

MEMORABLE DAY!

Sunday, November 3, 2025, will remain etched as a great day in the history of India. Hours after ISRO fired the heaviest satellite – weighing 400 kg – in space, in Odisha, Indian women cricketers scripted a decisive victory and lifted the world cup in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra. The day symbolized a confident India ready to take risks and score milestone to make their nation great. ISRO successfully launched India's heaviest communication satellite, CMS-03 onboard LVM3-M5 rocket into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit and took India's space journey to another level. The grand spectacle was witnessed by commoners and surely many of them must have felt inspired to join India's scientific workforces to carry forward the legacy of great scientists. At the DY Patil stadium of Navi Mumbai, the India not just won a match but created a bench mark for the young women to dream aspire and succeed no matter what their circumstances are. The women played well – fact that was acknowledged by the world cricketers – is besides the point, their conduct after the victory laws exemplary. The players emotionally hugging the players of the team they had defeated, making former cricketers Julian Goswami and Diana Edulj part of the celebrations was so feminine. Most of these women come from normal families where resources were a problem and society would not initially approve of them. Against the stories of their parents standing by them and Making the girls march ahead in life speaks of the new India where gender differences are narrowing down, Most importantly the support of the crowd the impromptu celebrations by men across the world shows not only women's cricket has come of age but also the maturing of a nation. The day made Indians even more confidence of their destiny and the journey of growth of their nation.

Suvangi Rath & Praveen KV

Delhi's annual struggle with toxic air has become an unfortunate ritual. Each winter, the Air Quality Index (AQI) spikes to hazardous levels, schools shut down, masks return, and public outrage erupts—only to fade until the next smog season. Decades of bans, restrictions, and blame games have done little to clear the skies. To truly breathe easy, Delhi must go beyond regulatory quick fixes and embrace solutions that engage every citizen, policymaker, planner, and business. Nature-based solutions (NBS)—green roofs, urban forests, blue-green corridors, and rain gardens—offer a path not only to cleaner air but also to climate resilience. The real question is not whether Delhi can afford to adopt them, but whether it can afford not to. NBS works by restoring the balance between the built and natural environments. They replicate the self-regulating power of ecosystems—absorbing pollutants, managing stormwater, and reducing heat—while creating urban spaces that breathe. Cities around the world are already transforming themselves through such approaches. Singapore's lush green corridors cool its dense high-rises and filter pollutants. Paris's "Blue Green Wave" roof reduces heat while capturing fine dust. Bangkok's Centenary Park cleanses the air and prevents floods, and Kuala Lumpur's pocket parks have shown that even small green oases can cut particulate pollution by up to 15%. For Delhi, these lessons are urgent. Nearly 80% of India's urban residents breathe air that exceeds safe pollution limits, contributing to over 1.6 million premature deaths every year and economic losses of nearly \$37 billion.

Nilantha ILangamuwa

On October 10, 2025, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea marked the 80th anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea—an institution that has evolved into both an ideological monolith and a geopolitical instrument. The celebrations were more than a show of loyalty; they were a deliberate assertion of strength, discipline, and endurance—a reminder that North Korea, for eight decades, has resisted external domination, endured historical trauma, and carved out a geopolitical identity that is both confrontational and paradoxically conciliatory. Presiding over the spectacle was Kim Jong Un, the youngest in a dynastic lineage that has outlasted empires and redefined autocracy. Beside him stood his sister, Kim Yo Jong—now a prominent figure in the State Affairs Commission—whose growing visibility and sharp rhetoric mark her as co-strategist in Pyongyang's recalibration of the Korean Peninsula's political landscape. To understand the roots of Kim Jong Un's strategic vision, one must return to the crucible from which North Korea was born. Kim Il-sung, the nation's founder, emerged from the twin forces of colonial oppression and revolutionary upheaval. Born in 1912 during Japan's occupation of Korea, he was influenced early by Protestant teachings—an exposure that introduced him to Western notions of self-reliance, seeds that would later blossom into the doctrine of Juche. His years as a guerrilla fighter in the Anti-Japanese United Army and later as a Soviet-backed revolutionary shaped his worldview around adaptability rather than rigid ideol-



