of the Maldives was affected by a terror attack as he was bombed outside his place on may 6 th . The former president was flown off to Germany to seek medical care.

To understand the events that took place, we must go back to the past and grasp the history of the Maldives and the rising of Mohamed Nasheed himself.

The Maldives

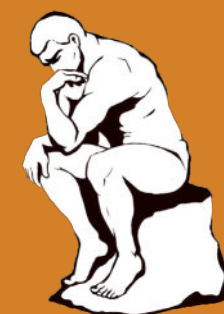
Topography:

The Maldives lies in two rows of atolls in the Indian Ocean, just across the equator. The country is made up of about 1,190 coral islands formed around 26 natural ring-like atolls, spread over 90,000 square kilometres. These atoll structures are formed upon a sharp ridge rising from the ocean, thereby creating their world-wide uniqueness. Each atoll in the Maldives is made of

a coral reef encircling a lagoon, with deep channels dividing the reef ring. A string of islands takes their places among this atoll ring; each island has its own reef encircling the island lagoon. The reefs of the islands, alive with countless underwater creatures and vibrant corals, protect the islands from wind and the ocean waves. This unique structure of reefs and channels makes navigation almost impossible for anybody without sufficient local knowledge of the waters.

The islands stretch like a garland for 822km from 7 degrees north of the Equator to just south of it, with the greatest width from west to east being 130km. The territory embraces a total area of 90,000 sq. km but that includes the sea, which forms 99.6% of the Maldives. The land area of all the islands amounts to 298 sq. km.

The Maldives has no hills, but some islands have dunes which can reach 2.4 meters (7.9 feet) above sea level, like the NW coast of Hithadhoo (Seenu Atoll) in Addu Atoll. Islands are too small to have rivers, but small lakes and marshes can



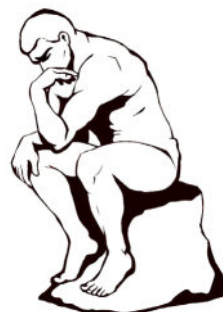


MUHAMAD NASHEED
Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Nasheed

be found in some of them.

The people of the islands are widely dispersed across the atolls, with about 200 inhabited islands. Around 112 islands are developed as tourist resorts and the rest are uninhabited or used for agriculture and other livelihood purposes. Male' the capital city, lies to the north of the centre of the atoll chain and is heavily populated with about 140,000 people. The nearest neighbours are India, 600km distant to the north, and Sri Lanka, 670km to the east. History of the Maldives:

The Maldives (formerly called the Maldivian Islands) was first settled in the 5th century B.C. by Buddhist seafarers from India and Sri Lanka. According to tradition, Islam was adopted in 1153. Originally, the islands were under the suzerainty of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). They came under British protection in 1887 and were a dependency of then-colony Ceylon until 1948. The Maldives gained total independence from the British on 26 th July 1965. however, the British maintained an air base on the island of Gan in the southernmost atoll until 1976, the date thereafter celebrated in the Maldives as Independence Day.



For centuries a sultanate, the islands adopted a republican form of government in 1952, but the sultanate was restored in 1954. In 1988, an internal coup attempt aided by Tamil mercenaries was thwarted with the help of the Indian Armed forces. Today in this multicultural Republic, Dhivehi is the official language although Arabic, Hindi, and English are also spoken. Traditional education provided in Dhivehi and based on the teachings of the Quran as well as modern education provided in English guided by international curricular standards are both offered.

The beginning of Muhamad Nasheed

Mohamad Nasheed born may 17th 1967 was the former president of the Maldives from 2008 to 2012. Often know as the many of many comebacks Nasheed who was exiled from his country returned stronger then ever in 2018 paving his way back to the political scene of the country.

He is also know to be a anti Muslim extremist and is know to speak out openly on terrorism which has been a problem in the Maldives for the last decade

Early life

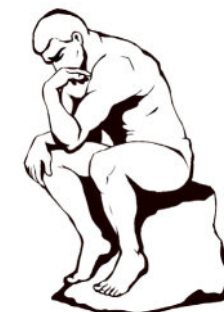
Nasheed attended grammar school in Male before attending schools in Colombo, Sri Lanka (1981–82), and in West Lavington, Wiltshire, England (1982–84). He received a bachelor's degree in maritime studies from Liverpool John Moores University in 1989.

