

## EXAMINATION SYSTEM

The NEET examination paper leak and the anomalies subsequently reported in the CBSE's online marking system have raised serious questions about the integrity of India's examination system. It is a betrayal of the trust that students and their parents place in these institutions, and it demands urgent corrective action.

A country as large and ambitious as India, with aspirations of becoming a global power, must get the basics right. The current education system, heavily dependent on one-time examinations, often works against genuinely meritorious students. It discourages talent and critical thinking while rewarding rote learning. Nevertheless, examinations such as NEET and JEE Advanced, which determine the future of millions and carry enormous stakes, must be conducted with absolute fairness and precision.

These examinations must not only be transparent and rigorously evaluated but must also inspire public confidence. The response to the present crisis should go beyond temporary fixes and cosmetic reforms. What is needed is a comprehensive review of the examination system, accompanied by innovative and long-term solutions. This is what the country expects from the Modi government, which has undertaken major reforms in several other sectors.

## UNITY IN J&amp;K

Should political parties in Jammu and Kashmir unite over the issue of restoring statehood? There is certainly no harm in such an effort. However, unless the unity is organic and driven by genuine conviction, it is likely to meet the same fate as earlier experiments such as the Gupkar Alliance.

Political parties are ultimately guided by their own interests, and any broad-based unity often requires larger parties to sacrifice some of their political advantages. This is why opportunistic alliances tend to lose momentum and fade away soon after they are formed. Interestingly, the latest call for unity has come from a party that has struggled to remain politically relevant after recent elections. The public exchange between Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti over the proposal has further underscored the difficulties of forging a common platform. Their differences illustrate why political unity in Jammu and Kashmir, though desirable in principle, remains difficult to achieve in practice.

Sudhir K Mishra

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And it had a new address: Uttar Pradesh.

As someone who shepherded the BrahMos programme from a drawing board concept to the world's fastest cruise missile, I view the conflict as a validation of an industrial philosophy. The success was not accidental, it was the result of a convergence of technological maturation, political will and industrial ecosystem building centered on the Gangetic plains. The perception of Uttar Pradesh as a mere hinterland died when the BrahMos was unleashed and it carried the signature of the Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor or UPDIC.

The creation of the UPDIC changed the topology of our security map. Linking Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi, Aligarh, Agra and Chitrakoot was a strategic decision to weaponize India's demographic dividend. In modern warfare, you cannot fight with a missile that lacks a spare part supplier or a radar that lacks a maintenance hub. You need an ecosystem where a microchip fabricated in Noida is integrated into a seeker head tested in Lucknow, mounted on a launcher assembled in Kanpur and loaded with ammunition produced in Aligarh. By April 2025, this ecosystem was operational, moving UP from 'hinterland' to 'heartland'. The BrahMos was the star of Operation Sindoor. The engagement at Nur Khan airbase (Chaklala) near Islamabad serves as the definitive case study. A BrahMos struck the heart of the Pakistani air force's capability. The story behind that strike is one of industrial resilience. Recognizing the need for volume and redundancy, we aggressively expanded production into Uttar Pradesh. The integration and testing facility in Lucknow became a critical node. During the conflict, the Lucknow hub-supported by a network of

## From coastal nation to global sea power

Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta

The sea does not forgive strategic ambivalence. Nations that have ceded control of maritime chokepoints, neglected their shipbuilding base, or outsourced the transshipment of their own cargo to foreign intermediaries have, without exception, paid a steep geopolitical price. India, for much of its post-Independence history, was content to watch from the shoreline. That posture is now being dismantled, deliberately, systematically, and with a clarity of national purpose that commands attention.

The architectural framework for this transformation rests on two interlocking blueprints. Maritime India Vision 2030 provides the operational scaffolding, with over 150 initiatives targeting vessel turnaround times, coastal shipping expansion, and a doubling of major port capacity to 1,630 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA). The Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 casts a longer shadow: more than 300 benchmarks pointing towards smart ports, dedicated shipbuilding clusters, and carbon neutrality across India's major transit hubs. Together, these are not wish lists; they are the coordinates of a nation that has chosen to compete at the apex of global maritime commerce.

Physical infrastructure, however, is only as durable as the law that governs it. Three landmark pieces of legislation enacted in 2025 have restructured the regulatory foundation from the ground up. The Merchant Shipping Act broadened vessel definitions, dismantled archaic ownership restrictions inherited from the colonial era, and created competitive financing pathways to incentivise international tonnage to fly the Indian flag.

The Indian Ports Act harmonised domestic port operations with international green safety standards, including rigorous ballast-water management protocols in line with the IMO's Ballast Water Management Convention - a compliance posture that shields Indian

ports from regulatory penalties and signals premium reliability to global shipping lines. The Coastal Shipping Act, by decentralising customs barriers for domestic cabotage, has already triggered a 118 per cent surge in coastal shipping volumes, freeing deep-water berths for high-value international cargo.

