THE EDITORIAL PAGE

INDIA AND MIDDLE EAST

As the two-year war between Israel and Hamas came to an end, India has played a positive and calming role. Committed as New Delhi is to the two States theory to resolve the longstanding Palestine-Israel conflict, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hailed US President Donald Trump's efforts in bringing this war with high human cost to an end. Not many Indians realize that India was among the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine. This was much before it recognized Israel and established diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. India helped Palestine with grants, developmental projects, scholarships for students, etc. Though many ignorant Indians keep passing uncharitable comments about India's stand on Palestine, the authorities in Gaza or the West Bank and in the embassy in Delhi have always been grateful to India for its support. The difference between the present Indian governments and the earlier ones is that while the latter hyphenated them. The Narendra Modi government treats both independent nations differently and has a different approach to both.

Pak turmoil

Pakistan is in deep trouble with internal turmoil, violence, lawlessness, and its army having picked a fight with Afghanistan and then beating a hasty retreat. Islamabad has finally fallen into the ditch it had been digging for others for years. There was apparently no provocation from Afghanistan that could invite an aerial attack on Kabul by the Pakistani Air Force. The Afghan Army's rage knew no bounds, and Durand Liner witnessed heavy clashes. Pakistan suffered heavy casualties, and some of its soldiers have been taken as prisoners by the Afghans. However, the disgusting part is that Pakistani intellectuals, lawmakers, ministers, and anchors badmouth Afghans in their national discourse. The Pakistanis would like the world and also the Afghans to forget the reality of Jihad that Pakistan-USA, with the help of Saudi Arabia, made the young refugees to wage against the USSR. As a result, Pakistan was flooded with dollars. The Taliban 2 has come to realize this and hence their distancing from Pakistan.

Forged in iron: Women rising in kettlebell sport

Ishani Sirohi

Say kettlebell, and most people picture a dusty corner of the gym, those round iron bells used for quick swings between sets. But hidden inside that simple shape is an entire sport: Kettlebell Sport, or Girevoy Sport, born in the heart of Russia. The word girya itself means kettlebell in Russian. What began as a simple tool for farmers to weigh grain evolved into one of the world's most gruelling strength-endurance disciplines. Its events sound deceptively simple — the jerk, the long cycle, and the snatch — but they test every ounce of precision, breath control, and mental resilience an athlete has. Professional divisions lift two 24 kg bells for women and two 32 kg bells for men. Amateurs lift 16 kg for women and 24 kg for men.

From Russian Roots to Global Grit

Kettlebell Sport was formalised in the Soviet era as a test of strength and endurance. Over decades, it developed its own techniques, timing, and judging systems, eventually spreading across Europe, America, Asia, and now India. Today, the sport falls under federations like the International Union of Kettlebell Lifting (IUKL) and national bodies such as the Kettlebell Sport India Association (KSIA). The formats have evolved beyond the traditional 10-minute sets. There are now half-marathons, full marathons, and even events with multiple hand switches, each testing not just strength, but stamina and focus. Yet despite this evolution, kettlebell sport remains one of the least recognised disciplines. It lacks funding, facilities, and visibility. In a country obsessed with cricket, it's an uphill climb to even get people to know what this sport is, let alone support it.

The Invisible Women of Iron

If the sport itself is niche, then women in kettlebell sport exist almost in the shadows. There are no fancy sponsorships or televised championships. Women train in makeshift setups, sometimes on uneven floors, under tube lights, without proper bells. They balance work, families, and training, often with no coach and even less recognition. And yet, they show up.

The women of kettlebell sport aren't chasing fame; they're chasing mastery. Every rep is an act of defiance against invisibility. Every lift says, "we're here too." Ask someone about kettlebell sport, and you'll probably get a puzzled look. "You mean CrossFit?" they'll ask. Not quite.

Kettlebell Sport isn't about random repetitions or short bursts. It's a symphony of efficiency, every grip, lockout, and breath measured to conserve energy and maximise output. Gyms display kettlebells as just equipment, unaware that in other parts of the world, athletes are setting records with those same tools. It's like owning a Stradivarius violin and using it as a paperweight. In India, kettlebell sport is still finding its footing. Small communities are rising, people training in garages, rooftops, and parks, guided more by passion than infrastructure. This year, under the aegis of IUKL and KSIA, four Indian athletes received partial sponsorships to compete at the World Cup stage in St Petersburg, Russia. That might not make national news, but for those of us inside the sport, it's monumental. It's proof that even without the glamour of mainstream sports, the spirit of competition and the hunger to represent the tricolour burns strong. Every Indian lifter who steps on an international platform carries more than just kettlebells. They carry the weight of every athlete training unseen, unheard, unfunded, and they lift anyway.

Will kettlebell sport ever reach the Olympics? Maybe not soon. But every great sporting movement starts the same way — with a handful of believers who refuse to quit. Kettlebell Sport is unique because it fuses strength and serenity. Ten minutes on the platform isn't a display of aggression; it's meditation through movement. You have to be calm under pain, composed under pressure.

