

● ECONOMY

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86% POLLING IN TRIPURA AMID SPORADIC VIOLENCE

Tripura snapshot

The traditional rivals, Left Front and Congress, are united against the BJP as Tripura goes to the polls on Thursday. TIPRA Motha is also a key party

Party-wise number of candidates:

BJP	55
Left Front	47
TIPRA Motha	42
Trinamool Congress	28
Congress	13
Indigenous People's Front of Tripura	5
Others	11
Independent	58

(*BJP and IPFT are allies, **Left Front and Congress have a seat-sharing arrangement)

2018 election result:

BJP: 36 | Left Front: 16
IPFT: 8
(*BJP and IPFT formed the government ending 25 years of Left Front rule in Tripura)

Key candidates

BJP
Manik Saha (in pic), Chief Minister, Town Bordowali; Pratima Bhoumik, Union Minister, Dhanpur; Jishnu Dev Varma, Deputy CM, Charilam

CPI(M)

Jitendra Chaudhury (in pic), State secretary, Sabroom; Pabitra Kar, Khayerpur

Congress

Sudip Roy Barman (in pic), Agartala; Birajit Sinha, State president, Kailashahar

TIPRA Motha

Brishaketu Debbarma, Simna

Total number of seats: 60



Sporadic incidents of violence, alleged booth jamming and intimidation marred the election to the 60-member Tripura Assembly on Thursday.

Over 86% of the 28.14 lakh voters exercised their franchise, as per provisional data at 11.30 p.m. Officials said the final turnout could exceed the 89.38% recorded in 2018. Chief Electoral Officer Kirankumar Dinkarrao Gitte said there were long queues at many of the 3,327 polling stations in the State, making it difficult for the officials to wrap up within the time frame. Votes will be counted on March 2.

Several incidents of violence were reported from across the State, with all political parties accusing their rivals of trying to disturb the peace. Tripura Inspector-General of Police G.S. Rao said six people were arrested in connection with five complaints of physical assault. Agents attacked a few members of political parties, including two Communist Party of India (Marxist) polling agents, were injured in attacks at different places. Amit Kumar Bhowmik, election agent of the Left Front candidate Ratan Bhowmik, who is contesting from the Kakraban-Salgarh constituency in Gomati district, was critically injured in one of these incidents, and referred to G.B.P. Hospital in Agartala. In the Khayerpur constituency, Left Front candidate Pabitra Kar narrowly escaped when miscreants attacked his vehicle. The vehicle was badly damaged. Officials said there were some "minor incidents"

which included six complaints of disturbance over the functioning of electronic voting machines (EVM), eight cases of obstruction of political supporters, and three cases of obstruction of political agents. There were reports of threats, intimidation and assault from the Santirbazar, Hrishyamukh, Sonamura, Teliamura and Majlishpur constituencies.

Residents of a couple of villages in Dhanpur blocked an arterial road after they were allegedly prevented from entering a polling station. Union Minister Pratima Bhoumik, who lost to former Chief Minister Manik Sarkar in 2018, is the BJP's candidate from Dhanpur. Mr. Sarkar, who has won the Dhanpur seat five times, did not contest this time. The run-up to the election saw a 25-fold increase in seizures of cash, liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies, together worth ₹44.67 crore. In 2018, that figure was just ₹1.79 crore.

Thursday's election was special for a new set of voters: Brus, who were resettled in Tripura after displacement from Mizoram due to ethnic violence in 1997. A majority of the 14,055 eligible Bru voters exercised their franchise with enthusiasm at 12 designated locations. Chief Minister Manik Saha, tipped to hold on to the post if the BJP retains power, is seeking re-election from the Town Bordowali constituency. Other prominent candidates are CPI(M) State secretary Jitendra Chowdhury (Sabroom), Congress leader Sudip Roy Barman (Agartala) and Tipra Motha's Purna Chandra Jamatia (Bagma).