Nasheed returned to the Maldives and in 1990 became assistant editor of the new magazine Sangu, which criticized the government of Pres. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Sangu was banned, and Nasheed was sentenced to house arrest. He was jailed later that year and was held in solitary confinement for 18 months. He was sentenced to three years in prison in 1992 but was released in 1993. Nasheed applied for government permission to form an independent political party in 1994, but his request was rejected. Beginning in April 1996, he served six months in prison for an article he had written in a Philippine magazine about the 1993 and 1994 elections in the Maldives.

In 1999 Nasheed was elected to the Maldivian parliament, the People's Majlis. He was arrested again in October 2001, and in the following month, he was sentenced to two and a half years' exile to a remote island. In March 2002, while in exile, he was expelled from the Majlis because he had not attended the parliament for six months; he was released in August. After riots in the capital, Male, in September 2003, Nasheed left the Maldives for Sri Lanka, and while in exile there he helped found the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) in November 2004.

Presidency, exile & return

Nasheed returned to the Maldives in April 2005. That June the Maldivian government passed legislation allowing political parties to participate in elections, and Nasheed, as head of the MDP, began a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience designed to bring greater democracy to the Maldives. Detained again, he spent more than a year under house arrest (2005–06). In the first free presidential election in the Maldives, in October 2008, Nasheed defeated Gayoom with 54 percent of the vote. As president, Nasheed became known internationally for his outspoken efforts toward halting climate change. All the Maldivian Islands are low-lying, none rising to more than 6 feet above sea level. In 2009 Nasheed wrote, "Sea level rise of even half a meter would make much of [the Maldives] uninhabitable... But the Maldives is no special case; simply the canary in the world's coal mine." The Maldives announced plans that year to become the world's first carbon-neutral nation by 2020. Nasheed even held a cabinet meeting underwater in October to draw attention to the danger the Maldives would face from rising sea levels. In June 2010 relations between Nasheed and the People's Majlis reached a new low when Nasheed's entire cabinet resigned to protest the parliament's blocking of the Nasheed



government's initiatives. Nasheed reappointed his cabinet. Nasheed's administration continued to be hampered by loyalty to Gayoom within the judiciary and among members of the opposition Maldivian People's Party in the Majlis. Later Nasheed was forced to resign from the post as the protest was joined by police and military personal through Gayooms network. In March 2015, Nasheed was convicted under the Anti-Terrorism Act of Maldives for arresting Criminal Court Judge Abdulla Mohamed while president, and sentenced to 13 years at Maafushi Prison.

In 2016, he was Granted asylum in the United Kingdom as a political refugee by the British Government, where he had gone for treatment. Later that year Nasheed left for Sri Lanka where he remained till late 2018. After his childhood best friend, relative, and party's candidate, Ibrahim Solih, won presidential elections in 2018, Nasheed returned to the Maldives, well along the following year he goes on to win the seat for Machangolhi Medhu constituency in parliamentary elections with a total of 1054 votes, subsequently taking the office as Speaker of Parliament.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT:

On 6 th May 2021 an assassination effort was made in contradiction of Maldivian speaker of the People's Majlis and former president Mohamed Nasheed near his home in Malé. At 20:39 MVT (UTC+5), a homemade explosive device planted on a parked motorcycle exploded, injuring Nasheed and four others. Maldives authorities claims it to be a terrorist attack by religious extremists.

Three suspects have been arrested. The arrested suspects denied being involved; all three of them had prior criminal records. Nasheed underwent 16 hours of surgery for injuries to his head, chest, abdomen, and limbs. Multiple pieces of shrapnel were removed during surgery. The hospital treating the former president said he was in a critical condition in intensive care on 7 May after surgery to his head, chest, abdomen and limbs. On the 13 th May, Nasheed was flown to Germany for additional medical treatment after being seriously injured.

Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, who formerly served as Foreign Minister of the Maldives, said it is important to "carefully conceptualise" the May 6 attack. "It is a targeted attempt to assassinate former President Nasheed, an act of political

violence for which no one has claimed



Image Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohamed_Nasheed_with_Obamas.jpg

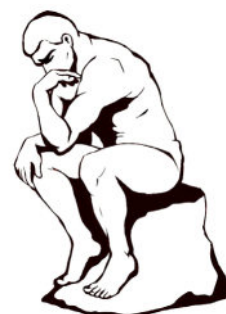
responsibility to date. It is also a terrorist attack because it is aimed at eliminating former President Nasheed for his political views and activities--- which primarily include the promotion of a secular democracy and combatting corruption, as Speaker of the Parliament and leader of the MDP.” Conclusion: Looking back into Mohamed Nasheed life we learn of the man who stands tall as a mountain who even though has had a number of obstructions in his way never seemed to have moved from the way he was striving for. His love for his country and his passion for the environment shows us the way of how he works tirelessly for their betterment. The way he lives is an example of how life is never going to be easy but one has to stand tall and face the unknown adversaries of life.

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Image Source: <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/peoples-majlis-speaker-mohamed-nasheed-calls-on-pm-modi-reaffirms-unwavering-support-to-india-first-policy20191213170516/>



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“His love for his country and his passion for the environment shows us the way of how he works tirelessly for their betterment. The way he lives is an example of how life is never going to be easy but one has to stand tall and face the unknown adversaries of life”

ISHITA MALHOTRA,
FACULTY HUMANITIES,
THE ASSAM VALLEY SCHOOL



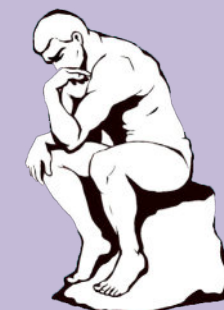
A SPWARE ON YOUR PHONE? CRISIS IN INDIA

[The Pegasus spyware and its impact in India is evaluated by Ishita Malhotra]

A spyware that infects devices and spies on the victim by transferring data to a master server in an unauthorised manner is now the incumbent government’s main vigilance apparatus in India as claimed by a global collaborative investigative project, the “Pegasus Project”. The “Pegasus” spyware, it is asserted, has been used to spy on politicians, journalists, activists, primarily in ten countries. In India specifically, it has been averred that Cabinet Ministers, holders of constitutional positions and journalists were perhaps subjected to surveillance.

Pegasus, in its rudimentary form, can infect devices that are connected to the internet. Some updated versions, experts affirm, can also infect phones even without the victim claiming on any links or messages. Most spyware and stalkerware apps conceal themselves as useful and send out stolen data to central servers without the knowledge of the users. A broad aspect that has been unveiled is the ability of the spyware to infect a device by a zero-click attack which does not require any action from the phone’s user. This is an upgrade from earlier spear-phishing methods using text links or messages.

It is germane to the discussion to trace the roots of Pegasus. Pegasus was developed by the NSO Group Technologies, an Israeli technology firm founded by and named after the three founders Niv Carmi, Shalev Hulio and Omri Lavie in 2010. The NSO Group pegs its spyware Pegasus clients at sixty in forty countries. However, going by the analysis



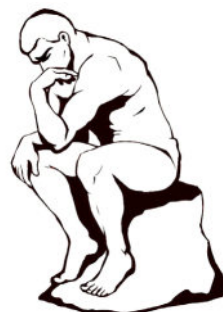
made by the Pegasus Project, its clients have interests primarily in ten countries including India. To top it all, Pegasus is graded as a cyber-weapon and can be sold only to authorised government entities as per Israeli law as per the Group’s statement. With governments across the world resorting to cyber intelligence to fight terrorism and serious crimes as well as track down dissidents and critics, the universal remedy NSO offered were in high demand. Besides, Pegasus, the company offers a host of technologies to fight drone incursions, improve search-and-rescue operations and advanced data analytics solutions. In a thirty-two page ‘Transparency and Responsibility Report’ released earlier this year, NSO dismisses allegations that Pegasus is a mass surveillance tool. Data is collected only from individual, pre-identified suspected criminals and terrorists. The aforementioned report at the same time states that NSO licenses Pegasus to sovereign states and state agencies, does not operate Pegasus, has no visibility into its usage, and does not collect information about customers.

