

END OF A SOFT STATE

The Narendra Modi government has done a great favour to the coming generations by working on erasing the soft state image of the country. The government is dealing with issues which had been managed like festering wounds for decades by different governments. These problems had potential of exploding and going beyond control and having a long-term impact on India's security and the future. The illegal immigrants just walked from across the borders to be embraced by vote-hungry parties; terrorists roamed around freely and almost gas lighting their victims. The government stopped all this with a firm policy and keeping nation's interest uppermost on their agenda. One of these problems is the illegal immigration from Bangladesh which has been around for decades. Though, initially the migrants might have come in search of greener pastures but there were reasons enough to believe that this phenomenon was being used by India's enemies to foster their plan of changing India's demography and harm the country. Finally, the Modi government has not only launched a campaign to send back illegal immigrants and secure India's borders, it has also decided to set up a high-level committee to assess extent of "artificial" demographic changes due to illegal immigration and other unnatural causes. The Committee can also recommend need for a law to deal with this problem in the future.

JUDGE GIRIBALA

Bhopal's former judge Giribala Singh badmouthing her dead daughter-in-law Twisha Sharma on the TV sent shockwaves across the country. Twisha's death at her matrimonial home within 6 months of her marriage constitutes dowry death. People were aghast at the audacity of this woman to be speaking so brazenly about a young woman who died in her house. The entire episode once again exposed how people in position can manipulate the system in their favour. The woman was not only granted anticipatory bail despite strong evidence against her but she was left alone to temper with evidences and scene of crime. It's therefore a relief that she has finally been arrested by the CBI after the court cancelled her anticipatory bail.

Ashok K Mehta

Speaking on the anniversary of the nuclear tests conducted in defiance of US warnings, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "India will not bow down to anyone", heralding the successful execution of its strategic autonomy, though its evolution has seen more downs than ups, especially during the turbulent Trumpian era. Punitive tariffs and multiple sanctions, along with waivers on Russian military platforms, Russian oil, and Chabahar Port, have taken their toll. During the recent BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar criticised unilateral non-UN sanctions on India, calling them "unjustified", even as Delhi awaited waivers on Chabahar and Russian oil. Later at the conference, he noted the unnecessary resort to unilateral coercive measures and sanctions, which are inconsistent with international law and the UN Charter. These measures "disproportionately affect developing countries". This is perhaps the first time such comments have been

made - akin to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Strategic autonomy has been bruised notwithstanding the slew of deals with the EU and France. The purchase of 36 Rafale fighters in 2016, subsequent contracts for 18 naval versions, and the rejection of US, Russian, European, and Swedish offers were seen as a combination of high technology and, more importantly, trust. Trump's coercive tariffs and warnings over de-dollarisation in BRICS have made India compliant. But the narrative worsens. A US submarine sinking an Iranian naval ship, IRIS Dena, in the Indian Ocean after it returned from the Indian Fleet Review 2026 dented India's image as a net security provider.

"Strategic" is perhaps the most overused adjective in the diplomatic lexicon. It is attached to "restraint", "patience", "sovereignty", and "national interest". The word "partnership" is variable, dynamic, and transactional. But "strategic autonomy" — hedging or balancing relationships through sovereign choices — has endured. It originates from non-alignment adopted after independence,

India eyes Amphibians for coastal watch

Sanjay Singh

The description of India as a vast Himalayan sub-continent overshadows India's claim as being the world's second-largest peninsula, with the Tropic of Cancer bisecting the country into two equal halves. Peninsular India, surrounded by the Arabian Sea to the west, the Indian Ocean to the south, and the Bay of Bengal to the east, has a formidable maritime boundary running unbroken for 7,500 kms. The geostrategic importance of India's peninsular boundary becomes critical in light of her maritime neighbours - the Maldives and Pakistan to the west, and Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka to the east and south. The archipelagos of Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands further define her position as a maritime nation.

Till now, the peninsular location of India has protected it from misadventures by unfriendly neighbours. But history does not give any advance notice of a strategic paradigm shift.

The strategic aspect of India's maritime dream is comprehensively captured in India's Maritime Doctrine 2025, authored by the Indian Navy, while the economic aspect is covered by the Maritime Vision 2030 released by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. The first document highlights the ever-lurking threats in waters within India's sovereign zones and beyond, and the need for extensive and intensive patrolling. The second document underlines the need to fully exploit the economic benefits of our maritime assets and the steps necessary to secure our Blue Economy dream.

