BANGLADESH SAVED

The much-speculated victory of Jamaat–e-Islami in Bangladesh had sent fears. Those who knew the history of Bangladesh wondered whether the country's basic ethos was so weak as to elect those very forces that tried to sabotage its freedom from a repressive and genocidal regime would get to rule it. India, being a neighbour and a facilitator of that freedom, was also worried. However, today's verdict in the elections in favour of the BNP proved that the basic ethos of a country doesn't change. The younger generation may lose a sense of history, but not the values of life. Today's victory for BNP amounts to the rejection of Jamaat-e-Islami by the Bangladeshi voters. JeI is the same force that had collaborated with the Pakistani Army in carrying out the genocide of Bengalis in the run-up to the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Now, in the interim government, the party had played a dubious role. Close to the elections, it announced that women are not permitted to occupy the top leadership positions in the government, sending shockwaves across. Many countries had accepted the fait accompli of JeI's victory and tried to woo its leadership. The wise voter knew that in the absence of the Awami League, which stands disqualified, its best bet is the BNP. India had already established its contact with the Tarique Rahman-led BNP. India has given shelter to Shaikh Hasina, leader of the Awami National League, but never abandoned a realistic approach to dealing with its neighbour. Though a decisive victory for the BNP is good news, the forces that are being funded and ideologically supported from outside would be eager to create trouble. India has to pursue a policy of good neighbourliness with Bangladesh. Keeping its long-term security concerns in mind, India can have normal relations with Dhaka. That is also in the interests of Bangladesh.

Love lost in Valentine's commercial spectacle

Rahul Kaushik

It's the Valentines' time of the year these days. Valentine's Day, as it is celebrated today, presents itself as a timeless festival of love. In reality, it is a carefully assembled product of literary invention, marketing strategy, and global consumer culture. What was once a quiet expression of affection has been converted into a high-pressure commercial event, where emotions are measured through spending, visibility, and compliance with trends. This transformation has not only diluted the meaning of love but has also misdirected young people into confusing consumption with connection.

At its core, the modern Valentine's Day rests on a fragile myth. The historical figures named Saint Valentine were Christian martyrs, remembered for faith and sacrifice, not romance. The association between 14 February and romantic love emerged much later, largely through medieval European poetry, particularly the work of Geoffrey Chaucer. Over centuries, this literary idea evolved into a cultural custom, and eventually into a global commercial event. The version of Valentine's Day we encounter today, defined by chocolates, roses, candlelight dinners, and curated social media posts, is not an ancient tradition but a modern construction shaped by market logic.

The real shift occurred when love was made legible to markets. Once affection could be standardised, packaged, and sold, it became profitable. Valentine's Day moved from being a personal choice to a social obligation. Advertising reframed ordinary products as emotional necessities. Chocolates became proof of care, jewellery became evidence of commitment, and dinner reservations became indicators of effort. The message was subtle but consistent: love must be demonstrated, and demonstration requires spending.

For young people, this message lands at a particularly vulnerable moment. Youth is a phase marked by identity formation, emotional exploration, and a desire for acceptance. Valentine's Day marketing exploits these sensitivities with precision. It creates artificial deadlines like Valentine's Week, themed days, limited-edition gifts, and amplifies a sense of FOMO, i.e. fear of missing out. Forgetting a gift or opting out of the ritual is framed as emotional failure. In this environment, affection becomes a performance evaluated by peers, algorithms, and brands.

Social media intensifies this distortion. Platforms reward visibility, not sincerity. A handwritten note or a quiet conversation holds little value in a culture that prioritises aesthetic displays and public validation. Influencer-driven campaigns reinforce the idea that love should look a certain way, which is stylised, branded, and shareable. Even when users recognise sponsored content, repetition normalises the behaviour. Over time, young people internalise the script: if love is real, it must be visible; if it is visible, it must be consumable.

Quick-commerce platforms have now added another layer of pressure. By marketing speed as care — "last-minute delivery", "don't let them down" - they monetise anxiety itself. Emotional responsibility is converted into a transaction, and relief is sold at a premium. Instead of encouraging thoughtfulness, such systems reward urgency and impulsive spending. Love becomes less about intention and more about logistics.