Between 2012 and 2021, NSO has seen manifold rise in its client list. The tightly held company never reveals the names of its clients but the 2021 report states it has sixty customers in forty countries. Fifty-one percent of its clients are intelligence agencies, thirty-eight percent law enforcement agencies and eleven percent military. Israel has identified Pegasus as a cyber-weapon and its exports are controlled. The NSO has asseverated that Pegasus is not a tool for mass surveillance but numbers found in the

clusters of database with regard to specific countries suggest otherwise. While the enunciated aim of Pegasus is to fight crime and terrorism, the database also has contact details of a number of journalists including Indian journalists. A cluster of contacts identified as being of possible interest to the Indian client, has the contacts for opposition politicians, civil rights activists and judges.

A bird's-eye view of the surveillance laws in India would be useful. A Section 5(2) of The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, states that the government can intercept a "message or class of messages" when it is "in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of an offence". The operational process and procedures for it appear in Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951. Rule 419A was added to the Telegraph Rules in 2007 after the verdict in the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs Union of India case in 1996, in which the Supreme Court said telephonic conversations are covered by the right to privacy, which can be breached only if there are established procedures. Under Rule 419A, surveillance needs the sanction of the Home Secretary at the Central or State level, but in "unavoidable circumstance" can be cleared by a Joint Secretary or officers above, if they have the Home Secretary's authorisation. In the K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India verdict of 2017, the Supreme Court further reiterated the need for oversight of surveillance, stating that it should be legally valid and serve a legitimate aim of the government. The court also said the means adopted should be proportional to the need for surveillance, and there should be procedures to check any abuse of surveillance. The second legislation enabling surveillance is Section 69 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which deals with electronic surveillance. It facilitates government interception or monitoring or decryption of any information through any computer resource if it is in the interest of the "sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order" or for preventing or investigating any cognizable offence. The procedure for electronic surveillance as authorised by Section 69 is detailed in the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009. These laws most certainly put the government of the day in the driver's seat.

According to Indian academician, Pratap



Bhanu Mehta, "The Pegasus scandal is a matter of grave concern for Indian democracy. The widespread and unaccountable use of surveillance is morally disfiguring. Privacy is not about the wish to hide, as is often asserted. It is about having a space of one's own where our thoughts and being are not the instrument of someone else's purposes. It is an essential component of dignity and agency. So surveillance needs to be treated as a moral affront. Pegasus is a chilling software. It is not just eavesdropping on conversations; it can be used to access the entire digital imprint of your life. It renders helpless not just the owner of the phone hacked but everyone who is in contact with them." In other words, fiddling around with the freedom of citizens is inadmissible.

Therefore, it makes it pertinent on the one hand to reiterate what John le Carre once wrote, "A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world." Now, it's the phone. In theory, NSO's spyware can take over a potential target's phone. If not checked, it's the ultimate toy in the hands of a surveillance state. On the other hand, it brings the larger question into focus and a question that demands a good round of debating, which is, 'Are we really are a-surveillance-state-in-the-making? Well, that only time will tell. However, the role that opposition is playing in the entire issue is something that cannot be overlooked.

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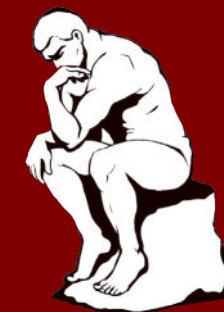
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POLITICAL TURMOIL IN MYNAMAR

[Raghav Agarwal attempts to understand the political turmoil in Myanmar with focus on the role of the military and the ousted civilian government.]

India's eastern neighbouring country popularly known as Myanmar, a second name (Burma) is in the midst of a serious political turmoil. This has a very interesting story to it, like India, Myanmar too was a clear target in the colonist eyes of the British. Three wars pertaining to years - 1824, 1852 and 1886 were fought between the British and Myanmar popularly known as the Anglo-Burmese wars. The British annexed the state to make it a province of British India. Without delving into the multi ethnic-culture of the local population, the British named it Burma which loosely translated was the largest ethnic group called Barmans in the state.



After independence the state tried to popularise the name of Myanmar, but the acceptance was refused by countries such as the USA.