Delhi remains among the worst hit, with AQI levels often above 300 due to vehicular emissions, construction dust, and stubble burning. Short-term measures—odd-even traffic schemes, firecracker bans, and artificial rain—have brought only fleeting relief. NBS, by contrast, provide enduring benefits: they cool overheated neighborhoods, improve biodiversity, absorb carbon, and enhance public health—all at relatively low long-term cost. India already has examples that show what's possible. The proposed "Great Green Wall of Aravalli," stretching from Gujarat to Delhi, envisions a billion native trees restoring degraded land and buffering pollution. Within the capital, smaller innovations are taking shape. The "Breathable Art" installation at Swarn Jayanti Park, launched in 2025, uses air-purifying plants like areca palm,

bamboo palm, and spider plant to filter outdoor air while serving as an environmental awareness space. It represents what Delhi needs more of—creative, community-driven, and scientifically sound interventions. The city's existing green lungs already demonstrate the value of ecology-led planning. Deer Park's 95 acres of native trees sequester large volumes of carbon and pollutants; Neela Hauz Biodiversity Park has revived a once-dead wetland that now filters water and moderates temperature. The Jahanpanah City Forest and the Delhi Ridge continue to serve as critical buffers against dust and heat. Vertical gardens and green rooftops on commercial and residential buildings are emerging as powerful tools to improve air quality while softening Delhi's harsh concrete landscape. Studies consistently show that ar-

eas with denser vegetation record lower PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations. However, expansion of such green spaces remains hampered by bureaucratic overlaps and poor maintenance. For NBS to truly succeed, policies must align incentives across sectors. Tax rebates, zoning bonuses for green roofs, fast-track approvals for rain gardens, and grants for "green communities" can motivate developers and citizens alike. Linking fragmented parks through connected green corridors can amplify their ecological and social impact. Partnerships among civic bodies, NGOs, and residents are essential to sustain these systems. Even modest steps—such as Delhi's ongoing tree-planting drives along Ring Road—show how traffic management and urban forestry can work hand in hand. But the real transformation must be structural. NBS cannot remain symbolic acts of tree planting; they must be embedded into the city's planning DNA. Urban development norms should mandate green infrastructure—native species plantations, permeable pavements, and rooftop gardens—as integral components. GIS and remote sensing can help identify pollution hotspots most in need of vegetation or wetlands. Financing models like green bonds, corporate sponsorships, and payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes can ensure continuity beyond political cycles. Delhi's smog crisis, though daunting, offers an opportunity to reimagine the city. By weaving nature into every layer of urban planning, governance, and daily life, Delhi can reclaim its most fundamental right—the right to breathe. The art of city-making, after all, is the art of living and breathing together—and in that art, nature must once again take centre stage.

STRATEGIC REINVENTION OF NORTH KOREA

nam's war against the United States, Laos's devastation during the "Secret War," and the broader trauma of foreign intervention—has created ideological empathy. North Korea has skillfully weaponised this common heritage, casting itself as a symbol of resilience and postcolonial self-determination. Even Myanmar and Cambodia show signs of drifting towards this orbit, attracted by the blend of historical solidarity and pragmatic engagement. Within its borders, Kim Jong Un's grip on power has been strengthened by the ascent of Kim Yo Jong. Her role reflects an evolution in leadership—where dynastic legitimacy fuses with bureaucratic acumen. Her carefully crafted statements towards Washington and Seoul, alternating between menace and diplomacy, reveal a mastery of signalling that resonates both domestically and abroad. As noted in my August 2025 column The Rise of Kim Yo Jong in North Korea (Daily Pioneer, India), she embodies the regime's dual nature—continuity and adaptation. Her growing prominence ensures the Kim dynasty's future while projecting a modernised image of authority. Yet beneath the grand parades and orchestrated unity lies a deeper psychological narrative—one forged in war, deprivation, and defiance. The trauma of American bombings during the Korean War remains embedded in the national psyche, shaping a collective narrative of siege and survival. When North Korean diplomats rail against "imperialist aggression," they are invoking genuine historical memory, not merely engaging in propaganda. This anti-colonial framing resonates across the Global South,

