

WILL THE CEASEFIRE HOLD AS ISRAEL STRIKES LEBANON?

The world breathed a sigh of relief when a two-week ceasefire was announced in the US-Iran-Israel conflict. The West Asia crisis has been going on for over a month now and has caused heavy casualties on both sides, killing innocents and causing enormous loss to the environment and property.

However, as it was, the ceasefire, a momentary pause, was fragile, as Israel, one of the key players, has said that it was kept in the dark by the US. As if to sabotage the ceasefire, Israel launched a massive 100-missile strike on Lebanon, killing over 250 people. Iran, on its part, closed the Strait of Hormuz. This impasse has again put a question mark on the validity of the ceasefire, as both sides exploited the structural flaws in the truce. Israel maintains that Lebanon was not part of the deal while Iran includes Lebanon as integral part of the deal framework. To show its displeasure with Lebanon strikes Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz which in itself a big proof that reescalation is not ruled out in near future even before the 14-day ceasefire ends.

The biggest drawback in the ceasefire is the structural flaw in the framework. While Iran has consistently insisted that any meaningful de-escalation must include Israeli operations in Lebanon, the United States and Israel have treated it as a separate entity. Israel's strike has been interpreted in Tehran as a violation of the spirit of the ceasefire. Iran's missile response signals that it is unwilling to compartmentalise the conflict. If the ceasefire collapses it would be a big embarrassment for the US President Donald Trump personally, who positioned the ceasefire as a diplomatic victory. It would also mean that Israel its partner in the war is not in sync with its decisions. He faces three difficult choices: resume hostilities, intensify diplomatic efforts, or pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to halt military operations in Lebanon. And there is little hope that any of these choices would bring lasting peace in the region. Thus, there is an imminent danger of hostilities breaking out. Resuming the war risks unleashing a wider regional conflagration. Iran has already demonstrated its willingness to escalate, and any renewed US military action could trigger coordinated responses from allied militias across the region. Then there is also the risk of China and Russia also getting involved directly or indirectly making it a world conflict. The consequences would not be confined to West Asia.

Politically, it would also undermine Trump's credibility, especially as he had touted the ceasefire as a major achievement. The diplomatic route is more appealing but fraught with challenges. Vice-President JD Vance's outreach to Iran through talks in Pakistan offers a pathway, but it depends on Israeli restraint. Without halting operations in Lebanon, Iran is unlikely to engage meaningfully. Tehran's distrust runs deep. The US-Israel relationship is deeply entrenched, and reining in Benjamin Netanyahu could have domestic and strategic costs. Yet without addressing Israeli actions, the ceasefire remains unstable. Ultimately, the issue is not just whether the ceasefire will last, but whether it was ever meant to.

Acharya Prashant

There is something in the human being that cannot sit quietly with itself. Not restlessness in the ordinary sense, not boredom that a good night's sleep would fix, but a structural dissatisfaction, a felt sense of incompleteness that persists regardless of what is acquired or achieved. The person who appears to have everything still reaches for something more. At rest, there is still a low hum of insufficiency beneath the rest, one that cannot quite be named or located.

This dissatisfaction is not a mystery. It is the ego's own structure: a false centre claiming to be the whole, unable to sit with itself because sitting with itself would expose the claim. What the ego will not face, it must run from. And running requires a destination.

To keep that condition below the threshold of conscious discomfort, one reaches for objects: achievement, approval, belief, tribe. And of all the objects available, a borrowed collective identity is among the most efficient: it delivers belonging, definition, and a ready-made opposition in a single transaction, with no inner work required. You simply absorb the group, and the group begins doing what you needed done.

This is what makes IPL cricket, now in its nineteenth season and carrying a total business value that has crossed eighteen billion dollars, something more interesting than just a cricket tournament. The economics have been analysed, the spectacle often criticised, and the cricket endlessly debated. But the real question worth asking is a different one, and it concerns the man watching rather than the men playing. Why does he need it so badly that none of the rest of it seems to matter? What is the franchise actually doing for him? What would he have to sit with if it were not there?