And that's where women, especially, shine. Their grace, discipline, and ability to endure redefine what strength means. They're not just breaking records, they're rewriting expectations. The dream isn't just about medals or rankings. It's about exposure.

If kettlebell training found its way into schools, it could change the way we approach fitness entirely. It doesn't care about your background, body type, or gender. The bell rewards discipline. It humbles ego. And that's exactly why it deserves a place in the mainstream.

Kettlebell sport may never be glamorous. It doesn't need to be. It's a sport for the persistent, for those who don't lift for applause but for purpose. As someone who has stood on the world stage, felt the iron bite into my palms, and the silence between each rep, I can say this: the sport gives back far more than it takes. It forges you, physically, mentally, spiritually. So the next time you see a kettlebell in the corner of your gym, don't walk past it. Pick it up. Feel the weight, the history, the challenge it carries. Because in that moment, you're part of something bigger, something that's still writing its story, one rep at a time. The kettlebell doesn't ask for applause. It asks for respect. And every woman who lifts one earns it!

THE MYTH OF PERFECTION

Vinayshil Gautam

Much has been said about the quest for perfection, and everyone is encouraged to go on working till that perfection is achieved. The story of actual life has many messages other than this. Typically, pure gold is supposed to be worth 24 karats. It is equally true that pure gold, when it is 24 karats, will not hold, and to make it a usable product, there has to be a mix of alloy, and the gold cannot be more than 22 karats in the product.

This, in effect, means that when one is talking of an ornament of pure gold, it is assumed that the content of gold in the product would be less than 100 per cent. In fact, the measurement of pure gold to form the ornament, as indicated above, is uniformly supposed to be less in measure. Absolute terms do not apply.

So also, in real life, perfection is not acceptable in absolute terms because operationally, it does not work. The best of efforts requires accounting for some reality, as reality can vary from activity to activity and indeed from situation to situation.

Illustratively, when people talk of speaking the truth, the capacity to speak 100 per cent truth is dangerous, and listeners very often do not quite accept truth in its entirety. The question is: if 100 per cent truth is not acceptable, then how much of the truth is acceptable? These are often written off as settled questions, but they face everyone's query at many steps of human deed. The prescriptions are unaccommodating and demand perfection. The operational situation requires compromises that no one can be certain of.

Even religious preachers and those who claim to be moral guardians are not known to articulate any definite guidelines. The result is a situation where practices, sometimes essentially local in character, become prevalent. The trouble, however, is that when approximations come into play, there is no standardization of approximation. This can and does lead to intolerances and sometimes reversible aberrations.

These sometimes can and do become even beyond minor modifications. This is an essential gist of management, and this is where practices become more dominant than merely maintaining the 'correct posture.' This essentially makes life an art. Indeed, nothing succeeds like success.

In current times, the story of the Mahabharata is a telling example, even where exceptions are there. The reference is to repeated references to a higher cause and moral justice. The pursuit of the objective is not lost in a pedestrian quest for righteousness. This does not throw morality out of the window but takes a higher view of the same. The narrator often can and does express implied disapproval, but then leaves it to the judgment of the reader. Such being the facts of life, the consensus of a group regarding what it considers tolerable and acceptable becomes a hallmark of correctness and otherwise. This is the power of group dynamics.

The narrative of the Mahabharata is a sterling example of how "approximation" so often carries the day and technical accuracy is lost among the many contenders. Indeed, like everywhere else, the victor takes all, and the vanquished can only wish to live to see another day.

That having been said, it does not alter the idea of the bull's eye. While being in archery, nobody approximates the archer's efforts to hit the bull's eye, and no one would say that even if he approximates by 20%, you are within the acceptable limits. The bull's eye remains the bull's eye. Perfection indeed has its place. Its content is often determined by the context.

What, then, is the message that the entire debate, discussion, and analysis falls back upon? What indeed is the concept of judgment? What is right or acceptable depends on situation to situation, context to context, and sometimes even the person's cognitive ability. This leads us to an important conclusion: namely, the realization that human judgment is superior to all other analyses, whether it be of everyday life or archery. Practical life has only experiences to serve as guidelines, and there is no greater touchstone than 'what works.'

That is where the text of the Mahabharata is such a tell-tale story of life itself. There is a Bengali proverb to the effect: "Jaynay Bharatiya Senay Bharaty" (that which is not in the Mahabharata is not in India). Epics are not unique to India, but the epics of India are transcendent and beyond many epics from different parts of the world . Truly being an Indian is the compendium of much global wisdom. The crux is that it is also what is doable and achievable through traditional learning or otherwise.

It is about time to draw attention to the traditional learning modes of India and try to convert them for use by modern Indians. This will certainly enrich and level up the approach to artificial intelligence. That may be another story.

