

LADAKH
BREAKTHROUGH

The talks between the Ladakhi representative and the Union Ministry of Home Affairs seems to have gone well recently. This is a significant breakthrough given that there was a stalemate and the shadow of violent protests of September cast a shadow over the Delhi-Leh relations. The government has been working on thrashing a solution and creation of more districts is one of the confidence building measures taken recently. The meeting had all the stakeholders –MHA officials forming the political dialogue sub-committee, representatives of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), besides former and sitting Members of Parliament from the UT. So far it's clear that the government is ready to accommodate aspirations of the people of Ladakh and restructure political powers to their liking within the constitutional framework. The demand for statehood is untenable for reasons known to all. Ladakh has to be a special case given its unique topography, ecology and developmental challenges; so it also deserve a customized political package.

BAGGAGE ISSUES

The baggage of the Hajj pilgrims returning to Kashmir is safe and has to be delivered later for technical reasons that the airlines have explained in their public announcement. It calls for patience and cooperation and not being too demanding as it pertain to security of the nation and passengers. Even the top politicians have jumped in and raised demands for repatriation of the Hajjis' luggage. The weight restrictions are often imposed for specific reasons, primarily for safe landing and optimization of the flying capacity. At times the repairs of the airport also lead to restrictions on the weight carrying capacity of the airplanes. The Hajj pilgrims often carry too much load as they bring goodies and sacred relics from the Hajj. Handling heavy luggage poses a challenge to the airlines and the airports; people can cooperate by understanding the situation and keeping calm.

Debarati Dhar

Walk through any public space today and the scene is the same. Airports, metro stations, university corridors, parks — everywhere, people are locked into glowing screens, thumbs moving in that familiar, almost hypnotic rhythm. Listen closely to the audio bleeding from nearby earphones and you will not just hear music. You will hear voices — urgent, relentless, and opinionated — telling you exactly how to feel about the world. We have become addicted to a new kind of dopamine: the constant consumption of other people's opinions.

As someone who studies communication in the context of democratic participation, I have watched this shift unfold with growing concern. This is not simply a change in political behaviour. It represents a fundamental transformation in how public discourse operates — and what it is doing to our capacity for independent thought. For years, the central anxiety in media studies was the digital divide: the gap between those with ac-

cess to information and those without. That problem has effectively inverted. Today, we are not starved of information. We are drowning in it. And paradoxically, greater access has not produced more thoughtful citizens. It has produced more dependent ones. For decades, mass communication was shaped by what Kurt Lewin called Gatekeeping Theory — the idea that editors, journalists, and media institutions controlled what information reached the public and how it was framed. Those gates, for all their flaws, imposed a kind of discipline. Today, the gates have not merely been bypassed. They have been torn down entirely. In their place stands the creator economy: millions of independent commentators, influencers, and self-appointed analysts broadcasting to millions of followers from spare bedrooms and makeshift studios.

On the surface, this looks like a democratic triumph. No more editorial monopolies. No more corporate gatekeepers deciding which stories matter. Just direct, unmediated expression from ordinary people.

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something far more chaotic: an endless-step flow, where anyone with a smartphone can become an interpreter of national events, broadcasting real-time takes to thousands of followers without editorial oversight, fact-checking, or accountability. But focusing only on who is speaking misses the deeper problem, which is the nature of the medium itself. Marshall McLuhan's famous insight — that the medium is the message — reminds us that what matters is not just the content on the screen, but what the screen does to our thinking. The smartphone, governed by the attention economy, does not care whether an opinion is accurate or nuanced. Its logic is optimised purely for engagement: speed, emotional provocation, and compulsive return. When political discourse enters this environment, it must conform to the algorithm's demands. Traditional media, despite its many failures, operated within natural boundaries. A newspaper had a fixed number of pages. A broadcast ended when the hour did. Those limits gave the human mind something precious: a pause. Space for scepticism,

reflection, and quiet absorption. Digital platforms have no such limits.

