

## THE INCORRIGIBLE

Pakistan continues to pursue target of hitting Indian through terrorists. The country is on high alert as Lashkar-e-toiba is supposedly planning a strike in Delhi or some other city. The intelligence agencies have apparently laid their hands on tangible information about the attacks and accordingly alerted the states. Lashkar, a terror outfit promoted by the Pakistan's Deep State, is changing tactics. From being confined to J&K, it's trying to create cells in other states and trigger attacks like the one we saw in front of the Red Fort in Delhi in December. In J&K, the outfit is under heavy pressure and security forces are giving its terrorists a hot chase. Most importantly, the outfit has lost the support and is not being able to get fresh recruits from J&K. Thanks to the ban on the public funerals of terrorists which turned into recruitment rallies for the terror groups. Besides, the mass funerals glorified terrorists and misled the youth.

## AI IMPACT SUMMIT

The Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit in Delhi has created a stir in India and the world. The massive gathering at the summit of the leaders, CEOs startup entrepreneurs of all ages has made common people get interested in the futuristic technology and understand how it will change our lives. Most importantly, it has set the tone for massive investments in AI in India. When the government takes up a sector and gives it direction, there is bound to be growth and progress. In India, a lot of individual efforts have been going on in the sector. The Summit has collated them and presented an impressive picture. It's only a matter of some time when India will be leading the AI revolution in the world not in the sense of a superior technological force but as a parent of the world in taking the revolutionary technology to all the people at an affordable cost.

## Nirupama Subramanian

What's an election season without a problem in an alliance? As Tamil Nadu gears up for the state Assembly polls in a couple of months, a Congress-DMK spat that seemed to be heading towards a break-up appears to have blown over for now, but the issue at the heart of the very public clash still hovers over the Secular Progressive Alliance: why can't those who fight elections together in Tamil Nadu agree to share power in a coalition government if voted to office?

What began as the Congress asserting this demand to its Dravidian ally in the state came close to breaking point for a longstanding alliance, delaying seat-sharing talks. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was the first to raise it in January, when DMK deputy general secretary K Kanimozhi met him for seat-sharing talks.

After Kanimozhi reportedly said a firm "no" at a stormy meeting, Gandhi did not rake up the demand again, but prominent voices in the party close to the central leadership

picked up the baton. Earlier this month, Chief Minister MK Stalin reiterated at a public forum that the DMK was not for a coalition government in Tamil Nadu. But the matter did not end there.

The argument being put forward for power-sharing is that the Congress has stood with the DMK all these years, even providing unconditional outside support when the DMK formed a minority government in 2006, but suffering ignominy and parliamentary defeat in 2014 "because of the DMK" — a veiled reference to the alleged 2G scam. So, it's payback time.

The DMK's response is that a coalition government at the Centre and Dravidian rule in the state is the ideal formula for the health of federalism and the Dravidian model. Second, the Congress has benefited by winning seats in both the Assembly and Parliament due to the alliance, and that the very idea of a coalition puts off Tamil Nadu voters due to concerns about stability.

The DMK believes it has experienced popular rejection due to a power-sharing agreement. In 1980, on the back of a sweeping win in the

Lok Sabha election, including in Tamil Nadu, the Congress-DMK believed it could repeat the performance in the state Assembly election. The MGR-led AIADMK government was dismissed. The Congress and the DMK agreed on a coalition government. The alliance lost to the AIADMK-led alliance.

The Congress could have pushed for power-sharing in 2006, when the DMK did not win a majority. But Sonia Gandhi and other party leaders were disinclined. The Congress may have believed it had greater leverage by offering outside support to a minority DMK government, but that lost opportunity is being aired as a bad decision now.

It's not just the DMK that is against power-sharing in the state. The AIADMK, too, does not believe in power-sharing coalitions. Like the DMK, it has fought elections in alliance with national and state parties, and been part of ruling coalitions in Delhi since MGR's support for the Janata government. But never in the state.

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the BJP when Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced after persuading the party into an alliance that the "NDA" would form the next government in Tamil Nadu.

With Congress Member of Parliament Manickam Tagore and All-Indian Professionals' Congress chair Praveen Chakravarthy pressing on with the demand, it seemed the party was going for broke, the TNCC president's frantic reprimands notwithstanding.

