

4 YEARS, NO END
IN SIGHT

When Voltaire said, "It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets," he could well have been talking about the Ukraine war that has raged for four long years. It is a war that goes unabated. With both sides digging in their heels, the conflict now appears to be more about ego clashes and superpower rivalry than about the people who continue to pay the price. Four years ago, on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin launched what he called a "special military operation" against Ukraine. He had no idea it would stretch for years, as he wanted to wrap it up by claiming the border areas of Ukraine which he feels belong to Russia. But it is a stalemate — costly, grinding, and far from resolution. Four years on, the goals set by Russian President Vladimir Putin are yet to be achieved, but the cost of the war has been huge on both sides. It is a human tragedy unfolding every day. The United Nations estimates that more than 15,000 civilians have been killed and over 40,000 injured. Military casualties on both sides are estimated to run into the hundreds of thousands, with some believing the figure could go between 1.8 and 2 million. The economic toll has been equally severe. Direct damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and property has exceeded \$195 billion. When broader economic losses are taken into account, the overall cost of the war is assessed at more than \$2 trillion. It is a war no one is winning, yet all are paying the price.

Russia now controls significant swathes of eastern and southern Ukraine, yet it has failed to subdue the country or topple its government. Ukraine, with the help of Western military aid and resilience, has reclaimed territory, but the human cost is immense. The battlefield has evolved into a war of attrition — artillery duels, drone swarms, trench warfare reminiscent of the early 20th century, and relentless missile strikes on cities. After Donald Trump became President of the United States, he has been pressing Kyiv to consider territorial concessions in pursuit of peace, but Ukraine is in no mood to oblige. War fatigue is visible, yet no one wants to blink first.

Energy shocks, inflationary pressures, and the strain of sustaining military aid have tested alliances. For Ukraine, the war is existential — about sovereignty, identity, and survival.

Equally damaging has been its impact on geopolitics. The post-Cold War belief that large-scale wars would not happen no longer holds. The war has redrawn security contours, expanded NATO, and the world is once again moving towards war preparedness. Global food and energy systems have been badly impacted, as grain exports from the Black Sea became bargaining chips and gas pipelines turned into geopolitical weapons. Developing nations have been paying the price through higher food bills and fuel shortages.

Yet through all this, Ukraine's resilience remains exemplary and will endure long after the war is over. Zelenskyy's bunker address was a reminder that in modern war, morale is as critical as missiles. It is also a warning to nations harbouring imperialistic ambitions that no matter how small a country may be, if its people resolve to fight back, it becomes invincible.

Bangladesh's Presidential flip-flops

Bhopinder Singh

Recently, the President of Bangladesh, Mohammed Shahabuddin, made scathing comments about the outgoing interim government of Mohammad Yunus. He described himself as a "palace prisoner" and went as far as suggesting that there were attempts to oust him. However, President Shahabuddin had been a lifelong member of the Awami League before assuming supposed neutrality upon assuming the presidency in 2023. He had been personally chosen by Sheikh Hasina, and naturally the then opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had not supported his candidature.

Under Shahabuddin's watch, months of chaos involving protests, violence, suppressive clampdowns, and ultimately the resignation of Sheikh Hasina took place. Even attempts to rein in the situation — such as announcing Sheikh Hasina's resignation — were left to the Bangladesh Army Chief, Waker uz-Zaman. Whereas the President and, more importantly, the Commander-in-Chief, Mohammed Shahabuddin, sounded wishy-washy. The President's meek plea that he could not secure Sheikh Hasina's resignation was slammed by the likes of Asif Nazrul (Interim Government's Adviser for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs): "The President's statement that he did not receive Sheikh Hasina's resignation letter is a lie, and it is a violation of his oath."

It is very likely that the Mohammad Yunus dispensation did treat him lightly and relegated him to a rubber stamp (as is the sub-continental term) — but throughout the year and a half of Yunus's administration, Shahabuddin did not make a squeak of protest when his presidential status certainly afforded him that opportunity. Shahabuddin secured his continued presidency by knowingly accepting what he now calls a violation of the Consti-



tion by silently passing 133 ordinances.

Today, as the Tarique Rahman-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has stormed the electoral hustings, President Shahabuddin is now singing incredulous hosannas in favour of the BNP, a sworn rival of his own ideological past, i.e., the Awami League. Shahabuddin obsequiously praised the incoming government and its leader Tarique Rahman: "They had expressed their willingness to uphold the Constitution all through that time. I had a lot of curiosity about BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, but with time, I got to know him as a genuine person. He was so cordial. BNP's support was 100% there in my bad time." Obviously, the exiled Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina (leader of Shahabuddin's original party) must be cringing at his flip-flop.

Now, as the new Prime Minister Tarique Rahman goes about reshuffling the Bangladesh military leadership and curbing the powers of the Army Chief, Waker uz-Zaman, the ostensible Commander-in-Chief, President Shahabuddin yet again signs all decrees sycophantically. Incidentally, earlier, when

marauding student mobs were baying for President Shahabuddin's blood in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's ouster, it was the same Army Chief, General Waker uz-Zaman, who had saved the life and presidency of Mohammed Shahabuddin.

