

INDIA BLOC REJUVENATION!

After major elections the assorted opposition parties often meet to discuss their future together. The common mission that brings them under one roof and umbrella like the Third Front of India Bloc is their defeat at the hands of BJP. Their rhetoric centers around Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS. The strategy has not worked so far and it only leads to strengthening PM Modi's image and a leader with vision for changing India. Once against after the Congress and Trinmool Congress suffered defeat in Assam and West Bengal at the hands of BJP, the INDIA bloc is trying to reactivate itself. The India Bloc seems to be tying itself in knots and getting back into the same vicious cycle of anti-Modi and anti-RSS rhetoric, which ultimately turns into advantage for the saffron party. Politics can't be only about rhetoric and badmouthing a popular leader; it amounts to scoring a self goal. The constituents of INDIA Bloc have to talk about policies and deliverables to become relevant.

TROUBLE IN POJK

Massive human rights violations are going on in the Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) following protests by locals. The residents are protesting against lack of political powers and Against direct rule of Islamabad. The Pakistani authorities have not only unleashed a reign of terror against the key leaders, it has also sought to ban the Joint Awami Action Committee which is leading the protests. It seems heavy clashes are going on between locals and the Pakistani forces leaving at least 11 people dead and dozens injured. The worst part is Pakistan imposes ban on the internet and its media is complicit on blacking out the news from the region. The region has been kept neglected and its people have no rights for self governance. Islamabad conducts sham elections and ultimately imposed a leader on their choice on the people. How long with this continue?

Jagat Prakash Nadda

Every safe pregnancy is a reflection of a nation's commitment to its women. In a country which experiences nearly 2.9 crore pregnancies annually, ensuring safe motherhood at scale requires robust health systems, sustained political commitment, timely interventions, and equitable access to quality healthcare services.

The remarkable decline in maternal mortality over the past decade stands among India's most significant public health achievements.

This progress has been driven by sustained investments in maternal health, strengthened service delivery systems, community participation and a relentless commitment to ensuring that every woman has access to quality care throughout her pregnancy journey.

At the heart of this transformation is the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA), which marks ten years of advancing safer motherhood across the

country.

Envisioned by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi ji, the scheme was launched on 9th June 2016. PMSMA as a nationwide movement to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care services, free of cost, to all pregnant women on the 9th day of every month during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

The choice of the 9th day carries a deeper significance. Pregnancy is a journey of nine precious months, each month bringing new hope, anticipation and responsibility. By dedicating the 9th day of every month to maternal health, PMSMA serves as a reminder that every pregnancy deserves continuous care, monitoring and support throughout all nine months, until the safe arrival of a healthy newborn.

One of the most important lessons in maternal health is that no pregnancy is entirely risk-free. A pregnancy that appears normal today can develop serious complications tomorrow. Recognizing that any pregnancy can be-

Navita Srikant

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's recent remarks in Nepal's Parliament on the India-Nepal boundary issue have generated considerable debate. Yet much of the discussion has focused on individual words rather than the larger significance of what was said.

At its core, the Prime Minister's message reflected an important reality: territorial concerns and civilisational ties are not competing ideas. A mature state is capable of safeguarding both.

By asserting Nepal's concerns regarding the Kalapani area while acknowledging the deep cultural and familial ties that bind Nepal and India, he highlighted a truth often lost in contemporary discourse—that sovereignty and coexistence can advance together. Recognizing shared lives and livelihoods across the border is not a denial of national interest; it is an acknowledgment of reality.

India-Nepal relations cannot be viewed solely through the prism of maps and boundaries. Unlike many international borders, the India-Nepal border has evolved within a landscape of shared communities. It is shaped not only by treaties and political agreements but also by rivers, forests, mountains, and settlements whose lives have been intertwined for generations.

The relationship is rooted in centuries of shared civilizational ties, roti-beti sambandh, pilgrimage routes, and philosophical traditions that have been preserved and nurtured across generations.

Families exist across the border. In the Terai, communities share language, culture, and kin-



ship through Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Awadhi traditions. In eastern Nepal, longstanding connections link communities with Sikkim, Assam, and West Bengal. In the Far West, these ties with Uttarakhand remain intertwined. Literature, folklore, and everyday life remain testimony to a relationship that has never been confined by geography alone.

In many parts of the frontier, an Indian child may attend a Nepali school because it is closer than the one on the Indian side. A Nepali youth may cross the border daily for work and return home each evening. Communities trade together, celebrate together, and often share family ties through generations of cross-border marriages.

These realities do not weaken sovereignty. They explain why Nepal-India relations require a degree of sensitivity and understanding that goes beyond conventional border politics.

The challenge today is that issues requiring patient dialogue, technical expertise, and sustained groundwork are often

overshadowed by narratives designed for temporary political gain. Across South Asia, it is easier to manufacture outrage than to undertake the difficult work of negotiation. It is easier to amplify differences than to acknowledge interdependence. Differences between neighbours are natural, particularly where geography, history, and human settlement have evolved together over centuries. What should concern us is not the existence of differences, but the growing tendency to interpret every disagreement through the lens of mistrust.