where nations still grapple with the residues of external domination—quietly amplifying Pyongyang's soft power in unexpected ways. Economically, North Korea operates in the shadows between isolation and adaptation. Despite sanctions, trade with China and Russia provides critical sustenance, while the regime has developed underground trade networks and limited partnerships that sustain essential industries. State media present these modest gains as triumphs of Juche, reinforcing the mythology of a self-sufficient nation thriving under siege. The annual military parades, with their carefully choreographed displays of missiles and machinery, serve not only as martial demonstrations but as visual affirmations of technological and economic progress—a performance of survival and ingenuity. At eighty, North Korea stands not as a Cold War relic but as a case study in strategic reinvention. The Kim dynasty has refined autocracy into an enduring system—blending ideological rigidity with tactical flexibility. Kim Jong Un combines his grandfather's revolutionary instinct and his father's theatrical flair with a modern awareness of global optics, manipulating perception as a form of power. In Kim Yo Jong, the regime finds both continuity and renewal—proof that even in opacity, adaptation ensures survival. Eight decades on, North Korea stands not as a relic but as an architect of its destiny, wielding memory, ideology, and might with precision. Its evolution from guerrilla roots to geopolitical strategist underscores a legacy of reinvention that continues to shape Asia's balance of power.

India Has Opportunity To Recalibrate Its Afghan Strategy

Abhinav Narayan /Srijan Sharma

The guns have fallen silent—at least for now—along the volatile Afghanistan-Pakistan border after a series of deadly clashes between Taliban fighters and Pakistani forces. The fragile ceasefire holding this uneasy calm together conceals a far deeper fracture: the unravelling of Pakistan's decades-old doctrine of "strategic depth." What was once the cornerstone of Islamabad's regional vision—a plan to control Kabul through militant proxies and use Afghanistan as a buffer against India—has collapsed into blowback, betrayal, and diminishing influence. The frontier that Pakistan sought to dominate has turned into a front of confrontation. For New Delhi, however, this upheaval marks not just a shift in regional dynamics but a potential opening to recalibrate its Afghan policy and shape a new form of strategic depth grounded in partnership rather than proxy. For nearly four decades, Pakistan's security establishment viewed Afghanistan not as a neighbour but as an extension of its strategic geography. Since the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s, Islamabad's military and intelligence apparatus,

particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), cultivated deep ties with Islamist factions that later coalesced into the Taliban. The objective was simple yet audacious: ensure that any regime in Kabul remained friendly—or at least pliable—to Pakistani interests, thereby creating a buffer in case of future conflict with India. Through the 1990s, this policy bore fruit as Pakistan became the principal backer of the Taliban regime, offering funding, training, and safe havens. Militant outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad used Afghan soil to stage attacks on Indian interests, turning cities like Khost and Kandahar into jihadist crossroads. Even after the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban in 2001, Pakistan maintained its influence through the Haqqani network, a semi-autonomous group rooted in North Waziristan that functioned as Islamabad's "insurance policy" in Afghan affairs. This dual game—allying with Washington in the War on Terror while covertly sustaining the very networks it was meant to dismantle—gave Pakistan tactical advantages. It secured billions in aid from the United States while retaining the means to exert pressure on Indian interests in Afghanistan. Between 2008 and 2011, the Haqqani network or-