The Franchise You Never Joined

Every season, millions of people across the country develop a fierce, protective attachment to a franchise they do not own, whose players they have never met, and whose victories produce in them a warmth they would struggle to explain. The first thing to notice about this attachment is that it is borrowed, and borrowed from nothing the spectator chose with any real attention. Nobody examined the economics of a fran-

chise before deciding to feel wounded when it loses. Nobody studied its ownership before making its victory feel personal. The team was absorbed, usually through geography, peer pressure, or proximity to a single player whose face appeared on enough billboards. And yet the resulting loyalty behaves in every way like something earned: fierce, tribal, capable of genuine aggression toward those who hold the rival affiliation.

Outside a home stadium after a closely contested match, one often sees the winning side's supporters turning on those who came for the other team. People with no personal history with each other, no competing interests, no actual grievance, treating each other as opponents because of the colours on someone else's shirt. This is not fan enthusiasm exceeding itself but a precise illustration of what borrowed identity does to a person when it operates without examination.

The ego, by its nature, requires objects to feel real. It cannot sustain itself on nothing; it must attach, claim, identify. And the franchise is a remarkably convenient object for this purpose. It is stable, highly visible, emotionally intense, and, crucially, it requires no inner work whatsoever. You do not need to understand anything, question anything, or risk anything to absorb a franchise as your own. You simply take on the identity, and it begins immediately doing what all borrowed identities do: sorting the world into those who share it and those who threaten it. The fan who cannot explain why he loves his team, but who would feel genuine contempt toward you for loving the other one, is not behaving irrationally. He is behaving as the ego always behaves when it has been handed a costume and told: this is who you are.

This is the same mechanism by which the ego adopts religion, region, caste, or political affiliation. The psychological movement is identical in every case. The ego encounters something that can give it belonging, definition, and a ready-made opposition, and it accepts instantly, because the alternative is to remain without scaffolding. An ego without borrowed identity has to face itself, and that facing is what the ego spends most of its energy avoiding. The franchise is simply a more colourful and seasonally reliable version of the same relief.

What should disturb a thoughtful person

is not that this mechanism exists, but that it is so transparent in this context and yet so invisible to those inside it. A man who would bristle at being called communally tribal will spend two months a year in an emotional state psychologically closer to tribalism than he would like to admit, organised around the batting average of a paid athlete who lives in a different country and would not even recognise him on the street.

The Formula of Inner Poverty

There is a principle worth stating as plainly as possible, because it is the key to everything else. The poorer the inner life, the cheaper the entertainment will need to be. When the actual life fails to provide genuine engagement, genuine love, work of any real depth, the evening's match ceases to be a pleasure and becomes an anaesthetic, something the person takes not to feel good but to feel less. The kind of entertainment one repeatedly reaches for can reveal more about inner condition than income, education, or stated aspiration ever will.

At this point, one thing has to be clear: there is nothing inherently wrong about watching a cricket match, or for that matter any sport. A person whose life contains real work, real attention, real relationships conducted with some honesty, can still enjoy a cricket match. The grief of one result will have time to settle before the next demands his attention. The odds scrolling at the screen's bottom, the fireworks engineered to arrive with every boundary, the cheerleaders whose presence has somehow become structurally necessary to the proceedings: none of these feel like requirements, because the watching comes from abundance rather than from demand. Two months of the sporting calendar do not constitute the emotional high season of his year, with everything else as merely what happens in between.

Cricket, as it was played before it became primarily a vehicle for advertising, repaid close attention. There was a time when a bowler who conceded nothing across six deliveries earned applause, when a spinner who tossed the ball up and beat the batsman in the air was considered to have done something skillful, when a batsman who occupied the crease for an entire session without incident was understood to have served his team well. Test cricket in particular

checked something in a player that other formats could not: the capacity to remain still, patient, and focused across days rather than deliveries. That quality of the game has not been replaced by something better. It has been replaced by something louder.

There is a quality of watching that does not leave the person where it found him. Not excitement, for excitement passes without depositing anything. Something that went deeper than excitement, an inner movement that left a residue, so that the person who attended carefully to a passage of real beauty walked out of the ground carrying something he did not have when he walked in. This kind of engagement demanded something of the watcher: patience, freedom from the demand for the next stimulus, and the willingness to let the experience develop at its own pace rather than his. A well-constructed innings unfolding over hours, the slow accumulation of tension between a precise bowler and a patient batsman, the geometry of a cover drive that the entire ground understood in the same moment: these required genuine attention, and what they asked of a person, they gave back changed.