SELLING WHEAT FROM BUFFER STOCK TO BOOST LOCAL SUPPLY

3.85 In lakh tonnes, the amount of wheat sold by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to bulk consumers in the second round of e-auction with more than 1,060 bidders participating. Last month, the government announced plans to sell 30 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS). PTI

THE EXISTING PAs WHO CAN CONTINUE AS ONLINE PAYMENT AGGREGATORS

54 The number of entities that can continue to operate as Online Payments Aggregators (PAs), according to the list published by the RBI. This includes Amazon (Pay) India, Google India Digital Services, and Zomato Payments. To ensure transparency, the RBI published the list of entities, as of February 15, that submitted applications seeking authorisation to act as online PAs. PTI Instagram has the most complaints against influencers

STATES MUST PAY PART OF MGNREGS WAGES, SAYS UNION MINISTER GIRIRAJ SINGH

The financial burden of wages to the beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) should also be shouldered by the State governments, in order to make them more proactive in controlling corruption, Union Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh said on Thursday, in response to a query from The Hindu.

Speaking on the sidelines of a press conference in Delhi, Mr. Singh said the MGNREGS should not be treated as a regular employment scheme, as it is only meant to be a fallback mechanism for those who could not find employment anywhere else.

Asked about the ongoing dharna by MGNREGS workers at the Jantar Mantar, demanding withdrawal of the mobile phone app-based attendance capturing system, the Minister reiterated that the government cannot compromise on transparency.

Aadhaar link

Academics and activists working under the umbrella body of the NREGA Sangarsh Morcha expressed alarm over the Ministry's latest order, which makes Aadhaar-based payment of wages mandatory. According to the Ministry's own data, this will exclude 57% of the active workers.

Going a step further, Mr. Singh remarked, "I believe that we should go to Parliament to amend the MGNREGA to change the contribution [pattern] to a 60-40 [split between the Centre and the States], instead of the Centre bearing 100% of the wage bill. When the States partially bear the burden, they will be more vigilant regarding corruption." The 2023-24 Union Budget allocation for the MGNREGS was cut 33% in comparison to the previous year's revised estimates.

So far, under the Act, the Centre bears 100% of the wages, which are directly paid to the workers' accounts and must be transferred within 15 days of them completing their work. On January 30, the Ministry issued an order tweaking the mode of wage payments, with effect from February 1. Until now, the MGNREGS system allowed two modes of wage payment: "account-based" or "Aadhaar-based". The former is a plain bank transfer. The latter uses Aadhaar as a financial address and sends money to the person's "last Aadhaar-linked account". In its circular, the Ministry argued that the switch to the Aadhaar-based payments only was being done to "ensure effective implementation" of the programme.

Addressing a press conference under the banner of the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, activists Nikhil Dey, Yogendra Yadav and Jean Dreze said the move was disastrous and would deal a body blow to the programme.

Excluding 57% of workers



"For the Aadhaar-based option to work, not only must the worker's job card and bank account be seeded with Aadhaar, but the account also has to be connected to the National Payments Corporation of India. This connection, known as mapping, can be very cumbersome, because it requires meeting stringent KYC [Know Your Customer] requirements, resolving possible inconsistencies between the Aadhaar database and the bank account," Mr. Dreze explained.

Because of the complicated nature of this process, only 43% of the active MGNREGS workers currently use Aadhaar-based payments, according to the Ministry's own records, despite a relentless push from the government. "By this order, the government, in effect, is saying that 57% of the workers won't be paid," Mr. Dey said. This added hurdle, along with the mandate to capture attendance data via a mobile phone-based app which the workers are having trouble navigating, will automatically depress the demand for work under the scheme, he said.

IAF's ACQUISITION OF 114 FIGHTER JETS TO BE PART OF A MAJOR PROCUREMENT PLAN

A mega 500-fighter aircraft acquisition process on the anvil for the armed forces; reaching the sanctioned 42 squadrons will take time and the immediate effort is to arrest the drawdown in strength, says Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari

The delayed process for the procurement of 114 multi-role fighter jets (MRFA) is set to take off soon and along with three different indigenous fighter development programmes, it will result in a mega 500-fighter aircraft acquisition process for the armed forces. This will arrest the dwindling fighter strength of the Indian Air Force and enable it to reach the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons.

"We are hopeful the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for MRFA will be issued in three or four months," Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, Deputy Chief of the Air Force, told The Hindu at Aero India. It is a "budgetary decision" and also about how fast the aircraft are available, he said. The AoN will begin the formal procurement process following which the IAF will issue the Request For Proposal. On the delay in the process, he said they were evaluating how much of "Make in India" could happen, as also localisation and capability to upgrade the aircraft locally rather than depend on the foreign manufacturer.