The perception grew that this was more than posturing for a higher share of seats, and that the Congress was opportunistically escalating the matter at a time when the entry of actor Vijay has introduced more fluidity than usual in Tamil Nadu's political scene. His Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has not joined any alliance yet.

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may have been as much a gearing-up for a possible break with the Congress as a pre-emptive move against an anticipated Election Commission of India strike at the scheme.

Stalin is also banking on the state's economy, headlining the government's target of a \$1-trillion economy by 2031, its growth rate of 11.19% in 2024-2025, and welfare programmes. Over the last two years, the DMK leader has also been focussed on positioning the contest in Tamil Nadu as one of the ideologies — between the Dravidian model and Hindutva, cultural nationalism, federalism and constitutionalism. On Wednesday, he tabled the report of his government-appointed High-Level Committee on Union-State Relations, among whose recommendations is a paring down of the Governor's powers.

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been fully dependent on its Dravidian ally and its well-oiled machinery of cadres for smooth vote transfers. With its winnability, the DMK has helped keep Congress alive in Tamil Nadu. The INDIA bloc's biggest haul of 40 seats was from Tamil Nadu.

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It is anyone's guess how the Congress would gain from a party that has more star-struck fans than workers on the ground, and whose leader's saviour complex is more suited for movies, in which the hero takes all, than for the rough and tumble of electoral politics.

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How that goes will show the mood in both the Congress and DMK after a bruising first round on power-sharing. The Rajya Sabha elections in mid-March will be another test for the alliance.

## The pivot to the hard right

## Gurbachan Jagat

Controlled fire was perhaps one of the most defining moments in human evolution as the ability to cook food gave humans the massive surge in calories required to fuel a much larger and more complex brain (the human brain consumes about 25% of the body's energy). It is postulated that fire allowed humans to bypass the metabolic limits which keeps the brains of other primates small. Richard Wrangham, professor of biological anthropology at Harvard University, brought this up in what is referred to as the 'cooking hypothesis'.

In other words, the ancestor who developed the ability to build a 'controlled fire' was the inventor/scientist not only of his time but for all times. The opening line of the Rig Veda is, "Agnimile purohitam yajnyasya devamrtvijam, hotaram ratnadhatamam" (Agni I adore, who stands before the Lord, the god who sees Truth, the warrior, strong disposer of delight). It is an invocation to Agni (the fire god), praising him as a mediator between humanity and divine energy. From the controlled fire and the cooking of food, human ingenuity made progress in discoveries and inventions.

Although the great scientists and explorers of the Middle Ages made phenomenal progress, the quantum jump was provided by the Industrial Revolution, which saw a tidal wave of human ingenuity and invention. It also gave rise to democratic movements across Europe. Literature blossomed alongside science.

The products of the Industrial Revolution were still very much under mankind's control due to the development of democratic governance and institutions. These were liberal in nature until the German, Spanish and Italian states gave birth to dictatorships which emasculated the democratic institutions



of these nations. However, through the First and Second World Wars, the democracies — with the overwhelming support of the people — prevailed.

This period also saw the next quantum jump — atomic energy that was unleashed on a world holding its breath. Fortunately, the world came together and set up institutions to keep this energy under control. Treaties were signed and honoured by nuclear powers. So far, we have succeeded and used it mainly in a positive way. This has been made possible because of our democracies, liberal governments and institutions.

Today, as humanity develops artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computers, and as the two come together, they bring the strong possibility of a 'sentient' AI. Theoretically, it's AI which is self-aware and capable of taking independent decisions. Are we once again at an inflection point...is humanity about to develop the next 'controlled fire'? The challenge for the evolution of humanity along with technological evolution has always been in

its ability to 'control' the fire it creates, for it brings havoc if not controlled. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster is a case in point, so are the questionable bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Similarly, many questions remain unanswered about the Covid-19 pandemic. I could go on about the misuse of technology, how humanity twists technological advancements developed for its benefit into weapons of mass destruction or control. For as we develop this advanced technology, we must keep in mind what Carl Sagan described as 'technological adolescence' characterised by humanity possessing tremendous world-altering power without the necessary wisdom or foresight to manage it safely.

