

KISHTWAR CALAMITY

Heartbreaking images of human loss in the flash floods caused apparently by cloud burst in village Chositi, Kishtwar, are pouring in. So far 32 bodies of locals have been extricated and some 200 pilgrims are missing. It goes without saying that the entire machinery of the state – the Army, NDRF, SDRF, and above all local people are relentlessly trying to locate the survivors rescue them. It was encouraging to see the local MLAs Sunil Sharma and Shagun Parihar reaching the affected villages and lending a helping hand in rescue operation. Leaders’ presence amidst the victims of a calamity is encouraging and boosts the moral of all. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has also announced curtailment in the partying that follows the flag hoisting on the Independence Day as a mark of respect for the person killed in the tragedy and in empathy with survivors. Nature’s fury has dampened the Independence Day celebrations for which there was so much enthusiasm.

**OPERATION SINDOOR**  
Operation Sindoor will go down in the history as India’s fight for humanity and against terrorism. President Droupadi Murmu’s words in her address to the nation on the eve of 79th Independence Day carry a profound meaning. It’s akin to India fighting jihadis, who were pushed in and trained by Pakistan to carry out violence in J&K and the west not ready to understand it. The west woke up to jihadi terror only after 9/11 and then ruthlessly attacked other countries while it continued to hobnob with the fountainhead of terrorism – Pakistan. After 9/11, the Western nations empathized and cooperated with India on exposing terrorists sponsored by nation states. Operation Sindoor has been exemplary in many ways. First it showed India’s clear mindset of attacking terror hubs and ensuring no innocent Pakistani was killed. India has no intention of escalating it but hit hard when Pakistan tried to provoke us. No wonder it came for a lot of praises by war experts.

From Being Challenged to Becoming a Challenge in Sports

Jeevesh Gupta

In India, the journey of a para-athlete begins long before they step onto a track, court, or field. Unfortunately, it often begins with hurdles that have nothing to do with sport itself. For many, whether they are living with a physical disability, visual impairment, or intellectual challenge, the first battle is against deeply rooted prejudice. Families may brand them a curse, society dismisses them as a burden, and Government systems often treat them as liabilities rather than potential champions.

In such an environment, sporting success is rarely determined by raw talent alone. The first – and often most exhausting – contest is to defy the assumption: “How can you even think of playing this game, let alone winning?”

Breaking Stereotypes  
When our organisation, Campaign for Differently Abled, organised a privately funded para-athletics meet at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi, it became an eye-opener for everyone who attended.

In India, para-sports receive minimal promotion, and even when people hear of such events, attendance is sparse. The prevailing belief is that it will not be “real” competition or will be dull to watch. Many assume that seeing athletes run in unconventional gaits, play basketball or tennis in wheelchairs, attempt archery without arms, or play blind cricket with a ringing ball would lack the excitement of watching the French Open or a T20 cricket match. Yet the reality is far more inspiring. Over 200



visually impaired athletes from across the country participated in our one-day meet, competing in events such as the 100m, 400m, 1500m, long jump, and shot put. The raw energy, focus, and determination on display stunned the small audience. It proved two things: first, that India has immense untapped talent in para-sports; and second, that opportunity – not ability – is the real shortage.

The lesson was clear: Such events must become more frequent and attract bigger audiences. Each spectator leaves not only entertained but also transformed, carrying stories of grit and excellence into their own circles. Changing mindsets begins here.

The Road Ahead  
With India set to host the World Para-Athletic Meet in Delhi in September 2025 and the Asian Para Games in Japan in 2026, the time to act is now. These events present a chance to do more than just increase our medal count – they can serve as a

platform to draw people with disabilities out of isolation and into the sporting arena. When a differently abled athlete takes up a sport, they often change more than their own life. They alter their family’s perceptions, inspire their communities, and create a ripple effect that reaches others living in more challenging circumstances across the country.