chestrated high-profile attacks on Indian diplomatic missions, forcing New Delhi to scale back its development footprint. To Islamabad's strategists, this was a vindication of the strategic depth doctrine: Afghanistan remained a pliable frontier that could be used to counter India without confrontation. But the edifice began to crumble. The policy of duplicity bred its own nemesis. The tribal belt that sheltered Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements soon spawned the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—an insurgency that turned its guns inward. Pakistan's military campaigns in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) became endless cycles of appeasement and retaliation. The 2004 Shakai Agreement with militant commander Nek Mohammad collapsed within months. When the CIA eliminated him in the first drone strike on Pakistani soil, it symbolised not triumph but the beginning of Islamabad's loss of control. Over time, the TTP morphed into a lethal domestic force, waging a brutal campaign against the Pakistani state. The re-emergence of the Afghan Taliban in 2021, after two decades of U.S. occupation, initially seemed like a strategic victory for Islamabad. Celebrations rang out in

Rawalpindi; officials spoke of "historic depth restored." Yet, the Taliban that returned to Kabul were not the same subservient clients of the 1990s. Hardened by years of war and craving international legitimacy, the new leadership rejected Pakistan's tutelage. When Islamabad demanded that Kabul curb the TTP's cross-border activities, the Taliban refused. Instead, they invoked Afghan sovereignty, dismissing Pakistan's pleas as interference. By 2024, these tensions had erupted into direct armed clashes along the Durand Line. Pakistani airstrikes on Afghan territory were met with retaliatory fire. The TTP, emboldened by Taliban tolerance, resumed attacks inside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Pakistan's last reliable link—the Haqqani faction—fractured as Sirajuddin Haqqani clashed with Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada over ideology and control. With Haqqani's influence waning, Islamabad's leverage vanished. This inversion of roles—the patron turned pariah, the client turned challenger—marks one of the most dramatic reversals in South Asia's modern geopolitics. The concept of "strategic depth" now stands exposed as a strategic delusion. What was intended to give Pakistan breathing

space in a future conflict with India has instead suffocated its security apparatus. The frontier Islamabad once sought to use as a launchpad has become a source of perpetual instability. The blowback has been both ideological and territorial. From the early 2000s onward, Pakistan's tribal regions became the epicentre of a transnational jihadist movement. Al-Qaeda, Uzbek fighters, and radical clerics like Maulana Fazlullah transformed local grievances into a global narrative of holy war. Extremist radio stations in Swat preached Sharia rule, and assassination attempts on General Pervez Musharraf underscored how deeply the state's own Frankenstein had infiltrated its ranks. The military's heavy-handed operations displaced millions, but failed to eliminate the insurgency. The TTP, fractured but resilient, survived by merging tribal revenge with religious zeal. Each failed peace deal—from Swat in 2009 to North Waziristan in 2014—only reinforced the militants' perception that the state could be bled into submission. By the time Osama bin Laden was discovered and killed in Abbottabad in 2011, Washington's trust in Pakistan had evaporated. Intelligence cooperation collapsed, U.S. aid dwindled, and

Pakistan found itself fighting an unwinnable internal war with limited resources and diminishing legitimacy. When the Taliban returned to power a decade later, Islamabad saw a fleeting opportunity to restore lost leverage. It facilitated limited U.S. drone operations, including the strike that killed Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul. Yet, these tactical alignments could not conceal the deeper strategic decay. The Taliban's defiance, the TTP's resurgence, and growing international isolation have cornered Pakistan into an unenviable position: a state trapped between hostile forces on both sides of its western border and an unresolved crisis of extremism within. Amid this chaos, New Delhi finds itself presented with a historic opportunity. For years, India's Afghanistan policy has been guided by cautious idealism—prioritising development aid, cultural diplomacy, and people-to-people ties while avoiding direct engagement with the Taliban. This approach earned India goodwill among Afghans but limited strategic reach. The evolving situation calls for recalibration. Reopening its technical mission in Kabul and cautiously engaging with the Taliban regime signals a quiet but deliberate shift.