Myanmar gained independence in 1948, but soon was hit by a military coup in 1962, proving to be a disturbance to the already unstable political situation in the country. In 1988 the military seized control over the well-functioning government of Ne Win, claiming the "undemocratic" policies introduced by the government. At this time the daughter of Aung San (father of Myanmar), Aung San Soo Kyi started gaining popularity on the political front and established a

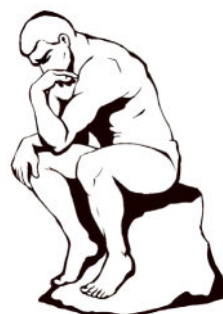
political party which she named NLD (National League of Democracy).



Image Source: <https://theconversation.com/aung-san-suu-kyi-trial-how-myanmars-judicial-system-is-stacked-against-the-deposed-leader-162901>

Aung San Suu Kyi was a political leader who led the famous 8888 uprising through the rough history of Myanmar, the uprising is called so because of the date 8th August 1988. The events of this movement were the most pronounced, immediate and effective to the ultimate cause of establishment of a democracy on that day. A new flag was unfurled to power this movement, with a fighting peacock on a red background reaching out to a star. The nation was in tremendous debt, to counter this issue, the military demonetized the currency declaring every note but of 45 and 90 kyat invalid. The pertaining reason being, the numbers they decided to leave behind being divisible by 9 which they believed to be lucky. The intensity of the protest kept evolving with some significant violent happenings. More than hundreds of citizens had come to protest against the system. The protest rose to such alarming levels that the onboard military dictator went publicly to send an answer "If the army shoots, it has no intention of shooting in the air, it shoots to kill." In September 1987 a referendum was held to gain perspective on multi party acceptance to which 90% of the body responded in support. There were promises of elections to the country but kept getting pushed back which evidently burnt people's trust to the ground, this movement was successful towards its cause and it also gave birth to the NLDP, Aung San Suu Kyi did a tremendous job in her leadership, even going on the record to receive a Nobel peace prize in 1991 for the same.

Elections were held in 1990, in which the NLD had bagged a majority of seats but the claims were nullified by the military on a basis of electoral fraud on the NLD's part. These accusations were severely criticized



and the NLD was supported by countries like India, USA and the European Union. Time moved swiftly and came 2008 to establish a true democracy, starting with framing a new constitution. The military had very cleverly reserved 25% of the seats in the parliament for themselves. They established full authority on defence, draining a large proportion of the annual budget of the country. Moreover, they introduced a new law which said that any individual having familial relations with other nations would be denied a national portfolio.

Inevitably, Aung San Suu Kyi could no longer be the head of the NLD because her mother hailed from the United Kingdom, her portfolio was reduced to a state counsellor but she still remained the de facto head of the party. The 2010 elections were under planning but was heavily opposed by the NLD given their loss of a tactical advantage. The new constitution had severely fueled the fire of the downfall of Myanmar's financial stability but there was another problem upon them i.e. the Nargis cyclone. They were in a serious need of help but that help was doubtful given their political situation of basically a military dictatorship, so, Myanmar announced another election in 2012 to finally establish a democracy at face but also to show the transition of power to a democracy to the world.



Image Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56150616>

In the 2012 elections, the military had framed a proxy to participate in the elections i.e. USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party). The NLD had again won the majority of seats and was allowed to form a government with no obvious opposition by the junta given the coming disaster.

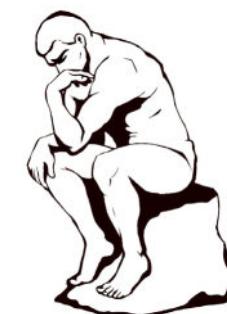
The upcoming years had brought some unsmiling events for the country. The Rohingya Crisis was an absolute shame to Myanmar's reputation. The local muslims.i.e. the Rohingyas were brutally forced out of the state to countries like Bangladesh and India. A lawsuit was filed against the country in the



FLAG OF 8888 UPRISING
Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8888_Uprising

international court of justice by the African state of Gambia. The junta representative was appointed to be Aung San Suu Kyi, her image was severely tarnished in the eyes of people among the world. It got to such a stage that there was a callback for the Nobel Peace Prize received by her.