DWINDLING STRENGTH

The IAF is currently down to 31 fighter squadrons as against the sanctioned strength of 42, which is set to dwindle further as the remaining three MiG-21 squadrons are phased out by 2025.

By the end of the decade, phasing out of other aircraft would also begin. On this, Air Marshal Tiwari said reaching 42 squadrons would take time and the immediate effort was to arrest the drawdown in strength. The 83 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A that would begin coming in from next year followed by the LCA-Mk2 and fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) in the near future, along with the MRFA, would arrest this, he added. There is also a twin-engine deck-based fighter (TEDBF) on the drawing board for the Navy's aircraft carriers. Girish S. Deodhare, Director-General of the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), said they were looking at six squadrons of the LCA-Mk2 (108 aircraft), seven squadrons of the AMCA (126 aircraft) and up to 100 TEDBF. Besides, the IAF would receive 83 LCA Mk1As and 114 MRFAs.

Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) officials said that they expected an additional order for up to 50 LCA-Mk1A. In addition, a decision in 26 multi-role aircraft for the Navy was expected shortly, between Boeing F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet and the Dassault Aviation Rafale. Also, the final deal to procure 12 additional SU-30MKIs to replace the ones lost in accidents and 21 MIG-29s from Russia had been stuck, which both the IAF and Russian officials said has only been delayed but was on track.

Developing AMCA

On the AMCA, which is awaiting government sanction, Air Marshal Tiwari said based on global trends it would take 10-12 years for its development and around three to five years after that to begin production. The HAL had said that they were on track to deliver the first LCA-Mk1A in February 2024. As reported by The Hindu, ADA officials had said the LCA-Mk2, which would be much more capable than the LCA-MK1A, was expected to be ready for production by 2027.

On the sidelines of Aero India, Navy chief Adm. R. Hari Kumar said they may get up to 45 TEDBFs by 2040. Dr. Deodhare said the TEDBF is expected to take first flight by 2026 and to be ready for production by 2031.

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SC SET TO PRONOUNCE ORDER TODAY ON WHETHER A SPEAKER UNDER NOTICE CAN DISQUALIFY LEGISLATORS



The Supreme Court is scheduled on Friday to pronounce its order on the question of whether a seven-judge Bench should re-examine its 2016 decision that a Speaker under a cloud should first clear his name before hearing disqualification petitions against legislators under the anti-defection law.

The court had reserved its order on Thursday. A five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y.

Chandrachud was hearing a series of petitions following the political crisis which rocked Maharashtra when current Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his camp followers rebelled against then Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and eventually brought down the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in early 2022.

In 2016, a majority judgment of the Supreme Court in the Nabam Rebia case had held that a Speaker or Deputy Speaker facing notice of removal cannot decide disqualification proceedings against legislators.

But senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for Mr. Thackeray, argued that the Nabam Rebia judgment has a flip side too. Legislators facing disqualification under the Tenth Schedule are now issuing notices of removal against Speakers and Deputy Speakers in order to stall the proceedings against them.

“The Nabam Rebia judgment stops a Speaker from acting as Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule the moment he himself receives a notice for his removal... This has now become a device legislators are employing to stall their disqualification. Meantime, politics takes over. Mr. Shinde and 15 legislators were issued notices by then Deputy Speaker Narhari Zariwal in the disqualification petition filed against them by the Thackeray camp.

However, the legislators had responded by sending Mr. Zariwal notice for his removal. The government falls. A new Chief Minister is appointed with the support of the rebel legislators. A new Speaker is installed and the disqualification proceedings are in limbo...” Mr. Sibal submitted.