What has replaced that is stimulation without depth: immediate, surface-level excitement that activates without deepening, passes without leaving anything behind, and is completed the moment it lands. It asks nothing of the watcher because it cannot afford to; the moment it asks for attention rather than simply capturing it, the watcher moves on. One kind of engagement left the person altered; the other leaves only the demand for another unit of the same, because nothing has been satisfied, only temporarily suppressed. The difference runs not between old cricket and new cricket, or between sport and other forms of entertainment, but between a quality of inner engagement that produced a genuine, somewhat higher pleasure and a structural restlessness that produces only the simulation of it. The comparison that states it most simply: a book read with real attention leaves the reader better than it found him; a match watched with excitement leaves the viewer where he started, except more demanding. From one engagement, something was gained. From the other, only the evening was spent.

What the IPL Spectacle Really Feeds

FEE UPON FEE UPON FEE: THE MIDDLE-CLASS MONSOON

Rachna Lakhpati

There is a screenshot doing the rounds on social media. A food delivery order. A break-up of charges. And buried somewhere between the restaurant GST and the platform fee sits a quietly audacious little line item — Rain Fee INR 25.00. And then, because apparently the universe has a sense of humour, right below it — GST on Rain Fee: INR 4.50.

Let that sink in for a moment. We are now paying tax on weather. This is a watershed moment — not because of the INR 4.50, which is frankly the least of our worries — but because of what it represents. The complete and creative normalisation of extracting money from the paying class for absolutely everything, including the sky deciding to do what the sky has done for four billion years.

The logic, presumably, is that delivery partners need support during rains. Fair enough. Nobody is arguing against protecting workers in difficult conditions. But here is where things get philosophically uncomfortable — if a company chooses to implement a weather sur-



charge, who authorised the government's cut of that surcharge? Rain is not a service. It is not infrastructure. It did not file returns. Yet here we are, paying GST on the inconvenience of precipitation.

And this opens a door that, once cracked, is very hard to shut. If there is a Rain Fee today, tomorrow brings no surprises. A Summer Surge Fee for the heat. A

Winter Comfort Fee for the cold. A Spring Freshness Levy, perhaps, for the pleasant weather that clearly someone must be taxed on. Every season becomes a billing opportunity. Every act of nature becomes a line item. The Indian middle class — already a masterclass in absorbing financial shocks with a deep breath and a resigned scroll — will simply add these to the

growing list of things they silently pay for.

And that silence is precisely the problem. The middle class in this country is, functionally, the most reliable ATM in the national economy. Taxes deducted before the salary even lands. GST on everything from biscuits to broadband. Fuel prices that somehow remain immune to global oil drops but sprint ahead of every global rise. And now, GST on a rain surcharge on a food delivery app.

What is striking, and worth saying plainly, is that a demographic that contributes this consistently, this obediently, and this extensively to the national exchequer receives remarkably little in return. No meaningful healthcare subsidy. No housing cushion. Education costs that climb faster than salaries. And certainly no rebate for the rain.

There is an old social contract at the heart of taxation: you pay, and the state provides. When the providing becomes invisible and the paying becomes inventive, the contract starts to feel less like governance and more like a subscription nobody agreed to. The monsoon will pass. The fees, one suspects, will not.

From Bargari to Baisakhi: Why sacrilege still shapes Punjab's political destiny

Monika Malik

Nearly a decade after the torn pages of the Guru Granth Sahib were found at Bargari in 2015, the anger that followed still lingers quiet at times, explosive at others. Governments have changed, laws have been promised, and commissions have submitted reports, but the political aftershocks of that episode continue to travel through every election cycle. That is why the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Punjab Government's decision to hold a special Assembly session on April 13, Baisakhi, to amend sacrilege laws is not just legislative business. It is a political message wrapped in religious symbolism.

Baisakhi, after all, is not merely a festival in Punjab. It marks the birth of the Khalsa in 1699, a foundational moment in Sikh history. Choosing that day to strengthen sacrilege laws reflects an enduring truth: in Punjab, faith and politics rarely move in separate lanes.

At the heart of the current legislative push lies the 'Jagat Jyot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Act, 2008', originally enacted by the SAD-BJP government to ensure dignity and proper handling of the Guru Granth Sahib, but long criticised for weak enforcement mecha-

nisms. The law granted exclusive rights to publish the Guru Granth Sahib to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and focused largely on regulating printing, storage, and transportation.