Strategise and Invest  
This begins with identifying: Sports with the maximum medal opportunities

Sports with low global participation  
Disability categories with the highest medal potential

For instance, India has only recently begun training athletes in Boccia (a sport for players with severe limb impairments) and Goalball (for visually impaired athletes). Boccia has been part of the Paralympics since 1984, and Goalball since 1976, yet we have neither the infrastructure nor specialised coaches for them. At the 2024 Paralympics, Boccia offered 11 medal events, with Hong

Kong winning three gold and two silver medals. In Goalball, Japan and Turkey clinched gold in the men’s and women’s events respectively. Why can’t India field a world-class team in these disciplines?

In Paris 2024, there were 559 medal events across 22 sports, offering 1,734 medals in total. India sent just 84 athletes, competing in only about 15 per cent of these events – yet our medal conversion rate was an impressive 34.5 per cent. This means that if we simply doubled our participation, our medal tally could multiply significantly. The top three Paralympic medal – rich sports are Athletics (522 medals), Swimming (423), and Cycling (153). While India has improved in athletics, our participation in swimming and cycling remains negligible – and so do our medals in these sports.

A targeted plan should aim to double our Paralympic medal tally to at least 58 at the next Games. At the Asian Para Games, we improved from 72 medals in Jakarta 2018 to 111 in Hangzhou 2023. Following this trajectory, we should realistically aim for 150 medals. A disability-wise strategy is equally important: identify which categories – physical, intellectual, or visual impairments – have the most medal events, and invest accordingly. Also, identify where performance has been weakest and channel resources there.

Private and Government funding must be increased, but efficiency and transparency are essential. While overall sports funding has grown, para-sports still lag far behind, especially in

attracting private sponsorships.

Build and Train  
India must establish a world-class, disability – focused sports training ecosystem, similar to the China Disability Sports Training Centre. This should be more than just a stadium – it should be a fully accessible living and training environment designed to meet the daily needs of athletes with disabilities. A happy and supported athlete has a far better chance of success. This ecosystem should offer:

“Specialised courts and equipment for Boccia, Goalball, wheelchair basketball, and para-swimming

Research and development facilities for adaptive sports equipment.

Dedicated centres to train coaches in disability-specific sports science.

Accessible accommodation, transport, and healthcare facilities for athletes.

Without the right facilities – like tactile court markings for Goalball or ramps for Boccia – India cannot expect to produce champions in these disciplines.

Changing the Narrative  
Promotion must happen on multiple levels:

Highlighting personal journeys – Just as films like Taare Zameen Par, Barfi, and Sitaare Zameen Par have showcased intellectual disability, we need mainstream storytelling that celebrates para-athletes.

Chandu Champion, for example, brought to light the story of Murlikant Petkar, India’s first Paralympic gold medalist, who waited decades for national recognition.

A LONG ROAD TO INCLUSIVE AND JUST SOCIAL ORDER IN UTTAR PRADESH

Annu Tandon

Uttar Pradesh, my birthplace and the cultural soul of India, is a land of immense strength, rich history, and silent resilience. Its rivers and fields, its music and mysticism, all whisper stories of both beauty and betrayal. But beneath the vibrant hues of this state lies a truth we must confront-decades of systemic exclusion and quiet suffering endured by those who form the very backbone of our society: the backward classes (Pichhde), Dalits, and minorities (Alpasankhyak).

This vast majority, collectively referred to as PDA, has long remained marginal in decision-making, their contributions to society acknowledged only in passing. Of the 21 Chief Ministers in the history of Uttar Pradesh, only six have emerged from these communities. Reports indicate situations affecting Dalits and Backward Classes in Uttar Pradesh often do not receive any attention in mainstream media, particularly in cases where justice is delayed or not forthcoming. For economically weaker sections of these communities, the process of lodging complaints can be especially difficult. In certain instances, even serious offences such as physical assault or sexual violence become entangled in legal complexities, including the filing of counter-complaints, which can delay or dilute the pursuit of justice.

Ultimately, observations from various cases suggest that caste-based disparities, deeply embedded in our social structures over time, continue to influence outcomes.