No boundary issue between neighbours has ever been resolved through social media campaigns, emotional slogans, or competing nationalist narratives. Durable solutions emerge through dialogue, trust, political courage, and institutional mechanisms.

Prime Minister Shah's remarks are significant precisely because they suggest that national interest and constructive engagement can coexist. A leader can firmly assert a country's position while

simultaneously recognizing the human realities that shape bilateral relations.

Personal Reflections

During my time working at Singha Durbar, I often spent mornings at Pashupatinath Temple reflecting on the civilizational ties that bind Nepal and India. Conversations with scholars on Pashupatinath, Kedarnath, and Kailash Mansarovar reinforced a simple realization: the Himalayas have long connected peoples, traditions, and pilgrimages across present-day political boundaries.

The same realization emerged while travelling through Mithila Parikrama and the Ramayana Circuit, the Mithila Parikrama, one encounters a living cultural landscape that predates modern borders. Sita Maa or Prince Siddharth's journey cannot be reduced to a territorial claim. These remain shared inheritances of a civilization.

This civilizational context does not eliminate the need for boundary demarcation or protecting national interests. It provides the trust necessary to address diffi-

cult questions through dialogue rather than confrontation.

Rabi Lamichhane in Delhi

The recent visit to India by the Nepali delegation led by Shri Rabi Lamichhane, former Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, reflected the continued importance both countries attach to engagement at the highest levels. Meetings with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, National Security Advisor Shri Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar, Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, senior officials and political leadership underscored a simple truth: sustained dialogue remains the most credible pathway for advancing holistic cooperation.

The significance of such engagement lies not merely in protocol but in its purpose. The real test of leadership is not whether differences exist; it is whether leaders possess the confidence and statesmanship to ensure that those differences do not define the relationship.

Conclusion

The India-Nepal border is shaped by both history and geography. Rivers alter their course, settlements evolve, and patterns of cultivation change. Boundary management therefore requires continuous cooperation, political commitment, and mutual trust. In a region where borders have often reflected the legacies of external historical forces, India and Nepal have an opportunity to demonstrate that enduring neighbourly relations are built through sovereign dialogue, shared interests, and an unwavering commitment to each other's stability, prosperity, and dignity.

FIGHTING AIR POLLUTION WITH URBAN GREENING

Meenakshi Dhote

Trees, shrubs, and grasses do far more than add greenery to grey cityscapes. Vegetation intercepts airborne particles on leaves, branches, bark, and stems, physically reducing the amount of dust and pollutants residents inhale. Dense canopies stabilise exposed soil, cutting down on wind-blown dust resuspension - one of Delhi's major pollution contributors. Plants also absorb gaseous pollutants such as oxides of sulphur and nitrogen directly through their stomata.

Additionally, trees add surface roughness that promotes atmospheric turbulence, which in turn prevents pollutant accumulation by encouraging greater dispersal and dilution. Green areas further stimulate the sedimentation of aerosols and dust particles. As a bonus, neighbourhoods with dense tree cover tend to run several degrees cooler than bare urban zones, delivering cleaner air and cooler streets simultaneously.

Research conducted across Delhi supports these benefits. Studies found that PM10 and PM05 concentrations were significantly higher in less vegetated areas like Anand Vihar and Jahangirpuri com-



pared to greener localities such as Mandir Marg and Sri Aurobindo Marg. Well-designed vegetation barriers have also been shown to meaningfully reduce local PM5 levels near plantation zones, and dense shrub barriers around schools, hospitals, and pedestrian areas offer added protection by intercepting dust precisely at breathing height.

Choosing the right species

Not all plants are created equal when it comes to pollution tolerance. Some species are highly sensitive to pollutants and serve best as early-warning bioindicators, while others are hardy enough to withstand polluted conditions and actively help reduce

the pollution load. The Air Pollution Tolerance Index (APTI) - calculated using a formula involving a plant's ascorbic acid content, total chlorophyll, leaf extract pH, and relative water content - provides a scientific basis for species selection. Combined with biological and socio-economic factors, this yields an Anticipated Performance Index (API) that guides Green Belt development decisions.

A 2024 study by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) identified Peepal (Ficus religiosa) as one of Delhi's most pollution-tolerant tree species, followed closely by Karanj (Pongamia pinnata). Other recommended species for Delhi-

NCR include Neem, Arjun, Jamun, Banyan, Shahtoot, Imli, Mango, and Amaltas - all valued for their high dust-capturing capacity, resilience under polluted conditions, and climate suitability. For large-scale ecological restoration along the Yamuna floodplain, biodiversity parks, and the Delhi Ridge, native species like Arjun, Jamun, Karanj, and Imli are particularly well-suited, offering additional benefits such as groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity conservation.

Greening roads and flyovers

Urban road infrastructure offers significant untapped potential for strategic greening. Narrow medians of 0.5-1.2 m can be seeded with grasses like Dhoob and Vetiver to stabilise soil and reduce dust resuspension. Medium medians of 1.2-3 m width suit single to triple rows of shrubs such as Bougainvillea and Nerium oleander, while those between 3-4 m can support layered combinations of shrubs, grasses, and small trees like Frangipani. Larger medians exceeding 4 m allow for full-scale planting of trees, including Neem, Alstonia scholaris, Terminalia arjuna, Sheesham, and Karanj, combined with understory shrubs and grasses for maximum pollutant capture.

