

TRAGIC LOSS OF LIVES

Once again, Jammu's hilly roads and rickety fleet of buses have led to the death of at least 21 people. Prima facie, it is clear that the bus was overcrowded and developed fault as it was moving from Ushampur to ramnagar – a fully hilly area. The driver it seems lost control over and the vehicle fell downhill about 100 meters. The impact of the fall was so severe that extricating bodies and the injured was quite difficult. The bus was mangled while crushing an auto rickshaw under its weight. One shudders to think of the toll had the Army convoy not been passing through the site of the accident. Why the government is not paying attention to the killer roads of Jammu's hills? The region tops in the fatal accidents and yet the governments in Kashmir and Delhi seem to be in no haste to address the burning issue. Most urgently why the overcrowded buses are allowed to plkay and why there is no regular check of fitness for the public vehicles

JHALMURI AND PM MODI

Jhalmuri, the common roadside snack eaten in West Bengal and parts of Bihar has become famous thanks to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who during his Bengal visit for election campaign, ate jhalmuri from a roadside shack and the video of the incident went viral on social media - clocking over 100 million views in 24 hours of being posted on Instagram, and touching 90 million mark on Facebook. The common snack made with seasoned rice puffs with salad vegetables and a dash of pungent mustard oil has aroused global curiosity with Google searches for "Jhalmuri" spiking to their highest levels in 22 years. This is the power of the social media and a legend of a leader who has the pulse on the common man's heartbeat.

Women's Reservation Bill: A historic opportunity lost

Anoop Bose

On April 17, 2026, "a date which will live in infamy", the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, seeking to reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in an expanded Lok Sabha and State Assemblies and facilitate delimitation of constituencies, nosedived in the Lok Sabha and crashed even before taking off into self-sustained growth. Of the 528 members present in the House, 298 voted in favour of the Bill and 230 opposed it, resulting in the Bill failing to clear the decisive hurdle of attaining the two-thirds majority (popularly termed as the "special majority") required for a Constitutional Amendment Bill to clear the House, in terms of the affirmative procedure mandated by Article 368 of the Constitution of India. Our most respected and revered Prime Minister Narendra Modi, valiantly leading the charge of the government, had sought to allay a lurking fear of the Opposition parties regarding inequitable representation of Southern States and had personally guaranteed that no injustice would be done to the southern states with the increase in seats in the Lok Sabha. Modi had thundered in ringing tones on the floor of the Lok Sabha, "Let all of us not miss this important opportunity to give reservation to women. I have come to appeal to you - do not see this from a political lens, this is in the national interest". The Union Home Minister Amit Shah (affectionately known as "Mota Bhai"), in his characteristic style, had also assured the House that the current representation of southern states would be preserved, or increased marginally, once the seats in the Lok Sabha were increased from the current 543 to roughly 816.

Yet, the Bill, despite its avowed merits, faced a wholly unjustified defeat because of the machinations of the opposition parties led by Rahul Gandhi, resplendent in his signature white T shirt, whose grasp of and commitment to the Constitution (his great grandfather, the versatile Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru, was one of the principal architects of the Constitution and authored the pivotal "Objectives Resolution" on 13th December, 1946, which laid the philosophical foundation of the Constitution, and chaired key committees like the Union Constitution Committee) leaves much to be desired and has yet to pass the acid test. It is indeed a lamentable travesty of fate that Rahul Gandhi is the great grandson of the brave and resilient first and only Lady Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi who was aptly hailed as "Maa Durga" by the prodigious former Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee in the very same Lok Sabha after India's spectacular victory over Pakistan in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War as well as the formidable Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray in an interview published in the Shiv Sena mouthpiece Samana on 19th October, 2011.

In his lacklustre speech, full of polemics but shorn of substance and conviction, Rahul fondly remembered his "Dadi", but conveniently strayed away from the very subject matter of an important constitutional debate and raised wholly extraneous, frivolous and irrelevant pleas. Rahul ranted, "There is a hidden power, massive, extremely strong, but completely hidden. And that power, that force, that doesn't show itself, but is there, knows the entire history of the magician, it knows every single detail about the magician from when he first came into politics, till when he arrived as Prime Minister. The truth is, the magician has been caught. The magician of Balakot, the magician of Demonetisation, the magician of Sindoor has suddenly got caught, why?..."