The consequences of this shift are not trivial. Financial stress is the most obvious outcome. Students and early earners feel compelled to spend beyond their means to meet expectations shaped by advertising rather than reality. Emotional insecurity follows close behind. Those who cannot or choose not to participate may feel inadequate, excluded, or behind their peers. Relationships, too, suffer when affection is reduced to optics. When gestures are performed for validation rather than meaning, intimacy becomes fragile and transactional.

Perhaps the most troubling impact is the gradual erosion of emotional literacy. Valentine's Day marketing teaches young people that feelings must be expressed through products, not presence. It sidelines patience, listening, and care - qualities that sustain relationships over time - in favour of spectacle and immediacy. Love is no longer something to be cultivated; it is something to be proven on cue.

This commercial framing also sits uneasily within the Indian cultural context. Bharat has never lacked ways to honour love, companionship, and devotion. Festivals and social practices have long integrated affection with responsibility, community, and continuity. Love has been expressed through duty, care, shared rituals, and long-term commitment, not through one-day performances. The imported model of Valentine's Day, driven by individualism and consumption, disrupts these rhythms by isolating emotion from context and responsibility.

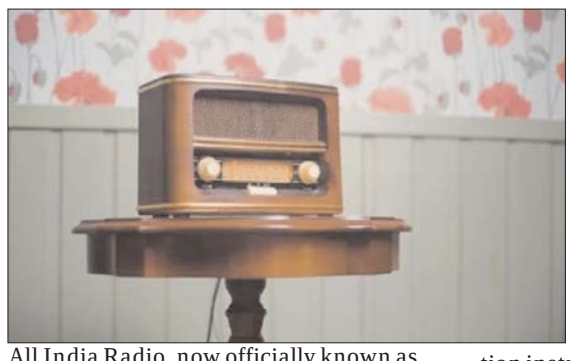
This is not an argument against romance or celebration. It is a critique of the framework that governs them. Love does not lose value because it is modern, but because it is monetised. When emotions are shaped to fit market calendars, they lose their autonomy. Young people are not misguided because they want to love, but because they are taught that love must follow a script written by advertisers.

Reclaiming the spirit of love requires reclaiming emotional agency. It means recognising that affection does not need deadlines, hashtags, or price tags. It thrives in sincerity, not scarcity. A meaningful relationship is not built in a week of themed days, but in everyday acts of attention and respect. When young people are freed from the pressure to perform love, they are better able to understand it.

Valentine's Day, as it stands, offers a narrow and commercialised definition of affection. By questioning its assumptions, youth can begin to separate feeling from marketing and connection from consumption. Love, after all, is not a product to be purchased once a year. It is a practice, shaped by time, care, and intention — something no market can truly sell.

BREAKING NEWS: THE INTERNET IS DOWN — LONG LIVE THE RADIO!

Santhosh Mathew



In an age where Wi-Fi signals decide our moods and smartphones rarely leave our palms, it sounds almost satirical to say that the most reliable companion in times of crisis is not a 5G tower but a humble radio set. Yet every year on February 13, when the world observes World Radio Day, we are reminded that the simplest technologies often outlast the loudest innovations. The date commemorates the establishment of United Nations Radio in 1946, but its relevance goes far beyond institutional history. It celebrates a medium that refuses to fade, because it is woven into the daily lives of millions. Marshall McLuhan once described radio as a "hot medium"-intense, intimate, and capable of engaging listeners at a deep emotional level. Radio speaks directly to the ear and ignites imagination. In today's world of podcasts and ear buds, McLuhan's idea seems prophetic. Radio is no longer confined to a wooden box. It has become an extension of our pockets and our ears. Every smartphone is, in essence, a portable radio. In India, radio is more than a communication device; it is the "common man's university." Long before digital platforms democratised content creation, radio entered villages, tea shops, fishing harbours, railway stations, and army camps. It carried agricultural advisories to farmers, educational lessons to students, classical music to connoisseurs, and news bulletins to a newly independent nation eager to understand itself.