Perhaps no single indicator better captures the seriousness of India's international commitment than its implementation of the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009. For years, the vessel-recycling industry at Alang, the world's largest ship-breaking yard, attracted both economic interest and humanitarian criticism. India's ratification and progressive implementation of the Hong Kong Convention are changing that calculus. By mandating hazardous-material inventories, requiring Ship Recycling Facility Plans, and aligning domestic yards with internationally audited environmental and worker-safety standards, India is transforming Alang from a reputational liability into a strategic asset.

The greenfield megaport agenda addresses what has long been India's most glaring strategic vulnerability: dependence on Colombo and Singapore for the transshipment of Indian-origin cargo. Vadavan Port in Maharashtra, with its natural deep draft of 20 metres and the capacity to berth 18,000-plus TEU ultra-large container vessels, directly challenges that dependency. More consequential still is the Galathea Bay Transshipment Hub in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which sits astride the East-West global trade artery. Once operational, it will make India a genuine transshipment alternative for the entire Indo-Pacific region. The "One Nation-One Port" framework and Sagar Ankan benchmarking guidelines ensure that these assets operate not as isolated facilities but as nodes in a nationally integrated port grid.

The IMO's revised 2023 GHG Strat-

egy, which targets net-zero maritime emissions by or around 2050, is reshaping commercial shipping faster than most port authorities have appreciated. India is not waiting to be compelled. Deendayal and V.O. Chidambaram ports are being developed as primary bunkering hubs for zero-emission marine fuels, green hydrogen, and e-methanol. The Paradip Port Authority has executed a landmark Rs 45,000 crore MoU with ACME Clean Tech Solutions to anchor regional green-fuel production.

India has made its choice. Capital and connectivity are the twin enablers of maritime power. The ₹25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund, supported by the Sagarmala Financial Services Corporation Limited, finally gives domestic shipbuilders the long-term debt and equity runway to contest a market long dominated by South Korean, Japanese, and Chinese yards. On the digital front, the Sagarmala Digital Centre of Excellence, developed with C-DAC, is embedding Artificial Intelligence and blockchain logistics into a Virtual Trade Corridor under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). This is not incrementalism. India is architecting itself as a central node, not a peripheral stop, in the most consequential new trade corridor of this century.

Transformations of this scale do not happen through policy documents alone. They require sustained political will, the ability to reconcile conflicting federal interests, and the patience to convert long-horizon investments into institutional momentum.

Under the stewardship of Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister for Ports, Shipping and Inland Water Transport, the Ministry has shepherded this entire legislative and infrastructural architecture from concept to execution. That India's major port capacity doubled over the past decade, and that this expansion was paired with regulatory modernisation, international convention compli-

and a coherent green-transition strategy, reflects governance that is both visionary and disciplined.

Candour demands acknowledgement of the frictions ahead. The ₹80 lakh crore capital requirement for the 2047 vision demands a qualitative leap in Public-Private Partnership architecture. This will require risk-sharing models sophisticated enough to attract global institutional capital without compromising strategic sovereignty. The expanded oversight mandate of the Maritime State Development Council has, at points, generated administrative friction between central ambition and state-level execution. And Galathea Bay, however strategic its location, must compete against ports that have decades of operational optimisation on their side. India will need aggressive tariff structures, zero-touch automated customs, and seamless bunkering to make the choice of Indian hubs a commercial compulsion rather than a diplomatic courtesy.

India's maritime moment is not a future aspiration; it is an unfolding reality. The legislative foundation has been laid, capital mobilised, international conventions engaged, and the green transition initiated. What remains is the discipline of execution: ensuring that the speed of physical construction is matched by the agility of regulatory adaptation, that central ambition is translated faithfully at the state level, and that the private sector is given the confidence to commit capital at the scale the vision demands. India's 7,500-kilometre coastline has always been a geographic fact. It is now becoming a strategic instrument. Policymakers who fail to grasp the full weight of that shift will find themselves operating with an outdated map.

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## WHEN JUSTICE FAILS, REVENGE TAKES CENTRE STAGE

Shankar Sahay

Sidney Sheldon famously observed that, to the ancient Greeks, the concept of justice (dikaiosini) was often synonymous with vengeance (ekdikisis). Vadh-2 and System, two films released this week on OTT, are based on this very belief. The cornerstone of both films is: "If the system can't deliver justice, then it's acceptable to take the law into your own hands and seek revenge."

As expected, while Dhurandhar and Dhurandhar-2: The Revenge, which dish out nationalism in the garb of chauvinism, keep the moolah flowing into the multiplexes, these two films, which portray the pain of ordinary people and their fight back, find shelter in the comfort of home on OTT platforms.

After all, who cares so much about the common man that they would visit a theatre to watch a film?

While both films depict protagonists facing immense misery at the hands of the high and mighty and then plotting actions that result in the downfall of culprits who got away scot-free under the law, the story of Vadh-2 spans decades, whereas in System, justice comes more swiftly.

Also, while in Vadh-2 the wrongly framed



character accidentally gets an opportunity to settle scores, the victims in System plan their moves meticulously.