What happened was, the last session of Parliament completely destroyed the structure because a deal was signed with the United States that under no circumstances would have been signed by any Prime Minister of this country, unless he was compromised." Reprehensively, apart from ridiculing, disparaging and denigrating Modi sarcastically as a "magician" and mockingly assailing the Indo-US trade

deal (apparently blissfully ignorant of the fact that Nehru had fostered a warm and cordial "Nehru-Kennedy spirit" and the US had promptly come to the aid of an embattled and encircled India after the Chinese Dragon (with whom the Gandhis have dishonourably struck a secret pact!) tossed the 1955 Bandung Declaration aside, treacherously stabbed Nehru in the back and unleashed upon India a devastating war on 20th October, 1962, and induced China to declare a unilateral ceasefire on 21st November, 1962 and cede considerable territory it had forcibly captured in Arunachal Pradesh!), Rahul has unpatriotically roped in our brave armed forces into the debate and has sought to portray them in a very poor light by raising the spectre of Balakot and Sindoor! Surprisingly, even an astute, enlightened and erudite parliamentarian like the charismatic Shashi Tharoor, who is known as an indefatigable feminist and who is feted, admired and adored by women the world over virtually a la the Italian born actor and dancer Rudolf Valentino (popularly known as the "The Sheik of Araby"), scrupulously chose to tow his party line virtually throwing all his lofty ideals about women's rights and empowerment literally to the wind! The hopes and dreams of over 60 crore Indian women have been rudely dashed to the ground, and the just and worthy cause of greater parliamentary representation for women has been consigned to the freezer locker of history!

In a powerful, hard hitting special televised address to the nation at 8.30 pm on 18th April, 2026, Modi, said, "Today, every citizen of India can see how the rise of women's power has been halted and how their dreams have been brutally crushed. Despite our best efforts, we could not succeed. The Women's Reservation Bill could not be amended, and for this, I sincerely apologize to all mothers and sisters." He then launched an all-out scathing attack on the opposition saying that the opposition had committed "bhroon hatya" ("female foeticide") of this honest endeavour by defeating the

women's quota bill. He further went on to assert without mincing words, "What happened in Parliament was not just desk thumping, but an attack on the dignity and self-respect of women. A woman may forget many things, but she never forgets her insult. The conduct of the Congress and its allies in Parliament will remain in the minds of women across the country."

Retracing the pages of our chequered history, Swami Vivekananda, a staunch advocate of the cause of women, had proudly proclaimed on 21st January, 1895, "Our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes that we now say: 'The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.'" Again, in May, 1896, he had asserted, "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing." Likewise, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, was a firm believer in women's empowerment. He had remarked at the All India Women's Conference on 23rd December, 1936, "When a woman, whom we call abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful." We are indeed proud of our women parliamentarians and the names of some of them like Radhabai Subbarao, Rukmini Devi Arundale, Anne Mascarene, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Vijaya Raje Scindia, Sucheta Kripalani, Sheila Dikshit, Sushma Swaraj and Geeta Mukherjee, read like a veritable roll of honour in the glorious saga of Indian politics.

I am highly emboldened to conclude with the invigorating words of our national poet and Nobel laureate, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, "For we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself."