They are architected for infinite scrolling and continuous stimulation. In this environment, complex socio-political issues cannot survive in their original form. They must be compressed into punchy, emotionally charged, instantly digestible content. The platform rewards outrage, absolute conviction, and ideological certainty. This is where the structure of the digital public sphere becomes psychologically hazardous. Humans are naturally inclined to avoid cognitive discomfort. We seek out voices that confirm our existing fears and beliefs. Algorithms, designed to maximise engagement, have become extraordinarily skilled at exploiting precisely these tendencies — feeding us content that matches what we already think, drawing us deeper into personalised echo chambers that feel like the whole world.

The result is a slow but profound transformation in how citizens relate to democracy. The troubling irony is that the most opinion-saturated individuals often believe themselves to be

the most informed.

A person might spend hours each day consuming political podcasts, YouTube commentary, and social media threads, genuinely convinced they are fulfilling a civic duty. In reality, they are increasingly outsourcing their thinking. Rather than assembling verified facts and forming independent judgements, they are absorbing pre-packaged interpretations from digital commentators who have already done the thinking — and the feeling — for them.

This arrangement creates a peculiar trap for creators as well. The influencer who appears authentic and independent is rarely truly free. Challenge your audience's ideological comfort zone and your metrics fall, your revenue drops, and the algorithm deprioritises your content. Creators become prisoners of the very echo chambers they help construct, compelled to escalate their rhetoric continuously just to maintain visibility. The appearance of liberated expression masks a deep structural dependency. A functioning democracy does not require consensus. It requires, as

Jürgen Habermas argued, a shared foundation of reality — a common factual base from which genuine disagreement can emerge. When the public sphere fractures into millions of algorithmically curated bubbles, each with its own personalised version of truth, that foundation begins to erode. We are no longer arguing from shared facts. We are performing our identities through our chosen digital icons. The real danger here is not polarisation, which is as old as politics itself. The deeper threat is the gradual erosion of independent thinking — the slow weakening of our capacity to sit with uncertainty, evaluate evidence patiently, and reach conclusions without emotional scaffolding provided by someone else.

More voices do not automatically produce better dialogue. The democratisation of expression does not guarantee the democratisation of thought. When every scroll tells us what to think, and every individual becomes an opinion-maker, the question worth sitting with is an uncomfortable one: who is left to simply think for themselves?

Birsa Munda legacy empowers a generation

Ranjana Chopra

When India recalls its great freedom fighters, one name rises from the forests of Chotanagpur with enduring moral force - Bhagwan Birsa Munda, revered as Dharti Aaba, the Protector of the Land. More than a historical figure, he remains a living symbol of dignity, resistance, and tribal self-respect. His vision - that tribal identity must be protected, equality must be meaningful, and development must reach ordinary people with justice - continues to guide India's journey towards Viksit Bharat. Today, after twelve years of renewed national emphasis on inclusive development, those ideals are shaping policy, governance, and the aspirations of a new India.

Giving the legacy its rightful place
Bhagwan Birsa Munda's legacy has long lived in the songs, stories, and collective memory of tribal communities across India. In 2021, the Hon'ble Prime Minister accorded this legacy national recognition by declaring 15th November, Birsa Munda's birth anniversary - as Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas. The recognition deepened further with the observance of Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh from November 15, 2024, to November 15, 2025, to mark his 150th birth anniversary. During this period, more than 2 lakh events were organised, reaching over three crore citizens in a nationwide celebration of tribal pride, heritage.

Across the country, these celebrations reflected the richness and diversity of tribal life. From the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland and the Tribal Literary Festival in Kerala to the National Tribal Film Festival in Jharkhand and the Canoe Sprint Championship in Telangana, the events brought tribal culture, creativity, sport, and storytelling into the national spotlight. Together, they saw participation from more than 11 lakh tribal citizens representing distinct cultures and communities. They were declarations - that tribal heritage is a living, breathing force in shaping modern India. Building upon twelve years of sustained and focused national efforts towards tribal empowerment and inclusion, Janjatiya Garima Utsav 2026 carries this momentum forward through four thematic weeks that together reflect the full spec-



trum of tribal development. The third week, in particular, focuses on a question central to India's future: how do we recognise the individuals and communities that shaped this nation, and how do we empower the next generation to carry that legacy forward?