All India Radio, now officially known as Akashvani, has been the backbone of this journey. Its guiding motto, "Bahujana Sukhaya, Bahujana Hitaya"-for the happiness and welfare of the many-captures its inclusive philosophy. AIR was a public service committed to national integration and social development. In a country of hundreds of languages and dialects, Akashvani became a unifying thread, embodying India's "unity in diversity."

The FM revolution of the late 1990s and early 2000s injected new energy into Indian radio. Private FM stations brought local flavour, lively radio jockeys, interactive talk shows, and urban vibrancy. Radio once again became fashionable among city youth. It was no longer just about news and classical music; it was about companionship during traffic jams and late-night conversations.

Yet, beyond glamour and entertainment, radio's true strength lies in resilience. When cyclones hit coastal regions, when floods submerge towns, when earthquakes disrupt infrastructure, it is often the radio that survives. Electricity may fail. Mobile networks may collapse. Internet services may crash. But a battery-operated radio continues to function.

In disaster management, radio is not nostalgia-it is a necessity. Community radio stations broadcast real-time weather warnings, evacuation instructions, and relief information in local languages. In remote villages cut off from highways and digital networks, radio remains the lifeline. Closely linked to disaster response is ham radio-amateur radio operated by trained enthusiasts. When all conventional communication systems break down, ham operators step in. During earthquakes, floods, and cyclones in India, ham radio volunteers have played a silent yet heroic role in coordinating rescue efforts and connecting stranded communities with authorities. The portability of radio makes it indispensable. It does not demand literacy or expensive data plans. In recent years, radio has experienced a remarkable revival, largely due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly programme, 'Mann Ki Baat.' Launched in 2014, it transformed perceptions of radio from an ageing medium into a dynamic tool of governance and public engagement. Mann Ki Baat reflects what communication scholars describe as the "mass line" approach-direct engagement between leadership and the people. The human voice, calm and conversational, created intimacy. Millions felt personally addressed. The programme has undeniably popularised and revitalised radio. Radio, in this context, is not merely transmitting information; it is building participation. It is governance through conversation. Meanwhile, community radio continues to empower marginalized voices. Women's groups discuss self-help initiatives. Farmers exchange practical knowledge. Fisher folk receive storm alerts. Each small transmitter strengthens the democratic fabric of the nation.In a hyper-visual age, radio offers a rare gift-imagination. It allows listeners to visualize stories in their own way. It accompanies them while driving, cooking, studying, or working. It informs without overwhelming. As World Radio Day is observed on February 13, the celebration is not about sentimentality. It is about acknowledging a medium that remains India's most inclusive classroom and most portable parliament.

The next time the internet falters and screens go blank, the old transistor may still whisper steady news and reassuring voices. In that quiet reliability lies radio's enduring power. Perhaps the satire is true after all: when the noise of the digital world fades, it is the invisible waves in the air that keep a nation connected.

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Ecological federalism: Transcending man-made borders

Arvind Kumar Jha

India's environmental governance framework has historically been constrained by a rigid adherence to political and administrative demarcations. By privileging anthropogenic jurisdictions over the ecological continuities that sustain the subcontinent, the prevailing system departs from a foundational principle of environmental governance: development within one jurisdiction must not externalize ecological harm beyond its point of origin. Yet, in practice, the dominance of state-centric political boundaries over invisible ecological continua has almost normalised such externalisation.