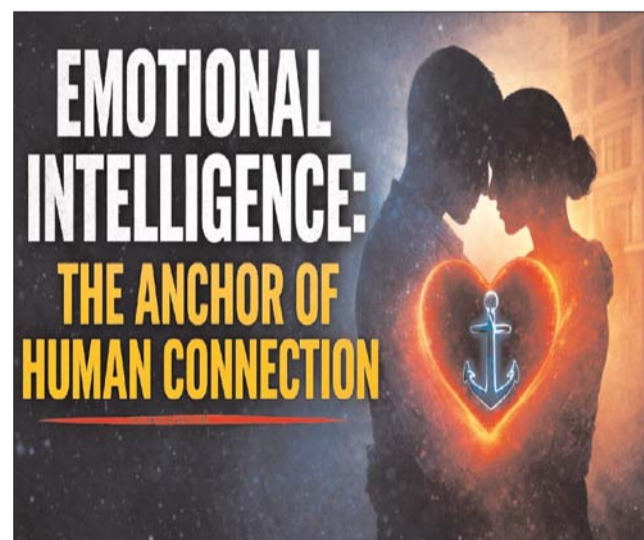
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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: THE ANCHOR OF HUMAN CONNECTION

Sakshi Sethi

In an era marked by volatility and constant uncertainty, emotional intelligence has become less of a soft skill and more of a necessity. Global tensions, such as the ongoing conflict in West Asia, have far-reaching economic and psychological consequences, often filtering into everyday life. While such events are beyond individual control, the way people process and respond to them is not. This is where emotional intelligence—understood as the ability to recognise, manage and express emotions judiciously—assumes critical importance. It shapes the tone of relationships, deepens empathy, and sustains mutual respect.

The present climate of anxiety, driven by economic uncertainty and an unrelenting stream of distressing news, has heightened emotional vulnerability. When left unchecked, these emotions can spill into personal and professional relationships, magnifying minor disagreements into serious conflicts. Emotional intelligence provides a safeguard against this erosion. At its foundation lies self-awareness—the capacity to identify one's emotional state and understand how it influences behaviour. Recognising feelings of frustration, fear or



fatigue allows individuals to prevent them from distorting interactions with others.

Closely linked to this is self-regulation, the discipline of managing emotional responses. Emotionally intelligent individuals tend to resist impulsive reactions, choosing instead to pause, reflect and respond thoughtfully. This deliberate restraint, often described as the "power of the pause," helps de-escalate tension and fosters a more balanced environment. In

both personal and professional spaces, such composure can make the difference between conflict and resolution.

Empathy, another cornerstone of emotional intelligence, plays a vital role in strengthening relationships. The ability to understand and share another person's perspective builds trust and emotional closeness. However, empathy must remain balanced. When it becomes excessive or misplaced, it risks enabling unhealthy behaviour or avoiding necessary truths. Effective communication is deeply intertwined with emotional intelligence. It is not limited to articulate expression but extends to attentive and mindful listening. Many conflicts arise not from fundamental disagreements but from misunderstandings and unspoken expectations. When people feel genuinely heard and acknowledged, relationships naturally grow

stronger.

Within families, emotional intelligence acts as an anchor of stability. Children, in particular, are sensitive to the emotional climate around them. Similarly, in professional settings, emotional intelligence has emerged as a defining leadership trait. Beyond individual relationships, emotional intelligence influences how people engage with society at large. In times marked by division and conflict, the ability to approach differences with understanding rather than hostility becomes invaluable. It encourages respect for diverse viewpoints.

Importantly, emotional intelligence is not innate; it requires conscious cultivation. Practices such as mindful listening, reflection, gratitude and presence in conversations can gradually strengthen this capacity. In an unpredictable world, intellectual ability alone is insufficient. It is emotional intelligence that sustains relationships, nurtures trust and anchors individuals amid uncertainty. Ultimately, when external stability falters, it is the depth and quality of human connections—shaped by emotional awareness—that provide enduring strength.

(The writer is an educator and a councillor; Views presented are personal.)

Re-energising Bureaucracy for Viksit Bharat

Amitabh Ranjan

As India pushes aggressively toward the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, the dominant conversation has been on energy sovereignty, digital public infrastructure and economic growth trajectories. However, under these visible drivers lies a less glamorous, yet decisive factor: the capability of our bureaucracy to deliver outcomes at scale.

Recent governance challenges, from Covid-19 containment to rapid digitalisation, have made one thing clear: public policy without administrative capacity to implement is a weak proposition. This is where Mission Karmayogi, the Government of India's flagship civil services initiative, becomes crucial.