Restoring the Names

Answering that question begins with recognising the many tribal heroes whose contributions remained absent from mainstream historical narratives for far too long. Across tribal regions, generations of educators, artists, healers, and reformers have sustained communities and preserved cultural identity. Their stories deserve a rightful place in India's national memory, and sustained efforts are now underway to document and celebrate these contributions.

Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) across the country are playing a central role in this effort by documenting oral histories, recording indigenous knowledge systems, and preserving tribal languages and cultural traditions. At present, 29 TRIs across 26 States and 3 Union Territories are engaged in this work, with 355 primers documented in 222 tribal languages. These efforts are helping preserve invaluable cultural knowledge for future generations.

The effort to restore tribal voices to the national narrative is also taking shape through Tribal Freedom Fighters Museums, envisioned as spaces of memory and recognition. Ministry of Tribal Affairs has sanctioned 11 such museums across 10 states to honour the role of tribal communi-

ties in India's freedom movement. Four museums have already been inaugurated, including those dedicated to Bhagwan Birsa Munda in Ranchi and Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh in Nava Raipur. Through these institutions, the stories of tribal heroes are being documented, celebrated and permanently woven into India's collective historical memory.

Empowering the torch bearers

From honouring the past, the journey naturally moves towards empowering the present generation. This is most visible in the growing number of tribal students benefiting from the Ministry's scholarship programmes. In the current year alone, 26,01,979 tribal students have been supported under five scholarship schemes, with a total outlay of ₹3825.54 crores. Many are the first in their families to access higher education, carrying not only personal aspirations but the hopes of entire communities. Of this, over 56 per cent of the current scholarship beneficiaries are women. The expansion of Eklayva Model Residential Schools (EMRS) reflects the same commitment to educational access and opportunity. The number of sanctioned EMRS institutions has increased from 167 in 2013-14 to 723 in 2025-26, a rise of over 330 per cent - while functional schools grew from 123 to 499 during the same period. Student enrolment has also risen significantly, from 0.34 lakh to 1.56 lakh students. By providing quality residential education in tribal regions, EMRS institutions are helping build stronger educational foundations and expanding opportunities for tribal youth across the country.

These numbers reflect more than the expansion of schemes; they represent a larger structural shift. Scholarships and fellowships are investments in confidence, representation, and leadership. Our commitment is unwavering: no tribal student

should be denied opportunity because of geography, background, or limited access to institutions of learning.

Alongside this educational transformation is a significant shift in grassroots leadership led by tribal women. For generations, tribal women have been the quiet keepers of culture, natural resources, and community life - sustaining families and traditions. India is home to 5.20 crore tribal women, accounting for almost half of the total tribal population, and their leadership is becoming central to inclusive development. At present, 4,712 VDVKS have been sanctioned, of which 3,365 are operational, benefiting over 12.9 lakh people, with women constituting more than half of the beneficiaries. These efforts are strengthening grassroots democracy.

The legacy that walks forward

Celebration, remembrance, education, and women's leadership together form part of a larger and continuing story, one in which tribal communities are increasingly shaping India's future with confidence and dignity. Through initiatives such as Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA-JGUA) and Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adiwasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), transformative change is reaching the ground through a new paradigm of convergence and collaboration. The rise of tribal scholars, the recognition of unsung heroes, and the growing leadership of tribal women together reflect how the legacy of Bhagwan Birsa Munda continues to live in contemporary India. Today, India's more than 10.5 crore tribal citizens are forward-looking chapters in the national story. They are not at the margins of national progress, but among the strongest contributors to the vision of Viksit Bharat - scholars breaking new ground, women redefining leadership and unsung heroes finally receiving recognition. In this journey, the legacy of Dharti Aaba walks forward.

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The writer is Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI; Views presented are personal.