Now abandoning his ideological fountainhead, the Awami League, bad-mouthing the outgoing Mohammad Yunus government, and ingratiatingly praising the incoming government of his one-time ideological rival — Tarique Rahman's BNP — appears par for the course for Mohammed Shahabuddin.

There are personal reasons for this volte-face by Mohammed Shahabuddin. The Bangladeshi presidential term is for five years, with a maximum of two terms possible. However, in the relatively short span of 55 years of independence, there have been 17 Presidents. Only four of them were able to complete full terms. The other 14 were subjected to premature removals, coups, and even assassinations.

The first President of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh (1971-72) and later of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

(Sheikh Hasina's father), was assassinated along with his family members. His successor as Acting President, Syed Nazrul Islam, was also assassinated in mysterious circumstances in what is dubbed the Jail Killing. The third President, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, later carried out an infamous partisan flip-flop by supporting the coup-led government of Mostaq Ahmad. Mostaq Ahmad himself became President, only to be ousted in yet another coup. Mostaq's successor, Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem, took over until he too was removed in a stunning coup by General Ziaur Rahman (father of current Prime Minister Tarique Rahman). The curse on the Bangladeshi presidency continued with the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman in 1981. Thus, the saga of partisan vendetta and presidential flip-flops continued as Bangladesh remained on tenterhooks of instability with an estimated 25 coup attempts. The current President, Mohammed Shahabuddin, needs to look at the fate of his own predecessor, Mohammad Abdul Hamid (the longest-serving President with two terms). The July Revolution in 2024 led to charges of Mohammad Abdul Hamid assaulting protestors, and later his house was vandalised during the Bulldozer Programme. But the lawyer in Mohammed Shahabuddin knows that he must flip-flop and renege on his past partisan affiliation. He was once the coordinator in the case filed over the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He also served as chairman of the Judicial Inquiry Commission set up after the 2001 General Polls to investigate murders, rapes, looting and inhumane activities committed by BNP leaders.

Today, as he has sworn in the Tarique Rahman-led BNP government, Shahabuddin — with over two years of residual presidency still left — must dance to a completely different tune if he does not wish to suffer the fate of 14 out of the 17 Presidents of Bangladesh.

REDISCOVERING THE SOUL'S ETERNAL DIVINE CONNECTION

AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let us pause and remember who we truly are. We are not merely fragile material bodies moving through a temporary world; we are eternal souls inhabiting these bodies for a brief span of time. In the Bhagavad Gita (15.7), Lord Krishna declares that every living being is His eternal fragment. This single truth has profound implications. If we are parts of the Divine, then our natural position is to reconnect with Him. Just as an orphan finds security and belonging when adopted into a loving family, the soul finds fulfilment when it accepts its relationship with God.

Yet, despite this divine invitation, we hesitate. We continue wandering through cycles of birth and death, searching for stability in a world that offers none. Why do we avoid taking shelter in the Supreme when He is omnipotent, omniscient, and ever-present? The answer lies in our misplaced faith. We seek refuge in wealth, status, power, and relationships, hoping they will grant lasting peace. Money has its utility, but it cannot purchase inner tranquillity. Power may command obedience, but it



does not silence anxiety. Even those who appear outwardly successful often struggle inwardly. The modern world, despite its comforts, is restless. Sleepless nights, fearful dreams, and the haunting sense of insecurity remind us that something essential is missing. Lord Krishna provides the solution with clarity. He explains that the soul is sat, chit, and ananda — eternal, conscious, and blissful by nature. Eternity (sat) means that while bodies perish, the soul never dies. In the Gita (2.17), He affirms that the soul is indestructible and cannot be annihilated. Death is merely a transition — a change of garments. Under-

standing this dissolves much of our fear. We are not extinguished at death; we continue our journey. God patiently waits for us to turn towards Him and promises that by taking His shelter (18.62), we can attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.

The second quality, chit, refers to consciousness. We are aware, but our awareness is misdirected. We identify with temporary labels — name, nationality, profession — forgetting that these dissolve with the body. We also misuse our free will, chasing desires under the illusion that unrestricted enjoyment will bring happiness. Instead, we encounter frustration, anger, and wounded pride. Our ego, built on false identity, becomes the source of suffering.

Then comes ananda, bliss. We confuse fleeting pleasures with true joy. Sense indulgence often carries hidden conse-

quences — physical discomfort, mental agitation, or emotional emptiness. What we call enjoyment frequently leaves us more disturbed than satisfied. Real bliss is not dependent on external stimulation; it arises from harmony with our spiritual nature. The turning point begins when we consciously accept: "I am a soul, a part of God." With this understanding, free will is used wisely. We cultivate remembrance of the Divine through prayer, mantra, sacred study, and contemplation. The senses, once restless and outward-driven, become disciplined and purposeful. The mind, trained through practice and detachment, gradually rests in divine awareness.