I cannot help but feel deep concern even for the humans affected by some recent events in Uttar Pradesh. In cities like Prayagraj and Saharanpur, homes belonging to members of the Muslim community were demolished following protests over remarks made by a political leader.

Legal experts have questioned the fairness and legality of such demolitions, pointing out that many were carried out without proper notice or due process. For those affected, the sudden loss was not just of property, but of security, dignity, and hope. I am not here to enter into a political debate over the rights and wrongs but as a fellow human being – and as a woman who understands the fragility of a child’s sense of safety – I cannot ignore the trauma this can cause. And yet, there is hope. Akhilesh Yadav’s PDA Vision – first introduced in 2023 – is not just a political slogan. It is a heartfelt framework for inclusion, empowerment, and equity. It builds on the ideals of Mahatma Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Ram Manohar Lohia, visionaries who imagined an India where no one was left behind. The PDA framework aims to correct historical wrongs through just and representative governance. Under the

current regime, the underrepresentation of PDA communities has only worsened. Despite constituting over 70 per cent of the population, their presence in key administrative roles remains woefully low. OBCs, who make up about half the population, hold less than 19 per cent of District Magistrate posts. Dalits fare even worse, occupying only 5.3 per cent of these roles. The numbers speak volumes and reflect a structural denial of opportunity and power.

Reservation, when discussed today, is too often dismissed as a handout. But for these communities, it has simply been a doorway – to education, to government service, to dignity. Without it, many would still be locked out of the halls of power, regardless of merit or determination. As someone who came from privilege, this truth was not always visible to me. But stepping into the shoes of the marginalized, even momentarily, reveals the layers of prejudice that still persist. Stories passed down through generations – like that of Shabari’s devotion to Shri Ram, or the friendship between Ram and Nishad Raj – show us a time when social justice was not only imagined but lived. Yet over centuries, we lost that essence. The fall in social empathy has left Eklayvas without teachers and Karna – like talents still questioned about their birth, not their brilliance.

Some accuse the PDA framework of promoting caste-based politics. But let us

ask – what politics has ever existed in India without caste and community calculations? Even those who accuse us of identity politics distribute tickets, form alliances, and make appointments based on caste arithmetic. The difference is that PDA does not tokenise identity – it empowers it. We do not seek to divide; we seek to include. Critics have falsely labelled our vision as one of appeasement, especially towards Muslims. Yet our record tells a different story. We stand firmly by the Constitution – against bulldozers driven by prejudice, against the naming-and-shaming of shopkeepers by faith, against midnight cremations that robbed a daughter of dignity in Hathras.

The PDA vision is not just about correcting caste or community imbalance. It is also about acknowledging economic fragility – among Dalits, among backward classes, and yes, among economically weaker members of the so-called upper castes. True justice listens to all who are voiceless. It is essential to conduct a caste census to understand the demographic realities of our nation. Representation must be data-driven, not anecdotal. But beyond numbers, what we need is will – the will to bridge the invisible walls that keep communities apart. Education must be accessible and excellent. Recruitment must be fair. Governance must reflect the people it serves. And for that, political will is essential.

Remembering the horrors of Partition

Rahul Kaushik

On 14 August, India observes Partition Horrors Remembrance Day. It’s a day to confront one of the darkest chapters in our history. The Partition was not merely a boundary drawn on a map; it was the brutal tearing apart of a civilisation, triggering the largest forced migration humanity has ever seen. It came with mass slaughter, abductions, rapes, and the annihilation of communities that had lived together for centuries. British cynicism and the Muslim League’s separatism played their part, but it was also the Congress leadership’s own political greed and short-term calculations that created the fertile ground for this catastrophe. The Congress leadership’s lust for power was the thread that ran through its fateful choices. From the 1920s onwards, the party’s strategy repeatedly placed its own political advantage above national cohesion. One of the earliest and most damaging examples was the embrace of the Khilafat movement in 1919–1924. At a time when India’s struggle for self-rule could

have been framed in inclusive, non-sectarian terms, Congress chose to align itself with a pan-Islamic cause linked to the Ottoman Caliphate, which was nothing but a foreign religious institution.

Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders saw Khilafat as a way to bring Muslim masses into the nationalist fold. In reality, it injected religion deep into Indian politics, legitimised communal mobilisation, and deepened the divide between Hindus and Muslims. The unintended but predictable consequence of this appeasement was the strengthening of communal identity as a political tool. In the decades that followed, this dynamic helped the Muslim League grow from a marginal elite club into a mass party claiming to speak for all Muslims. Instead of resisting this communal consolidation, Congress’s own political decisions, from seat-sharing arrangements to public postures, allowed the League to flourish. By the time of the 1940 Lahore Resolution, the League had the organisational confidence and political legitimacy to openly demand Pakistan.

When the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 offered a framework for a united India through a federal arrangement, Congress initially agreed. But within weeks, Jawaharlal Nehru publicly dismissed key provisions, signalling that Congress would not be bound by them. This gave Muhammad Ali Jinnah the pretext to walk away from the idea of unity entirely. Nehru and other Congress leaders feared that a loose federation would dilute central power and require continuous compromise with provincial leaders, especially in Muslim-majority provinces. Their priority was clear: Secure a strong central government under Congress control, even if it meant letting the League take its demand for Pakistan and leave.

That choice was fatal. Partition was accepted not as a last-ditch necessity, but as an acceptable cost for the swift transfer of power to a Congress-dominated centre. In their impatience to govern, they gambled with the lives of millions. The human cost of that gamble defies comprehension. In Punjab and Bengal, the hastily drawn Radcliffe Line cut through villages, fields, and mar-

ketplaces. Neighbours who had lived together for generations were suddenly on opposite sides of an international border. Violence exploded almost immediately. Trains arrived in stations filled not with passengers, but with corpses. Entire villages were burned. Columns of refugees stretched for miles, vulnerable to armed mobs. Women were abducted on a mass scale, raped, forcibly converted, and in many cases killed by their own families to “preserve honour” before they could be taken.

Historians estimate that between 200,000 and two million people were killed in the span of months. Over 15 million were uprooted, compelling Hindus and Sikhs to flee Pakistan in chaotic, desperate journeys. Families were scattered forever. For countless survivors, the physical wounds healed, but the psychological trauma never left. The violence was not a spontaneous accident; it was the foreseeable outcome of dividing a subcontinent in haste, without the security, planning, or time required to protect its people.

Yet for decades after indepen-

dence, Congress cloaked its role in Partition behind a narrative of helpless inevitability. It became politically convenient to blame only the British or the Muslim League. Rarely acknowledged was Congress’s own record: legitimising communal politics through Khilafat, enabling the Muslim League’s rise, and ultimately agreeing to the very division it claimed to oppose, all to secure its own unchallenged hold on power in what remained of India.

This is why Partition Horrors Remembrance Day, observed every August 14, is more than a symbolic gesture. It is a necessary act of national truth-telling. It forces us to remember not just the suffering of the victims, but the political failures and compromises that made that suffering possible. It breaks the comfortable amnesia that allows parties to romanticise their past while glossing over their betrayals.

Remembering Partition matters for three reasons. First, it honours the dead and the displaced – millions whose lives were destroyed in the maelstrom of 1947. Their sto-

ries deserve to be told, not buried under the sanitised prose of official histories. Second, it teaches the cost of legitimising communal politics. The road from Khilafat to Pakistan is a cautionary tale about what happens when leaders use religious identity as a bargaining chip for short-term political gain. Third, it is a warning against political impatience and the lust for absolute control. When leaders choose the fastest path to power over the hardest path to unity, it is the ordinary citizen who pays in blood.

It’s important that Partition Horrors Remembrance Day should not be reduced to speeches, articles, and ceremonies. It should be marked by survivor testimonies, archival exhibitions, and public discussions that name all the forces responsible for the tragedy. It should challenge the myth that Partition was inevitable, and confront the reality that it was, in part, the outcome of deliberate political choices.

Independence and Partition came together in August 1947. For some, it was a dawn of freedom; for others, it was the start of exile, loss, and mourning.