AFTER RAISI’S CHINA TRIP, XI TO VISIT IRAN

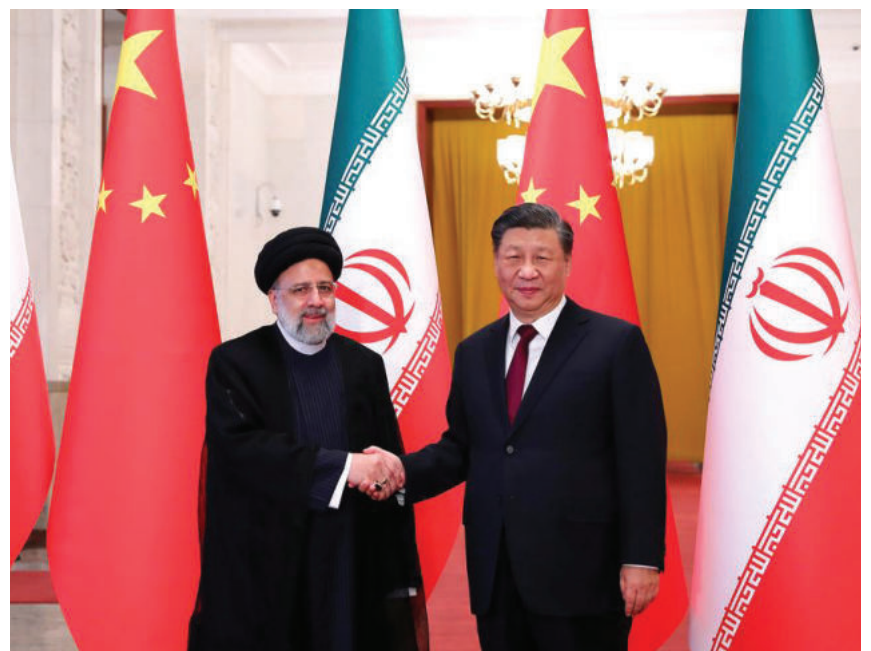
Chinese President Xi Jinping will make a state visit to Iran, Beijing’s Foreign Ministry said on Thursday, as a three-day trip to China by the Islamic republic’s leader drew to a close. Beijing and Tehran reinforced their strong economic ties in 2021 by signing a 25-year “strategic cooperation pact” but have been under pressure from Western nations over their positions on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Iran is also under strict U.S. sanctions for its nuclear programme.

Mr. Xi “gladly accepted” an invitation by President Ebrahim Raisi to make a trip to Iran.

No date was given for the visit, which would be the Chinese President’s first to the Middle Eastern nation since 2016.

Beijing and Tehran on Thursday called for an end to sanctions imposed on Iran over its nuclear programme. Both countries blamed current tensions on Washington’s “unilateral withdrawal” from the deal.



SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE AND SNP LEADERSHIP IN TROUBLED WATERS AFTER STURGEON QUILTS

The Scottish National Party (SNP) on Thursday faced calls to postpone a special conference aimed at reviving its troubled push for independence, after the surprise resignation of leader Nicola Sturgeon.

The party's executive was to meet later on Thursday to set the timetable for the leadership race.

There is no frontrunner to succeed Ms. Sturgeon, who was a towering presence in Scottish and U.K. politics, and no clear path forward on the dream of independence for Scotland from the U.K.

"I personally think that party conference should be paused, for obvious reasons," Stephen Flynn, who leads the SNP in the Westminster parliament, told Sky News.

"I think the new leader should have the opportunity and indeed the space to set out their position, their values and their intentions going forward," he said.

SNP president Mike Russell told the BBC that the leadership race was "unlikely" to be over by March 19.

"Therefore there is a question to be asked about whether that should be postponed while a leader comes into place," he said.



Ms. Sturgeon, 52, confirmed she would remain first minister until the SNP elects a new leader.

Possible contenders in the SNP include Constitution Secretary Angus Robertson, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes, Health Secretary Humza Yousaf and Deputy First Minister John Swinney.

GOVT. LIKELY TO PLACE REVERSE CHARGING OF GST ON SCRAP BEFORE GST COUNCIL

The Centre will consider and then place industry's demand to shift the GST levy on purchase of scrap metal to a reverse charge mechanism before the GST Council, in view of the operational difficulties and legal disputes arising from non-compliance by informal sector scrap dealers who often fail to deposit tax collected from buyers.

Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra signalled that the review may, however, be broadened to include other scrap materials as well, in order to take a holistic view under the GST framework. A reverse charge mechanism enables buyers to directly pay the GST dues for their inputs instead of depending on sellers to remit the taxes and then avail tax credits.

Mr. Malhotra was responding to a suggestion by Suresh Kumar Singhal, vice president of the Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry and MD, Vijay Iron Foundry, to impose GST on scrap procured by manufacturers through a reverse charge mechanism.