The proposed amendments go beyond harsher punishments. The AAP Government is now looking at the digitisation of registered saroops, the introduction of QR codes and bar-coding systems, and mandatory record-keeping of printing, transportation, and storage, aimed at creating traceability and accountability at every stage—an attempt to prevent not just sacrilege, but also the administrative lapses that often precede it.

The disappearance of a "saroop" of the Guru Granth Sahib from Burj Jawahar Singh Wala in June 2015 was disturbing enough. But when torn pages were found scattered outside a gurdwara in Bargari village that October, the outrage was immediate and visceral. Protests spread rapidly across the state. For many Sikhs, it was not simply a crime—it was an attack on the living Guru.

Then came the police firing at Behal Kalan and Kotkapura. Two lives were lost. That moment transformed public anger into political resentment—against

authority, and against the state itself. For the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which had governed Punjab for a decade by then, the fallout was devastating. The perception that the government mishandled the crisis—both the sacrilege incidents and the protests that followed—began to erode its credibility. The 2017 Assembly election was the first major political test after Bargari, and it showed how deeply the issue had penetrated public consciousness.

The Congress campaign under Capt Amarinder Singh repeatedly invoked sacrilege and police firing incidents, promising justice and accountability. The Akali Dal, once considered nearly invincible in rural Punjab, faced hostility in regions that had earlier been its strongholds. That election marked the beginning of the Akali Dal's steep decline. Bargari did not destroy the party overnight, but it punctured its aura of control. The party's Panthic credibility began to weaken visibly after 2017. Even in the years that followed, Bargari remained shorthand for betrayal in political speeches. Successive governments attempted to respond with laws and inquiries. Yet, the pace of justice remained painfully slow.

Punjab has, in fact, seen multiple leg-

islative attempts over the years. In 2016, the SAD-BJP government introduced amendments proposing life imprisonment for desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib and lesser punishments for other religious texts.

In 2018, the Congress Government revised the proposal to include uniform punishment for sacrilege of all religious scriptures, but the Bill has remained pending for years without Presidential assent.

The inquiry process itself unfolded in layers. The SAD-BJP government first constituted the one-man Justice Zora Singh Commission in October 2015 to probe the Bargari sacrilege incidents and subsequent police firing, but its 2016 report was widely criticised as inconclusive and failed to restore public confidence. The succeeding Congress Government then set up the Justice Ranjit Singh Commission, whose findings pointed to serious administrative lapses and recommended action against several officials. Reports were tabled, allegations were made, yet visible closure remained slow.

That gap between promise and outcome gradually created a deeper crisis—one of trust.

When the AAP entered Punjab's po-

litical landscape, it capitalised on precisely that sentiment. In the run-up to the 2022 Assembly election, AAP promised swift justice and stricter laws. The promise resonated widely, especially among voters frustrated with years of unresolved cases. Its sweeping victory reflected not just anti-incumbency against Congress, but accumulated anger from the Bargari years.

What makes sacrilege different from other political issues is its emotional permanence. Sacrilege touches identity. It triggers memory rather than debate. That is why even isolated incidents — such as reports of missing religious texts — revive the older wounds of 2015.

Every few months, the issue resurfaces. And each time it does, the political temperature rises. That lingering sense of unfinished justice is visible in the extraordinary protests the issue continues to inspire. For months, activist Gurjeet Singh Khalsa has remained perched atop a mobile tower in Samana, demanding stricter punishment for sacrilege—a stark reminder of how unresolved grievances continue to shape public sentiment.

Over time, the political conversation itself appears to have shifted. In the years immediately following Bargari, the cen-

tral demand from Sikh organisations was justice—identification of the accused and accountability for the police firing. Gradually, however, as investigations dragged on and trials slowed, public discourse began to move from demanding justice in specific cases to demanding tougher laws altogether. What began as a call for accountability has, in many ways, evolved into a broader demand for stronger legal protection of the Guru Granth Sahib.

The current government's move to amend sacrilege laws on Baisakhi must be seen in this context. It is not merely about punishment; it is about reassurance.

The proposed amendments aim to introduce stricter penalties—ranging from long-term imprisonment to life sentences—along with provisions to address newer forms of offence, including digital dissemination of sacrilegious content. The move could revive debate over exclusive protection for the Guru Granth Sahib versus uniform legal safeguards for scriptures of all religions. The real challenge is enforcement. Investigations must be credible, prosecutions consistent, and outcomes visible. Without that, even the toughest law risks becoming symbolic rather than effective.