Today, it must be noted that the pivot to the hard right is happening; it can be observed in the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement and in similar political activism in Europe, Asia, South America, etc. Our great technological advancement is coming at a time when liberalism in politics and government is giving way to the hard right. Liberal democracies and liberal economies are giving way to authoritarianism in politics and economics...the world order is reverting to the nation state.

Moreover, the 'nation state' is going in for a far more rigid form of government that is authoritarian. The effort is to maintain the facade of democratic elections and hollow the system from the in-

side. The Trojan horse of authoritarianism and protectionism has come through the gateway of elected governments. Plato critiqued democracy and saw it gradually decaying into a tyranny as power shifted to demagogues who were adept at manipulating the masses — there is much truth in this if we neglect our institutions and bring down the checks and balances of power. The centrist, liberal ideology has been pushed back by the tidal wave of a dogmatic right.

Coupled with these developments is the urgent, almost immediate rearmament and the rise of the defence budgets of most countries of Europe, Asia, etc. This requires a shift from developmental economics to the rearmament of the developing and the developed world. The benefits of this go to the vast military-industrial complex. Today, budgets are being tailored for rearmament, the nuclear treaties being made null and void and nuclear arsenals being replenished... all this points to a disaster in the making. It has already started with wars erupting in various locations across the world.

Add to this the emergence of AI and you have a world at the mercy of a few technocrats and authoritarian rulers. Institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Disarmament Commission and other organisations under the United Nations (UN) helped create a systemic check on the development and use of nuclear energy.

However, AI is a developing technology which is moving at a very rapid pace and is capable of bringing far-reaching changes and disruptions; it is currently without any systemic controls.

The immediate need is for countries to get together to face this onslaught of AI and introduce a system of checks and balances which, if not done, can lead to a situation where AI can become an 'uncontrolled fire'.

## Restoring Vande Mataram, Rejecting The Politics Of 1937

## Rahul Shivshankar

You couldn't miss the irony even if you wanted to. Vande Mataram, the anthemic hymn that roused a nation to demand its freedom, was fettered by political hesitation in independent India. Its full-throated ode to Bharat Mata was abridged by the Congress party, eager to placate a line of argument that questioned the very civilisational imagination of India. And so, since 1937, when Muhammad Ali Jinnah took offence, Indians have only ever sung the first two stanzas of their National Song.

Now, marking the National Song's centenary year, the Modi government has decided to restore it to its original glory. Through a long-debated and awaited government order, singing all six stanzas of Vande Mataram has been permitted. If sung in sequence at an official function, it will precede the National Anthem.

It is important to underline what this order does and does not do. The Constitution of India does not mandate the singing of Vande Mataram, nor does it



compel any citizen to participate in any patriotic song against their conscience. Article 19 protects freedom of expression, and Article 25 guarantees freedom of religion. The restoration merely removes a political restriction that had survived from a different era.

The announcement, however, has been met with derisive outbursts from Opposition ranks. Several leaders of the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, and others have attacked the government. The accu-

sations levelled against the BJP are familiar. That it is fanning the flames of Hindu assertion. That it is rewriting the grammar of secular constitutionalism. That it is attempting to polarise upcoming elections. But the most consequential accusation is the one made with the express purpose of stoking Muslim insecurity. The Opposition is reviving an old argument. That this is a deliberate insult to Muslim religious sensitivities. One Congress leader even urged Muslims to take to

the streets, claiming that the hymn invokes Hindu deities that Muslims cannot be asked to invoke.

But this argument collapses under historical scrutiny. Before Independence, Muslims sang Vande Mataram in full. They even sang it from Congress party platforms. At least till 1908, when the then President of the All India Muslim League, Syed Ali Imam, derisively branded the hymn a "sectarian Hindu cry". Over the next three decades, Imam's jaundiced view spread rapidly. In 1937, the then president of the Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, declared that India's biggest minority community would not sing the hymn unless those stanzas were dropped. The song evidently was weaponised. From a unifying symbol, it was recast by Jinnah as a sectarian test of loyalty, used to question Muslim commitment to the idea of Pakistan.

But Jinnah lost. Many Muslims rejected that bigoted call. They remained in India. They saluted the tricolour and they swore by its Constitution. For these Muslims, Bharat was Mata. In its hurry to politicise, has the Opposition forgotten this simple fact?

## Cong-DMK rift resurfaces ahead of Tamil Nadu polls

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