While Vadh-2 begins at the crime scene and then moves to prison, System opens in

prison and then takes viewers back to the crime.

Both films slowly unravel the losses suffered by the have-nots, their hardships, and finally their retaliation.

The films explicitly depict how the affluent use not only the judiciary and police but the entire system to shift the blame onto the downtrodden and escape accountability. Apart from sterling performances by the casts of both films, one remarkable feature of Vadh-2 is seeing Luv Ranjan produce a film that is neither a love story nor one that blames girls while supporting boys. Similarly, it is a pleasure to see Jyotika and Sonakshi after a long time in System.

So, if you are sick and tired of the bravado of Dhurandhar, or are waiting for Dhurandhar-2 to arrive on OTT, these two films are worth watching.

Both Vadh-2 and System tap into a growing public frustration with institutions that often appear inaccessible to ordinary citizens. Though rooted in the unsettling idea of vigilante justice, the films compellingly portray the anguish of the powerless and their quest for accountability.

In an era dominated by larger-than-life nationalist spectacles, these OTT releases offer a more grounded reflection on inequality, injustice, and the moral dilemmas that arise when the system itself seems to fail.

The writer is an educator author, and corporate coach; Views presented are personal.

## How UP emerged as X-factor in Op Sindoor success against Pakistan

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MSMEs across the state-ensured a throughput that kept the squadrons armed. We were able to rapidly replace missiles fired in the opening strikes, ensuring follow-on operations did not stall due to "ammo hunger." The BrahMos involves thousands of components, from the ramjet engine to the seeker head. In UP, we indigenized the supply chain for many of these sub-systems. When Pakistan attempted to disrupt our logistics, the decentralized nature of UP's manufacturing—spanning 4,000+ MSMEs—meant there was no single point of failure.

However, Operation Sindoor was not just about striking; it was about surviving. Pakistan's retaliation involved Fatah ballistic missiles and a swarm of drones, including Turkish YIHA and Asisguard Songar combat drones. This was India's first full-spectrum drone war, and the survival of our forward operating bases depended entirely on the Air Defence network. Here, too, UP's contribution was decisive. Electronics production units in Noida and Ghaziabad worked round-the-clock to provide the high-reliability radar components and secure data links required for the Akash missile system to intercept

incoming threats. Furthermore, private startups in the UP corridor provided the "agile" response needed for counter-drone warfare. Noida also emerged as a silent warrior in the electromagnetic spectrum. The Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS), which allowed for the seamless coordination relies on real-time data processing engineered in some software and hardware labs of the NCR and its extensions into UP. The Secure Communication Links that protected our data from interception were fortified by encryption standards much of it developed in these clusters. Resilience is also about logistics. Our ability to bounce back was the true metric of power. This is where Uttar Pradesh's geography became decisive. Kanpur became the artery of sustenance; its ammunition factories ensured that the howitzers did not fall silent. The state's central location allowed for the rapid movement of critical spare parts for Rafales and Mirages to the front lines. UP acted as a sponge that absorbed the shock of demand and released the capability of supply.

This transformation was driven by focused political leadership. Chief Min-

ister Yogi Adityanath's stewardship of the Defence Corridor moved beyond the "ribbon-cutting" culture to focus on the nuts and bolts-land acquisition, power supply for MSMEs and easing regulatory hurdles. The political backing created an environment where a private startup in Lucknow could bid for a BrahMos component contract, and the state government acted as the guarantor of stability. It is pertinent to mention here Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and CM Yogi jointly flagged off the first batch of BrahMos missiles from the Lucknow facility on October 18, 2025. This major achievement happened in just five months since inauguration, demonstrating the project's ability to transition from launch to full production in record time. The lessons for UP are clear: we must move up the value chain. Having mastered missile bodies in Kanpur and electronics in Noida, the next phase must focus on propulsion, advanced materials and artificial intelligence. The war showed that the future is unmanned. UP has the potential to become the drone manufacturing capital of India, integrating the software talent in Noida with the fabrication capability in Agra and Kan-

pur. Ultimately, weapons do not fight wars; people do. The most valuable asset Uttar Pradesh contributed was not a missile, but a mindset. The Defence Corridor has created high-value employment where an engineer tightening screws on a BrahMos seeker in Lucknow or writing code in Noida knows they are directly contributing to national security. Operation Sindoor demonstrated that India possesses the capability to fight a limited, high-intensity conflict with decisive results. It proved that the BrahMos, deeply integrated into the UP-manufacturing ecosystem, can be produced, sustained, and replenished in large numbers.

The 88-hour confrontation is now history, but its lessons are shaping our future. Uttar Pradesh stands at the center of this transformation. We have moved beyond the era where the state was merely a recruitment ground for soldiers. Today, it is the arsenal of the Republic.

As I look back, the image that stays with me is the supply chain in synchronized rhythm—the trucks rolling out of Kanpur, the code being compiled in Noida, the missile bodies taking shape in Lucknow.