"This demand is there with us... but then there is not only steel scrap, please keep that in mind," Mr. Malhotra said. "There is other scrap also, which are also not in reverse charge mechanism. So we have noted your request and we will put it up before the GST Council," he added.

Earlier, representatives of steel and induction furnace producers from across the country urged the Centre to



rationalise the GST structure for metal scrap and termed this a pressing issue for the iron and steel sector, especially as recycling scrap was also a green imperative.

"The current GST regime causes significant disruption in the supply of the main raw material, metal scrap, thus making this a business continuity issue rather than a mere tax issue," said Sudhir Goyal, member, All India Induction Furnaces Association.

SHUFFLING FEET

Navigating foreign trade dynamics needs sharper policy responses

India's goods exports, a key driver of its growth impulses and a major job creator, got off to a disappointing start in 2023. Merchandise shipments fell 6.6% year-on-year to \$32.91 billion in January. While this is the second month of contracting exports, the dip is more than double the 3% drop in December 2022 and marks a sharp 13.6% sequential decline. Along with an anticipated post-Christmas cooling off in demand, order books probably took a hit as much from actual slowing of economic activity as buyers' wary assessments about consumer confidence levels, with the new year kicking off amid a pall of gloom and doom on the global economic outlook. Engineering exports fell 10%; pharma products lost momentum as did 14 other products out of India's top 30 export items, including jewellery and textiles. The silver lining is that imports dipped too, bringing the goods trade deficit to a 12-month low of just \$17.75 billion, a far cry from the \$25-odd billion averaged in each of the previous six months and the record \$29.23 billion gap of September 2022. If this trend holds, India's current account deficit for 2022-23 may end up lower than the uncomfortable 3%-plus levels of GDP projected by most agencies.

Yet, the drop in imports during January suggests domestic demand growth is fading. While the year-on-year drop was just 3.6%, the \$50.66 billion import bill for January is the smallest in 18 months and 15.8% lower than December's revised \$60.2 billion figure. Only a part of this stepdown can be ascribed to lower commodity prices as non-oil, non-gold imports have fallen by a sharper 6.7% from January 2022 levels. The Commerce Ministry has argued that India's weaker trade balance this financial year has been driven by the "two-way effect" of a slowing world economy hurting exports and resilient domestic demand shoring up imports. That effect no longer seems to be at work. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has rightly flagged concerns about Indian exporters' prospects this year amid global slowdown fears. Her prescription that exporters keep closer tabs on developments in different markets to avoid being "demotivated" is also spot on. Amid the overall headwinds, trends are diverging in key markets. U.S. retail sales rebounded to grow faster than expected in January while Japan's trade deficit hit a record; more U.K.-based trading businesses now expect an uptick in turnover this March compared to those that expect a fall, as per a survey by its Statistics office. Industry bodies and the government must work in tandem to tap shrinking opportunities better and help exporters move across this river of uncertainty by feeling the pebbles along the way.

INSTAGRAM HAS THE MOST COMPLAINTS AGAINST INFLUENCERS

2,767 The number of complaints processed by the Advertising Standards Council of India since coming up with influencer guidelines in May 2021. More than half of the violations were found on Instagram, while Alphabet's Youtube contributed to a third of them, the self-regulatory organisation for the advertising industry said. PTI

SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRY NORWAY SENDS AID TO WAR-TORN UKRAINE

7.4 In \$ billion, the amount to be donated by the Norway Parliament to Ukraine, as part of a five-year support package, making Norway one of the biggest donors to the war-torn country. The money will be split evenly between humanitarian and military assistance over five years, broken down to 15 billion kroner annually. AP



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DEEP SEA FISH CONSERVATION MUST NOT GO ADRIFT

The Supreme Court of India has given permission to fishermen using purse seine fishing gear to fish beyond territorial waters (12 nautical miles) and within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (200 nautical miles) of Tamil Nadu, but observing certain restrictions. The Court's interim order of January 24, 2023, against the banning of purse seine fishing by the Tamil Nadu Government in February 2022, seems to be more concerned about regulating fishing with administrative and transparency measures than about the conservation measures and obligations which a coastal state owes in its EEZ under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, conservation measures (as suggested in various regional conventions) and judgments of various tribunals (embodying conservation measures based on best science or relevant scientific evidence to control overfishing and protect endangered marine living resources from extinction) should have informed the order. Purse seiners tend to overfish, unlike traditional fishermen using traditional fish gear, thus endangering the livelihood of the traditional fisher.