In light of recent political developments in the Gulf that have altered the global order, India is faced with new realities regarding the nature and direction of hidden threats. It is now commonly accepted that the costs of land wars may far outweigh the gains. The loss of civilian lives, damage to schools and hospitals, and the cost of maintaining and feeding a huge army in peacetime amount to self-goals. Among the newer and more cost-effective ways to cripple an enemy would be selec-

tive attacks on logistics and the choking of supply lines, leading to the depletion of agricultural and industrial inputs. Moving away from the era of land wars, such attacks are likely to be launched from the sea, air, land, or through a combination of all three.

Securing India's maritime dreams will require a different kind of wings in the air and hulls in the water. Before India can become Atmanirbhar in the range of equipment required to safeguard its maritime boundaries, it must first identify its precise requirements and create a critical inventory capable of responding to emergencies. The changing nature of warfare is also likely to render huge inventories of traditional military hardware obsolete. Can India's manufacturing infrastructure — both public and private - along with its defence research capabilities, address these emerging needs?

The changing nature of warfare also demands a reassessment of how we perceive threats. We need to clearly pinpoint and assign responsibility for guarding India's maritime interests. Is it the responsibility of the state police in coastal states, the Indian Coast Guard, or the Indian Navy? The seas on both sides of the Indian peninsula are replete with unidentified, unregulated, and unregistered vessels sailing casually. These may well be the prying eyes and spying ears of hostile forces.

The Indian Coast Guard, the guardians of our coastline and the first line of coastal defence, has performed an exemplary role in patrolling the seas. It can claim credit for several daring rescue and reconnaissance missions. Hundreds of distress calls are made to the Coast Guard every week, and it is expected to respond each time.

This brings us to the moot point: what equipment do we currently possess that can effectively meet the challenges along our maritime borders? Of course, we can create more road access to the coast and along the coastline, or build new airports and heliports. However, roads and airports require land acquisition and often result in environmental degradation through the depletion of arable land and green cover. Airports can also become vul-

nerable targets, easily crippled by a well-directed attack. Helicopters are limited by their range and speed. Speedboats? Pirates may possess faster vessels equipped with superior avionics and firepower.

Pirates have mastered the art of deception by flying misleading flags and even waving casually at our coast guards, fully aware that Coast Guard Dornier aircraft cannot land on water and are not weaponised. At best, they can alert nearby vessels, but reaching the location may take considerable time. How do we rescue naval crews in response to an SOS from a stranded vessel in the high seas? Or respond swiftly to distress calls from India's offshore oil rigs? History has repeatedly demonstrated the catastrophic cost of delays in reaching burning oil rigs despite timely SOS signals.

Disasters have also occurred in the Himalayas - avalanches, glacial lake outbursts, and earthquakes. Is there a vehicle capable of rapid rescue and evacuation in such conditions? The answer lies in the emergency services provided by amphibian aircraft. They can conduct search, rescue, and evacuation operations on virtually any surface, including alpine glaciers. They fly faster than helicopters, possess greater range, can operate in adverse weather, and carry heavier payloads.

Today, specialised amphibians perform highly diverse roles. Fire-retardant water scoopers can collect 6,000 litres of water in just 12 seconds while in motion, dump the load instantly, reload within minutes, and repeat the process. As forests in Kumaon continue to burn, India still appears to lack a robust solution. Amphibians can also be modified into air ambulances equipped with operating theatres and ICUs — effectively becoming flying hospitals. Amphibians can be weaponised to land alongside pirate vessels unexpectedly and identify illegal, unregulated, or falsely registered ships. As India strengthens its domestic borders, the coastline increasingly becomes the preferred route for unauthorised entry. One only has to recall how Ajmal Kasab and his associates used the sea route to reach Mumbai and enter the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel.