For a long time, capacity building in the government sector was viewed as a 'Compliance Theatre'. Training programmes were episodic, often detached from actual job requirements and focused more on information awareness rather than skill development. The result was a foregone conclusion. Officials who were trained but not necessarily

transformed.

Mission Karmayogi seeks to change this notion. Its essence is simple but powerful: from rule-based training to competency-driven, role-based learning. Instead of asking what a civil servant knows, the ecosystem focuses on what s/he can actually do. This includes not only domain knowledge but also behavioural capabilities like problem solving, collaboration, communication, empathy, etc., skills which are indispensable in a citizen-centric governance set-up.

The iGOT-Karmayogi platform has operationalised this change. As a digital learning ecosystem, it has revolutionised anytime, anywhere learning. The real innovation, however, lies in linking learning with performance. Training is no longer a box to be ticked. It is tied to appraisals, outcomes and service delivery improvements.

This is a huge shift from the past. Probably for the first time, capacity building is being ingrained into the DNA of governance rather than being treated as an external addition. Early signals are heart-warming.

Participation levels have skyrocketed, ministries and departments are aligning training with functional necessities, and a gradual cultural shift is now obvious. The bureaucracy is beginning to move away from a compliance mind-set toward a learning mind-set. This shift, though subtle, may prove to be transformational.

The timing of these reforms is crucial. India's governance ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex. Emerging technologies and AI disruptions, climate change, cybersecurity threats and global economic volatility are no longer abstract concerns. They are immediate administrative challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the strengths of India's civil services and the need for continuous, structured upskilling. Mission Karmayogi acknowledges that governance today requires more than technical expertise. It requires innovation. And above all, it requires a growth mind-set, and not a fixed mind-set, that is open to continuous learning.

More importantly, the reform

push is not limited to the higher bureaucracy. Initiatives like National Learning Week and Sadhana Saptah are extending this culture of capacity building to states, districts, municipalities and panchayats i.e. addressing the grassroots public administration and challenges. This decentralised approach is critical because India's development outcomes are ultimately determined at the last mile. This initiative is now democratising the training ecosystem in India: "Training for All", available from chairmen to linemen.

However, the reform journey is far from complete. One significant threat is the dilution of training quality. As the number of courses expands, there is a real danger of falling back to a checklist approach unless the content is rigorously curated and updated. Quantity must not come at the cost of quality.

Another sore point is the digital divide. Platforms like iGOT promise inclusivity, but uneven access to connectivity and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural India, may limit their impact. Bridging this gap is necessary if the reform is to

achieve relevance across India.

But probably the toughest challenge is institutional inertia. Systems can be rebooted quickly, but not mindsets. Embedding a culture of continuous lifelong learning asks for sustained leadership push, rewards and incentives.

So, what is the way forward? Firstly, capacity building must be made outcome-oriented. Training programmes should be directly linked to measurable improvements in governance like efficient public service delivery, better grievance redressal and enhanced citizen satisfaction. Public dashboards and transparent metrics can help push accountability.

Secondly, technology must be leveraged more strategically. AI-driven analytics can identify skill gaps and create personalised learning pathways for officers, ensuring that training remains relevant in a rapidly evolving ecosystem.

Thirdly, states and local bodies must be equal partners. Governance in India is federal in nature and capacity-building frameworks must reflect that reality. Investing in

grassroots administrative capability is now not an option but mandatory for inclusive development.

Finally, learning must be incentivised. Career progression, recognition and peer-learning platforms can help institutionalise continuous capacity-enhancement within the civil services. At its core, Mission Karmayogi is not just a training initiative; it is a huge governance reform. It recognises the fact that strong institutions are created on capable individuals and that administrative excellence is the foundation of national development. India's aspiration to become Viksit Bharat by 2047 is bold, but it is achievable.

The real test lies not in framing policies but in implementing them effectively on the ground. If Mission Karmayogi succeeds in sustaining momentum and deepening its impact, it could quietly become one of the most consequential reforms of our time.

(In conclusion, Viksit Bharat would not be defined only by what India builds, but by how effectively and efficiently it governs.)