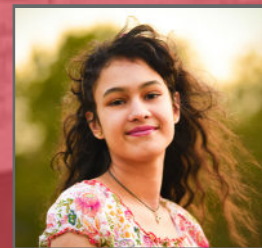
The elections held in November 2020 was a nail in the coffin for the military's belief in democracy, the NLD had won a majority but were framed for Electoral fraud by the military. As a result, the military has again taken control on February 1st 2021 over the state, the happenings in Myanmar have been an absolute disaster for their growth and stability, international agencies have gone on the record to proclaim it a turmoil. The situation continues to remain volatile with the brute and unrelenting force of the military junta crushing all opposition. Press and other forms of communication are facing severe clamp down and human rights are seriously trampled. The opposition find themselves behind bars. For the world community, this is a major point of concern.



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ANUSHCKA JOSHI
CLASS 12 SCIENCE



EYE CATCHERS

Reporting from the
Flashpoints

[Eye Catchers is a segment where the attempt is to understand visually the happenings from the frontlines to the fault lines. Anushcka Joshi also peers through the lens of acclaimed photo journalist late Danish Siddiqui]

THE REUTERS JOURNALISTS PRESS FREEDOM

sentenced to 7
years in jail



Image Source <https://rsf.org/en/news/myanmar-could-two-reuters-journalists-be-freed-soon>

On December 12, 2017, two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, were detained in Myanmar. At the time of their arrests, they had been working on an investigation into the killing of 10 Rohingya Muslim men and boys in a village in Myanmar's Rakhine state jail and raised questions about Myanmar's progress towards democracy, questioning diplomats and human rights advocates.



Image Source <https://www.rappler.com/world/global-affairs/mailed-reuters-journalists-myanmar-win-un-press-freedom-prize-april-2019-be-freed-soon>

They were freed on May 7
after more than 500 days in
prison

They were released
under a presidential
amnesty for 6,520
prisoners

Nobel laureate Suu Kyi,
could only consider
releasing the pair after
the Supreme Court
had rejected their final
appeal.



Image Source <https://rstv.nic.in/myanmar-frees-two-reuters-journalists-amnesty.html>



The two were then
driven away by
Reuters colleagues
and reunited with
their wives and
children.

**"I'm really happy and
excited to see my family
and my colleagues. I
can't wait to go to my
newsroom," - Kyaw Soe Oo**



Image Source <https://www.abc.com.au/world/story/reuters-reporters-released-wa-lone-kyaw-soe-oo-myanmar-rohingya-1519111-2019-05-07>

Mexican drug cartel threatens to kill TV reporter

August 10, 2021

“Watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks the Latin American country as one of the world’s most dangerous places for journalists.”

Image Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/06/mexico-drug-war-missing-estimate>



The devastating human toll of Mexico’s security crisis was laid bare on Monday as authorities admitted nearly 62,000 people had vanished since the start of its catastrophic war on drugs in 2006.



Image Source: <https://rsf.org/en/news/mexican-cartels-video-threats-against-journalists-must-be-taken-seriously-rsf-says>

Men claiming to speak for Mexico’s most powerful drug cartel Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) have released a video threatening to murder a prominent female news anchor over what they deem to be unfair coverage.



Pulitzer-Winning Photojournalist Danish Siddiqui Killed In Afghanistan Clashes

16 July 2021

Image Source: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pulitzer-winning-photojournalist-danish-siddiqui-killed-in-afghanistan-clashes-2487952>

Mr Siddiqui was part of the Reuters photography team to win the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography for documenting the Rohingya refugee crisis.



A Reuters photographer since 2010, Siddiqui's work spanned covering the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Rohingya refugees crisis, the Hong Kong protests and Nepal earthquakes.

VISA POUR L'IMAGE 2021 PERPIGNAN

28 AOÛT - 26 SEPTEMBRE 2021

PERPIGNAN LA BIENNALE

Canon

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DUPON

AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE LA DRAG OCCITANIE / PREMIER MERTERRANEE

33^e FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU PHOTOJOURNALISME

New Delhi, Inde, 23 avril 2021
© Danish Siddiqui / Reuters