India's maritime responsibility also ex-

tends to disaster mitigation and regional humanitarian assistance. India aspires to be regarded as the most dependable neighbour in the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea during natural disasters and crises. This requires the capability to deliver relief rapidly. Amphibian-enabled rapid response systems for tsunamis, floods, and volcanic eruptions would strengthen India's diplomatic standing as a soft power. The world remembers the first responder to a disaster; others are relegated to footnotes. One of the world's most dramatic rescue missions, undertaken by the USAF and the US Marines in 1956 under "Project Mag-nate", involved rescuing six stranded scientists and crew members after an air crash deep in Antarctica in sub-zero temperatures. With only a few hours available for survival, the amphibian aircraft flew hundreds of miles in inclement weather, located the wreckage, and landed on ice when the sea proved too rough. All six survivors were rescued and flown to safety. Does India possess an amphibian aircraft with such capabilities? Hundreds of Himalayan lakes could be accessed using such aircraft, whether requiring landings on ice, water, or makeshift dirt tracks.

A maritime economy fundamentally uses water as a resource for mobility, economic value creation, livelihoods, and sustenance. More than 18 per cent of India's population lives in 72 districts situated along the coastline across nine states. These regions include fishing communities, coconut growers, rice and cashew farmers, and skilled workers engaged in tourism, healthcare, and wellness industries.

With coastal tourism emerging as one of the fastest-growing sectors for sustainable employment, Maritime India is strongly positioned to become a major beneficiary of India's growth story. India is blessed with eighteen "Blue Flag" certified beaches distributed across the nine coastal states, awaiting development. However, private-sector investment will materialise only with reliable all-weather connectivity. Many of these beach destinations remain pristine and hold enormous development potential.

AHANKAR: THE GREATEST BARRIER BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

We should all be peaceful, 'sukhi' (happy), and satisfied. Unfortunately, we fail to achieve this dream state. Aren't we small, truly helpless, and largely ignorant? We are, but we do not accept this reality due to 'ahankar' (false ego). What is this 'ahankar'? It is a faculty given to us to realise that we exist and have a separate identity. In brief, ahankar means that I am; I exist. Unfortunately, we falsely believe that we are great because of whatever opulences we possess, such as wealth, power, etc. But these are temporary possessions earned through good karmaphalas (results of past pious deeds). They do not give peace, sukha, or satisfaction - what we constantly seek and miss.

It is time to seek an entity who can grant all these and is willing to accept us as well. As a matter of fact, God is willing to help all of us. His only condition is that we give up ahankar and sincerely take His shelter. God then takes charge and begins to micromanage the life of the surrendered soul. This includes reformations, especially of 'svabhava' (nature), which is a person's worst enemy. Aren't we helplessly lustful and greedy? As



improvements occur, God begins to empower the willing soul in a manner that suits the individual. For example, my Lord has empowered me to write spiritual texts.

With time, one becomes capable of accomplishing great tasks, just as Arjuna did in the Mahabharata war. Prior to that, Lord

Krishna had assured Arjuna about the outcome of the war; Arjuna merely had to become a 'nimitta' (instrument) of God, rise, and gain fame. (11.33) It was a foregone conclusion because God was the 'karta' (doer) in that case.

We also have Hanumanji's example of

how one should act as a 'nimitta'. Upon his return from Lanka, having successfully accomplished his mission, Lord Ramachandra asked him, "How did you accomplish the stupendous task of burning Lanka, which was protected by Ravana?" Hanumanji replied, "O Raghunathji! It is all due to You; there is no greatness on my part." (Shri Ramcharitmanas, Sundarkanda 32) Hanumanji understood that it became possible only because of empowerment by his Lord. Unfortunately, we are not that wise; we try to take credit despite the warning given by Lord Krishna: "Whatever you do; whatever you eat; whatever offering you make; whatever you give in charity; whatever austerities you perform, do that as an offering to Me." (9.27)

We become puffed up with success, forgetting that everything was possible only through God's empowerment, as Hanumanji realised. This satisfies Ahankar and distances us from God. Yet not everyone makes this mistake; some remain humble. Such souls progressively become peaceful, sukhi, and satisfied under God's protection. Gradually, they attain the dream state of 'jeevan mukta' (liberated while living in a material body). Many even qualify for liberation, which God is pleased to grant.