As this connection deepens, insecurity fades. Guidance begins to flow from within, illuminating decisions and correcting missteps. Life becomes anchored in dharma. One feels protected — not by circumstance, but by divine presence. This is the beginning of jeevan mukti — liberation even while living. The journey is gradual, yet transformative. Soul consciousness reshapes priorities, instils peace, and awakens hope for the ultimate destination: a spiritual existence beyond death, in eternal communion with the Divine.

India's ascent and Congress culture of self-flagellation

Balbir Punj

Even as the world begins to acknowledge India's rise as an economic, digital, and diplomatic power, sections of its own political class seem gripped by an impulse to self-flagellate — a compulsive urge to diminish, discredit, and deconstruct national achievements before a global audience. Political frustration and hate are now refashioned as politics.

This sordid phenomenon was starkly visible during the recently concluded five-day (Feb 16-20, 2026) 'AI Impact Summit 2026' held in New Delhi — an event that was neither routine nor ceremonial, but one that signified India's arrival as a principal stakeholder in the global technological order.

Under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, the Congress ecosystem chose to transform a global diplomatic and technological congregation into a theatre of ridicule and derision, for itself and the country.

The now-infamous "shirtless protest" orchestrated by members of the Congress youth wing within

the precincts of Bharat Mandapam was not an act of democratic dissent in any meaningful constitutional sense. Rather, it was an exhibition of built-in hostility and hatred towards

Prime Minister Modi, which turned into an act that sought to undermine India's global standing.

This sordid drama was not staged by some local Congressmen on their own. It obviously had support from the top. Rahul expressed support for the Youth Congress protest, describing the participants as "Babbarsher" (lion-hearted) on February 24. However, to understand the deeper civilisational implications of this conduct, one must turn to a historical analogy nearly a century old.

In 1927, American author Katherine Mayo published 'Mother India', a text that purported to offer a sociological portrait of Indian civilisation. In reality, the book assembled selectively negative data — child marriage, sanitation deficits, caste discrimination — into a sweeping indictment of India's moral and institutional capacity for self-governance. Its implicit argument was

clear: a society so afflicted by internal pathologies was unfit for political independence.

Writing in Young India on 15 September 1927, Mahatma Gandhi famously dismissed the work as a "drain inspector's report". This phrase was not a rhetorical flourish but a methodological critique. Gandhi did not deny the existence of social problems within Indian society; rather, he objected to their selective amplification and colonial framing as evidence of civilisational inferiority.

Gandhi's approach was deeply rooted in a vital political insight: true internal reform must come from within a civilisation itself, rather than being exploited by external or domestic forces to undermine its right to self-determination. The colonial authorities aimed to twist India's social issues into moral justifications for imperial domination.

Today, the political formation that self-claimed genealogical and ideological descent from Gandhi's legacy — the Congress leadership centred around Rahul Gandhi — appears increasingly inclined to replicate the

very epistemic framework that Mahatma Gandhi sought to dismantle.

The controversy involving Galgotias University at the AI Summit — wherein an allegedly Chinese-manufactured robotic dog was displayed as an indigenous innovation — was swiftly extrapolated by Rahul Gandhi into a sweeping denunciation of the summit as a "disorganised PR spectacle" in which Indian data was ostensibly being commodified.

The resemblance to Mayo's methodological strategy is hard to ignore. In both cases, episodic shortcomings are generalised into systemic incapacity; isolated institutional lapses are reframed as civilisational deficiencies.

While Mayo's narrative served colonial interests by portraying India as unfit for self-rule, contemporary political rhetoric risks portraying India as unprepared for technological leadership in the emerging digital order.

This is hardly unprecedented. During the 2020 visit of then United States President Donald Trump, sections of the anti-CAA lobby mo-

bilised protests that escalated into violence in parts of Delhi, thereby projecting an image of internal discord before an international audience. The parallels with the present moment are instructive: in both instances, domestic political contestation was internationalised in ways that risked compromising India's strategic narrative.

It is instructive, in this regard, to recall the exemplary conduct displayed in 1994 when Pakistan sought to internationalise the Kashmir issue at the United Nations Human Rights Commission through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao rose above partisan considerations and entrusted the leadership of India's delegation in Geneva to Opposition leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The resulting diplomatic intervention successfully neutralised Pakistan's resolution, securing support even from countries such as China and Iran. The episode remains a testament to a political culture in which national interest superseded party rivalry.

In contemporary India, however, that culture appears increasingly attenuated. The AI Impact Summit, hosted at Bharat Mandapam, attracted global technology leaders from companies such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, OpenAI, and Anthropic, alongside heads of state including Emmanuel Macron.

Hotel tariffs across Delhi surged dramatically during the summit — five-star accommodations reportedly exceeding ₹1 lakh per night — reflecting both the scale of participation and the economic opportunities generated by such international engagements.

The summit culminated in the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by nearly ninety countries and international organisations, emphasising the democratic diffusion of AI resources, secure system development, and equitable access to technological innovation. Investment pledges exceeding \$250 billion for infrastructure and \$20 billion for deep-tech venture capital further underscored global confidence in India's digital trajectory.