Rivers in rage: Floods, memory and life in Indian Himalayas

Ritika Joshi

The rains this year in Uttarakhand came with a fury that felt both familiar and new. Rivers swelled within hours. Roads cracked and vanished. Hillsides gave way as terrified families ran uphill, clutching their children. For outsiders, such scenes seem sudden and shocking. But for those who call the Himalayan valleys home, this fear returns every monsoon. Every season brings the dread of cloudbursts and collapsing slopes. The Himalayas, mighty as they are, remain fragile — a landscape where beauty and danger coexist. Here, rivers are gods, floods are remembered in songs, and disasters are often told as divine retribution. To live in these mountains is to live in reverence — balanced between awe and fear. For centuries, the rhythm of the monsoon has guided every aspect of Himalayan life. Farmers sow when the rains arrive. Pilgrims to the Char Dham temples plan their journeys by its pulse. Traders once timed their crossings of high passes by their breaks. But the rhythm is now broken.

Uttarakhand normally receives around 1,162 mm of rainfall during the monsoon season. This July alone, 239 mm poured down within just the first 10 days. Rain that once spread across months now falls in violent, concentrated bursts. Scientists confirm what locals already sense — extreme rainfall events are increasing. The heaviest storms release more water than ever before. For mountain farmers, the difference between steady rain and a cloudburst is the difference between life and ruin. A single night of torrential rain can wash away entire terraces, erode topsoil, and turn careful construction into rubble.

In Dehradun, even the state capital, a cloudburst this year left neighbourhoods submerged. Cars floated through narrow lanes; families stood waist-deep in water inside their homes. The city, once imagined as a safe valley refuge, could not withstand the monsoon's rage. The other side of the Himalayan story is written in ice. Glaciers, the ancient water towers of Asia, are melting faster than ever. As they retreat, they leave behind glacial lakes — deceptively calm and scenic, yet dangerously unstable. In Uttarakhand's Alaknanda catchment, glacial lake area has grown by over 239 per cent between 1990 and 2020. Across the Himalayas, such lakes are expanding, their natural barriers made of loose rock and moraine instead of solid dams. A landslide or sudden inflow can cause them to burst catastrophically.

The 2021 Chamoli disaster was one such warning. Within minutes, a torrent of rock, ice, and water swept away hydropower projects and entire villages. Survivors described it as "the mountain exploding." Downstream communities had no warning — only devastation.

This danger does not stop at state borders. In Sikkim, a glacial lake outburst in October 2023 sent the Teesta River roaring through valleys, collapsing bridges, breaching dams, and destroying army camps. For the Lepcha people, the tragedy echoed an ancient belief — that floods arrive when humans lose harmony with nature, and the Mother Creator sends waters to cleanse the land. The mountains themselves are weakening. Satellite studies reveal that much of the Himalayan terrain is now highly erosion-prone. The risk is greatest where forests have been thinned, and highways and tunnels have sliced through fragile rock.

When heavy rain falls on disturbed slopes, it no longer seeps into the soil — it rushes down, carrying boulders, trees, and houses in its path. In Dharali, Uttarkashi, the Bhagirathi River rose overnight, wiping out homes and farmland. In Himachal Pradesh, this year's floods swept through Kullu and Manali, submerging apple orchards and bridges. Families who had lived by these rivers for generations saw everything vanish.

Much of this damage, locals say, is self-inflicted. Roads to pilgrimage sites cut deep into unstable hillsides. Hydropower tunnels blast through fault lines. Hotels rise on floodplains where rivers once meandered freely. For engineers, every new road marks progress; for the mountains, each cut is a wound. The floods of 2023 were a grim reminder that nature always collects its dues.

Floods are not new to the Himalayas. The British gazetteers of Kumaon and Garhwal record dozens of them — awed by the violence of rivers that could erase entire valleys. In 1893, when a landslide dam on the Birahi Ganga burst, the Alaknanda valley was devastated. Elders in Garhwal still tell their grandchildren stories of "the flood of Birahi."

In Himachal, old families remember how the Beas once changed its course overnight in 1975, taking orchards and temples with it. In Assam's foothills, folk songs still speak of the Brahmaputra swallowing villages whole. These memories endure not only as grief but as warning — a reminder that rivers are never truly tamed, and that respect is the first rule of survival.

While science attributes floods to rainfall and melting glaciers, mountain folklore offers another explanation — divine anger. In 2013, after Kedarnath was ravaged, many saw it as Shiva's "tandava," his cosmic dance of destruction. Others said it was the wrath of Nanda Devi, whose sacred sanctuary had been violated.

In Kumaoni jagars — ritual ballads — floods appear as punishments for human arrogance. In the oral epic Malushahi, storms and rivers are forces that decide fate. Himachal's legends speak of Parashurama unleashing waters to drown sinful lands. The Lepcha myth of Sikkim and the Apatani traditions of Arunachal share a common lesson: when humans forget humility, the rivers remind them who truly rules these mountains. Across the Himalayas, rituals continue to express this ancient respect for rivers. In Uttarkashi, villagers float lamps on the Bhagirathi before opening irrigation canals. In Pithoragarh, lamps are lit on bridges at the onset of the monsoon.

In Himachal, offerings are made to the Beas and Sutlej before the sowing season. In Arunachal, rituals appease river spirits before fishing begins. These are not mere customs. They are acknowledgements of a deeper truth — that rivers have agency, that nature must be approached with reverence. Such rituals remind communities that preparedness and humility are part of survival itself. Behind every flood statistic lies a human story. Farmers in Pithoragarh watch their terraces crumble into rivers.