India's strategic autonomy needs a reset

made - akin to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Strategic autonomy has been bruised notwithstanding the slew of deals with the EU and France. The purchase of 36 Rafale fighters in 2016, subsequent contracts for 18 naval versions, and the rejection of US, Russian, European, and Swedish offers were seen as a combination of high technology and, more importantly, trust. Trump's coercive tariffs and warnings over de-dollarisation in BRICS have made India compliant. But the narrative worsens. A US submarine sinking an Iranian naval ship, IRIS Dena, in the Indian Ocean after it returned from the Indian Fleet Review 2026 dented India's image as a net security provider.

"Strategic" is perhaps the most overused adjective in the diplomatic lexicon. It is attached to "restraint", "patience", "sovereignty", and "national interest". The word "partnership" is variable, dynamic, and transactional. But "strategic autonomy" — hedging or balancing relationships through sovereign choices — has endured. It originates from non-alignment adopted after independence,

when New Delhi punched far above its weight. With adversarial relations with the US intensifying, India was gradually pulled towards the Soviet Union. Confronted with simultaneous threats from Pakistan, China, and the US in 1971, India was compelled to sign the first formal Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the USSR. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi insisted that the phrase "India is a non-aligned country" be inserted into the treaty, although it functioned de facto as an alliance.

India has evolved from non-alignment to multi-alignment, multi-engagement, and multipolarity, culminating in strategic autonomy, whose utility appears to be diminishing in a disrupted global order. Since no formal national security policy or strategy documents have been produced, strategic autonomy remains an immaculate conception, despite six drafts reportedly gathering dust. With India's oldest ally, Russia, the relationship is described as "Special, Privileged and Strategic". The partnership with the US has evolved from an "Estranged Democracy" into a "Comprehensive, Global and Strategic" partnership. Relations with China have

fluctuated between war and border skirmishes, signifying deep mistrust. The EU is a more recent entrant into the strategic club, though largely in trade and commerce. Relations with Vietnam were elevated to an "Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" during the recent visit of President To Lam.

Lately, there has been intense debate regarding strategic autonomy and India's graded strategic relations with other nations, many of which have undergone qualitative upgrades. Strategic autonomy is a dynamic policy that requires periodic recalibration in line with contemporary geopolitics and geo-economics. The recent summit between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump in Beijing confirmed a shift in the US strategic approach towards China — from rivalry and competition towards "stable and respectful relations". Diplomatic vocabulary acquired a new phrase from Xi: "constructive strategic stability", replacing the Biden-era term "strategic competition". Trump went further in a Fox News interview, describing the meeting as resembling a "G2", recalling earlier remarks made

by President Obama that had caused consternation. Trump displayed unusual restraint and respect towards Xi, praising his leadership extensively. The subsequent Xi-Putin summit was described as a meeting between "dear friends" in an "everlasting strategic partnership". In both cases, Xi conceded little to either Trump or Putin. These developments call for a reassessment of India's strategic autonomy.

At the recent Chennai conference, the majority opinion supported the establishment's approach, calling it "pragmatic". The opposing view argued that the government had deferred excessively to Trump, beginning with Modi's February 2025 visit. Regarding the two kinetic assaults on Iran, critics argued that India had effectively taken sides even before the conflict began. It appeared aligned with the US and Israel, particularly after Modi addressed the Knesset 48 hours before the Iranian Supreme Leader was assassinated in an Israeli precision strike. Apparently, both US and Indian intelligence agencies believed the conflict would end swiftly. Delhi remained silent, despite Modi's earlier repeated assertion that

"this is not an era of war" and that only a political solution could resolve conflicts. India's attempt to balance strategic relations with the US, Russia, China, Israel, the EU, and Vietnam has resulted in too many competing priorities, with its relationship with Israel increasingly becoming a liability among Global South nations.

Some of India's recent diplomatic difficulties might have been avoided with more skillful handling of Trump's claim that the US facilitated the ceasefire during Operation Sindoor, which was not entirely untrue. Acknowledging this would not necessarily have undermined strategic autonomy. India's insistence that there was no third-party mediation appears

difficult to sustain, given that in nearly every crisis since 1971 the US has played a role. Pakistan, meanwhile, managed its diplomacy skillfully, transforming its image from a state sponsor of terrorism into that of a responsible mediator in conflict resolution.

Pakistan can now claim to have helped facilitate the impending ceasefire between the US and Iran, in which Israel is conspicuously absent.