CONSERVATION AND CONVENTIONS

The top court should seek guidance from the obligations arising from the multilateral and regional conventions which are meant to bring in sustainable fishing practices over a certain period of time, thereby allowing a common resource such as fish to be naturally replenished. Under Articles 56.1(a) and 56.1(b)(iii) of UNCLOS, coastal states have sovereign rights to ensure that the living and non-living resources of the EEZ are used, conserved and managed, and not subject to overexploitation. Access to the zone by foreign fleets is also solely within the coastal state's discretion and subject to its laws and regulations. In order to prevent overexploitation, coastal States must determine the total allowable catch (TAC) in the EEZ (Articles 61(1) and (2) of UNCLOS) in light of the best scientific evidence available. The guidance from the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna 1993 (SBT) could have also been sourced by the top court to enable recovery of depleted fishing stocks.

The crux of the SBT is TAC and distribution of allocations among the parties to the SBT, which are very relevant from the angle of conservation of general fishery. TAC and the catch quotas are aimed at putting sustainable use into practice among fishermen and maintaining maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The efforts to implement TAC and catch quota might face scientific uncertainty relating to safe limits to ensure MSY. In such a situation, the established international environmental law practice is to lean on adopting a precautionary approach.

REGULATION OF FISHING METHODS

Merely restricting the purse seiner to fish on two days —

Monday and Thursday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.— (in the Court order) is not sufficient without regulating the fishing methods used. International legal efforts are gradually moving in the direction of abandoning the use of large-scale pelagic nets. The huge size of the purse seine nets (2,000 metres in length and 200 m in depth) allows maximum catch for the purse seiners, in turn leaving behind insufficient catch for traditional fishermen. There are several regional organisations that either prohibit the use of large drift nets or at least call for their prohibition, such as the 1989 Tarawa Declaration of the South Pacific Forum.

The 1989 Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Drift Nets in the South Pacific goes as far as to restrict port access for drift net fishing vessels. The United Nations General Assembly passed Resolutions 44/225 (1989) and 46/215 (1991) supported and strengthened this development, calling for a moratoria on all large-scale pelagic drift net fishing vessels in high seas. Although the conventions and the UN General Assembly resolutions are applicable to the state parties in the high seas, these are relevant in terms of preventing overfishing in general and the conservation of fishery management in the EEZ as well.

ON NON-SELECTIVE FISHING TECHNOLOGY

The Court's final judgment needs to look into non-selective fishing methods by purse seiners resulting in the by-catch of other marine living species (which could include, many a times, endangered species) — a potential ground for trade embargo. A party under Article XX (b) can take measures to protect human, animal or plant life provided it involves "conservation of exhaustible natural resources if such measures are made effective in conjunction with restrictions on domestic production or consumption" (Article XX(g)). In Shrimp/Turtle, the appellate body held that the U.S. measure — which prohibited imports of shrimp from any country that did not have a turtle-excluder fishing gear comparable to that of the United States — fit the Article XX(g) exception for the conservation of exhaustible natural resources. However, the appellate body also found that the U.S.'s measures had been applied in a way that violated the chapeau: by treating certain Asian countries differently than America's trading partners in the western hemisphere.

Despite the best conservation measures and regulation of fishing methods adopted by the authorities, it will be a challenge in dealing with the limitless character of the seas which renders a common resource such as fish available for exploitation by all. The theory of Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', which says 'Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all' should convince all fishermen, especially the purse seiners of Tamil Nadu, that they must cooperate in complying with conservation measures.

MAPPING GENERAL PERVEZ MUSHARRAF'S LEGACY

President Musharraf wanted to do what no other Pakistan leader was able to do till that time, to make India agree to Pakistan's position that the J&K issue was the primary cause of India-Pakistan problems. However, the question is whether Musharraf was really interested in building a viable relationship with India who he viewed as an eternal threat

About an hour into Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's first one-on-one conversation with Army Chief and self-appointed President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, in July 2001 at Agra, the enormous difference between the approaches, wisdom and stature of the two were becoming increasingly apparent. While the former was deeply invested in overcoming bilateral differences of the past and taking the relationship into constructive and productive channels, the latter was fixated on India acknowledging that the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) issue lay at the root of all difficulties between the two countries.