The Union government often justifies centralized project approvals in the name of national growth, strategic necessity, or economic modernization. However, at times, legitimate ecological and inter-state concerns have been underemphasized or overridden, with macroeconomic priorities taking precedence over landscape-level sustainability considerations. Consequently, the environmental consequences of large-scale infrastructure, extractive, and energy projects seldom remain confined to the territories in which they are approved. Their costs are dispersed across ecologically sensitive regions and resource-dependent communities that hardly have any role in shaping those decisions. For example, air pollutants traverse state boundaries; rivers carry contaminants downstream; deforestation alters rainfall distribution and groundwater recharge patterns across regions; and river modifications disrupt basin-wide hydrological dynamics. The experience of the Aravalli Range offers a particularly compelling illustration of a policy gap and institutional shortcoming. Extending across multiple states in north-western India, the Aravallis constitute one of the world's oldest fold mountain systems and perform indispensable ecological functions. They facilitate groundwater recharge, act as a natural barrier against desertification advancing from the Thar Desert, moderate regional climatic conditions, and sustain a critical green buffer for the National Capital Region (NCR). Despite this trans boundary significance, the range has often been administered through narrow, state-specific regulatory approaches rather than as a unified ecological landscape.

Mining interests, aggressive real estate expansion, and unregulated land-use change have advanced with insufficient regard for the range's long-term integrity. Particularly concerning are recent attempts to redefine the range through restrictive technical criteria, such as the "100-metre height" threshold, which risk diluting existing protections and significantly reducing the spatial ambit of environmental safeguards. Such recalibrations, clearly divorced from ecological logic, render ancient and interconnected landscapes vulnerable to incremental and potentially irreversible degradation. Research by the Central Arid Zone Research Institute indicates that desertification pressures are breaching the Aravalli barrier and advancing toward the Indo-Gangetic plain at an estimated rate of approximately 0.5 kilometres per year. Simultaneously, unauthorised land conversion and mining approvals granted without incorporating landscape-level ecological metrics, such as fragmentation indices, have disrupted biodiversity corridors and impaired ecosystem processes.

Vegetation loss driven by extractive activities and infrastructure expansion has intensified regional heat waves, reduced hydrological recharge, and diminished air-purification capacity. Assessments by the Central Ground Water Board identify the Aravallis as the principal recharge zone for the over-exploited aquifers of the NCR. With groundwater levels in several districts reportedly declining by nearly one metre annually, the continued impairment of recharge processes poses a direct threat to the socio-economic stability of urban and peri-urban populations.

Given the profound socio-political, economic, and ecological ramifications of the current governance model, it is imperative to reassess the management of the Aravalli Range within the framework of cooperative federalism and long-term ecological security. Global precedents offer a viable roadmap for this transition, demonstrating how trans boundary ecosystems can be preserved through institutionalized mechanisms of shared responsibility.

The restoration of the Rhine River provides a powerful example. In the mid-twentieth century, industrial expansion in upstream countries severely polluted downstream stretches, particularly affecting the Dutch delta. In response, riparian states strengthened cooperation through the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine. This framework institutionalised subsidiarity, equitable cost-sharing, harmonized discharge standards, and joint financing of wastewater management infrastructure. Through sustained collaboration, the Rhine transitioned from one of Europe's most polluted rivers into a global model of basin-level ecological recovery.

A comparable federal template exists in Australia's management of the Murray-Darling Basin. Recognizing that fragmented state-level governance was ecologically untenable, the federal government established basin-wide planning mechanisms and enforced scientifically determined Sustainable Diversion Limits. Substantial public investment in irrigation modernisation, water-efficiency improvements, and ecological restoration ensured that, while individual states retained administrative authority, their decisions remained bounded by a centrally controlled ecologically defined ceiling.

The Catskill Watershed in the United States demonstrates the economic rationality of conservation. Confronted with deteriorating water quality, New York City chose to invest in upstream forest and agricultural land protection rather than construct a multi-billion-dollar filtration plant. By compensating landowners for maintaining ecological integrity and financing watershed protection programs, the city secured high-quality drinking water at a fraction of the projected infrastructural cost. Conservation, in this instance, proved fiscally prudent as well as environmentally sound.

Further insight emerges from Central Asia's cooperative management of the Chu River and the Talas River following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. When upstream Kyrgyzstan faced disproportionate maintenance costs for dams that primarily benefited downstream Kazakhstan, the two nations negotiated a cost-sharing agreement. Kazakhstan agreed to compensate its neighbour for operational expenses and foregone development opportunities, thereby formalising the recognition that hydrological infrastructure and ecosystem services can be managed to generate cross-border economic benefits.