THE HIDDEN HEALTH COST OF EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTION

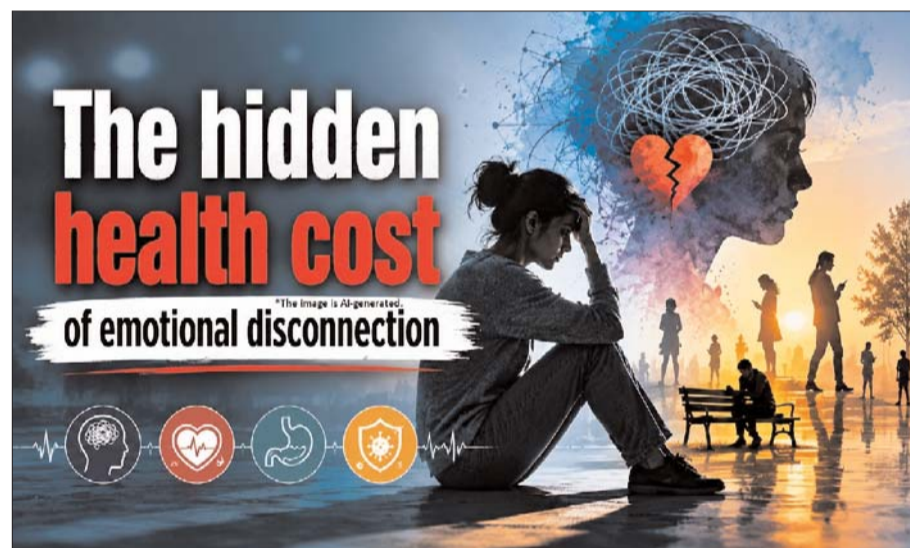
Pratiksha Vats

Many illnesses are not merely diseases of the body — they are expressions of an unheard mind. A significant part of human suffering today can be prevented, not only through medicine, but through awareness, emotional expression, and genuine human connection.

There is a quiet illness entering our homes. It carries no fever, appears in no diagnostic report, and yet settles invisibly into daily life — in missed conversations, in growing emotional distance between people who once shared everything effortlessly. In today's world, we measure love through responsibility — through how much we provide, how hard we work, how secure a future we build.

These intentions are genuine. But somewhere along the way, we have replaced presence with provision.

This absence is felt most deeply by those who rarely demand attention — our elders. Their meals are provided, medicines managed, comfort ensured. Yet emotional care remains missing. They sit quietly, near windows, watching time pass — not seeking entertainment, but connection. What they often hear instead are familiar words: "I am



busy," "Work is too much." These are not unkind words.

They come from responsibility. But over time, they replace emotional connection with explanation. Because love is not only measured in effort — it is felt in presence.

The World Health Organisation recognises that loneliness among older adults is not merely an emotional concern, but a serious health risk linked to depression, cognitive decline, and increased medical dependency. Loneliness does not remain only in

the mind — it begins to shape the body. This pattern is not limited to elders.

Within relationships too, when emotional needs go unmet, they rarely surface as direct communication. Instead, they emerge as irritation, withdrawal, or unexplained physical symptoms — fatigue, headaches, persistent discomfort.

What appears as overreaction is often an unspoken need for closeness. A simple hug, a few minutes of undivided attention, can resolve what no argument can.

There is a deeper truth rarely acknowledged. In some families, attention increases when illness appears — people gather, conversations slow, concern becomes visible.

Unconsciously, a connection forms: *when I am unwell, I am seen.* Over time, this emotional adaptation may shape behaviour. Medical visits begin serving a dual purpose — not only for physical care, but for moments of togetherness. The root cause is not medical. It is emotional absence. When emotional needs remain consistently unmet, a quiet cycle begins — loneliness leads to physical discomfort, which brings temporary attention, only for loneliness to return. This cycle may gradually increase medical dependency, even when no purely physical cause exists.

What can interrupt this cycle is not complexity — it is consistency.

A few minutes of undivided attention daily, genuine listening, simple questions asked with real interest — these are not small gestures. They are emotional anchors.

Before illness becomes the only language through which someone is heard, we have the chance to listen earlier. Because no one should have to fall sick just to feel seen.

The writer is Nutritionist, Wellness Coach and Health Writer; Views presented are personal.

India's opinion addiction: When every scroll tells you what to think

Debarati Dhar

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