In this conversation, and in others, between them in Agra, the General's single-minded instincts — perhaps honed during his years as an army commando — were always getting the better of him. He wanted to return to Pakistan and show his people that he had achieved what no other Pakistan leader had ever done: he had made India to implicitly, if not explicitly, agree to Pakistan's position that the J&K issue was the primary cause of India-Pakistan problems. Ironically, in a speech, some months after becoming the Army Chief of Pakistan, Musharraf had said that India-Pakistan differences would remain even if the J&K issue was resolved because India was a hegemonic power.

For Musharraf, J&K's incorporation into Pakistan was an unfinished agenda of India's Partition. This is also an opinion that was and continues to be widely held in Pakistan. The logical inference which flows from this standpoint is that India-Pakistan ties do not depend on a resolution of the J&K issue alone, and that India must be flexible on all bilateral matters even if it involves sacrificing its own interests.

THE KARGIL AMBITION

It is an open question if Musharraf ever overcame the basic thrust of his initial commando training. Certainly, Musharraf's actions in Kargil show his thinking as simplistic and tactical. The entire operation was based on the assumption that India would be unwilling to militarily counter the Pakistan army's occupation of the Kargil heights. The fact that India would undertake all steps required to protect its northern defences was obviously ignored. The General also misread the reaction from major powers. He anticipated that they would pressure India to accept a ceasefire which would enable Pakistan to continue occupying the Kargil heights. Instead, they viewed the Kargil action as immature and irresponsible.

Additionally, Musharraf had largely kept Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the dark about the connotations of the Kargil enterprise. However, this writer can state with confidence that for a few days Sharif entertained the illusion that Kargil could lead him to becoming 'Fateh-e-Kashmir' (conqueror of Kashmir). It is only when Vajpayee conveyed to him that India would pay any price to defeat Musharraf's intrusion that he realised that he had to seek a way out.

Pakistan was humiliated because of Kargil. Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif fell out and the former began to make plans to oust Sharif. However, he had to proceed circumspectly to assess the attitudes of some corps commanders, because of the inroads that Sharif and his father had made in the top levels of the army. Musharraf and his cronies used trusted businessmen, among other civilians, to contact some of the corps commanders whose loyalty to the Army Chief could not be taken for granted. Sharif's father, popularly called 'abba mian' tried to patch up differences between his elder son and Musharraf but failed. In October 1999, Musharraf took over power and a few months later, Sharif went into exile. However, 'abba mian' continued to live for long periods in his home in Raiwind. Musharraf had always respected him and instructed the General Officer commanding Lahore to ensure his welfare. Musharraf also dismissed DG ISI General Ziauddin Butt who Sharif had appointed as Army Chief.

THE GRADUAL DECLINE

Musharraf effectively ruled Pakistan from October 1999, when the army ousted Nawaz Sharif and restored the General to the position of its chief, till late November 2007 when he appointed Ashfaq Kayani as his successor. He continued in office as President of Pakistan till August 2008, after which he quit under threat of impeachment.

Musharraf drew the substance of his power from his position as Army Chief and the moment he handed over the baton to Kayani he became powerless. If Musharraf had hoped that Kayani would help him retain the Presidency, he was sorely disappointed. But he should have known better. The Pakistan Army has always acted as a body corporate. Once a chief leaves, his honour is sought to be protected to all extent possible but he is expected to stop interfering in the army's functioning or in the country's public affairs. Musharraf learnt this to his bitter cost when he tried his hand in politics.

The army did not want him to return to Pakistan to dabble in politics. Kiyani and his successor Raheel Sharif showed their displeasure by not intervening in the judicial processes against Musharraf. At the same time, they did not allow the judicial decisions against him for treason to be implemented. Moreover, Raheel Sharif also prevailed upon Nawaz Sharif to let Musharraf go into exile.

Interestingly, Musharraf regretted overlooking Lt. General Tariq Majeed, and choosing Kayani instead, for the Army Chief's job in 2007. It is not that Majeed would have saved him from his indiscretions but he would have been kinder and gentler to him for Majeed is a gentleman unlike the rough-edged Kayani.