A Decade of PMSMA: Transforming Maternal Health and Accelerating India's Journey Towards Safe Motherhood

Jagat Prakash Nadda

Every safe pregnancy is a reflection of a nation's commitment to its women. In a country which experiences nearly 2.9 crore pregnancies annually, ensuring safe motherhood at scale requires robust health systems, sustained political commitment, timely interventions, and equitable access to quality healthcare services.

The remarkable decline in maternal mortality over the past decade stands among India's most significant public health achievements.

This progress has been driven by sustained investments in maternal health, strengthened service delivery systems, community participation and a relentless commitment to ensuring that every woman has access to quality care throughout her pregnancy journey.

At the heart of this transformation is the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA), which marks ten years of advancing safer motherhood across the

country.

Envisioned by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi ji, the scheme was launched on 9th June 2016. PMSMA as a nationwide movement to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care services, free of cost, to all pregnant women on the 9th day of every month during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

The choice of the 9th day carries a deeper significance. Pregnancy is a journey of nine precious months, each month bringing new hope, anticipation and responsibility. By dedicating the 9th day of every month to maternal health, PMSMA serves as a reminder that every pregnancy deserves continuous care, monitoring and support throughout all nine months, until the safe arrival of a healthy newborn.

One of the most important lessons in maternal health is that no pregnancy is entirely risk-free. A pregnancy that appears normal today can develop serious complications tomorrow. Recognizing that any pregnancy can be-

come high-risk without warning, PMSMA introduced a simple yet transformative approach by identifying risks early, monitor them closely and ensure timely referral and management. Every high-risk pregnancy identified represents an opportunity to prevent a maternal death, a stillbirth, a newborn complication or lifelong disability. By shifting the focus from treating complications to preventing them, PMSMA has strengthened India's maternal healthcare system and made pregnancy safer for crores of women.

One of the defining strengths of PMSMA has been the institutionalization of a fixed-day, assured platform for specialist-led antenatal care, bringing predictability, accountability and continuity to maternal health services across the country. Under the programme, pregnant women are screened for nearly 25 HRP conditions, including severe anaemia, hypertension, gestational diabetes, infections and other complications that can threaten maternal and newborn survival, if

left undetected.

As evidence emerged that high-risk pregnancies require continued monitoring beyond routine antenatal care visit by a Specialist/Medical Officer under PMSMA, the Government of India further strengthened the programme through the launch of the Extended PMSMA (E-PMSMA) strategy in 2022.

Under E-PMSMA, high-risk pregnant women receive additional follow-up visits over and above the regular PMSMA session to ensure timely management until safe delivery. The initiative introduced name-based tracking of high-risk pregnancies and strengthened follow-up mechanisms up to the 45th day after delivery, ensuring that vulnerable women remain under continuous care throughout pregnancy and the immediate postnatal period. Incentives for Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), accompanying high-risk pregnant women for additional visits have further strengthened referral compliance and continuity of care.

To further strengthen implementation, monitoring and accountability, the Government of India has developed a centralized PMSMA digital portal that serves as the backbone of programme management across the country. The portal enables real-time reporting of service delivery, name-based tracking of high-risk pregnancies, monitoring of programme performance and evidence-based decision-making at national and state levels.

Importantly, the platform also allows private-sector specialists and community volunteers to register and contribute to the programme, reinforcing the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi Ji's vision of Jan Bhagidari that lies at the heart of PMSMA.

The success of PMSMA also highlights the importance of convergence across India's maternal health ecosystem. Working in synergy with initiatives such as Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK), Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN), National Quality Assurance Stan-

dards (NQAS), POSHAN Abhiyaan, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Ayushman Bharat and Midwifery Services, Optimization of Post Natal Care (OPNC), PMSMA has contributed to building a stronger continuum of care for women throughout pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period.

At the heart of this transformation are India's frontline healthcare workers i.e. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Community Health Officers (CHOs), nurses, midwives and medical officers. Their tireless efforts in community mobilization, counselling, screening, referral and follow-up have ensured that maternal health services reach women even in the most remote and underserved areas of the country.

The impact of these collective efforts is increasingly visible in national health outcomes. According to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) estimates for 2022-24, India's Maternal

Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined to 87 per 100,000 live births, bringing the country significantly closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal target of reducing the MMR to below 70 per lakh live births by 2030.

These gains are also reflected in broader maternal health indicators. The recently released National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023-24) reports that institutional deliveries have increased to 90.6% from 88.6% in NFHS-5 (2019-21), while antenatal care coverage has improved from 92.6% in NFHS-5 to 95.9% in the NFHS-6.

These achievements demonstrate that more women are accessing essential maternal health services than ever before, creating valuable opportunities for early detection of complications and timely interventions. Achieving such progress while managing one of the largest annual birth cohorts in the world underscores the scale and effectiveness of India's maternal health programmes.