The Indian connect

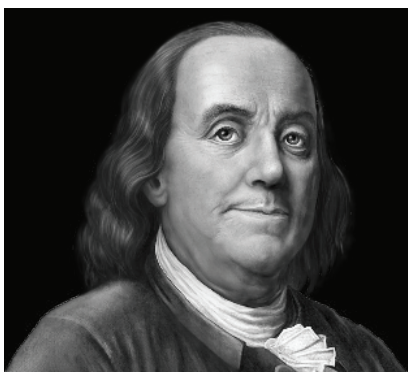
Musharraf was a Mohajir (a term which refers to muslim migrants from India). His parents moved to Pakistan from Delhi. He also married a Mohajir lady. Being a Mohajir, he had to make a mark in an army dominated by Punjabis. He hid his affinity for his Mohajir colleagues well but those who were in his inner circle knew of his sympathies for some Mohajir officers. While he was a colourful person, he could blend in a social gathering at least till he took over the reins of full power in Pakistan. One of my cousins recall having a pleasant conversation with him during a visit to attend a wedding in Lahore in January or early February of 1999. My cousin did not know that he was talking to the Pakistan Army Chief. It was only later that his host disclosed that he was actually speaking to Musharraf. Musharraf was also known to be a ladies man and some of these relationships were diplomatically significant. However, Musharraf's Mohajir origins did not diminish his negative views about India.

After the failure of the Agra summit, the statesman in Vajpayee remained committed to the normalisation of ties between India and Pakistan. His trip to the Pakistan monument during his Lahore visit in 1999 was not an empty gesture even though the Pakistani generals did not understand its significance just as sixteen years later, on Christmas Day in 2015, they failed to comprehend the importance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stopover in Lahore to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The question is if Musharraf who pledged in January 2004 not to allow territory controlled by Pakistan to be used against India — a commitment which was never kept — and engaged in back-channel talks on J&K and other issues was really interested in building a viable relationship with India who he viewed as an eternal threat. There is no conclusive evidence, certainly not in the public domain, and perhaps not even in the confidential papers about the ultimate outcome of these backchannel talks. There has been talk of a four-point formula which would

have inter alia allowed movement between the two sides of the Line of Control and of some mechanisms between the two sides. There is no clarity if these would have been consultative mechanisms or joint mechanisms. The real point is whether these mechanisms would have diluted Indian sovereignty over the erstwhile State of J&K. Indian backchannel negotiators have denied any proposal to compromise on sovereignty. The Pakistanis say, in private conversations, that some crucial issues needed to be ironed out, though Prime Minister Manmohan Singh claimed in his press conference in January 2014, that an agreement had been reached which could not be announced because Musharraf was irretrievably weakened by 2007. In any event the constitutional changes of 2019 have changed the dynamic of Indian approaches to J&K.

THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL GENERALS

Of the four Army Chiefs who held direct political power in Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq blew up along with his aircraft in 1988. The mystery of his death has never been solved. The remaining three were compelled to leave office and cut pathetic figures after their exit. Ayub Khan resigned in 1969 and died in 1974 in Islamabad. In these three years he was ignored by the people though he had been supreme leader for eleven years. Yahya Khan, whose drunkard antics caused the break-up of the country, suffered the ignominy of defeat at India's hands. He handed over power in January 1971, to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and lived on till 1980 but was under house-arrest till a year before his death. And, Pervez Musharraf spent the last six years of his life in exile abroad with a treason conviction over his head. He battled a fatal illness and only his body was brought back to Pakistan to be buried. He died unhonoured and un-mourned. Significantly, all were largely welcomed by the people when they assumed power. Today in Pakistan, when incumbent army chiefs still hold the substance of power in their hands, retired chiefs continue to cut sorry figures once they take off the uniform. The latest to be the target of ignominy is General Qamar Bajwa who retired in November 2022. He is naturally being blamed by former Prime Minister Imran Khan for all of Pakistan's current troubles. But there is no sympathy for him, even among other politicians. And, his successor Asim Munir can be expected to distance himself from Bajwa even if he owes his job to him.



I don't fail the test,
I just found a hundred ways to do it wrong

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



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